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Dante's "Life of Dante"  
The *Divine Comedy* as Autobiography

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Graduate Department of Italian Studies  
University of Toronto

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a comprehensive autobiographical reading of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. The first chapter considers the notion of self and the narratology of life-writing in the Middle Ages, concluding that the *Commedia* is Dante's story, or more precisely Dante's stories.

The second chapter looks at the *Vita nuova* as Dante's first attempt at autobiography. The use of religious imagery, the evocation of biblical analogy, and the adoption of classical literary devices within the context of a lyric work are examined as is the framework Dante creates with the "Book of Memory" to tell the story of his love for Beatrice.

The third chapter, therefore, looks at Dante's political work, the *Convivio* in its relationship to the *Vita nuova* and examines how the *Convivio* revises the earlier effort. Here Dante rethinks Beatrice's role and considers the effects of exile. We see Dante's first attempt to reconcile the personal and social aspects of his life. The *Convivio*, however, remained unfinished and the reconciliation was not resolved satisfactorily.

Chapters 4 and 5 look at how Dante's love story and political story are expressed in the *Commedia*. Chapter 4 examines how Dante uses the *Commedia* to rewrite the *Vita nuova* and to present a revised version of his love story. The chapter considers the role of the framing metaphor, the journey, in effecting the revision Dante first attempted in the

*Convivio*. Similarly, Chapter 5 looks at the political story introduced in the *Convivio* and its absorption and revision by the *Commedia*. It considers as well, how the intersection of Dante's own particular story and its universal significance effects the reconciliation of both aspects of his life within a greater cosmic scheme.

The thesis shows that the *Commedia* picks up where the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio* left off and represents the culmination of Dante's life-long project of self-examination while presenting not only Dante's vision of world history but of his own. In the *Commedia* Dante critiques the lives of others and his own life as well. The *Commedia* is a self-portrait intended for public display and, therefore, may legitimately be considered as autobiography.

## Introduction

### The *Commedia* as Life-writing

It may well be that all literature has an autobiographical dimension. It seems almost impossible to imagine that an author could distance himself so much from his own literary influences, from his own perceptions and beliefs that his work would in no way reflect personal experience. In this respect Dante's *Commedia* is no exception. Echoes of Dante's personal opinions resound in its cantos. His personal acquaintances, enemies, and heroes wallow, trudge and soar throughout its three realms. Indeed the pilgrim/protagonist bears the name "Dante." But the autobiographical dimensions of the *Commedia* need not be restricted to the inevitable traces of personal experience. What I propose in this thesis is that the entire *Commedia* may be read as autobiographical in the sense that it constitutes a concerted effort on the part of the author to recount, contemplate and understand the significance of the events of his life.

My approach is novel. While there have been numerous analyses of specific autobiographical aspects of the *Commedia*, such examinations are fragmentary. It has rarely been suggested, for example, that episodes which are obviously linked to Dante's actual life are mere components of a greater autobiographical project. Amilcare Iannucci is one of the few critics who have considered the autobiographical dimension of the *Commedia* as extending beyond the confines of specific episodes or cantos. Iannucci notes a link between certain episodes which he calls "parallel episodes." Not only do

these episodes have repercussions in terms of the narrative structure of the *Commedia* but, Iannucci suggests, they also convey a personal revelation. But even Iannucci's approach is cursory in terms of examining the entire *Commedia* as a "life of Dante" told by the author himself. In many ways though, this thesis takes its cue from Iannucci's work and examines the extent to which the autobiographical element of the *Commedia* forges a structure even more pervasive than that which is evident in the "parallel episodes." Accordingly, I do not look at individual episodes or cantos except where they are integral to understanding the *Commedia's* greater autobiographical structure. While an examination of these micro-narratives might ultimately be fruitful, the scope of this work does not permit such an examination and stops at recognizing such episodes as essential components of the *Commedia's* greater autobiographical structure. Moreover, it is not my intention to repeat the efforts of other critics who have given such obviously personalized episodes an already invaluable inspection. I will instead look at the entire *Commedia*, without breaking it down into smaller parts but rather seeing it as a continuous narrative intended to tell, among other things, the story of Dante's life.

There are some critics who have taken a more comprehensive approach to the personal aspect of the *Commedia*, but such examinations have considered the issue primarily in terms of modellisation. John Freccero, for example, in his pivotal work, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, looks at the extent to which the *Commedia's* structure borrows from Augustine's *Confessions*. But Freccero's approach focuses on discerning the presence of an earlier autobiographical model and fails to adequately examine the way

in which Dante's story unfolds within that model. Moreover, Freccero's approach with its focus on the Augustinian model, does not address the presence of other models nor the way in which Dante revises these models, Augustinian or otherwise, in order to tell his own life story.

This is not to say that I will not consider Dante's use of earlier models. However, the approach I take is considerably more expansive than Freccero's. I submit in this thesis that Dante draws upon not only the Augustinian model but on many others in composing the *Commedia*. Consequently, I will look at the way Dante appropriates a variety of narratives, not only autobiographical models, and revises them in such a way that they become vehicles for his own story. I will not be examining Dante's personal understanding of Augustine's work so much as how Dante uses Augustine's writing, and the writing of other authors, to compel a specific reading of his own works.

Accordingly, I will not be looking at, in the case of the Virgilian epic for example, how many times we hear echoes of the *Aeneid*, but at the purpose for which such echoes are inserted. In keeping with this broader approach, I will be looking at other works by Dante and examining the role which they play in the *Commedia's* autobiographical function. Just as much as the events of his own life provide Dante with source material for the narrative of the *Commedia*, so too do the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio* furnish source material which is interwoven into the narrative fabric of the *Commedia*. The *Vita*

*nuova* and the *Convivio*, as early attempts at life-writing,<sup>1</sup> I suggest, represent models which are glossed, absorbed and rewritten as much as any of the other sources which contributed to Dante's creation of the *Commedia*. While an autobiographical reading of the *Vita nuova* is by no means novel, the same cannot be said of the *Convivio*. I am unaware of any sources which read it in this way. However, such a reading is not only supportable but, as I will show in my thesis, indispensable to a full understanding of the autobiographical dimension of the *Commedia*.

The purpose of this thesis is to take a new look at the *Commedia*, a look which hopes to address this surprising void in the criticism. The comprehensive autobiographical reading which I propose considers the notion of self as it was held in the Middle Ages and the narratology<sup>2</sup> of life-writing as it existed at the time of the *Commedia's* composition. Though the *Commedia* has been many things to many people, this thesis looks to discover what it was to Dante. What I will show is that the *Commedia* is before all things, Dante's story, or more precisely Dante's stories; the story of his love for Beatrice and the story of his political vicissitudes. This thesis aims to examine the method by which these stories are transformed into the journey taken along the "cammin di nostra vita."

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<sup>1</sup> Donald Winslow uses this term which he defines as follows: "In the narrow sense this term means biography, but in general it may include autobiography as well, so that it is actually a more inclusive term than biography, even though some people may consider the word biography to include autobiographical works, letters, diaries and the like." (6)

<sup>2</sup> By narratology, I mean the manner in which a narrative is constructed, including the particular narrative models and meaning systems it employs.

In the first chapter, I look at the notion of autobiography in the Middle Ages and address the not infrequent question of whether autobiography as a genre even existed in the Middle Ages. To that end I consider the requirements and the role of autobiography and how these were expressed in the spiritual “autobiographies” of Augustine, Abelard, and Suso. The imagery of these works and the use they make of metaphor, simile, analogy and other literary conventions of the time, in order to find and express meaning, differs substantially from modern autobiography. Such literary devices, however, were so effective in representing truth, I conclude that autobiography not only existed in the Middle Ages but possessed many of the attributes of modern autobiography. I then consider the extent to which Dante’s *Commedia* reflects these conventions. An examination of the role of *razos* and *vidas*<sup>3</sup> in lyric poetry reveals that secular life-writing models are as crucial to Dante’s autobiographical efforts as the religious models mentioned above. Finally, I examine the notion of self in the Middle Ages and its effects on the representation of self in the medieval autobiographical work. My examination of self-expression, life-writing and the purpose of both, leads me to conclude that the external reception of a work is as important to the medieval life-writer as the exercise of introspection. It is against this background that I begin my assessment of Dante’s life-writing.

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<sup>3</sup> *Vidas* were short comments providing information about the author or alleged author of a poem or song. According to Paul Zumthor, through the intermingling of text and biographical information, “the interpreter poses an autobiographical reading of the song.” (42) *Razos* were brief interpretive commentaries intended to clarify the meaning of the poems. Iannucci has noted that the “*ragionate cagioni*” of the *Vita nuova* bear a substantial resemblance to the Provençal *razos*. (*Forma ed evento nella Divina Commedia* 88)

In the second chapter I look at the *Vita nuova* as Dante's first attempt at autobiography. The use of religious imagery, the evocation of biblical analogy, and the adoption of classical literary devices within the context of a lyric work, give us the first indication of one of Dante's unique stylistic characteristics; his literary eclecticism. But I examine the *Vita nuova* as well in terms of the story Dante tells within the framework created by the "Book of Memory." The *Vita nuova* represents not only Dante's attempt at establishing himself as a literary presence, but it attempts to tell his personal story; the story of his love for Beatrice.

The *Convivio* expands upon the *Vita nuova*, going beyond the confines of the love story to commence Dante's political saga. In the third chapter, therefore, I look at the *Convivio* in its relationship to the *Vita nuova* and examine how it revises the earlier effort. In the *Convivio* Dante rethinks the role of Beatrice and considers the effects of exile. But more importantly, we see Dante's first efforts at trying to reconcile these two aspects of his life, the personal and the social, within the context of each other. Dante uses his writing to try to extract a meaning from the events of both stories and to see the implications of one aspect of his life on another. The *Convivio*, however, remained unfinished and the reconciliation of these two divergent aspects had to wait until the *Commedia*.

In Chapters 4 and 5 respectively I look at how Dante's personal life, that is, the love story, and his social life, that is, the political story, are expressed in the *Commedia*.



In Chapter 4, I examine how Dante uses the *Commedia* to rewrite the *Vita nuova* and present a revised version of his love story. I look at the role of the framing metaphor, the journey, in effecting the revision he first attempted in the *Convivio*. Similarly, in Chapter 5, I look at the political story introduced in the *Convivio* and its absorption and revision by the *Commedia*. I consider as well how the intersection of Dante's own particular story and the universal significance of it effects the reconciliation of both aspects of his life, the personal and the social, within a greater cosmic scheme.

And finally, there is the emergence of Dante's concept of himself as a writer which is present in all of his works. From the book of memory opened in the *Vita nuova* to the book of the universe unveiled in the *Commedia*, Dante's writing traces his evolution from lyric poet to *auctor*.<sup>4</sup> Both textually and intratextually, the *Commedia* condenses and retells the story of Dante's literary career. In the *Commedia*, Dante critiques the *dolce stil nuovo*, narrates his forays into Aristotelian philosophy and ultimately celebrates his achievement as a divinely appointed *auctor*. But this story, because of its extent, its density, and complexity is not treated explicitly in this thesis. Although in numerous instances, I make reference to Dante's progression as a writer, I do so only where this aspect of his life story necessarily overlaps with the two aspects of his life which I do address. Indeed to ignore the omnipresence of Dante's literary project would be most remiss. However, Dante's development as a writer as expressed in the

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<sup>4</sup> The notions of *auctor* and *auctoritas* will be explored in greater depth below, but, for introductory purposes, *auctor* may be understood as connoting not just authorship but authority.

*Commedia* more properly merits a study of its own and does not, therefore, form the basis of a specific examination in this thesis.

What I do hope to prove in this thesis is that the *Commedia* picks up where the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio* left off and represents the culmination of Dante's life-long project of self-examination. The *Commedia*, I hope to show, presents not only Dante's encyclopedic vision of world history but of his own history. In the *Commedia* Dante not only catalogues, critiques and predicts the outcome of the lives of others but of his own life as well. The *Commedia* is, therefore, a self-portrait intended for public display, akin to what Charles Mauron has called a "personal myth."<sup>5</sup> (9) In this sense Dante's *Commedia* is the essence of autobiography, medieval or otherwise. It bears his signature throughout and is, therefore, the most accurate depiction of the man not so much as he was, but as he would have us see him.

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<sup>5</sup> Translation mine.

## Chapter 1

### Life-writing in the Middle Ages

While there is little dispute that the presence of Dante the writer looms large within the text of his *Commedia*, it has rarely been suggested that the work is predominantly autobiographical. Indeed, there have been suggestions that certain episodes allude to events in the author's life, and the observation has been made that other episodes specifically recall actual occurrences and acquaintances. There has been debate even in modern times,<sup>6</sup> as to whether Dante intends the reader to accept the narrative of the *Commedia* as having occurred in actuality, as recounting a vision or whether Dante's journey was purely poetic. There has, however, been no suggestion that the *Commedia* is the story of Dante's life. I would suggest that such a reading of the *Commedia* was precluded in the early criticism by the absence of a reason for considering the work on any other level than as a record of a journey through the underworld culminating in a great revelation. Moreover, in the Middle Ages, the notion of autobiography was so very different from that which evolved in the wake of the Renaissance that a discussion as to whether a work was autobiographical simply did not arise. In the modern era, an autobiographical reading of the *Commedia* has been effectively precluded by a definition of autobiography so restrictive that it has caused some, Paul Zumthor in particular, to debate whether autobiography as a genre even

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<sup>6</sup> Bruno Nardi, for example, claims that Dante considered his own experience as a "visione verace" and that those who view the poem as a literary fiction misread it. ("Chi considera la visione dantesca e il rapimento del poeta al cielo come finzione letteraria, travisa il senso." (*Dante e la cultura medioevale* 392)

existed before the Renaissance.<sup>7</sup> Yet it seems indisputable that throughout the Middle Ages theologians and, to a certain extent, poets were engaged in the act of telling the stories of their lives. While the form and function of these tales may not have always conformed to the modern expectation of what constitutes autobiography, it would seem somewhat myopic or superficial to conclude that autobiography is, therefore, a post Humanism phenomenon. By restricting the term “autobiography” to those works which reflect actuality and are, therefore, “true,” the modern view not only fails to recognize that “truth” was defined somewhat differently in the Middle Ages, but also loses sight of the essential nature of autobiography, that it is, before anything else, a writer’s recounting of his life in an attempt to find meaning in it. The tendency to characterize the *Vita nuova*<sup>8</sup> as autobiographic, as opposed to the problematic “vision” of the *Commedia* as autobiographical, highlights the dilemma. The modern concept of truth requires<sup>9</sup> that “true” events be empirically provable. To be “true” events must have occurred in actuality and have been experienced by the narrator who asserts that they are his experiences. The *Commedia* could hardly be included within such confines. On the other hand, the documentable nature of some of the poetry contained within the *libello*, the actual existence of the settings and of some of the characters in the narrative bears a striking affinity to the modern model of autobiography in which events are reported objectively and without exaggeration and where commentary and interpretation are clearly distinguishable from the facts. The modern definition, however, is simply not

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<sup>7</sup> For a summary of this debate see Paul Zumthor, “Autobiography in the Middle Ages?”

<sup>8</sup> Michelangelo Picone notes that the work is most often categorized as autobiography. (“La *Vita Nuova* fra autobiografia e tipologia” 59)

<sup>9</sup> Modern writers generally hold that an autobiography has to offer an at least ostensibly factual account of the writer’s own life in what William Spengemann terms “a self-written biography.” (xi)

valid in the context of the Middle Ages whose notion of truth bore little resemblance to the modern notion of truth.

If, however, we properly contextualize medieval life-writing and focus on its essential elements, we find that not only did autobiography exist in the Middle Ages but that “truth,” though defined somewhat differently, was as essential to the medieval model as it is to the modern. Moreover, once we understand the medieval notion of truth and how it affects the life-telling process, we see that, notwithstanding the traditional view of the *Vita nuova* as the most “autobiographical” of his works, it is the *Commedia* which Dante uses to tell the story of his life.

It is important to recognize that during the Middle Ages the truth or meaning of an event was more important than the allegorical or symbolic form that such truth or such meaning assumed. Redemption could be expressed by the escape of the Jews from Egypt or by Christ’s crucifixion. Similarly, descent into the underworld might take the form of Jonah being swallowed by a whale or by Christ descending into Hell after his crucifixion. Filial obedience found expression equally in Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac or in Christ’s acceptance of his crucifixion. While this fluidity of image to express meaning has its roots in the biblical exegetical tradition, increasingly this mode of representation was carried over into theological prose and eventually into religious poetry. Hence in the “Dream of the Rood” (Swanton 42-58) an entire body of church doctrine is expressed in a vision of a cross which becomes illuminated, bejewelled and arises in flight. The modern

mind understands and catalogues this mode of expression as “metaphor,” but the modern mind makes a distinction between metaphor and actuality which the medieval mind did not make. In essence, the modern mind does not equate the representation with the event. We place such value on the actuality of events that anything which is seen as a filter to that event detracts from its truth, however, such a distinction was neither necessary nor did it arise. Events were mere representations of further meaning and were rarely considered as being limited to a specific time and space. Moreover, what the modern mind would see as exaggeration or interpretation in the representation of events was considered a perfectly acceptable means of expression. Events were, therefore, interchangeable with other representations that might convey the truth with equal effectiveness. Accordingly, for the medieval reader, the truth of a poem or an account did not hinge on whether the episode had actually occurred. From this perspective, the mere “implausibility” of the events described in the *Commedia* ought not to prevent us from reading them, as the medieval reader might; that is, as “true.” When Dante introduces the framing metaphor of the “cammin di nostra vita” (*Inferno* I, 1) he is not proposing that the reader contemplate whether the journey is actual or not. Rather, he is forging a connection between two signifiers,<sup>10</sup> giving the reader a clue as to the meaning of the work. By taking an image which had long been used to signify life, Dante tells us that what follows will be a life story. The reader is expected to know this and to accept this. In this signifying scheme, life is not like a road, it is a road. A road and life have the

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<sup>10</sup> Cesare Segre notes the distinction made by Saussure between “signifiers” and “signified” (or “meaning”) and suggests that a narrative may be considered from at least two perspectives. The first is “discorsivo” in which the narrative is considered as a “signifier” or secondly, in terms of contents, that is what is meant by the narrative, the signified. (*Le strutture e il tempo* 3) It is in this sense that I use the term “signifier.”

same meaning. They share characteristics. They start. They have forks and curves. And ultimately, they end. Since the meanings are interchangeable so is their representation. The meaning of the work is contained in and revealed through the form of its representation.

Within the work, meaning is further revealed by the similarity one event shares with other events. Hence, in the *Commedia*, the meaning of Dante's descent into the underworld is revealed and emphasized by its similarity to Aeneas's descent. Since Aeneas's descent was revelatory, the reader can expect that Dante's descent will be also. At the same time, the similarities that Dante's descent bears to Christ's descent signals that Dante's event will, like Christ's, have redemptive value. It may, in fact, be that Dante's revelation and redemption came about as a result of an actual event not even described in the *Commedia*, but since actuality is of little importance in the medieval tale, there is little need for Dante to include his actual experience. Instead, it is the adherence to an established pattern which enhances the truth of an episode. Accordingly, the fact that Dante's descent into the underworld has strong literary echoes of Aeneas's<sup>11</sup> ought not to diminish Dante's account. Quite the contrary; since in Dante's time, Virgil's account of the founding of Rome, the *Aeneid*, was considered history (Comparetti 202, 203) and the revelatory power of a descent into the underworld a given, the similarities between Dante's journey and Aeneas's merely enhance the truth of Dante's revelation.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Hollander in "Le opere di Virgilio nella *Commedia* di Dante," has explored at length, the extent of the literary echoes of Virgil in the *Commedia*.

The timing of Dante's journey to parallel Christ's descent into Hell and subsequent resurrection has the same effect.

The fluidity of image in the medieval autobiographical mode, serves a dual purpose. First, it enhances the truth and, therefore, the historicity of the account. Secondly, and of greater importance, it also serves an exegetical function. Associating events from the author's life with events that have pre-existing meaning helps interpret *that life* and thereby serves the autobiographical impulse by elevating the account beyond mere chronicle to an interpretive exercise. When we understand the medieval approach to the function of imagery and grasp the way in which such fluidity of image reveals truth, we see that medieval life-writing actually bears a certain affinity to modern autobiography.

Determining whether autobiography existed as a genre in the Middle Ages is further complicated by the difference between modern first person narration and medieval first person narration. For the modern reader, the use of the first person carries the expectation that the events narrated have been experienced by the "I" recounting them.<sup>12</sup> In the Middle Ages, however, the use of first person narration did not automatically signal that the events narrated should be understood as having been experienced personally by the narrator. The modern conception of the use of first person narrative,

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<sup>12</sup> In his detailed discussion on the role of the narrator in narrating, Gerald Prince acknowledges a number of possible variations in first person narration. Nowhere in his discussion, however, does he even suggest that the narrating "I" might actually narrate events (using the first person) which were experienced by another. (7-16)



particularly in the context of autobiography, has been so conditioned by the modern notion of selfhood and introspection, that the thought that “I” could actually refer to someone other than the narrator seems not only ungrammatical, but intellectually dishonest. For a narrator to recount, for example, that he was given certain privileges when in fact the privileges were granted to someone else seems inconceivable and inexplicable to the modern mind.<sup>13</sup> In the Middle Ages, however, such appropriation of actual events was commonplace because of the convention whereby such techniques were recognized as revelations of truth. As Leo Spitzer has pointed out, “in medieval narrative, the notion of what we might call ‘literary plagiarism’ was commonly extended to include autobiographical facts which could not possibly apply to the author of a particular work.”<sup>14</sup>

At first, the appropriation of the experiences of others might appear to be an extension of the process of appropriating narrative patterns found in other works. But it is more than that. It is a genuine attempt to tell the events of someone else’s life as if they were the author’s, not simply to propose a relationship between two lives. Though the practice is related to the conception of “truth” as discussed above, it is probably more an aspect of the medieval sense of self which was profoundly different from that reflected in modern autobiography. In the Middle Ages, the self was given far less importance

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<sup>13</sup> In the *Manuale de mysteriis ecclesiae*, Pierre de Roissy borrows so heavily from the twelfth century *Poenitentiale* of Robert of Flamborough that he claims to have enjoyed certain dispensation privileges which were actually granted to Flamborough. (Spitzer 414)

<sup>14</sup> Leo Spitzer cites three examples in particular; Pierre de Roissy’s *Manuale de mysteriis ecclesiae*, Juan Ruiz’ thirteenth century *Libro de Buen amor*, and Marie de France’s twelfth century *Espurgatoire S. Patrice*. (414-419) In the last of these Marie substitutes her “I” for that of the monk whose work she was translating.

than it is in the post-Renaissance consciousness<sup>15</sup> and, therefore, its study was not considered to be a worthy subject except to the degree to which it might lead to a better understanding of God.<sup>16</sup> However, while medieval literature was not concerned with the experiences of the individual *per se*, it was interested in the individual experience as it related to the rest of mankind,<sup>17</sup> how it might stand as an *exemplum* for others. More important than the view of an individual as separate from his brothers in humanity, was the view of the individual as one more piece in a great cosmic puzzle. The interpretive

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<sup>15</sup> Arthur Melville Clark, for example, notes the marked paucity of “formulated aspirations” in the Middle Ages and suggests that where they did exist they were “not of a kind to stimulate the individual’s sense of individuality.” (26)

<sup>16</sup> Why medieval literature didn’t deal with the individual but was more concerned with mankind can only be answered with reference to sociological, psychological and political factors which do not form the basis of this thesis. According to Roy Pascal, in the Middle Ages, “the chaotic and violent unpredictability of life could scarcely be reduced by an individual to a meaningful coherence” which Pascal sees as the central defining characteristic of autobiography. (25) Arthur Melville Clark adds that the Renaissance and Reformation saw a “reaffirmation of individuality, which, though accepted in theory by the Church, had in practice been subordinated to ecclesiastical authority, to the fixed social gradation of feudalism and to the rigid castes of guild and community.” (31) We can see early indications of this conception of individual worth in the writings of St. Augustine which were so influential in the formation of theological and psychological thought in the Middle Ages and whose influence on personality is apparent in Dante, Petrarch and Chaucer, (Clark 31) in what Eugene Vance calls the “tension between the moral obligation to remember universals and the temptation to indulge in particulars.” (12) For Augustine, the latter is a useless exercise and leads away from the truth which is that God’s meaning for us is found only in those things that are universal and common to us all.

<sup>17</sup> While Evelyn Birge Vitz suggests that this tendency can be traced to earlier classical biographies such as Suetonius’s early second century *Lives of the Caesars*, she nonetheless, sees the influence of Christianity as the most significant contribution to this type of autobiography. (18) As she suggests, the men who wrote about human nature, the faculties and the appetites were primarily theologians whose basic concern lay not with individuation but with salvation and damnation, “the rise and fall of souls, their vertical movement in relation to God.” Birge Vitz sees this basic orientation as having pervaded almost all medieval thinking about human character and change. “Psychological movement is either exaltation or abasement (and abasement - humiliation - on *one* axis can be directly tied to exaltation on *another*); it is progress or regress: ‘super-gress’ or ‘sub-gress’.” In particular this model was followed in the writing of the lives of Saints who were venerated not because of how different they were from the rest of humanity, but how high above humanity, how “super human” they were. (19) Georges Gusdorf, in his article “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” notes that the “conscious singularity of each individual life is the late product of a specific civilisation. Throughout most of human history, the individual does not oppose himself to all others. He does not feel himself to exist outside of others and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community. No one is rightful possessor of his life or his death. Lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its center everywhere and its circumference no where.” (29-30)

aspect of medieval autobiography, therefore, served two purposes; first to determine the meaning of one's life in the grand scheme of the universe and in particular, within God's divine will, and second, to show how it might have meaning for others and how it might provide instruction to the members of its audience. Ironically, the diminished importance of self as well as the implicit proscription against self-interest and the requirement that literature address more universal concerns, results in an expanded sense of "I" in medieval literature; one which contrasts enormously with the restricted conception which commonly exists in modern narrative. Thus, in the same way that lack of actuality did not detract from the truth of the autobiography, whether the event described actually happened to the narrator or to someone else has equally little impact on the story's didactic value. What it does affect, however, is the breadth of application. Where an author is required to recount events that are uniquely his, it becomes a more difficult task to find a universal application. The freedom to appropriate events, however, broadens the selection process and permits the author to select events which convey a true meaning and which may serve the exigencies of *exemplum*. St. Augustine's *Confessions* demonstrates this combination of a genuine attempt to interpret the meaning of the author/narrator's life in the context of God's divine will and at the same time, to use that interpretation as an *exemplum* or teaching device from which others might learn. What distinguishes the *Confessions* from traditional sermonizing and, according to Spitzer, moves it into the realm of autobiography is that rather than drawing wholly on the scriptures to explain God's truth, Augustine follows the general precept he often preached; "Go not out of doors; rather return into thyself; in the inner man dwelleth

truth.”<sup>18</sup> (417) For those who espouse the modern definition of autobiography, this focus on introspection leads to a ready acceptance of Augustine’s book as truly autobiographical. Roy Pascal, for example, notes the fact that it “could only have been written by the man engaged” (23), that is, by the man who experienced the narrated events. More important to Pascal than the fact that many of the events and feelings are such that only St. Augustine would know them, is the fact that “it is only he who could link them and create out of them a coherence and growing intensity of meaning; only he could shape out of them the coherence of his moral personality.” (23) But Pascal ignores the subtle distinction which makes Augustine’s work so clearly medieval as opposed to modern. The attempt to make sense out of the events is a mere precursor to the ultimate goal of finding a universal application for particular events. Augustine uses events which are uniquely his because they fit the requirement that the events narrated must have universal application. He uses his own events because they embody the meaning he wishes to convey. But the use of his own events as the referent for the meaning which will have a universal application is incidental and is really a matter of choice. St. Augustine’s events are not included simply because he experienced them. They are not included merely so that he can understand and tell his life story. Rather, he understands and tells his story so that it may be used as an example of God’s meaning which has universal application. The interest in his life as an individual lies in his attempt to define that individuality as a reflection of God’s will, an attempt to see God’s pattern in his life. Augustine is not looking to discover how he is different from other men. He is not

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<sup>18</sup> “*Noli foras ire, in interiore animae habitat veritas.*” (Quoted in Spitzer 417) Augustine’s *Confessiones* was likely written between 397 and 400.

looking to see what drives him and how his particular circumstances shaped him into the man he became. Augustine looks at his life instead in an attempt to see God's plan for him, to see the meaning, the sense of the events that occurred before he was graced with hindsight; not the meanings that he thought they held before, but their "true" meaning as revealed by God after Augustine's conversion.

Because the events that Augustine chooses are mostly events from his own life, it is difficult perhaps to see the extent to which his work is quintessentially medieval. However, as Eugene Vance submits, "in the *Confessions* the self is merely a 'contingent signifier'; the 'deictic 'I'' a purely 'grammatical' sign pointing to an order of written signs identical with history."<sup>19</sup> (13) There are instances, for example, in which we discern events and details which recall the lives of others. Augustine's conversion taking place in his thirty-third year, for example, may have been a fortuitous coincidence with Christ's age at crucifixion but could just as easily have been a fabrication intended to enhance the "truth" of his story. If Augustine repeats the lessons of earlier authors, appropriates their models to do so, or borrows elements from the lives of others it is in order to serve the function of medieval autobiography; to seek meaning in one's life

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<sup>19</sup> As Vance points out, there is in Virgil's *Aeneid* a long self-narrative "that can only have served as a poetic model -- rather than as an example -- for Augustine's *Confessions*." He is referring to Aeneas's narrative of the fall of Troy in the court of Dido, which he calls an "auto-scopic narrative whose sincerity moves its audience." (14) Given Augustine's self professed love of Virgil's work, it is not unreasonable to believe that Augustine knew this passage well. His use of it then as a model, is not so much a borrowing, but a recognition that the lesson of Virgil can also be learned from his own writing. As Vance says, Virgil shows us not only "the inherent dangers of epic (and perhaps Homeric) narrative by suggesting that epic actually nurtures violence within those cultures whose order its discourse purportedly preserves, but he shows us, just as importantly, the futility of man's attempts to know his own nature through his actions in history." (15) This is precisely the lesson being taught by Augustine.

which in turn is part of a universal truth. The likeness a work bore to another work would enhance its truthfulness as we have seen above. The likeness was also in keeping with a manner of self-definition that is highly prevalent in medieval autobiography, that is, the attempt to define oneself in terms of likeness to others. What gave a work credence was its conformity to an established pattern. Yes, it should be better, it may even surpass the model work, but it ought not to deviate from recognized patterns.

A better example is perhaps the autobiography of Peter Abelard, a twelfth century French cleric,<sup>20</sup> in which the exemplary purpose is more pronounced. As Evelyn Birge Vitz observes, “Abelard is not primarily narrating, ... he is speaking to others.” The work raises no questions nor doubts about the author’s past or present motivations or his nature nor is there any discovery of “who I am” through writing.<sup>21</sup> Abelard looks instead, to his place in the greater scheme of things and seeks “to understand the *meaning* - in an allegorical, or figural sense - of his life.” (Birge Vitz 32-34) Abelard aims to teach his newly learned lesson to others by associating the meaning of his life with theirs. As Birge Vitz says, Abelard “associates himself with his reader as the *destinataire* of his own sermon.” (34). At the same time Abelard typifies the medieval tendency to perceive oneself in terms of similarity to others, not in individual distinction. Abelard, according

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<sup>20</sup> Pierre Abailard (Peter Abelard) (1079-1142) wrote *Historia calamitatum*, the story of his adversities sometime in 1132 or soon after. (Radice 25)

<sup>21</sup> Abelard’s life story then is not aimed at expressing his innermost motivations and sense of self-worth but rather to have an impact on his reader. Birge Vitz says this is literature not of *expression* but of *impression* and notes that Abelard is making of himself a sort of type, or *exemplum*. “He is delivering a sermon with his own life as the *exemplum* from which the lesson is to be learned.” (33) The artistic impulse behind medieval autobiography could, therefore, be said to be the anticipated reception rather than the purging effect of self-expression.

to Birge Vitz, never presents his philosophical or theological arguments as original, unusual, and different - only *better*; “His mind, his logic are not different, only greater than those of his adversaries.” (12, 13)

Abelard, like so many other medieval autobiographers, aligns himself continually with historical, biblical and literary figures and often quotes not what he said on any given occasion, but his own quotation of some warrior, saint or philosopher.<sup>22</sup> Salimbene,<sup>23</sup> according to Marziano Guglielminetti, also displays these tendencies, recounting personal experience in the form of episodes from the lives of the saints or associating personal experiences in his own life with significant historical events. (29)

Abelard, like Augustine, does not see himself or his life as *unique*, but rather *comparable* to other great men and their respective lives. (Birge Vitz 25) This convention leads to the mutability of form in the representation of the *exemplum*. It becomes especially pronounced in the religious autobiographies of the Middle Ages wherein the “religious experience is largely dissociated from the specific personality”<sup>24</sup> (Pascal 24) and rapidly becomes accepted in the genre.

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<sup>22</sup> Evelyn Birge Vitz refers to this as the “fascinating tendency of the Middle Ages and even, paradoxically, of medieval autobiography to be much less interested in the individual and his experiences and reactions, than in the time-honored experiences of all men - or rather of the great men and models from the past.” (19)

<sup>23</sup> The Italian Frate Salimbene de Adam, also known as Salimbene da Parma, (1221-1287) wrote the *Cronica*, his life story, in Latin sometime between 1280 and 1287. (Guglielminetti 29)

<sup>24</sup> See also Maddalena Carrasco who notes the importance of conformity to a “standard formula” in the telling of saints’ lives. (37-38) While Carrasco’s observations are made with respect to pictorial hagiography, her comments are equally valid in terms of narrative concepts. As Roland Barthes notes, “Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated language, whether oral or written, pictures, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, *drame* [suspense drama], comedy, pantomime, paintings (in Santa Ursula by Carpaccio, for instance), stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversation.” (237)

Given the above, Spitzer's suggestion that we must assume that the medieval public saw in the "poetic I" a representative of mankind (421) appears quite tenable. According to Spitzer, in the Middle Ages, the habit of confusing the empiric with the poetic "I" was in general unknown (421) and the medieval listener would know that when a poet said "I," he was not necessarily referring only to himself. Dante's juxtaposition of the first person singular and plural in the first line of the *Commedia*<sup>25</sup> may, therefore, be read as representing a metanarrative<sup>26</sup> recognition of this understanding. Where the first person narrative was intended to teach, the empirical existence and experience of the narrator could have little interest except to emphasize that the narrated events did happen to an actual individual, who could just as easily have been the listener. The end result, says Spitzer, is that the medieval public was interested only in the representative role of the poet. The listener was only concerned about the poet or writer to the extent that such poet or writer could represent him, the listener. Therefore, if an author borrowed someone else's events, it didn't really matter, since it "was a trifling matter who the empirical person behind this 'I' actually was." (416)

Because of the primacy of meaning over actuality and the relative unimportance of the individual *qua* individual, whether something actually happened or not was, therefore, not as important as what was to be learned from it. Suso, for example, presents

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<sup>25</sup> "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita/ mi ritrovai per una selva oscura." *Inferno* 1, 1-2

<sup>26</sup> According to Gerald Prince "when the subject of a discourse is narrative, we may say that the discourse is metanarrative." He goes on to suggest that there are a number of ways in which discourse can be said to be 'metanarrative'. For example, "a particular narrative may refer to itself and to those elements by which it is constituted and communicated." (15) It is in this sense that I use the term 'metanarrative.'



himself explicitly as “an example of God’s will.”<sup>27</sup> Although Suso describes the stages of his spiritual growth as historical events, they appear more as exemplary devices than as actual occurrence and according to Pascal, have significance “chiefly because they may be applied by others.” (25) Medieval autobiography, not surprisingly then, tended to portray many experiences in terms of archetypes, to roll all experience into a greater picture and to see all of the events of one’s life relative to the greater story of mankind. When speaking of himself, the writer was expected to transform himself “esthetically and morally, into a symbol of humanity as a whole, or at least of an entire class of men.” (Birge Vitz 40) The writer, therefore, was not obliged to recount the actual events which engendered the understanding of his place in the universe. Since the events themselves were merely representative of a greater meaning anyhow, he needed only to relate their meaning in whatever symbolic fashion he might choose.<sup>28</sup>

St. Augustine, therefore, does not recount deeds simply because they occurred but, instead, because they represent spiritual growth. He treats the characters who people his life story in a similar fashion so that in this representative mode, his mother is presented more as a symbol than as a human being who existed in actuality. We will see this same tendency in the *Commedia* where events and people are often included *because* of the meaning they convey. Just as the medieval individual didn’t matter except in terms

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<sup>27</sup> *The Life of Blessed Henry Suso by Himself* is based on a late fourteenth century manuscript and was probably written between 1360 and 1365. (v)

<sup>28</sup> In the case of the *Roman de la Rose*, a classic example of first person narrative whose autobiographical value is dubious, human experience was typically presented in what Birge Vitz refers to as “its archetypal aspect, not as an individualized sequence of actual events. From both the ontological and chronological standpoints, the symbolic, exemplary side of things takes precedence over the specific case, which, indeed, is not even represented narratively.” (40)

of how he fit into the grand scheme of things, actual events had little relevance in the Middle Ages beyond the truth they might contain or represent. Accordingly, if a different event happened to another individual but shared the same meaning as an event that occurred to the narrator, the former could be appropriated and commandeered at will so as to make the ultimate meaning of the narrated life more intelligible.

By the time we reach Dante's *Commedia*, the exemplary function of life-writing has become so entrenched in medieval narrative that the writer's own voice is secondary to the initial universal focus of the story. The particular ("mi ritrovai") is subordinated to the universal in an implicit narrative reflection of the medieval sense of self. The particular is also a part of the universal, a microcosmic representation of the universal. The task for the autobiographer is to find what portion of the universal truth his particular life represents and, conversely, how his particular life can be expressed in universal terms.

Universality, not actuality, is, therefore, the essence of truth in this model. Sameness and recurrence attest to truth. Accordingly, historicity as we know it was not a major determinant of whether a work was considered to be fiction or non-fiction. Divergence from the norm detracted from the truthfulness of events. Consequently, fiction in the Middle Ages is not that which is not actual, but that which does not reflect God's plan and is, therefore, not true. Non-fiction is that which is used to reveal God's plan. As Paul Zumthor points out, "Medieval storytellers did not make as clear a

distinction between an account of real events and fiction as did those of other periods.”

(29) Accordingly, the modern arguments against characterizing biography as history<sup>29</sup> hold little sway in the medieval context for such arguments are based on a series of assumptions and premises which did not hold the same validity in the time before the Renaissance. Intent (whether the work was intended to teach or to entertain) not content is determinant of the truth of the work and by extension, determinant of whether the work is autobiographical. Again, when looked at from this perspective, we have another key to unravel the truth claims of the *Commedia*. Whereas for the modern reader “true” means actually happened, documentable, historical, for the medieval mind “truth” signified that an event or assertion had meaning determined by God, that it was genuine, not an attempt to deceive, that it was instead, a revelation of truth. As Theodolinda Barolini suggests, the cloaking of a truth in the guise of what appears to be a lie, or what Dante calls “*un ver c’ha faccia di menzogna*” should not in any way detract from that truth. In her opinion it is merely a rhetorical device.<sup>30</sup> If we fail to understand this, we will fall prey to the

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<sup>29</sup> According to Sir Lewis Namier, biography ought not to be considered as “history” because biographers feared the “unbounded fields of history and preferred the boundaries of a single life.” Namier’s suggestion, therefore, is that biographers are not capable of “big picture thinking.” Secondly, Namier suggests that the lack of professional standards for biographers might disqualify biography from the title of “history.” Once again, however, this is merely reflective of the modern definition of truth is based on provability and actuality. Concomitant with this objection, Namier suggests that biographers lack the necessary psychological qualifications to properly assess and interpret the acts of individuals. Thirdly, Namier suggests that biographers can “pick and choose among their subject’s papers to illuminate the single human being, unlike the historian who must use all of the evidence and look at the lives of many men.”

<sup>30</sup> “In my opinion, Dante self-consciously used the means of fiction - poetic and narrative strategies - in the service of a vision he believed to be true, thus creating the hybrid he defined a “truth that has the face of a lie” - ‘*un ver c’ha faccia di menzogna*.’ We should remember that the use of rhetorical techniques in the service of a divinely inspired message is explicitly defended by Augustine in the *De doctrina Christiana*, who furnishes examples of Paul’s rhetorical prowess.” (Barolini *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* 11)

never-ending discussion noted by Barolini<sup>31</sup> and William Franke. Franke is of the opinion that the discussion is ultimately fruitless given that the question of the truth of the *Commedia* actually comprises so many further questions.<sup>32</sup> (261) But more importantly, for the purposes of this thesis, focusing on the issue of the “truth” of the literal narrative unnecessarily detracts from a consideration of the autobiographical aspect which is rooted, as we shall see, in the allegorical level of meaning.

Even in modern autobiography, the “truth” of an account is seen as threatened by the near impossibility of the author’s offering a detached, disinterested and objective account.<sup>33</sup> The necessarily retrospective approach of autobiography interprets events in

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<sup>31</sup> Barolini describes this as a “stratified division of the text’s authorial persona along allegorical lines, with the moralist responsible for the allegorical truth that is hidden under the *bella menzogna* of the poet’s fanciful inventions” which “creates a deplorable dichotomy that persists to this day.” (*The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* 6)

<sup>32</sup> “Is it a true story? Does the narrative relating Dante’s journey through the three realms of the world to come purport to be literally true and so to be a historical account? Was Dante a prophet? Is his poem inspired? Is it supposed to be a true revelation of a metaphysical order of being or of an eschatological dimension of existence? And these formulations cover only what might be termed ‘religious truth’, whereas the poem certainly has no less pretensions to disclosing philosophical, psychological, social, existential, etc., truth and truths, although a powerful compulsion to unity in Dante’s Christian, semiologically centred universe would make all these appear as facets of the poem’s Truth.” (261) Franke’s recognition of the complexity of the issue recognizes that determining truth in the Middle Ages by no means hinged on actuality alone.

<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, autobiography and even biography have not generally been regarded as “historical.” Francis James West, in his consideration of whether biography can be treated as history, notes that “biography is apt to be regarded as a branch of literature or literary criticism, rather than as history.” (5) William Franke, however, raises a number of issues which may cause one to reconsider the notion of “historicity” and which, if accepted, might very well justify including autobiography in history. As Franke suggests, “history can never be attained as an achieved fact, over and done with in the past. History always reaches us out of the past through the mediation of an interpretation in the present, an appropriation determined by what is meaningful in a new situation.” (270) Remo Bodei, in considering the issue of the role of time in historic narration suggests an approach consistent with Franke’s thinking. In Bodei’s opinion, the narration of history may actually require a less rigid attention to time lines than that suggested by traditional historians. “La complessità della storia - in particolare del nostro tempo - richiede l’abbandono dei modelli narrativi ed intuitivi, perché deve spiegare fenomeni distanti dal suo comune spesso contro-intuitivi. Le storie sono così processi di trasformazione di sistemi sotto l’azione di stato nell’ambito sistemico, che hanno carattere contingente in relazione al funzionamento del sistema interessato.” (341-343)

light of subsequent events and may not, therefore, see earlier events as they actually were. As Pascal points out, in “any worthwhile life there is a dominant direction that is not accidental, so that ultimately life is a sort of graph linking experiences.” (17) In contrast to a contemporaneous chronicle, the autobiography cannot be objective and, therefore, cannot constitute history by modern thinking. But again we must differentiate between a modern and a medieval notion. Modern historicity, like modern truth, is contingent on actuality<sup>34</sup> but also on objectivity. Not so in medieval writing where historicity and authority find their source elsewhere. Perhaps not surprisingly these, like truth, are derived from form. Augustine, for example, sees grammar as the fruit of reason in language and believes that grammar also serves as “the basis for an aesthetic order that can be free of error.” (Vance 12) In his *De ordine* Augustine notes the connection between grammar and history suggesting that historicity is tied to the worthiness of the writing.<sup>35</sup>

In the *Commedia*, it is not surprising that we sense the presence of a variety of forms and patterns ostensibly “borrowed” from other works. John Freccero, for example,

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<sup>34</sup> Zumthor's comments in respect of the *Historia calamitatum* of Abelard to the effect that, although the work is “moral and didactic”, it is “centered around events which are composed of controllable elements and can be defined in modern terms as historical” (30) reveal the modern notion of historicity to be tied to actuality.

<sup>35</sup> “But since its very name [grammar] proclaims that it professes letters, -- hence, it is called ‘literature’ in Latin -- it resulted that whatever was committed to writing [*litteris*] as being worthy of memory necessarily passed into its domain. Thus to grammar was added the discipline of history, which is a single yet many-sided word, one which includes an infinity of things fuller of cares than of enjoyment or truth, and which is more burdensome for grammarians than for historians themselves.” (Book II, 12, 37). (English translation by Eugene Vance based on the original text and the French translation of that edition.) “Poterat iam perfecta esse grammatica sed, quia ipso nomine profiteri se littera clamat - unde etiam Latine litteratura dicitur - factum est, ut, quicquid dignum memoria litteris mandaretur, ad eam necessario pertineret. Itaque unum quidem nomen, sed res infinita multiplex curarum plenior quam iocunditatis aut ueritatis huic disciplinae accessit, historia non tam ipsis historicis quam grammaticis laboriosa.” (Green 139)

has noted the great many similarities in the *Commedia* and the works of St. Augustine. In particular, he points to similarities between the Prologue scene in *Inferno* I and Augustine's *Confessions* and submits that Dante looks to Augustine for much of his imagery and for many of his motifs.<sup>36</sup> We understand, however, that this is not attributable to a simple lack of originality on Dante's part nor should it detract from the historicity of his account. Rather, it is merely intentional conformity to medieval convention. Borrowing events from the literary works of others emphasizes the truth and validity of the author's own story. Accordingly, if Dante paints his conversion in a form reminiscent of Augustine's conversion, his (Dante's) story will be seen as more genuine not less. Form, not actuality, therefore, is what determines truth and, by extension, historicity. Thus we may read Dante's frequent reminders of the importance of form,<sup>37</sup> especially in the *Paradiso*, as giving metanarrative notice of the historicity and value of his work.

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<sup>36</sup> Freccero points out that both writers experience thwarted attempts at conversion and both experience the descent into humility as a necessary element of redemption. As well, the frequent use of wings imagery throughout the *Commedia* can be associated with Augustine's writings on the journey of the soul being associated with flight. (*Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* 15) Similarly, the allegories of flight used throughout the *Commedia* extend as far back as Plato and Ulysses according to Freccero, who says that "Autobiography is represented schematically in Dante's poem by this synthesis of Platonic allegory with traditional biblical motifs, just as it was in St. Augustine's *Confessions*." ("Introduction to the *Inferno*" 173) Recently, however, Antonio Mastrobuono has taken issue with this assessment of the *Commedia* in a detailed critique of Freccero's *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*. In response to his own question, "Are we to regard Dante's entire spiritual autobiography as essentially Augustinian in structure as Freccero claims?", he answers with a decisive "Definitely not! Dante's entire spiritual journey is essentially Thomistic in structure." (240) Among the many arguments he uses to support his position, Mastrobuono points out that seeing the problem of Dante's conversion in Augustinian terms cannot properly address the issue of Dante's spiritual progress. Freccero's insistence on an Augustinian conversion leaves him only with antinomies to explain the poet's gradual spiritual evolution. Freccero's solution; "a series of conversions" is simply not acceptable to Mastrobuono. (238-239)

<sup>37</sup> *Paradiso* I, 103-105: "Le cose tutte quante/ hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma/ che l'universo a Dio fa simigliante," *Paradiso* II, 70-72: "Virtù diverse esser convegnon frutti/ di principî formali, e quei, for ch'uno,/ seguiterieno a tua ragion distrutti," *Paradiso* III, 79-84; "Anzi è formale ad esto beato esse/ tenersi dentro a la divina voglia, /per ch'una fansi nostre voglie stesse;/ sì come noi sem di soglia in soglia/ per questo regno, a tutto il regno piace/ com'a lo re ch 'n suo voler ne invoglia."

But the presence of a metanarrative element also highlights an aspect of medieval autobiography, that is, self-exegesis, which is highly pronounced throughout all of Dante's prose and prosimetric works. Such self-exegesis is not possible where the author is expected to distinguish the recounting of events from his interpretation of them. However, when the actuality of events is not as crucial to the truth of the events as it is in the modern model, the writer can include commentary and interpretation within the account, by presenting the commentary in essence, in the guise of an event. Not only is Dante, therefore, writing autobiography but he is writing about how his autobiography ought to be interpreted. In so doing he implicitly presents himself as an authority, at very least, with respect to the events which comprise his story. Far from detracting from the truth and historicity of the work, the inclusion of commentary and interpretation confirms the authoritative nature of the account and thereby imbues it with historicity.

Although after the Renaissance, the reliance on memory inherent in such a retrospective interpretation is often seen as detracting from the reliability and, therefore, historicity of autobiography, in the Middle Ages, memory was afforded much more value. Rather than being the instrument of autobiography's demotion from the appellation of "history," memory, St. Augustine believes, is the tool which enables us to gain access to the immaterial essences, including the highest essence in terms of which a

man's own image is to be perceived.<sup>38</sup> For Augustine, memory does have the potential to preserve truth and autobiography has the potential for historicity.

What is emerging from all of this is that, notwithstanding differences in appearance, the *Commedia* is as much autobiography as is the *Vita nuova*. The differences in the two works in terms of style, however, are attributable to the differing stages of personal evolution they represent and to the different models each work emulates. The *Vita nuova* was written earlier than the *Commedia* and, as such, represents Dante's early forays into the world of lyric poetry.<sup>39</sup> Although the seeds of an evolution towards a less-"medieval" model may be seen as early as Abelard,<sup>40</sup> the sense of self which we find in Petrarch and subsequent modern autobiographies<sup>41</sup> may be more easily traced to the evolution of the poetic "I" in lyric poetry. In its earliest stages, the lyric

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<sup>38</sup> Frances Yates notes Augustine's belief that knowledge of the divine is innate in memory. "Thou has given me this honour to my memory to reside in it; but in what quarter of it are thou resident, that I am considering." (*Confessions* X, 25-26) Nonetheless, St. Augustine was aware of the potential of the memory to be subject to contamination of a special sort, given that "the memory may ingest images that originate in sensual experience" (Vance 10): "The soul has loved these bodies outside of itself by means of the senses of the flesh, and it has become implicated through longstanding familiarity with them." ("Et quia illa corpora sunt, quae foris per sensus carnis adamavit, eorumque diuturna quadam familiaritate implicata est," *De trinitate* X, v, 7) One must, therefore, be very careful in choosing between the truthful memory and the contaminated recollections.

<sup>39</sup> See Shaw for an exhaustive discussion on the issue of dating the *Vita nuova*.

<sup>40</sup> Roy Pascal writes that while Abelard's "ostensible reason for his account is to demonstrate submission to God's will; the unconscious reasons are truly autobiographical - to recapture the past, to see his life as a whole, to find within its vagaries its one rapture and the one indivisible personality." (24)

<sup>41</sup> With Petrarch and the emerging individualism of the humanists, autobiography moved closer towards a modern model when what Pascal calls "a startling change" came over men's thoughts with regard to themselves. (26) The Renaissance saw for the first time a real interest in "what distinguishes one man from all others; an interest in the unusual, the different, the bizarre, the deviant." (Birge Vitz 20) Pascal considers Petrarch's 1351 *Letter to Posterity* as expressive of a "new direction of interest and self-confidence" and introduces what Pascal calls the theme of "untroubled concern for the inward dimensions of the self, springing not from any external necessity, self-defense or whatever it might be, but from a compulsion to meditate upon oneself." (26) By the fifteenth century the poetic "I" had become more closely tied to the protagonist of the work in question and was so closely linked in the mind of the listener to the "exterior subject which these circumstances implicitly indicate" that there no longer existed an impediment to the "I" being identified with the person of the author.



poems shared many of the same aspects we saw at play in the religious autobiographies of Abelard and Augustine. For example, while, as Zumthor points out, “In narrative or didactic poems, the author often directly intervenes in the text through an apostrophe to his audience,” the “author’s person, then appears in order to confirm the objectivity of the text -- nothing more.” (Zumthor 31) As Zumthor reminds us, because of the transmission mode of these poems, mouth to ear, the speaker could always change and so if the author (who is perhaps one of the successive reciters) has made of the *I* the subject of the statement, then this *I* functions as a potential form whose actualization depends on the circumstances.” Zumthor concludes, therefore, that it was unlikely that such poetry would have been interpreted in an autobiographical sense.<sup>42</sup> (32) As was the case with Abelard’s or Augustine’s first person accounts, in the early lyric poetry, since the poetic “I” is not constrained to signify an empirical narrator, the writer is similarly free to emphasise meaning to the point where events as actual occurrences have little value. However, as Zumthor observes, with the poet’s gradual movement towards inclusion of himself in the text, vernacular poetry began to take on certain autobiographical aspects. Similarly, a late twelfth century variant of the *grand chant courtois* in which a series of songs were linked so as to suggest a linear succession of events,<sup>43</sup> lent itself easily to the

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<sup>42</sup> In the case of the “grand chant courtois,” observes Zumthor (32), “the absence of a perceptible referent for the *I*, as well as for narrative sequences, prohibits the introduction of the notion of autobiography.” Zumthor also points to the use of “I” in the *pastourelles* and in Guillaume de Lorris’s *Roman de la Rose*, suggesting that in the former the “spoken narrative merges grammatically with the act of enunciation itself. But is clear that the narration of which I is the subject in no way involves the story of a person.” In the case of the *Roman de la Rose*, he says that the “I” has the same nature as the personifications (*Doux regards* or *Courtoisie*), and for this reason he participates in the game with them; both the I and the personifications form the base of a metaphorical, universal and abstract meaning.” (34-35)

<sup>43</sup> The twelfth century troubadours Raimond de Miraval and Uc de Saint Circ composed a set of songs “linked by an artificial sequence of their dominant themes” so that the “fictitious references” constituted, “in linear succession, a kind of novelistic schema.” The montage thus created permitted the simulation of

perception of lyrical poetry as possibly autobiographical. At the same time the “grands chants courtois” were more and more frequently accompanied by “vidas” and “razos” to produce an intermingling of text and biographical interpretation. Ultimately, towards the end of the Middle Ages, what Zumthor calls “a narrative reconstruction of the lyrical statement with the ‘I’ taken seriously” came into being. (43) Symptomatic of Dante’s lyrical stage in his writing career, the *Vita nuova* likely owes its form to this development, as opposed to the more spiritually focused Augustinian model with which the *Commedia* is frequently associated.

Given the divergent aims of, what I shall call the “lyric” model, and the “Augustinian” model, it is logical that both models would also exhibit differences in the use of the poetic “I.” In the *Vita nuova*, the “I,” while reminiscent of the Augustinian detachment of narrator from protagonist, is, in fact, “hierarchically double,” referring at once to an omniscient narrator and to the person whose memory evokes the moments of its own past existence. (Zumthor 43) The use of “I” in the *Commedia* is more akin to the “I” in the Augustinian model in which, according to William Spengemann the narrative mode is “grounded ultimately in the conviction that the retrospective narrator can see his life from a point outside it, that his view is not subject to the limiting conditions of the life he is recounting.”<sup>44</sup> Augustine’s perspective is not so much one of hindsight,

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an “*aventure*” and created what Zumthor describes as a “projection into measurable time of successive and differentiated acts.” (36)

<sup>44</sup> While the past self, the protagonist, can see each event in his life only in its everchanging relationship to a past which is being continuously reshaped by the addition of new experiences in the present and to future expectations which experience is continually revising, the narrator can see each past event in its fixed relation to a past which has presumably reached its final form.” (Spengemann 7)

although temporally that may be the case; rather, Augustine contemplates past events from the perspective of what Spengemann calls “the point of immutable truth.” (Spengemann 6, 7) In contrast to the Augustinian model, in the *Vita nuova*, Dante relocates the perspective from somewhere outside that life to a point within the life of the narrator, taking the narrator from a “timeless ground above the protagonist’s life to a point further along in the time of that life.” (Spengemann 34) Dante’s narrator in the *Vita nuova*, therefore, remains temporally and spatially in the “here and now” as opposed to Augustine who would have us believe that he has existentially altered his state of being and whose perspective is, therefore, one which should not be measured temporally or spatially along a mundane continuum. Augustine attempts to surmount the paradox that one cannot truly write autobiography until one’s life has ended by suggesting that his conversion in essence has brought about a death of his former self. In his conversion, St. Augustine has begun a new life and can, therefore, look at the former life with the knowledge that comes from seeing a completed picture and being able to attribute the proper weight to the events that can only be apparent when a life is viewed in its totality. As Eugene Vance suggests, “the *Confessions* form a dialogue between the converted self and the self-as-other, the *vetus homo* of history.” (5) The end of an old life and the start of a new is not only a result of conversion but is an essential element of “true” autobiography. In the *Commedia* (*Paradise XXVII*<sup>45</sup>), however, Dante elaborates upon this element. When his pilgrim looks back to see how far he has come, the

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<sup>45</sup> “Onde la donna, che mi vide assolto de l’attendere in sù, mi disse: ‘Adima il viso, e guarda come tu se’ volto.’” *Paradiso*. XXVII, 76-78

contemporaneous existence of “then” and “now,” reveals that the removal necessary to review one’s life, is not so much temporal or linear but existential.

Narratively, this perspective runs risks. Pascal speaks of the tendency to “make the line linking the past and present far too exactly continuous and logical” or to rationalize our lives, noting that memory “operates unconsciously to the same end.”<sup>46</sup> We will see, however, that Dante, as a poet, was obviously aware of such pitfalls and to a certain extent permits the narrator of the *Commedia* to withhold his ultimate interpretation and present knowledge of the meaning of events and instead permits the events to reveal their own meanings until ultimately all meaning is revealed in Paradise. As Iannucci states, “Here, beyond space and time, all meaning is gathered in and consummated.” (“Paradiso XXXI” 472)

The distinction in the perspectives of the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia* has a series of consequences, the first of which is the tone of narrative vis-à-vis the events of the past. As Spengemann notes, Dante, in the *Vita nuova* tends to view his past life far less harshly than does Augustine. Augustine professes no love for his past sins but Dante’s love of Beatrice “and the actions inspired by her provide the main impetus behind the *Vita nuova*.” (Spengemann 34) Dante cannot help but retain some attachment to the events that have brought him to Beatrice. Augustine’s events, on the other hand, were in no way conducive to his present position and, therefore, can be dismissed more

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<sup>46</sup> “The consciousness of the outcome of an experience imposes itself on the experience and distorts it; the completed fact is substituted for the ‘fact-in-the-making.’” (Pascal 15, 16)

easily. This is not to say, however, that Dante wholeheartedly adopts the Augustinian model in the *Commedia*. Indeed, Dante uses Augustine's model as merely one of many source models to which, as we saw above, he effects a series of revisions, annotations and additions. Accordingly, while Beatrice's rebuke in *Purgatorio XXX* might suggest that Dante is emulating Augustine's rejection of the past, closer examination shows that the rebuke is not an absolute rejection of Dante's love for Beatrice but a rejection of *how* he loved her. While I will discuss this in greater detail in the context of Dante's evolving love story, the distinction is necessary here to show that the *Commedia*, while closer to Augustine's model than is the *Vita nuova*, is by no means a simple regurgitation of Augustinian thought.

Similarly, while there are discernible differences in the relation of action to form found in the *Vita nuova* and that which is found in the *Commedia*, again, the *Commedia* cannot be said to be entirely Augustinian. In the *Vita nuova*, the events of Dante's life, the action, share some of the value that Augustine had placed almost entirely on form. That is, the action in Dante's *Vita nuova* has a revelatory function. In Augustine's "life" the revelatory function is contained in the form through which the action is presented, that is, in the form of a retrospective. According to Spengemann, Augustine's life "only has value when contemplated through the form of truth, and even then primarily as an example of error" and that "action and form are reconciled entirely on the ground of form." (26) Augustine explains the truth behind the protagonist's errors from his detached position and thereby highlights the distinction between the narrator and

protagonist. In contrast, Dante, acting as narrator, allows the form of truth to emerge gradually from the protagonist's experiences, that is, from the action. As a result, the connection between the narrator and the protagonist in the *Vita nuova* is much closer to the modern conception of the poetic "I." In the *Vita nuova* Dante sees the events as capable of revealing truth, whereas for Augustine, events have a hidden meaning that is only available from the outside perspective. Whether Dante does this intentionally or not, he is moving towards the notion that man can know himself and that man can interpret his own experiences from within his life. This approach accepts that events have a meaning in themselves as opposed to being meaningless except in what they represent. However, later in the *Commedia*, Dante will reveal the approach of the *Vita nuova* not as wrongminded but merely as close-minded and limiting. Though he accepts Augustine's notion that the greater truth lies in the meaning revealed from a removed state, Dante does not reject outright the "lesser" truth of the actual event.

Finally, the differing perspectives of the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia*, together with Dante's continuing concern for authentication contributes to the difference in the representative styles of the two works. In the *Vita nuova* events are considerably less allegorical in their presentation than Augustine's events. In the sense that Augustine denies "any ultimate spiritual significance to the temporal causal connections among the events of the faithless life, whatever divine meaning any particular event does possess stems entirely from its direct, vertical relation to the absolute truth, not from its place in a horizontal sequence of causes and effects; and that allegorical meaning is supplied

entirely by the narrator, who alone is in a position to know it.” (Spengemann 36, 37) For Augustine, all of the events of his former life shared the same meaning (that is, that his faithlessness always resulted in error) and were, therefore, interchangeable. For Dante, in the *Vita nuova* at least, more than in the medieval minds before him, it is the events in their actuality and the concurrence of events that contain meaning. It is essential, therefore, that he include, in his account, the events which have meaning. Since these events reveal a personal meaning, they cannot be so readily interchanged with events taken from the lives of others.

In the *Vita nuova*, the empirical “I” does have some import, more at least than it does in Augustine’s writing. Since for Augustine all of the events of his former life shared the same meaning, the choice of which events to include was not crucial. In fact as we have seen above, the events described may not even have been culled from Augustine’s own actuality. In contrast, for Dante of the *Vita nuova*, the selection process is much more integral. The process consists in selecting those events which were part of the pattern of meaning and dispensing with those that were not. Thus, the role of editing becomes essential to the *Vita nuova*. Pascal notes that in autobiography as opposed to journal keeping, the autobiographer may revise the journal entry, may omit it or give it a different weight than it might have enjoyed when it was written and when its import in the overall picture of his life could not have been assessed. (4) The *Vita nuova* epitomizes this aspect in its metaphoric representation of the memory as a book written by the protagonist and from which the author now extracts those events which have

meaning, copying them along with the necessary glosses into the *libello*. Dante, in writing his own *razos*, creates a product which bears some resemblance to the religious strain of medieval biography but which, as was suggested above, is much closer to the secular lyric tradition of life-writing. However, in the *Commedia* Dante moves beyond the model of the *Vita nuova* and, as was noted above, fashions a model which incorporates and then revises elements of Augustine's model and others. This shift accounts for the inclusion of the commentary within the text of the *Commedia*, the de-emphasis on actuality as the proof of events and moreover the move away from the book of memory which is markedly individual or particular and towards the book of the universe.

It is against this backdrop that we must assess Dante's work and the *Commedia* in particular. A product of the prevailing theology and an heir to the poetic tradition which gave birth to the *razos* and *vidas*, Dante, as Zumthor suggests, was aware of the inertia existing in "a language traditionally void of all avowals, of any aim of personal revelation" (46) and yet the *Commedia* does not closely resemble any one in particular of the previous autobiographical models. Instead, Dante uses the tools provided by the existing traditions to forge a new model. In appropriating the mode of autobiography, he alters it, borrowing from the Augustinian model but, at the same time, incorporating the evolving notions of the poetic tradition and engrafting innovations of his own to fashion a uniquely personal autobiographical model.



The process whereby he arrives at the model which culminates in the *Commedia* was, not surprisingly, also a gradual one; a product of Dante's own personal evolution. Although *Monarchia* and *De vulgari eloquentia* bear the stamp of Dante's own personality and reflect the intellectual evolution in his life, it is in the *Vita nuova*, the *Convivio*<sup>47</sup> and, ultimately, the *Divine Comedy* that we see Dante carve his own autobiographical path. Inasmuch as all three works attempt to make sense of the events of one man's life within God's divine plan, to see the meaning of events rather than simply chronicle them, they bear a certain affinity to the Augustinian model. In these works the "sentenzia" rather than the occurrence is paramount. According to Zumthor, the biographical "reality" is not the most important element in the *Vita nuova*; rather it is the "sensus" which prevails over the "littera." (43) The *Convivio* as well, albeit with a different slant, devalues literal representation. Similarly, the *Commedia* borrows somewhat from the Augustinian tradition in its attempt to create out of this meaning an exemplum in which the author's story is a lesson for everyman. As John Freccero states, "Dante's journey is neither a poetic fiction nor an historical account; it is exemplary and allegorical. Like Augustine's life it was meant to be both autobiographical and emblematic, a synthesis of the particular circumstances of an individual's life with paradigms of salvation history drawn from the Bible." ("Introduction to the *Inferno*" 179) The Freccero approach, while temptingly easy to accept, is only a starting point. To suggest that Dante relies on the model of St. Augustine and follows it throughout, is perhaps overly simplistic. Dante uses the Augustinian model but at the same time

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<sup>47</sup> Marziano Guglielminetti associates the *Convivio* with "la liceità dell'autoritratto intellettuale" which confronts the problem of "parlare di se medesimo" also found in the *Vita nuova*. (73)

borrowed from a great number of other sources,<sup>48</sup> revising and amending them in accordance with his own literary project to create an autobiographical model that is uniquely his own.

Moreover, while Dante, in the *Commedia* attaches importance to the exemplum, the preeminence of meaning ought not to diminish the import of the actual story being told. Barolini, for example, notes the great concern Dante had with authentication. Further, it is impossible to overlook the realism that emerges throughout both the *Vita nuova* and the *Commedia*. Dante's work is truly compelling in terms of the details he gives us which of course also adds to the apparent historicity of the events. Eric Auerbach has written substantially on the issue of historicity and historical truth and the concomitant connection to realism drawing on the Judeo-Christian tradition to demonstrate examples of narrative which contain "absolute claim(s) to historical truth." (*Mimesis* 11) Auerbach suggests that, in contrast to the later narratives of the Middle Ages, not only was the meaning of the Old Testament stories "true" but the events occurred in actuality and were also "true." It is to this type of historicity that Dante aspires. Dante has included more details about himself than we have seen in any previous medieval writers resulting in a greater appearance of truth, truth in the events themselves, not only in their meanings. In the *Commedia*, then, the actual events from Dante's life included in the narrative are not to be distinguished from archetypes or from the recall of

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<sup>48</sup> Giorgio Padoan suggests that there are at least three biblical visions which could have acted as models for Dante's vision; the abduction to heaven of St. Paul; the vision that St. Peter, St. James, and St. John had of the transfiguration of Christ; the vision of God's glory experienced by Ezekiel, "examples that in turn are buttressed with references to three authorities on visionary experience, Richard of St. Victor, St. Bernard, and St. Augustine." (44)

events that befell others before him; rather, they should be viewed as enhancements, intended to add to the apparent historicity and reliability of Dante's message. Dante, it seems, is not content to rely exclusively on any single medieval model to authenticate the meaning of his life but expands his scope to include scriptural narrative patterns. For Dante, the events, not just their meaning, must also be authenticated and the actuality of his narrative confirmed.<sup>49</sup>

As a poet, Dante is much more adept at representing the revelatory and interpretive process than many of his models, in particular, that of St. Augustine. In the *Commedia*, the initial obscurity of the meaning of the prologue, for example, is only gradually elucidated through a variety of methods such as the echoing of its imagery and through allusion to it in subsequent "parallel episodes."<sup>50</sup> In this way, Dante addresses the difficulty noted by Pascal when he suggested that the greatest problem of autobiography is the fact that "the autobiographer is not relating facts, but experiences" and that while autobiography must include "the meaning an event acquires when viewed in the perspective of a whole life," it must also give some of the other possible meanings,

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<sup>49</sup> In fact, Dante's truth claims, coupled with his descriptive mode, have given birth to a whole debate as to the "truth" of actuality of the events described in the poem. Barolini, in commenting on the genesis of the debate, suggests that those who first propounded a view of the literal sense as a poetic construct may have done so in order to protect Dante from the charge of heresy. (*The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* 6) See also Franke, note 32 above.

<sup>50</sup> Iannucci, in his article on *Paradiso XXXI*, discusses the division within the *Commedia* into "local" episodes and "structurally determining" episodes. The prologue is described as belonging to the latter category and, like other structurally determining episodes, will have its imagery and its significance repeated throughout the *Commedia* in episodes which Iannucci calls "parallel episodes." (471) Iannucci has also suggested that parallel episodes are not only structurally determinant but have an exegetical role. Used in the same way as the "parallel passages" or "testimonies" in the Scriptures, these passages are to be interpreted by comparison with others. (*Forma ed evento nella Divina Commedia* 92). This practice of comparing episodes to determine meaning is consistent with, and indeed, represents a microcosm of medieval autobiographical practices which rely greatly on comparison to other referents for interpretation.

such as an aberrant meaning because the autobiography will be an “artistic failure if the end is assumed from the beginning.”(16)

Poetically, Dante appears to have been more concerned with the aesthetics of the text than was Augustine, suggesting that Dante may have been prepared to blur the distinction between teaching and entertainment even if he was not prepared to impose in its place the distinction between fact and fiction. Accordingly, while the *Commedia* may be viewed as a move towards a more theological approach to life-writing<sup>51</sup> than that taken in the *Vita nuova*, in many ways the *Commedia* also represents a departure from the traditional medieval autobiographical mode. For example, Dante’s adoption of traditional biblical exegetical methods goes beyond merely associating his life story with others from antiquity. Dante looks to hermeneutic methods associated with biblical exegesis<sup>52</sup> and proposes that his own narrative has historical value equal to that of the episodes of the Old and New Testaments. In this way, Dante’s actuality, the source for

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<sup>51</sup> Winslow uses this term which he defines as follows: “In the narrow sense this term means biography, but in general it may include autobiography as well, so that it is actually a more inclusive term than biography, even though some people may consider the word biography to include autobiographical works, letters, diaries and the like. *Life-writing* has been used since the eighteenth century, although it has never been as widely current as biography and autobiography since these words came into the language. Some writers may prefer the Anglo-Saxon rooted phrase, life-writing, to those Latin and Greek based words.” (6) I have opted to use Winslow’s term because it avoids many of the difficulties raised by the connotations attached to the term “autobiography.”

<sup>52</sup> Corti gives a concise explanation of this method in the chapter “Dante e la Torre di Babele;” “L’*allegoria in factis* è fondamentalmente avantestuale, in quanto collega due referenti e non, come l’*allegoria in verbis*, due significati testuali: per essa gli episodi dell’Antico Testamento divengono prefigurazioni di episodi del Nuovo, da essa nasce la ‘tipologia biblica’, che riunisce in una corrispondenza tipologica la realtà storiche: lo storico re David è così un *typos* (*figura*, *τύπος*) dell’*antitypus* (*ἀντί-τύπος*) Cristo. Il collegamento tra prefigurante e prefigurato non è un rapporto di origine retorica, ma divina; non dipende dall’esegeta del testo sacro, ma di Dio emittente dei messaggi, che ha messo in moto la catena dei rapporti fra gli eventi; donde consegue che *allegoria in factis* e *allegoria in verbis* non solo operano a due diversi livelli, della *res* e dei *verba*, ma appartengono a due diversi sistemi di segni: l’*allegoria in factis* è una grande unità di significato che va al di là dell’ambito semantico e ha una particolare funzione ermeneutica nei riguardi del testo sacro.” (245-246)

the narrative, becomes the fulfillment of history and reveals, typologically, the “true meaning” of the *Comedy*.<sup>53</sup>

But Dante also looks to epic poetry as a model for the *Commedia* and, as he did with other models, revises and amends it to facilitate telling his story. The famous encounter with the poets of antiquity in *Inferno* IV demonstrates a poetic impulse parallel to the spiritual impulse which drove Abelard and Augustine. However, while Augustine and Abelard assess themselves in terms of comparative saintliness, Dante’s episode assesses himself in comparison with other poets. Dante has, therefore, in this case borrowed from the medieval methodology for his own purposes thereby enabling himself to take his place amongst the poets of the past rather than merely paying homage.

However, as Spitzer submits, Dante does follow the Augustinian model inasmuch as he takes great pains to present his poetic ‘I’ as a representative of humanity. Spitzer suggests, however, that Dante nonetheless does include elements of his empirical personality (his feeling, speaking, gesticulating personality) in this “I.”<sup>54</sup> Spitzer sees both of these aspects as necessary so that Dante can, on one hand, “transcend the limitations of individuality in order to gain an experience of universal experience” while, on the other, “an individual eye is necessary to perceive and to fix the matter of

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<sup>53</sup> Barolini notes, for example, that in *Purgatorio* 29, John the Evangelist agrees with Dante on a visionary detail, - “not the other way around!” (*The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* 8) Barolini’s remarks acknowledge that in the *Commedia* the episodes of the Bible are used to buttress the truth of Dante’s story as much as Dante’s story buttresses biblical truths.

<sup>54</sup> He cites, as an example, Dante “being jostled along in a procession of devils, now ascending toward Heaven magnetically attracted by the eyes of Beatrice.” (416)

experience.” (416) But Dante’s inclusion of his empirical “I” is also necessary so that we know we are reading Dante Alighieri’s life story which, despite his adherence to the models of universality, nonetheless expresses its own meaning as well. The reasons for the imposition of his empirical “I” on the poetic “I,” a deviation from the medieval norm, is tied to the quest for authentication referred to above.

Recently, Amilcare Iannucci has suggested that the events of Dante’s life, in fact, represent a more substantial component in the narrative structure of the *Commedia*,<sup>55</sup> that the work tells the stories of Dante’s love for Beatrice, his political vicissitudes and finally of his evolution as a writer. Understanding form and function in the telling of one’s life in the Middle Ages not only confirms Iannucci’s proposition but reveals a *Commedia* in which Dante’s life provides the bedrock of its entire narrative structure. By making his story the framework on which the other models are overlaid, from which the narrative pattern is fashioned and from which the allegorical meanings emerge, Dante signals a subtle but important, deviation from Augustine, Abelard and the others. By making his actual life the major source of the *Commedia*, Dante, the writer, has become much more central to his own story than were any of his forerunners. The truth of Dante’s stories is buttressed by the *sentenzia* of other lives, not vice versa, making Dante’s life *the* exemplum and all others mere reflection.

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<sup>55</sup> Amilcare Iannucci is one of the few who takes this view, suggesting that the *Commedia* is “an episodic work held together by Dante’s story,” that Dante’s own life story is *the* driving narrative force behind the *Commedia*, with *Paradiso XXXI* as the ultimate justification of that life. (“*Paradiso XXXI*” 470)

## Chapter 2

### Dante's First Life: The *Vita nuova*

To fully appreciate how the *Commedia* tells Dante's stories, we ought first to consider Dante's earlier attempts at life-writing since, in the *Commedia*, they constitute essential elements of the narrative structure. Although Dante may not have had the *Commedia* in mind when writing the *Vita nuova*, nor indeed when writing the *Convivio*, there is strong evidence to suggest that the *Commedia* is intended to posit an expanded, or at very least a more clearly defined reading of both of these earlier works.

It has been argued that using the *Commedia* to interpret the *Vita nuova* leads to the erroneous conclusion that when Dante wrote the latter, it could not have been fully understood (Shaw 180). I would suggest that this is not a necessary conclusion, and argue instead, that the approach leads to the highly tenable conclusion that the *Vita nuova* could not, when first published, have been read in the way that Dante would later have us read it. In support of this approach, I would argue that the strong presence in the *Commedia* of patterns set out in the *Vita nuova* demonstrates the interdependence of the two works, even if such interdependence was not perceptible when the *Vita nuova* was first published. The inclusion and expansion of characters from the *Vita nuova* in the *Commedia* indeed direct the reader to reflect upon and reconsider the significance of the earlier piece. The *Convivio* includes references to the *Vita nuova* as well as clear attempts to reinterpret it. Strong echoes of the *Convivio* in the *Commedia* suggest

Dante's concern with absorbing and revising the *Convivio* in order to reconcile it within the greater context of the *Commedia*. A comprehensive reading of the "autobiographical" works; one in which the works are seen as related components of a continuum as opposed to independent intellectual exercises, would, indeed appear warranted.

This is not to say that the interpretation yielded by this approach is necessarily the one intended when the *Vita nuova* and/or the *Convivio* were first written but it may be the one most consistent with the implicit directive of the *Commedia* which prompts a retrospective comprehensive interpretation of events and which suggests that the first impression may not always be the true one. To understand how the *Commedia* compels a second look at, among other things, Dante's earlier attempts at life-writing,<sup>56</sup> how the *Commedia* absorbs and reinterprets them, we should look at precisely what he was absorbing.

Probably a stronger argument than Shaw's argument against a comprehensive approach is that it can lead to tenuous speculation when a particular work does not appear to conform to a pattern noted in other works. Luigi Pietrobono, for example, noting the differing treatment Dante affords the character of the *donna gentile* in the *Vita nuova* and

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<sup>56</sup> Albert Ascoli addresses this specific issue and suggests that in much of Dante's writing, palinode constitutes "a powerful rhetorical device" which is used "as a tool for historicising Dante's writing career." (26) Iannucci also suggests that Dante's use of palinode has structural implications. "The palinode can be seen in terms of Dante's intertextual strategy. The most recent scholarship on this subject has affirmed that the pattern of evocation and delimitation prevails not only in the interrelation among Dante's own works (and indeed within individual works), but also between Dante's texts and his classical and medieval precursors." (*Dante: Contemporary Perspectives* xv)



in the *Convivio*,<sup>57</sup> concludes that the *Vita nuova* (or at least the ending) must have been rewritten sometime after the *Convivio*. Proceeding from the assumption that this theory of “rifacimento” is correct, Pietrobono goes so far as to suggest that the *Vita nuova* should be read as a prelude to the *Commedia*<sup>58</sup> and that a complete understanding of either can only be gained from reading the other. The theory has been wholeheartedly endorsed by Bruno Nardi who concludes that the issue of the *donna gentile* can only be resolved by concluding that Dante rewrote the ending of the *Vita nuova* subsequent to writing the *Convivio*.<sup>59</sup> Apart from the fact that there is no textual evidence to support this theory, it fails to consider the very distinct possibility that Dante started the *Convivio* in an attempt to demonstrate a revision and indeed, a maturation in his thinking for reasons which will be explored below. That he later abandoned the work and, instead, in the *Commedia* returns to and expands upon the thinking propounded in the *Vita nuova*, is evidence only that Dante was prepared to change his mind when his literary project so required. In contrast to Pietrobono’s explanation for the apparent inconsistency, this possibility is not only commensurate with Dante’s frequent use of subsequent writing to

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<sup>57</sup> According to Pietrobono the two works “Si contraddicono apertamente e sostanzialmente. Accettar per vero e indiscutibile il contenuto dell’una e dell’altro non è possibile.” The greatest difficulty he has arises from the fact that in the *Vita nuova* the love for the *donna gentile* is described as the “avversario de la ragione” whereas in the *Convivio* this love “è la stessa ragione in persona.” (18)

<sup>58</sup> Pietrobono is of the opinion that “Se qualcuno non scorge per qual cagione Beatrice ha una parte così conspicua nel Poema Sacro legga *Vita nuova* e lo apprenderà. Se altri non immagina i fini per i quali Dante aveva fatto apparire per breve tempo in terra una giovinetta che per le virtù singolarissime e divine di cui l’aveva insignita ben meritava d’esser chiamata un miracolo, per saperlo ha da fare una cosa semplice, leggere la *Commedia*.” (16) This is in sharp contrast to Shaw who holds that although many critics take for granted that when Dante was writing the *Vita nuova* he already had the *Commedia* in mind, “there is not evidence to support this assumption.” (178)

<sup>59</sup> “La fine del *Vita nuova* cui Dante fa esplicito e preciso riferimento nel trattato secondo del *Convivio* e che è presupposta dalla canzone ‘Voi che ‘ntendendo’ era una cosa assai diversa da quella che ora vi si legge. Dunque è evidente che Dante stesso ebbe più tarde a dare al *Vita nuova* una conclusione diversa da quella che aveva in origine.” (6)

amend or enhance the meaning of an earlier work but it is consistent with the textual evidence which indicates that the *Convivio* remained unfinished.<sup>60</sup>

The best way perhaps to avoid the disadvantages of both approaches, that is, the comprehensive (Nardi's position) versus the independent intellectual exercise (the Shaw approach), is to recognize that the validity of either hinges on the purpose for which the earlier works are being examined and the perspective from which such an examination is taken. For the purposes of this thesis then, I will look to both approaches starting with an independent assessment of Dante's first attempt to tell his story, the *Vita nuova*, determining first the author's initial intent and how his methodology is employed to that end. In further chapters I will consider the *Vita nuova* in the expanded contexts which Dante subsequently creates for it; the *Convivio* and ultimately, the *Commedia*, with a view to understanding not so much why Dante reinterprets or rescinds certain portions of his earlier story but how he does so.

It is significant that Dante's first attempt at ordering the events of his life is characterized by the immediate imposition of a metaphor. As I suggested above, medieval signifying schemes commonly employed images with pre-existing connotations to express a particular meaning. Here Dante looks to a medieval mnemonic aid for the image of memory as a book.<sup>61</sup> But the metaphor here is more than a static image, for in

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<sup>60</sup> See Zingarelli (5) on the *Convivio*; Petrocchi and Shaw all of whom provide substantial philological background on this issue.

<sup>61</sup> Mary J. Carruthers notes the persistence of the image of the book in connection with memory. "In none of the evidence I have discovered is the art of writing itself regarded as a supplanter of memory, not even in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Rather, books are themselves memorial cues and aids, and memory is most like a

the simple act of opening the book, Dante extends it into a structural device. By opening the book, Dante gives his book pages, gives it content and effects a transformation. Until this moment the memories lay pristine and undisturbed; comprising little more than a chronicle; the pages of the book filled with notations of events and scribbles to commemorate them, unfiltered and devoid of enunciated meaning. By opening the book and transcribing, if not the words written under the chapter heading, “Incipit vita nova,” then at least their meaning,<sup>62</sup> Dante is claiming the right to review, reinterpret and essentially reinvent the events which left their traces in the pages of his memory. We see only those events selected by Dante, only those events which he deems relevant to the meaning he wishes to express. Dante is, therefore, much more than a copyist for while his “libello” may recall the physical appearance of a medieval manuscript: a text, surrounded by a gloss, what we see is not the original book but Dante’s rendition of its contents. Rather than an embellished manuscript, the product which emerges in the form of the *Vita nuova* is in fact a rewriting of the Book of Memory. More than simple commentary on an existing text, Dante provides a complete overhaul of the source, surveying the events written thus far, interpreting them and choosing those which he sees as relevant to the meaning he wishes to convey. It is to this edition that he will add further commentary, including information not only about the meaning of the events, but about the methods he uses to effect this re-writing. The perspective of Dante the

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book, a written page or a wax tablet upon which something is written.” She goes on to confirm that the “metaphor of the memory as a written surface is so ancient and so persistent in all Western cultures that it must, I think, be seen as a governing model or a ‘cognitive archetype’ in Max Black’s phrase.” (16)

<sup>62</sup> “In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria dinanzi a la quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice: Incipit vita nova. Sotto la quale rubrica io trovo scritte le parole le quali è mio intendimento d’assemblare in questo libello; e se non tutte, almeno la loro sentenza.” (*Vita nuova* I, 1)

copyist/editor is clearly not the same as the perspective of Dante the chronicler who merely recorded events, unaware of their ultimate significance. Such knowledge and insight can be gained only after the events have occurred, only after they have been viewed in the context of other events and most importantly, only after the death of Beatrice.

From the start then, we see that the *Vita nuova* reflects the defining characteristic of autobiography; the desire to reconcile the events of one's life and find meaning in them. The motivation behind this desire, however, while not immediately clear, can be gleaned from a number of elements the most telling of which is the particular metaphor Dante uses to frame his account. In Dante's metaphor two objects sharing characteristics may equally be seen as representations of the same meaning. Accordingly, Dante is not suggesting his memory is like a book but that it is a book. The distinction is important given that in the Middle Ages, the notion of the book was charged with significance beyond a mere physical description of an object. According to Michelangelo Picone, for Dante to consider a work a "libro" or "book," it had to carry the weight of *auctoritas*, such as that which he afforded the Bible, or Virgil's *Aeneid*.<sup>63</sup> Not just any writer could produce a "book." A "book," in Dante's estimation, is the fulfilment of a divine mission

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<sup>63</sup> Michelangelo Picone suggests that, in light of the research on the symbolism of the book in the Middle Ages, Dante would have held the *libro* in high esteem and that for Dante few writings qualified as "books." In fact the term *libro* for Dante could only have been applied to those writings which imitated divine scripture. ("L'Ovidio di Dante" 108) Comparetti suggests that for Dante, "the history of the Latins begins with Aeneas and goes down to his own time." As Comparetti notes, Dante, as well as his medieval contemporaries would have afforded Virgil's writings a historicity which the modern reader would find unsupportable. (202, 203) Again, we ought to bear in mind the notion of truth and historicity as discussed in Chapter 1 and recall that historicity was a function of form and reputation and truth a result of significance not of probative value.

to write what will eventually be considered history. Dante's decision to present his readers with what is, in essence, a textual representation of a medieval manuscript clearly signals the reception Dante intended for this work. Although he refers to the product of the transcription as a "libello," he nonetheless terms his source document as a "libro." In so doing, Dante imbues the contents of the source document with a certain historicity and credibility even if they might otherwise appear fictional. Equally important to bear in mind is that by defining the source document as a "libro," Dante imputes to its writer a parallel elevation in status to that of "auctor." The metaphor of the book not only establishes Dante as "auctor," but provides him with a platform from which to expound upon what such status entails; an "auctor" does not confine himself to mere reporting but illuminates the significance of history and its events and rewrites them in accordance with this knowledge.

In rewriting these events Dante looks predominantly to signifying schemes consistent with his putative status as "auctor," the most immediately obvious of which is that used in the Bible. Just as in the Bible, the Book of all books, the allegorical meaning of the literal events of one Testament are revealed in another written by the same author, so too is the meaning of Dante's Book of Memory revealed in the "libello," or as Domenico De Robertis suggests, Dante's book of the *Vita nuova* "fulfills" the Book of Memory.<sup>64</sup> De Robertis, therefore, implies a relationship between the Book of memory

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<sup>64</sup> "O diciamo, nei termini dell'esegesi medievale e di chi li ha felicemente applicati all'opera dantesca, che il libro della *Vita nuova* adempie la figura del 'libro della memoria.' Col che si viene a fissare la natura di quell'altro rapporto, fra poesia e commento: rapporto storico. Dante ci sottopone la sua esperienza come un fatto storico, come esperienza appunto, e la commenta come tale, in termini non

and the *Vita nuova* akin to that between the Old and New Testaments which Auerbach has described as figural. In the case of the *Vita nuova*, however, it could also be said that it “fulfills” the Bible since many of the events described in the “libello” often echo events from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is almost as if Dante is writing a third Testament in which the literal love story has an allegorical meaning outside of all three texts. The text of the *Vita nuova* is a representation, an “imitatio” to use Erich Auerbach’s terminology,<sup>65</sup> whereas the allegorical meaning, the “adempimento,” comprises the true meaning which is not explicitly recorded in the text.

The strategy behind this style with its patterns of imagery lies in the author’s literary project. Dante starts with the meaning, the message he wishes to convey, and then uses an event to represent or justify it, thereby transforming the message into the allegorical or “true” meaning of the story. It is for this reason that in the *Vita nuova* the literal narration of events, the guise in which the meaning is cloaked is clearly not paramount and is useless without a secondary underlying meaning. For Dante, the descriptive art is a construct, a mere choice of form to be given to a meaning. The continual references to meaning, starting with Dante’s invitation in Chapter III to the other poets to explain his dream can be taken as an invitation to his readers to do the same. The omission of the actual description of events such as Beatrice’s death further suggests that meaning can be conveyed independent of the events. The importance of

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astratti o allegorici, ma di realtà vissuta, che pure racchiude un suo significato.” (*Il libro della Vita nuova* 181)

<sup>65</sup> In his essay “Figura” published in *Studi su Dante*, Auerbach discusses this relationship at length, contrasting *figura* with *fulfilment* and suggesting a parallel relationship between *imitatio* and *veritas*, and between the literal level of meaning and the allegorical meaning in biblical exegesis.

finding the underlying significance of what is written is so crucial to Dante that, as in the case of the repetition of nine in connection with Beatrice, he takes special pains to ensure, where the relation of the form to the meaning might be somewhat obscure, that we know what the signifiers represent.<sup>66</sup> Notwithstanding the primacy Dante affords the allegorical meaning, the written narrative is remarkably realistic in its detail. The setting is realistic, the characters, though stylized are exceptionally human; the incident of the *gabbo* described in Chapter XIV, for example, has the same mimetic qualities as many of the Biblical incidents noted by Auerbach in his pivotal work *Mimesis*. As was noted above, the purpose of such presentation is reasonably simple to comprehend; it is necessary for the establishment of *auctoritas*, but how Dante accomplishes this is rather novel and somewhat complex.

If we bear in mind that what Dante presents as the allegorical meaning of the literal narration is, ironically, the actual progression of the events in Dante's literary evolution, we see that he has somehow inverted actual and figurative reality. This process is seen on a smaller scale in Dante's use of the metaphor of the book but pervades the entirety of the work. The first step in the process is seen in Dante's visual representation of the *incipit* which takes the reader away from the traditional ambit of likeness-based imagery and into a whole new sphere of representation. As I noted above, Dante does not say his mind is like a book. He says his mind is a book. To prove it, he shows us a part of what that book looks like. What is particularly significant in this

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<sup>66</sup> Chapter XXIX [XXX], 3 Dante explains the significance of the various confluences of nines in the Universe and in Beatrice's life and concludes that "ella era uno nove, cioè uno miracolo."

approach is that it is the complete antithesis of the modern process where actual events are expressed as the literal narrative and their deeper meaning is expressed through metaphor, simile and other devices. In Dante's writing the actual events are transformed into what we might consider a figure of speech and this figure of speech is presented as the literal narrative. From that literal representation the reader then culls the "figurative" meaning. This process forms the basis of much of the narrative structure of the *Vita nuova*. As in the case of his memory which is likened to a book, Dante's literary progression is likened to his love for Beatrice and the turns it takes in the literal narrative. Rather than present the book or his love story as simile, he presents them as the reality, and the meaning from which he started becomes the hidden truth, or the allegorical meaning. Another example of this is found in Chapter XXIV in which Dante recounts seeing Giovanna, Cavalcanti's lady love, walking in front of Beatrice.<sup>67</sup> Rather than simply express an opinion which has its existence in actuality, Dante presents it as a narrative event. With this episode, Dante expresses his opinion that he will surpass Guido Cavalcanti as a writer. The literal narrative of the *Vita nuova* is not Dante's "true" story even if some of the events may have occurred in actuality; rather it is the framework which supports the the allegory, the "true" story, the meaning which Dante intends to convey.

A further aspect to this significative scheme is the coincidence of the three roles of exegete, author and protagonist. While the coincidence of the latter two roles is what

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<sup>67</sup> How Dante constructs this episode is discussed in significantly more detail below.



moves the work into the autobiographical field, it is the presence of the first which bears witness to the emphasis Dante places on self-exegesis. (Iannucci *Forma ed evento nella Divina Commedia* 88) This importance of self-exegesis exemplifies the intention underlying the more obvious linear, temporal movement of the narrative which purports to be Dante's story and it is the form of this exegetical exercise, as much as its content, which expresses the meaning Dante takes from the events. As Picone has noted, the *Vita nuova*'s prosimetric form recalls Ovid's *Remedia amoris* and reiterates the affinity Dante hopes to forge between himself and the classical *auctores*. ("L'Ovidio di Dante" 111) The form can, therefore, be seen as another means of expressing the historicity of the work and the concomitant status of its author. At the same time, the resemblance the form bears to the *vidas* and *razos* of lyric poetry affirms the life-writing function of the work. The two readings are complementary as the latter provides an apparently actual accounting of the events which spawned the poetry just as the former enhances their historicity. Accordingly, the exegetical form suggests that not only did the events happen but that they are also "true" in the medieval sense. It is this dual function of the narrative that must be understood before we can make sense of Dante's portrayal of the characters within the *Vita nuova* and of Beatrice in particular.

For McKenzie<sup>68</sup> and Shaw "[t]here can be no reasonable doubt that Dante's Beatrice was a real woman." (Shaw 163) Others have spent long hours in search of the

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<sup>68</sup> McKenzie, for example, offers the following logic in support of his argument that Beatrice was real. "We must remember that the Troubadours wrote about real ladies, not abstractions. Many realistic incidents in the *Vita nuova* were certainly derived from personal observation, and have no point unless they actually happened - a funeral, a wedding, the passage of a group of pilgrims on the way to Rome, etc. The scene is evidently laid in Florence, although the name of the city is not mentioned. In some cases

historical Beatrice as if the truth of her historical existence would somehow answer the question of how Dante intended she should be perceived. What is more important than her actuality, as Robert Hollander has pointed out, is “Dante’s treatment of her as actual.” (*Studies in Dante* 21) Perceiving Beatrice as actual is essential to her being perceived as divinely created. While the inclusion of purportedly actual events encourages an autobiographical reading, such a reading in turn ensures that the significance of Beatrice’s divinity is associated with Dante himself. Beatrice’s actuality precludes her from being merely a creation of Dante’s and instead confirms that it was God who selected a divine object for Dante. Just as the *Bible* and the *Aeneid* speak with authority because their events were divinely willed and their authors divinely inspired so too does the *Vita nuova* tell of similarly significant events. So too is its author charged with the same important mission to interpret and rewrite these events in a manner which reflects their revealed meaning. If Beatrice were simply presented as an ideal, a literary construct, both the historicity of the event and Dante’s *auctoritas* would be compromised. Let us not forget that the greatest witness we, as readers, have that the Beatrice described in the *Vita nuova* was an actual person is Dante himself. He places her in the *book* of his memory and thereby imbues her existence with historicity. At the same time that Dante puts Beatrice in his visions, he also locates her on the streets of his city and in people’s homes. Dante,

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Dante makes a special effort to have the circumstances conform to his scheme, as when he uses three calendars to connect the number nine with the death of Beatrice. If he had invented the story, he would have made the details conform to his scheme without such devices, just as he would have carried the symmetrical arrangement out more uniformly if he had composed all of the poems together. No satisfactory explanation can be given of many details, except on the supposition that they were real.” (*La Vita nuova* xviii) Such thinking, however, does not allow for the possibility that Dante was likely a keen observer of human behaviour with an eye for details. The incidents he described may very well have happened but not necessarily in the manner in which he describes them, in the order in which he places them or even to those described therein.

the author, goes to considerable pains to ensure the veracity of the story as we see at the end of Chapter II where he expressly states:

E però che soprastare a le passioni e atti di tanta gioventudine pare alcuno parlare fabuloso, mi partirò da esse; e trapassando molte cose le quali si potrebbero trarre de l'esempio onde nascono queste, verrò a quelle parole le quali sono scritte ne la mia memoria sotto maggiori paragrafi. (34,35)

Dante's lady, unlike the poetic object of so many of his contemporary lyric poets, therefore, would not be perceived as some ideal construct formulated in the mind of the poet, instead she would be seen as real and imbued with meaning that can be revealed to Dante alone and only by reading her signs. Dante's status as *auctor* comes not from his being able to describe his lady love but in being chosen to receive her blessing and in being divinely inspired to interpret her as she was intended. At the same time Dante's presentation of Beatrice as actual in no way precludes her having allegorical significance;<sup>69</sup> quite the contrary. Just as the events of the Bible are perceived as historical but at the same time have a significance which is revealed through the proper interpretive tools, so too does Beatrice embody meaning which was not immediately obvious to Dante the protagonist but has gradually been made clear to Dante the narrator. To reveal this meaning Dante the narrator/commentator recreates for the reader the exegetical process by which he came to this understanding, keeping the reader in the same state of suspense we imagine the protagonist experienced.

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<sup>69</sup> De Robertis notes this apparent duality; Beatrice as both a poetic object and an historical reality: "La personificazione della Filosofia sarà pienamente assunta nel *Convivio*, ne contrassegnerà il movimento ispiratore; ma per esser distrutta proprio come 'persona' drammatica. Beatrice, invece, è figura e presenza reale: una realtà poetica, beninteso, che non ha nulla che fare con la sua eventuale identità storica, ma che implica una fede assoluta nell'oggetto ..." (*Il libro della Vita nuova* 19)

Dante the commentator first looks to the Biblical model of “types,” noting the many similarities Beatrice bears to other characters from the Bible, most notably, Christ. In the same way that Augustine paints himself in his preconversion state as typologically related to Adam,<sup>70</sup> Dante suggests that Beatrice is like Christ, or as Hollander terms the process, treating Beatrice as “‘figurally’ relevant to Christ.”<sup>71</sup> (*Studi su Dante* 55) Once Beatrice’s resemblance to Christ is established, Dante extends her significance to himself

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<sup>70</sup> In *Confessions*, Book II, vi, 12, Augustine tells of having stolen pears from a garden in his sixteenth year. The story places great emphasis on the elements of temptation and surrender to the pressure of others to sin. Further, Augustine explicitly states that he already had all of the pears he needed and that he wanted for nothing.

<sup>71</sup> Singleton has made much of the many analogies Dante draws between Beatrice and Christ noting the singing of *Hosanna in excelsis* in Purgatory, and in the *Vita nuova*. He cites the many images in Chapter XXIII which link Beatrice’s death with Christ’s death, such as a multitude of angels, (“... lo immaginava di guardare verso lo cielo, e pareami vedere moltitudine d’angeli li quali tornassero in suso, ed aveano dinanzi da loro una nebuletta bianchissima. A me pare che questi angeli cantassero gloriosamente e le parole del loro canto me pareva udire che fossero queste: Osanna in excelsis”); the sun growing dark (“e pareami, vedere lo sole oscurare”); the birds falling dead from the air (“e pareami che li uccelli volando per l’aria cadessero morti”); and the occurrence of earthquakes (“e che fossero grandissimi tremuoti”). The association of Beatrice’s salutation with the term *salus* often associated with Christ and of course, the episode with Giovanna (Primavera) in Chapter XXIV. (*An Essay on the Vita nuova* 20-23)

De Robertis provides substantial background with respect to the source of the images which accompany Dante’s description of the dream in which Beatrice’s death is announced, noting that each of them recalls at least one scene from the New Testament, and often two or three Old Testament passages as well. In his *Libro della Vita nuova* he continues to consider the many analogies drawn between Beatrice and Christ produced by the image of the “città dolente” and in particular to the image of the pilgrims in Chapter XL (“Dopo questa tribulazione avvenne, in quello tempo che molta gente va per vedere quella imagine benedetta la quale Iesu Cristo lasciò a noi per esemplo de la sua bellissima figura, la quale vede la mia donna gloriosamente ...”) observing, “e proprio Cristo, *il termine di ogni pellegrinaggio, diventa ‘figura’ di Beatrice (Cristo ci lasciò ‘quella imagine benedetta’, la Veronica.*” (123)

Robert Harrison has also noted the profusion of images intended to evoke the image of Christ in the reader’s mind pointing first to the moment in Revelations when Christ appears to the Apostle: “*Vestitus erat veste aspersa sanguigno*” (19:13). Harrison notes further the blood in which Christ’s shroud has been dipped, making it *sanguigno*. In short, the *sanguigno* color of the cloth obliquely evokes the sacrificial blood of Christ, once offered up as wine to the disciples. Just as the rematerialization of Christ’s body and blood in bread and wine represents the founding moment of Christian sacramentality by which the body of Christ maintains its historicity through time, so the crimson cloth wrapped around the body of Beatrice seems to repeat in its own way the moment of sacred metaphor, rendering Beatrice sacramental in nature.” (26, 27)

by presenting us with a series of analogous relationships,<sup>72</sup> among the most obvious of which is the episode in Chapter XXIV, noted above, in which Giovanna (Primavera) precedes Beatrice.<sup>73</sup> Through this episode, Dante establishes first that as John is to Christ, Giovanna is to Beatrice. He then establishes that as Giovanna is to Cavalcanti,<sup>74</sup> Beatrice is to Dante. Consequently, as John is to Christ, Cavalcanti is to Dante. What is not explicit but we are to understand that Christ, Beatrice and Dante are on a certain level, analogous. The meaning of the episode and of the characters, one can deduce, extends beyond the words to pronounce that Dante is like the *verbum* whereas those who went before were like mere voices crying out in the wilderness, preparing the way.

The implication is clear; this is not simply a love story, nor is it merely a spiritual autobiography, this is also Dante's literary manifesto. Dante is stating unequivocally that

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<sup>72</sup> Maria Corti has discussed at length the various analogical models which were in use in the Middle Ages as well as their function, noting that the analogical process in literature is one of the many ways of illustrating the rapport between a cultural setting and a literary one. In such an analogical process the first of the two settings or fields is assumed by the author to be well noted (in this case the Biblical setting) and, therefore, familiar to the reader, already belonging to a cultural community system, while the second, the literary is illuminated and sometimes directly created with the help of an analogical model assumed by the first. Corti sees the use in the medieval era of an analogical model which interacts between two differing cultural fields, as tied to two factors, the first being the conception of the world as "unico testo creato con coerente architettura da Dio, dove tutto è correlato a tutto" and the second, the resemblances of relations between the parts, i.e. formal, structural resemblances. Corti cites Perelman's caveat that unlike in mathematics, the analogous proportion "*a* is to *b* as *c* is to *d*" in literature does not posit equality of the two relationships, but affirms a similarity of relationship. ("Il modello analogico nel pensiero medievale e dantesco" 12, 13)

<sup>73</sup> "E poco dopo queste parole, che lo cuore mi disse con la lingua d'Amore, io vidi venire verso me una gentile donna, la quale era di famosa bieltade, e fue già molto donna di questi primo mio amico. E lo nome di questa donna era Giovanna, salvo che per la sua bieltade, secondo che li altri crede, imposto l'era nome Primavera; e così era chiamata. E appresso lei, guardando, vidi venire la mirabile Beatrice." (*Vita nuova*, Chapter XXIV)

<sup>74</sup> Michelangelo Picone is among those who recognize this relationship noting that "Giovanna (la poesia di Guido) precede Beatrice (la poesia di Dante), come Giovanni precede l'avvento di Cristo." ("*Vita Nuova e tradizione romanza*" 70) There is little doubt that Cavalcanti is the *primo amico* referred to in the text given the number of other references we have and the biographical information that exists concerning their relationship.

he will surpass, or indeed may have already surpassed the entire lyric tradition at the apex of which formerly stood Dante's "first friend," Guido Cavalcanti. Since Beatrice is the instrument of this revelation, her meaning and purpose are, therefore, not confined to Dante's spiritual salvation and growing understanding of love as God properly intended. She can also express Dante's literary destiny. Presenting the two meanings in the same form perpetuates the truth of each. Those who ask rhetorically who Beatrice is if not Beatrice and what does she mean if she does not mean Beatrice, have a point for even the insertion of Christological associations does not detract from her existence at the literal level of the narrative. However, the signifying scheme Dante inherits and employs in the *Vita nuova* in no way precludes literal characters from having an ulterior significance. Therefore, while Dante uses events and persons to tell the story of his love for Beatrice, he uses those same events to tell his story as a writer.<sup>75</sup> In Beatrice's refusal in Chapter X to grant Dante her salutation, we see not only the origin of Dante's praise of Beatrice without hope of reward but we are also provided with an explanation for Dante's rejection of and challenge to the lyric tradition in favour of the more mystical experience as epitomized by the lauds of Iacopone da Todi and hinted at in the poetry of Guido Guinizelli. Just as Iacopone left behind the quest for worldly progress when his beloved died, so too is Dante's shift in aspiration attributable to Beatrice's death. Dante's independence from the hope of corporeal recompense is analogous to his independence from the tradition that engenders such hopes. Beatrice's true meaning, which is revealed

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<sup>75</sup> As Harrison notes "[t]he story of Dante's disorientations, his false starts and breakthroughs, his continuous groping for the poetic voice and authentic idiom, makes the early work a space of encounter for the various poetic options that the poet adopts, abandons, transforms, or discovers. The story of these options is the implicit and still untold story of the *libello*." (36)

only in hindsight, allows Dante to reconcile having earlier sought the input and approval of other poets<sup>76</sup> and justifies his shift in goals from the hope of inclusion in the earthly school of courtly love to the hope of inclusion in a more lasting and more elevated communion with divine love.

For the same reasons as Dante intended that Beatrice be seen as real, so too does he intend the *donna gentile* to be so received. As in the case of Beatrice, the significance of her relationship with Dante is also revealed through the use of analogy. However, in contrast to his treatment of Beatrice, in this case Dante will draw on a secular work for the analogical model within which to draw the comparison; namely the relationship between Dido and Aeneas described in Book IV of the *Aeneid*. Whereas Aeneas has a destiny he must fulfill but allows himself to be sidetracked by Dido, so too does Dante allow himself to be distracted by the *donna gentile*. Just as Aeneas is brought back to his senses and put back on the path of his destiny by a message brought from the “exalted

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<sup>76</sup> The incident described in Chapter III where Dante the protagonist solicits the opinion of the other poets as to the meaning of his dream (“Pensando io a ciò che m’era apparuto, propuosi di farlo sentire a molti li quali erano famosi trovatori in quello tempo: e con ciò fosse cosa che io avesse già veduto per me medesimo l’arte del dire parole per rima, propuosi di fare uno sonetto, ne lo quale io salutasse tutti li fedeli d’Amore; e pregandoli che giudicassero la mia visione, scrissi a loro ciò che io avea nel mio sonno veduto.” 40) is externally documentable. As Dante notes, he did receive responses. (“A questo sonetto fue risposto da molti e di diverse sentenzie; tra li quali fue risponditore quelli cui io chiamo primo de li miei amici, e disse allora uno sonetto, lo quale comincia: Vedeste, al mio parere, onne valore. E questo fue quasi lo principio de l’amistà tra lui e me, quando elli seppe che io era quelli che li avea ciò mandato.”) and Cavalcanti’s sonnet in response is still extant. (Avalle, *Poeti del Duecento* 544) The incident seems to carry a sense of false modesty with it. One can only imagine the intent of the young poet sending around his sonnet, inviting the opinions of more established writers. It seems like a wonderfully orchestrated attempt at self-promotion, announcing his arrival on the scene, requiring the acknowledgment of those who had already arrived. The incident is inconsistent, however, with Dante’s later attempts to reject and surpass the very contemporaries whose approval he so obsequiously sought. Given that the incident would have been well known Dante could not have ignored it and instead uses the episode in which Beatrice withdraws her salutation to contextualize and justify the incident.

Father” and delivered by Mercury,<sup>77</sup> so too is Dante drawn away from the distractions of corporeal love to his destiny by a vision of Beatrice.<sup>78</sup> As Dido is to Aeneas, so is the *donna gentile* to Dante. Further, the analogy also posits a relationship of likeness between Dante and Aeneas which once again emphasizes Dante’s *auctoritas*. At the same time, and perhaps more significantly, his use of the secular “libro” to characterize his relationship with the “*donna gentile*” emphasizes the distinction between it and his Biblically-described relationship with Beatrice. As Picone points out, the nature of Dante’s relationship with Beatrice also bears resemblance to the relationship between the mystic and God. (“Vita nuova Fra Autobiografia e Tipologia” 60) This resemblance further emphasizes the Christian nature of that relationship in particular contrast to that of his relationship with the *donna gentile*.

Dante’s representation of Amore is also drawn from a Virgilian model as he explicitly states<sup>79</sup> and is punctuated with language echoing *Virgil’s* descriptions of love.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Aeneid*, Book IV, 238-241 “... . Ille patris magni (emphasis mine) parere parabat imperio et primum pedibus talaria nequit aurea ...”

<sup>78</sup> Chapter XXXIX (XL) “Contra questo avversario de la ragione si levoe un die, quasi ne l’ora de la nona, una forte imaginazione in me, che mi parve vedere questa gloriosa Beatrice con quelle vestimenta sanguigne co le quali apparve a li occhi miei;”

<sup>79</sup> *Vita nuova*, Chapter XXV, “Che li poete abbiano cosi parlato come detto è, appare per Virgilio; lo quale dice che Iuno, cioè una dea nemica de li Troiani, parloe ad Eolo, signore de li venti, quivi nel primo de lo Eneida: Eole, nanque tibi, e che questo signore le rispuose, quivi: Tuus, o regina, quid optes explorare labor; michi iussa capessere fas est. Per questo medesimo poeta parla la cosa che non è animata a le cose animate, nel terzo de lo Eneida, quivi: Dardanide duri.”

<sup>80</sup> In the *Aeneid* love in general is often likened to fire: I, ll. 658-660 “...et ora Cupido pro dulci Ascanio veniat donisque furentem incendat reginam atque ossibus implicet ignem;”; I, ll. 673-675 “Quocirca capere ante dolis et cingere flamma reginam meditor, ne quo se numine mutet;”; IV, 1-2 “At regina gravi jam dudum saucia cura volnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni.”; IV, 66-67 “Est mollis flamma medullas interea, et tacitum vivit sub pectore volnus.” Similarly, in the *Vita nuova* Amore is often accompanied by images of fire as in Chapter III [III] “che me pareva vedere ne la mia camera una nebula di colore di fuoco,” and again, “e tanto si sforzava per suo ingegno, che la faceva mangiare questa cosa che in mani li ardea,” or in chapter XI: “anzi mi giugnea una fiamma di caritate.”



That such terminology was also highly common in the lyric poetry of the time further underscores the break with secular lyric that the *Vita nuova* attempts. It is important to note that, while Dante is using what is considered an allegorical figure to represent love, love and its representation nonetheless still exist on the literal level of the narrative. The anthropomorphic representation of love is consistent with Thomist thought concerning the representation of certain concepts in forms which are easier to comprehend.<sup>81</sup> We are still invited to look for a deeper meaning in terms of what love in the narrative means in Dante's own story; the "true story" whose meaning is being represented by the entire narrative plot. The fact that, as in the case of the *donna gentile*, Dante uses a secular paradigm as a point of comparison, coupled with the fact that, like the *donna gentile*, Amore ultimately disappears from the text, suggests that Dante's destiny lies outside of secular love and instead is drawn to its Christian counterpart. When we consider this meaning in conjunction with the earlier analogy that Dante draws between himself and Cavalcanti, we understand the way in which Dante sees himself as having surpassed his contemporaries; Dante's writing will not only be divinely inspired but will carry a divine truth which is absent in the secular love poetry.

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<sup>81</sup> Iannucci points out that St. Thomas, within the context of Biblical exegesis and specifically, in terms of those instances where God is anthropomorphized, explains that the literal meaning of events lies not in the rhetorical figure used but in the content, in that which is figured. "Sensus parabolicus sub litterali continetur: nam per voces significatur aliquid proprie, et aliquid figurative, nec est litteralis sensus ipsa figura, sed id quod est figuratum. Non enim cum Scriptura nominat Dei brachium, est litteralis sensus quod in Deo sit membrum huiusmodi corporale: sed id quod per hoc membrum significatur, scilicet virtus operativ. In quo patet quod sensui litterali sacrae Scripturae nunquam potest subesse falsum. (S. Th. I, q. I, a. 10, ad 3) Iannucci points out that in fact in the *Commedia*, Dante has Beatrice paraphrase St. Thomas to explain this notion to Dante the Pilgrim. (*Forma ed evento nella Divina Commedia* 86)

Dante's portrait of himself as protagonist provides a further example of the importance of establishing historicity to the notion of *auctoritas*. To confirm Dante as an *auctor* we must believe not only that Beatrice was a miracle of God but that it was to Dante that she was sent. Dante's inclusion of himself in the text allows him to convince us that he is not writing fiction, that he is writing history and, therefore, truth. In the same way as Beatrice's actuality was essential to her divinity, Dante's actuality is important to establishing the historicity of the divine mission he claims and the challenge it inspires.

Given the distinctly Christian overtones of the meaning Dante ascribes to his life, it is perhaps somewhat surprising how little the *Vita nuova* actually borrows from the medieval Christian autobiographical model epitomized by St. Augustine's *Confessions*. Notwithstanding apparent similarities between the works, closer inspection reveals these similarities to be little more than superficial. For example, while Dante's inclusion of events from his own life and his insistence on actuality might appear at first consistent with Augustine's accounting of events from his own life, an examination of the purpose for which each author includes himself reveals the use of the first person voice as little more than a formal similarity. In the Augustinian model for example, the author's actuality enhances the exemplum function of the story. In the *Vita nuova*, however, Dante asserts his actuality in order to enhance his own particular profile. In the Augustinian model the actuality of events is important to the value of the lesson they express. In the *Vita nuova*, as we have seen, the reliability of the events contributes to the

historicity and authority of the work and by extension, to the authority of the writer. In the *Vita nuova*, Dante's actuality serves his attempt to step outside of the normal course and find a meaning particular to him in both his love for Beatrice and in his literary journey. There is little in the way of a discernible attempt to discover a universal application for its lessons.

The hope in Chapter XLII [XLIII]; "Si che, se piacere sarà di colui a cui tutte le cose vivono, che la mia vita duri per alquanti anni, io spero di dicer di lei quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna" expresses Dante's literary aspirations and distills the ultimate significance of the *Vita nuova*. Dante's use of language reminiscent of Virgil<sup>82</sup> indicates the manner in which he plans to write, while the desire to differentiate himself (to write as "no one else") marks a departure from the Augustinian model. Unlike Augustine, Dante does not present himself as an exemplum for others; rather he sets himself apart from his contemporaries. Everything in his *Vita nuova* tells us that Dante is different from them; he is an *auctor*.<sup>83</sup> He alone has been selected to receive this lady's salutation and it will be his personal mission to follow the path which has been pointed out to him.

Similarly, the opposition of "then and now" in the *Vita nuova* appears at first to signal adherence to the Augustinian model but is ultimately revealed as little more than a

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<sup>82</sup> De Robertis in his commentary on the *Vita nuova* (247) notes that this language is almost certainly adapted from that used by Virgil in his 4th Eclogue; "O mihi tum longae maneat pars ultima vitae,/spiritus et quantum sat erit tua dicere facta:/non me carminibus vincet ..." (Eclogue IV, 53-55)

<sup>83</sup> Michelangelo Picone notes that the events recounted in the *Vita nuova* are those which demonstrate the shining sign of distinction and the belonging of the poet (fusion of the protagonist with the exegete) to a highly restricted canon of the romance "*auctores*." ("Fra autobiografia e tipologia" 64)

passing resemblance. In Augustine two separate narrative perspectives, “then and now,” are produced by the occurrence in which a pivotal event (a conversion or a death) in the life of the protagonist<sup>84</sup> lends a new insight to the events of the past. The pivotal event concomitantly produces a related feature, the contrast between “old man” and “new man” occasioned by the spiritual death of the former self as the result of the cataclysmic event. The first of these features is present to a certain extent in the *Vita nuova*. That Dante distinguishes between “then and now” (that is, before and after the cataclysmic event) and is reflecting on past events from such a perspective is made clear in Chapter II [I], where he notes that:

Nove fiata già appresso lo mio nascimento era tornato lo cielo de la luce quasi uno medesimo punto, quanto a la sua propria girazione, quando a li miei occhi apparve prima la gloriosa donna de la mia mente, la quali fu chiamata da molti Beatrice li quali non sapeano che si chiamare. (28-30)

The word *gloriosa* makes it clear that Beatrice is already dead. This perspective is reiterated in Chapter III where, discussing the meaning of a poem, Dante says: “Lo verace giudicio del detto sogno non fue veduto allora per alcuno, ma ora è manifestissimo a li più semplici.” (43) As De Robertis points out, this comment recalls the Gospel of John which recounts how at first, the disciples of Christ did not understand the prophecy of His death but once He was dead, “*glorificatus*,” they saw its meaning. (*Vita nuova*)<sup>85</sup> The

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<sup>84</sup> In the *Confessions* the turning points are marked by Augustine’s baptism and the death of Augustine’s mother Monica in Book 9, chapters 6 and 9 respectively.

<sup>85</sup> In his notes to the *Vita nuova*, De Robertis points out that “L’intera frase ricorda le parole da Giovanni, XII, 16: ‘Haec non cognoverunt discipuli eius primum; sed quando glorifactus est Iesus, tunc recordati sunt quia haec erant scripta da eo’ riferentisi appunto all’oscurità delle profezie di Cristo circa la propria morte (oscare anche ai suoi ‘fedeli,’ ma ripete insieme il paradosso evangelico della verità nascosta ai sapienti e rivelata ai semplici e ai fanciulli.” (44) (“His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when

allusion immediately introduces an analogy between Beatrice and Christ and signals the pivotal event, the death of Beatrice, which triggers the distinction between then and now.

Moreover, although Dante's use of the title "*Vita nuova*" might suggest adherence to the Augustinian paradigm, further analysis shows that Dante's perspective is gained not from his own conversion, not through a figurative death of the self but is tied to an external event, the death of Beatrice. It is this event which permits him, indeed forces him to turn from the old way of writing, that is, the lyric tradition, to the new way of writing, one in which the object is one selected by divine destiny and which continues to inspire from its exalted position in heaven. Like the death of Christ which made Christian redemption possible, so too will Beatrice's death, the death of a Christ-like figure make possible Dante's literary and spiritual redemption. Dante's omission of the details of the event demonstrates the primacy he gives to the meaning of events rather than to their literal expression. Clearly we are meant to focus on the meaning of the event not its literal details for to have Beatrice die in any way other than crucifixion would detract from the Christological association which Dante has so carefully created.<sup>86</sup> Dante's explanation in Chapter XXVIII [XXIX] for this omission;

E avvegna che forse piacerebbe a presente trattare alquanto de la sua partita da noi, non è lo mio intendimento di trattarne qui per tre ragioni: la prima è che ciò non è del presente proposito, se volemo guardare nel proemio che precede questo libello; la seconda è che, posto

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Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and *that* they had done these things to him." (*Holy Bible* 725) )

<sup>86</sup> See note 71 above.

che fosse del presente proposito, ancora non sarebbe sufficiente la mia lingua e trattare come si converrebbe di ciò; (191)

is, therefore, quite correct, especially since the *libello* is not really about Beatrice's corporeal existence. This event signals the literary redemption which Dante uses to explain his presumptuous claim to elevated status as an *auctor*. At the same time, the event grants him the perspective he needs to maintain that status. But Dante, the "old man" has not died, at least not in the Augustinian sense. Dante is still evolving and, as we shall see below, the *Vita nuova* not only looks back but also looks forward to the continuation of his life and fulfilment of the possibility of redemption. The protagonist of the *Vita nuova* is, therefore, still very much in the same life, his first life. He differs, therefore, from the Augustinian protagonist who sees life, removed from it not so much by time and space but by an existential shift. Accordingly, while the *Vita nuova* may share a few superficial characteristics with the Augustinian model it is probably more accurate to suggest that elements of the Augustinian models are integrated along with elements from a variety of models in order to fashion a narrative that reflects a uniquely personal project.<sup>87</sup>

The *Vita nuova* is, therefore, much more than an annotated anthology; it is a conscious attempt at self-promotion and constitutes a definitive statement of literary

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<sup>87</sup> Michelangelo Picone addresses this hybrid feature of the *Vita nuova*, noting that Dante, especially at this early stage of his writing career, was very much influenced by a number of sources. The *Vita nuova*, he suggests, seems to resolve the tension inherent in the double cultural articulation of the XIII century, that is between "esemplare e personale, agiografica e autobiografica" but at the same time seems tied to the "modello dinamico dell'*imitatio auctorum*." ("*Vita nuova* fra autobiografia e tipologia" 59)

intent. The entire work is fashioned so as to effect the desired reception and present a particular image of its author. Dante's use of the metaphor of the book, his redefining of the traditional role of copyist and commentator and finally, reinterpreting the events found in the book of memory, shows readers the value Dante places on his own writing and what Dante perceives as his place as writer even at this early stage in his career. His digression in Chapter XXV leaves us with no doubt that Dante is prepared to use the classical *auctores* to go beyond the vernacular literary tradition of which he was a part. The *Vita nuova* affirms this authority and offers an explanation for Dante's literary redemption and spiritual redemption. The *Vita nuova* explains why Dante abandons the distractions and dead ends of secular poetry and the love it celebrates and looks instead to the greater glory that awaits the truly Christian poet and lover.

## Chapter 3

### The *Convivio*: Dante as Redeemer

The *Vita nuova* launched Dante's literary challenge but it is in the *Convivio* that we see the first battle. In the *Convivio* Dante aggressively advances, surpassing the lyric tradition and staking out new territory. At the same time, the love story continues as the narrative focal point, though in this later endeavour Dante approaches the ladies in his life from a different perspective and looks for a broader significance to his interaction with them. Further, while its narrative, like that of the *Vita nuova*, examines the meaning of his life, the *Convivio* looks beyond Dante's understanding of the significance of his own life to seek the societal implications of his existence.

Though Dante explicitly mentions the *Vita nuova* in the *Convivio*<sup>88</sup> and makes it clear that he intends to continue that project in the *Convivio*, the connection between the two works is much more intricate than one of mere continuity. Indeed, while a project of continuation may be discernible on the basis of external form,<sup>89</sup> the *Convivio*'s internal

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<sup>88</sup> *Convivio* I, i, 16 "E se ne la presente opera, la quale è Convivio nominata e vo' che sia, più virilmente si trattasse che ne la Vita nuova, non intendo però a quella in parte derogare, ma maggiormente giovare per questa quella; veggendo sì come ragionevolmente quella fervida e passionata, questa temperata e virile esser conviene." (emphasis mine); *Convivio* II, ii, 1 "Cominciando adunque, dico che la Stella di Venere due fiata rivolta era in quello suo cerchio che la fa parere serotina e matutina, secondo diversi tempi, appresso lo trapassamento di quelle Beatrice beata che vive in cielo con gli angeli e in terra con la mia anima, quando quella gentile donna, cui feci menzione ne la fine de la Vita nuova, parve primamente, accompagnata d'Amore, a li occhi miei e prese luogo alcuno ne la mia mente." (emphasis mine)

<sup>89</sup> Although the *Convivio* commences with the impersonal third person as the narrative voice, while still in the first chapter it shifts to the first person singular which dominates the remainder of the work, indicating that Dante intended it to be perceived as having a personal connection to its author. Further, the prosimetric form also suggests, in two ways, a personal aspect. Dante's insertion of poems already known to be his work combined with the first person voice practically demands an autobiographical reading. Bruno Nardi confirms that a number of the poems would have been well known as Dante's work;



form reveals a relationship between the two works which is by no means simple. Relying on a number of strategies, Dante uses the *Convivio* not only to continue telling his life, but to revise and expand the scope of the earlier and less mature work.<sup>90</sup>

Among the many devices used to this end no other is as integral or as essential as the framing metaphor of the banquet. Given that Dante used the framing metaphor of the book in the *Vita nuova* to establish a structure upon which his entire literary project might rest it would appear at first that the use of a similar device for a similar purpose suggests a close connection between the two works. A closer inspection, however, reveals that the choice of metaphor introduces an important distinction between the two works. Whereas the book of one's memory, a chronicle of one's life, seems almost by definition to require the recounting of a series of events, a banquet is an essentially self-contained single event and we see very quickly that the framing metaphor used in the *Convivio* does not lend itself as easily to a progressive narrative structure, that is, one that is diachronic, as does the book metaphor of the *Vita nuova*. The metaphor of the *Convivio* engenders instead a more static, synchronic narrative mode. This distinction is crucial to understanding the

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suggesting that "... Dante propone il testo di quattordici sue canzoni, delli quali alcune già note ai lettori ..." (*Dal "Convivio" alla "Commedia"* 23) The evident desire to elucidate the meaning of the poems along with the discussion as to why such an explanation is necessary further emphasizes the project's personal nature. Additionally, the prosimetric form recalls the use of the same form in the *Vita nuova* suggesting a connection to, if not a continuation (or sequel as Vasoli suggests (xvi)) of the earlier prosimetric and highly personal offering.

<sup>90</sup> *Convivio* I, i, 16 "E se ne la presente opera la quale è *Convivio* nominata e vo' che sia, più virilmente si trattasse che ne la *Vita nuova*, non intendo però a quella in parte derogare, ma maggiormente giovare per questa quella; veggendo sì come ragionevolmente quella fervida e passionata, questa temperata e virile esser conviene. Ché altro si conviene e dire e operare ad una etade che ad altra; perché certi costumi sono idonei e laudabili ad una etade che sono sconci e biasimevoli ad altra, sì come di sotto nel quarto trattato di questo libro, sarà propria ragione mostrata. E io in quella dinanzi, a l'entrata de la mia gioventute parlai, e in questa dipoi, quella già trapassata."

*Convivio* in its relationship to the *Vita nuova* and to understanding its autobiographical dimension. For example, whereas the commentary in the *Vita nuova* bore a resemblance to the Provençal *vidas* and its very title was evocative of a biographical work, the *Convivio* more closely resembles a self-portrait produced at a single moment in time. Consequently, the author of the *Convivio* is much closer to the events narrated in the text than the author of the *Vita nuova* is to the events narrated in that text. The protagonist of the *Vita nuova* did not understand the meaning of the events as they occurred, unlike the author who existed on a different plane of cognizance because of the intervening event of Beatrice's death. In the *Convivio*, however, the protagonist exists on the same plane as does the author of the work. Both the protagonist and the author were aware of the allegorical significance of the poems and the events they narrate when the poems were written.<sup>91</sup> The perspective of the *Convivio* is, as a result, mostly rooted in the present tense and is substantially devoid of an earlier, unseeing, unenlightened past.

This distinction in narrative mode of the two works is further emphasized by the hermeneutic strategies of the *Convivio*. The emphasis which the *Convivio* gives to allegorical meaning, what Cudini refers to as a “predominio qualitativamente netto e deciso

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<sup>91</sup> This is confirmed in *Convivio* II, xii, 5 “... io, che cercava di consolarme, trovai non solamente a le mie lagrime rimedio, ma vocabuli d'autori e di scienze e di libri: li quali considerando, giudicava bene che la filosofia, che era donna di questi autori di queste scienze e di questi libri, fosse somma cosa. E imaginava lei fatta come una *donna gentile* ...”; *Convivio* II, xii, 8 “Per che io, sentendomi levare dal pensiero del primo amore a la virtù di questo, quasi maravigliandomi apersi la bocca nel parlare de la proposta canzone, mostrando la mia condizione sotto figura d'altre cose: ...” Whether or not Dante did, in fact, originally compose the poem as allegory has been the subject of much debate. Francis Fergusson, for example, simply does not believe Dante, saying, “But I think she was a real woman, and I cannot believe that *Voi che intendendo* (sic) was originally written to celebrate philo-sophia, the love of wisdom, genuine though that love was in Dante.” (41) What is more important is not so much what the truth was but what Dante intended us to accept as the truth.

al sovra significato allegorico” (131), and the concomitant diminution in the importance of the literal narration further detract from the possibility of a progressive narrative, what we might call a “story.” The resulting “nonstory” of the *Convivio* is, however, precisely what characterizes the nature of Dante’s message at this stage of his career. What the framing metaphor highlights, and the hermeneutic strategies echo, is the fact that the commentary in the *Convivio* is not a chronicle of a journey of self-discovery, nor an attempt to clarify what was not clear when the book of memory was first opened. It is instead a public exposition of what is presented as a demonstrable and decisive truth which seems to have been visible to the author and protagonist, if not all along, then certainly prior to the commencement of the banquet. In contrast to the *Vita nuova*, the *Convivio* greatly lacks narrative progression. As well, the opposition between “then” and “now” which is so evident in the *Vita nuova* seems notably absent from the *Convivio*. And yet, as we shall see, such an opposition very much informs the *Convivio*. Dante’s continual references to the *Vita nuova*,<sup>92</sup> and his characterization of it as a product of his youth, combine to create a continuity and a clear linear progression in which the *Convivio* may be viewed as continuing the project commenced in the *Vita nuova* and in which the *Convivio* has become “now” while the *Vita nuova* has been relegated to “then.”

But in an even more fundamental way the vision of the *Convivio* is closely linked to that of the *Vita nuova*. In neither account can Dante truly be said to be looking back from “without” his life. He has not yet experienced the death of self necessary to the

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<sup>92</sup> see notes 88, 90.

Augustinian model and, accordingly, from an exegetical perspective is not able to properly understand all of the events of his life. In the *Convivio* he is closer to such a perspective, having been exiled physically; yet he is still within in his own life. The *nunc et tunc* aspect of the Augustinian model is, therefore, most effectively achieved through its relationship to the *Vita nuova*. By juxtaposing the youthfulness of the *libello* with the more mature *Convivio*, Dante in essence absorbs the earlier work, transforming it into a first chapter, making it merely part of an even greater book. By framing the two works in such a way as to create a contrast, Dante has, paradoxically, persuaded us that the two parts are complements.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, the two parts will interact symbiotically, the *Vita nuova* providing the rudiments of the project which is continued in the *Convivio* and the *Convivio*, in turn, furnishing a revised significance to the *Vita nuova*.

Not only is the framing metaphor essential to repositioning the *Vita nuova* in the context of Dante's subsequent evolution, but it is also crucial to expressing the revised role Dante has fashioned for himself. Dante uses the banquet metaphor to paint himself as a Christ figure, an image which was only hinted at in the *Vita nuova* and which will see its full development in the *Commedia*. Therefore, as was the case with the *Vita nuova*, the framing metaphor signals the reception Dante intends for the work and the way in which he, as its author, should be regarded. As the host of the *Convivio*, a supper at which Dante announces that the bread he offers will provide a new light,<sup>94</sup> Dante

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<sup>93</sup> Cudini refers to this alternatively as a "legame di continuità - opposizione" (xix) and a "rapporto di continuità-diversità" (133), but stops short of exploring the symbiotic nature of this rapport.

<sup>94</sup> *Convivio* I, xiii, 12 "Questo sarà luce nuova, sole nuovo, lo quale surgerà là dove l'usato tramonerà, e darà lume a coloro che sono in tenebre e in oscuritade per lo usato sole che a loro non luce." While many critics have noted the biblically allusive nature of this language, surprisingly the relationship between Jesus

creates a stunning, if not immediately obvious, analogy between himself and Jesus Christ. Yet the analogy is not new. It recalls the same relationship implied in Chapter XXIV of the *Vita nuova*.<sup>95</sup> Here, however, Dante has adeptly chosen an image which represents a later Christ than that alluded to in the *Vita nuova*. The analogy in the *Vita nuova* was to a Christ whose mission and, therefore, Dante's as well, was still mere prophecy. In the *Convivio* the analogy is to a more mature Christ on the brink of fulfilment of that prophecy. The metaphor of the *Convivio* in which Dante is the host breaking bread, teaching those who are his disciples, therefore, allows Dante to fulfill the prophecy of the *Vita nuova* and create a new covenant. Just as the New Testament fulfilled the old scriptures, so too will Dante's new Testament fulfill and rely on the old scriptures, those of others and his own. Dante has, therefore, created a further relationship of analogy,<sup>96</sup> that is, between the two allusions and the two works and in so doing continues to transform the *Vita nuova* into "then" while presenting the *Convivio* as "now" and, therefore, by implication, the truer perspective. Thus we see a strategy which will figure prominently in the *Commedia*; the absorption of one work into the greater corpus of a later work. In another sense, the transformation of the *Vita nuova* into the "then" presents the two works as parallel episodes and illustrates one of Dante's earliest attempts at a strategy which will inform much of the *Commedia*.

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as the host of the last supper, surrounded by his disciples (or as the provider of light and bread in general) and Dante as the host of this new banquet where bread and new light will be offered appears in none of the authorities I have consulted.

<sup>95</sup> See note 71.

<sup>96</sup> See note 72.

It is through this temporal posteriority with its attendant “truer” perspective combined with the analogous relationship to Jesus Christ that Dante expresses the new and truer role in which we are to envision him. He is no longer simply an *auctor*, he is now also a redeemer. The Christ of the *Convivio*, however, is somewhat different from that of the *Vita nuova*. Dante’s new wisdom and love for philosophy have resulted in a “secular” Christ, meting out not Augustine’s wisdom but Aristotle’s. Here in the *Convivio* we see one of Dante’s earliest efforts at reconciling pre-Christian and post-Christian wisdom, a project which occupied much of late medieval thought. If the inspiration for the *Vita nuova* was mystical or spiritual, then certainly the inspiration for the *Convivio* was rational, but the goal of both works is nonetheless consistently redemption. Dante will redeem those who sit at his banquet by serving them the new light and offering them the bread of this new communion. The analogy is buttressed throughout the *Convivio* with other references suggesting that Dante is like Jesus Christ. Dante, for example, as the “*io*” of the narrative, espouses attitudes similar to those of Christ towards those in positions of authority.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, Dante, the writer adopts a style which recalls Christ’s manner of expression. According to the Gospels, not only did

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<sup>97</sup> Dante continually associates his audience with sheep recalling the image of Christ and by analogy, Dante as the Good Shepherd; *Convivio* I, i, 7 “Oh beati quelli pochi che seggiono a quella mensa dove lo pane de li angeli si manuca! e miseri quelli che con le pecore hanno comune cibo!” Just as Jesus held the Saducees and priests in disdain, so too does Dante reject the priests and law-makers and speaks instead to the common people for they, like him, have been rejected and oppressed by the authorities. The Gospels contain examples of Jesus’s rejection of the authority of the Scribes, Saducees and Pharisees. Matthew V, 20 in particular encapsulates the sentiments of Christ towards these lawmakers and enforcers of the law; “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” See also Matthew XV, 14 “Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” See also the entirety of Matthew XVI which further underlines Christ’s attitude towards the Pharisees and Saducees. Dante is equally scathing in his treatment of these groups. A particular focus of his disdain is “colui che è amico di sapienza per utilitate, sì come li legisti, [li] medici e quasi tutti i religiosi.” (*Convivio* III, xi, 10)

Jesus always speak in parables but he did so in order to fulfill the words of the prophets.<sup>98</sup> Dante's incessant reliance on analogy, therefore, constitutes yet another way in which he associates himself with Christ and underlines his authority as redeemer.

While the framing metaphor is, therefore, crucial to the expression of Dante's expanded role, it is also the descriptive device through which the genesis of this enhanced role finds expression. Just as in the *Vita nuova* a specific event caused Dante to rethink his position vis-à-vis his field of endeavour, in the *Convivio* too, a specific event, in this case exile, reveals the "true" broader direction which he is intended to follow. The new direction creates a new context within which other previous events are then reconciled. In the *Vita nuova* the withdrawal of Beatrice's salutation and her death caused Dante to resituate himself vis-à-vis the lyric poets and look to a new kind of poetry, one that praises not seeking recompense. Similarly, Dante's exile resituates him with respect to the entire field of "litterati" and "law makers"<sup>99</sup> and opens the way for the challenge to their authority which he mounts in the *Convivio*. Nonetheless, given that the initial role upon which Dante now expands was first established in the *Vita nuova*, it is imperative that Dante not deny the *Vita nuova* nor the meaning of its events. The *Convivio*, therefore, requires a difficult narrative balance on Dante's part. He must look forward, yet keep the past in mind. Accordingly, in the *Convivio*, Dante takes great pains not to

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<sup>98</sup> Matthew XIII, 34-38 "All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 'I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.'"

<sup>99</sup> Dante makes no secret of his disdain for the so-called "litterati" (*Convivio* I, ix, 3: "E a vituperio di loro dico che non si deono chiamare litterari, però che non acquistano la lettera per lo suo uso, ma in quanto per quella guadagnano denari o dignitate.") and implicitly distinguishes himself from them. He holds lawmakers in a similar disdain. See also note 97

negate the divine selection revealed in the events of the *Vita nuova*. He states quite clearly that this work will not detract from the earlier piece<sup>100</sup> and implicitly recognizes that he remains obliged to the authority established therein. Even though the *Convivio* suggests that at the end of the *Vita nuova*, Dante did not see his true destiny, it does not suggest that he was mistaken as to its divine nature. The error of the *Vita nuova* can be corrected, for it was only a misperception. It is perception, then, that is corrected in the *Convivio* not the object perceived. Dante is by no means denying a divine destiny and, accordingly, does not want to be seen as turning away from such destiny to embrace either a worldly female or a profane doctrine. Accordingly, reason and the pursuit of knowledge in the *Convivio* are at all times linked to God and are essentially Christian in nature just as his exile is expressed in Christian terminology.<sup>101</sup>

The true nature and extent of the redemption which Dante the redeemer will bring is revealed in a variety of ways. One of the earliest and perhaps most complex examples is found in *Convivio* I, i, 10 (“E io adunque, che non seggio a la beata mensa, ma, fuggito de la pastura del vulgo, a’ piedi di coloro che seggiono ricolgo di quello che da loro cade ...”) where Dante places himself at the feet of banquet guests waiting to gather what falls. The image recalls Matthew XV, 26, 27 wherein a Canaanite asks Christ’s mercy for her sick daughter. Though Christ tells the woman “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs” she quickly responds that even the little dogs eat the

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<sup>100</sup> See notes 88, 90.

<sup>101</sup> As was indicated above, the framing metaphor forged an affinity between Dante and Christ thereby establishing a Christian context for Dante’s marginalisation.



crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Seeing the woman's great faith, Christ concedes that although she is not a Hebrew, she is in fact virtuous and accedes to her request. The episode is generally interpreted as emphasizing that Christ was not sent to preach the Gospel directly to the gentiles but to the Hebrews of Palestine, that the Gospel was announced to the gentiles by the Apostles only after the Hebrews showed themselves unworthy through their disbelief.<sup>102</sup>

The combination of this image with that of Dante as the host of the banquet, mirrors the grammatical duality produced by Dante's vacillation between first person singular and first person plural at the beginning of Book I. The effect is one of inclusion and differentiation at the same time; telling the reader that Dante is like those who were excluded but whose virtue will ultimately be rewarded with redemption. At the same time the dual role tells the reader that it is Dante who will bring such redemption. The role of redeemer is probably one of the greatest departures from the Dante of the *Vita nuova* for while there he was being redeemed, here he is both redeemed and redeemer. If we remember that this work is to be read as a further development of the *Vita nuova* through which Dante told his literary story and hinted at his own *literary* redemption then we see that Dante is now painting himself as the literary redeemer of those to whom redemption was not originally extended but who may eventually be proved worthy. The redemption starts with his own work but as we shall see, by Book IV, the project has

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<sup>102</sup> The Jews historically referred to themselves as the "sons of God" because they were the chosen people who had preserved the true religion of the world and to whom God had entrusted His promises. The gentiles were called "dogs" for their idolatry and their deep moral corruption. (*La Sacra Bibbia* 70)

extended to the redemption or Christianization of pagan writers. The events of the *Convivio*, the circumstances of Dante's exile and unjust accusation, result in his mission being extended beyond that revealed in the *Vita nuova*. Now his mission goes beyond simply ordering and giving a Christian interpretation to his own history and writing, now the task includes the history and writing of other authors. While Dante's study of philosophy has given him the tools to read and understand the ancient authors, it is his exile which assures him of his divinely appointed authority to interpret them and place them within a Christian context.

Nowhere is this expanded authority as pronounced as in the case of Dante's treatment of Cato of Utica to whom he refers as "sacrissimo" (*Conv.* IV, v, 16) and of whom he asks "E quale uomo terreno più degno fu di significare Iddio, che Catone?" (*Conv.* IV, xxviii, 15). To further underscore the extent of this redemptive mission, Dante evokes the words of Paul the Apostle, immediately before and after both references to Cato. In the latter of the two citations (*Conv.* IV, xxviii, 15), Dante invokes the same doctrine used by Paul (circumcision "of the heart") to justify preaching to the Gentiles<sup>103</sup> and by the church in its interpretation of the story in Matthew noted above.<sup>104</sup> (70) Just as Paul brought to the Gentiles the way to redemption, so too will Dante bring the possibility of redemption to the pagan writers whom he deems worthy. If, as Michelangelo Picone suggests ("Fra autobiografia e tipologia" 112), the *Vita nuova*

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<sup>103</sup> Romans 2; 28, 29 "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."

<sup>104</sup> *Convivio* IV, v, 16, IV, xxviii.

represented opposing ideological worlds (classicism and Christianity) en route to reconciliation<sup>105</sup> then surely the *Convivio* continues the effort.<sup>106</sup> But here the emphasis is different. As Picone has recently observed, in the *Vita nuova* Dante's relationship to the classical authors was rooted in *imitatio*, that is, that Dante, in writing his *libello* integrates "the theory of pagan love (*eros*) into the vision of Christian charity (*caritas*)."<sup>107</sup> ("Dante and the Classics" 58) The reconciliation process is essentially one of absorption. In the *Convivio*, Picone points out, the classical authors are treated in a different way. Picone suggests that Chapters 25 through 28 of Book IV illustrate most clearly Dante's reconciliation process in the *Convivio*. Here Dante ranks the quotations of classical authors "within an encyclopedic Christian system. For him there does not seem to be a rupture between pagan truth and Christian truth, but continuity. Thus the classical fables and myths are fully capable of being restored to modern learning." ("Dante and the Classics" 60) Here then is where we see Dante at his most Pauline. He is not supplanting the classical authors but including them, and Christianizing them. At the same time as Dante includes the pagan authors within a Christian rubric, he adopts a number of forms not typically associated with Christian writing, such as Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* or indeed the use of the "allegory of the poets"<sup>107</sup> to give structure to his

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<sup>105</sup> Michelangelo Picone sees the *Vita nuova* as an amalgam of classical text and Christian commentary which represents the encounter of opposing ideological worlds (classicism and Christianity) en route to reconciliation. ("La *Vita nuova* fra autobiografia e tipologia" 112)

<sup>106</sup> Dante's interpretation (*Convivio* IV, xxii, 15: "Per queste tre donne si possono intendere le tre sette de la vita attiva, cioè li Epicurei, li Stoici e li Peripatetici, che vanno al monimento, cioè al mondo presente che è recettaculo di corruttibili cose, e domandano lo Salvatore, cioè la beatitudine ...) of the Gospel of Mark (that portion which narrates the appearance of the angel outside Christ's empty tomb) is just one of the many examples of Dante's efforts to integrate and give a Christian context to the secular sciences.

<sup>107</sup> For example, Dante's noting the choice between allegory of the poets and allegory of the theologians in the *Convivio*. (*Convivio* II, i; 3 "L'uno si chiama litterale, [e questo è quello che non si stende più oltre che la lettera de le parole fittizie, sì come sono le favole de li poeti. L'altro si chiama allegorico.] e questo è quello che si nasconde sotto 'l manto di queste favole, ed è una veritate ascosa sotto bella menzogna: ...";

work. Dante's decisive statement on the issue of *auctoritas*, that an *autore* is one who is not only to be believed but obeyed,<sup>108</sup> helps legitimize his adoption of such forms. *Auctoritas* in Dante's hands, suggests that a particular model of writing is to be followed by those aspiring to *auctoritas* and, conversely, that a form used by an *auctor* is legitimate. By using the forms of acknowledged *auctores* Dante continues to present himself as an *auctor* while his lending his Christian authority to the non-Christian forms continues his project of redemption of non-Christian authors.

Dante's exile, however, not only affects his literary story but engenders another narrative thread, his political evolution. It is the inclusion of this story that marks a decisive point of departure from the *Vita nuova* and most characterizes the *Convivio* as a second chapter. As Picone notes, the final aspiration of the *Vita nuova* was not to seek an historical reintegration into the "*civitas terrena*" but to find "l'iter intellettuale che conduce alla integrazione assoluta nella *civitas eterna*." The *Convivio* on the other hand is a book intentionally destined to restore its author in the esteem of the Florentine *civitas* from which he was unjustly estranged. ("*Vita nuova: Fra Autobiografia e Tipologia*" 63)

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II, i, 4: "Veramente li teologi questo senso prendono altrimenti che li poeti; ma però che mia intenzione è qui lo modo de li poeti seguitare, prendo lo senso allegorico secondo che per li poeti è usato." As Hollander points out, the mixing of the two types of allegory was frowned upon and yet Dante has done so. (*Studies in Dante* 41-46) Although for Hollander the significance of the introduction of this option lies in the fact that it buttresses Dante's claim to truthfulness of his poem, I would suggest that in the context of this thesis the import lies in the fact that it legitimizes the mixing of what was previously considered a secular format with that of a Christian format. Dante is fashioning a new role for the Christian poet, he is setting parameters that previously had not been sanctioned though in practice may have occurred. Antonio d'Andrea has also noted the novelty of this mixing, suggesting that Dante's attempts to combine the allegory of the poets and of the theologians, however, produce the result that "Lo statuto del senso letterale rimane così in sospenso e riflette la sua ambiguità sulla stessa." (72)

<sup>108</sup> *Convivio* IV, vi; 5 "E così 'autore', quindi derivato, si prende per ogni persona degna d'essere creduta e obedita."

Notwithstanding the apparent disparity such a divergent narrative thread might otherwise introduce, the adaptability of the framing metaphor permits Dante to maintain a sense of internal cohesiveness throughout. The metaphor is not only ideally suited to the expression of Dante's literary progress but, in its implicit analogy between Christ and Dante, is ideal for framing his political story for Dante, like Christ, has been unjustly accused and excluded. Just as the analogy between himself and Christ permitted Dante to assume the role of redeemer of the non-Christian writers, his role as an exile and, therefore, an external observer in this narrative thread justifies another role as teacher and redeemer of society.<sup>109</sup> Without offering us an explicit exegetical explanation, Dante has in essence created an image which represents his reality. It is almost as if he had written "And so I imagined my life, the false accusations and marginalisation, as the life of Christ." Just as the true story of his literary evolution lay in the allegorical interpretation, here too the true story is also located in the allegorical meaning of the metaphor he uses to give form to his story.

Using the framing metaphor as the principal representation of the events that spurred on his political mission, Dante introduces a variety of strategies within that framework to express his reaction and his proposed solutions to the cataclysmic event of his exile. Dante's continuing desire to reintegrate himself into society, for example, is expressed not only in the content of the *Convivio*, but in its form. By commencing in the impersonal third person, Dante compels the reader to focus first on a universal or general

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<sup>109</sup> As Cudini suggests, although the exile experience was a negative one it serves to imbue Dante with an "eccezionalità" and confirms the novelty of his cultural mission. (*Convivio* 56, 57)

notion not particular to anyone. The shift to the second person plural refocuses the reader on a specific object, one in which the writer is addressing the reader and creating a common bond which is more intimate than the preceding generality.<sup>110</sup> When Dante ultimately shifts to the first person singular<sup>111</sup> the reader is finally made aware that the common bond is shared not with just a nameless writer, but the “io” which, for the reasons set above, very soon becomes identified with Dante, author and protagonist of the *Vita nuova*. Yet Dante does not maintain this distinction between “io” and the audience, the purpose of its insertion having been served. Instead, he vacillates between the first person plural and the first person singular,<sup>112</sup> making it clear that while he sees himself as outside of the existence of those whom he addresses he is seeking ways to reintegrate himself. However, Dante does not rely on form alone to express his desire for reintegration; the content of the *Convivio* confirms what the form suggested. Dante identifies his circumstances with those of the audience which he addresses. He paints himself as part of a collective and tells us why he should be considered part of that collective, part of the “us” of “nostra anima.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> *Convivio* I, i; 1 “Si come dice lo Filosofo nel principio de la Prima Filosofia, tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere. La ragione di che puote essere ed è che ciascuna cosa, da providenza di prima natura impinta, è inclinabile a la sua propria perfezione; onde acciò che la scienza è ultima perfezione de la nostra anima, ne la quale sta la nostra ultima felicitade, tutti naturalmente al suo desiderio semo subietti.”

<sup>111</sup> *Convivio* I, i; 10 “E io adunque, che non seggio a la beata mensa, ...”

<sup>112</sup> Cudini also notes this vacillation in the context of *Convivio* I, i, 1; “Così, i due periodi di cui si compone il paragrafo si chiudono sostanzialmente allo stesso modo, ‘tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere’/ ‘tutti naturalmente al suo desiderio semo subietti’: muta il soggetto, che da impersonale, dopo lo scorrere dell’argomentazione, si è personalizzato (‘tutti ... *semo* subietti’).” (*Convivio* 50,51)

<sup>113</sup> Cudini notes that Dante did not consider himself a scholar by profession, that he is not one “di quelli pochi che seggiono” but flees also from the “pastura del vulgo” and thereby becomes a scholar of the truly wise, from whom he gathers “di quello che da loro cade.” *Convivio* I, i; 10, 11 “E io adunque, che non seggio a la beata mensa, ma, fuggito de la pastura del vulgo, a’ piedi di coloro che seggiono ricolgo di quello che da loro cade, e conosco la misera vita di quelli che dietro m’ho lasciati, per la dolcezza ch’io sento in quello che a poco a poco ricolgo, misericordievolmente mosso, non me dimenticando, per li miseri

Dante uses the same fusion of form and content to express his desire to vindicate his name. He uses as a model, Boethius's *De Consolatione philosophiae*, a work explicitly designed to facilitate speaking of oneself to clear one's reputation.<sup>114</sup> Similarities in the form of both works would, therefore, suggest that Dante's *Convivio* will have the same goal. However, Dante cites Boethius directly as authority to speak on his own behalf<sup>115</sup> so that the literal narrative also bears witness to this desire.<sup>116</sup>

It is in the expression of a third objective of the work, redemption, that the effectiveness of form combined with literal content is most evident. The narrative structure provided by the framing metaphor permits Dante to exploit a series of images which in turn can accommodate multiple allegorical meanings. The initial analogy between Dante and Christ, for example, is continually affirmed by metaphors which create an image of society as a flock of sheep which has strayed from the right path.<sup>117</sup> Dante as the teacher and host of the supper will light the way, the right way, back to the fold. At the same time, the continual use of the path imagery, for example, the "way"

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alcuna cosa ho riservata, la quale a li occhi loro, già è più tempo, ho dimostrata; e in ciò li ho fatti maggiormente vogliosi." Cudini suggests that Dante is declaring his desire that the "miseri" share what he has learned or rather what he has already shown. In this way he alludes to the *canzoni* on which he will comment, which he has evidently already completely or partly divulged. (*Convivio* 7,8)

<sup>114</sup> Michelangelo Picone suggests that Dante uses Boethius's *De Consolatione philosophiae* as one of the models for the *Convivio* (notwithstanding the fact that it was not typically considered a "Christian" work) because it so readily accommodated its self-explanatory purpose. ("La *Vita nuova*: fra autobiografia e tipologia" 63)

<sup>115</sup> *Convivio* I, ii, 13: "E questa necessitate mosse Boezio di sé medesimo a parlare, acciò che sotto pretesto di consolazione escusasse la perpetuale infamia del suo esilio, mostrando quello essere ingiusto, poi che altro escusatore non si levava."

<sup>116</sup> Cudini, *Convivio* vviii; Nardi, *Dal "Convivio" alla "Commedia"* 21; Vasoli *Convivio* xviii.

<sup>117</sup> John X, 11: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."; Matthew X, 6: "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

being wrong,<sup>118</sup> also recalls Christ's use of similar imagery.<sup>119</sup> Finally, Dante's representation of himself as the host of the banquet at which the new light will be given recalls not only Christ's characterization of himself as the light that would bring people out of the darkness but the episodes in the New Testament in which Christ is seen as the provider of bread which, in turn is associated with the salvation of the faithful.<sup>120</sup> Dante's new role as saviour extends, therefore, not just to literature but to the society that wrongfully rejected him. Such redemption, it ought to be remembered, is not of a spiritual nature. Certainly Dante considers the secular wisdom in a Christian context, but Dante, unlike Christ is not attempting to bring about the kingdom of heaven; rather he is

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<sup>118</sup> *Convivio* IV, i, 9, " ...proposi di gridare a la gente che per mal cammino andavano, acciò che per diritto calle si dirizzassero;" IV, xii, 19: " ...lo buono camminatore giugne a termine e a posa; lo erroneo mai non l'aggiugne, ..."; IV, xvi, 10: "E per lo cammino dritto è da vedere ..."; IV, xxii, 6: "...così questi umani appetiti per diversi calli dal principio se ne vanno, e uno solo calle è quello che noi mena a la nostra pace."; IV, xxiv, 12: " ...che entra ne la selva erronea di questa vita, non saprebbe tenere lo buono cammino, ..."; IV, xxviii, 2: " ... l'altra sì è, che ella benedice lo cammino che ha fatto ..."

<sup>119</sup> Matthew VII. 13, 14: "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

<sup>120</sup> Jesus is frequently portrayed as the light which will bring the people out of the shadows; Matthew IV, 14-16: "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned."; John III, 19: "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness more than light, because their deeds were evil."; John VIII, 12: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life."; John XII, 46: "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness." The association of bread with life and salvation is also omnipresent in the New Testament. Christ invariably is represented as one who offers bread (Matthew XIV, 26), multiplies bread (twice in the Gospel of Matthew) and indeed characterizes himself as bread (John VI, 35: "And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst." Matthew XXVI, 26: "And while they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Dante recalls many of these associations in presenting his banquet at one at which he will also serve bread. His general invitation to the "miseri" to his invitation recalls Christ's practice of eating with those most despised by society; Matthew IX, 11,12: "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." Dante's continual reiteration that the knowledge he is imparting is divine in nature completes the association in recalling Christ's words to Satan; in Matthew IV, 4; "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"



attempting civic redemption, in essence, good government, through Aristotelian rationalism.

In choosing a framing metaphor that lends itself as easily to one narrative thread as to the other Dante mirrors a technique which has its beginnings in the *Vita nuova*; the suggestion of one story by the imagery of the other. As in the *Vita nuova*, where the same imagery lent itself as easily to the writer's story as to the love story, here too the imagery and structure of the *Convivio* is equally adept at telling the political story and the writer's story both of which, in turn, share redemption as one of their goals. While at times the political message is clearly distinct, as in Dante's use of invective<sup>121</sup> and at other times his literary story is distinct (as in the digression on the meaning of *auctor*) most often both stories are layered one on top of the other, making his role as *auctor* intrinsic to his political role. This is most evident in *Convivio* IV. What we see throughout the final completed *trattato* is that the layering is not simple coincidence in the sense that the two stories are parallel; rather it is an intertwining in which the authority of one story is contingent on the other and each narrative thread provides the basis for the other. The clearest example of this is found in *Convivio* IV, iv, 11 wherein Dante cites Virgil's *Aeneid* as authority for his political views with respect to the divine authority of the Roman Empire.<sup>122</sup> In order to do so, Dante must first rewrite the relevant

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<sup>121</sup> *Convivio* IV, xxvii; 11 "Oh misera, misera patria mia! quanta pietà mi stringe per te, qual volta leggo, qual volta scrivo cosa che a reggimento civile abbia rispetto!.." provides one such example. See also *Convivio* IV, vi 19-20 "E dico a voi Carlo e Federigo regi ..."

<sup>122</sup> *Convivio* IV, iv, 11 "E in ciò s'accorda Virgilio nel primo de lo Eneida, quando dice, in persona di Dio parlando: 'A costoro - cioè a li Romani - né termine di cose né termine di tempo pongo; a loro ho dato impero senza fine.'" The reference is from *Aeneid* I, 278-9: "His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono:/ imperium sine fine dedi." ("To the Romans I set no boundary in space or time. I have granted them

section of the *Aeneid* by attributing the words of Jupiter to “Dio” (God). Having thus redeemed and Christianized the work Dante proceeds to rely on it in support of his argument. His literary story, his revised literary mission, therefore, becomes intrinsic to his political story for only in redeeming a pagan authority can he legitimately set that author’s works alongside the “Scriptures” whose prophecies will be fulfilled by Dante’s political mission. Similarly, in *Convivio* IV, v, 6 he poses a coincidence of Aeneas’s arrival in Italy with the birth of King David, both of which he uses to confirm the historic basis of his argument that the world was at optimal disposition for the birth of Christ during the reign of the Roman Empire. Dante thereby assigns to the *Aeneid* the same historical value as he affords Orosio and indeed the Old Testament.<sup>123</sup> That Dante’s calculation as to the coincidence of the two events is dubious<sup>124</sup> only confirms the importance of the insertion of the Virgil reference to his project. Dante has had to substantially revise either the biblical history or the “history” according to Virgil in order to locate the latter amongst the writings which confirm the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies. In Dante’s hands, Virgil’s *Aeneid* becomes intrinsic, along with the Gospel of Luke,<sup>125</sup> to Dante’s political expression.

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Dominion, and it has no end.” (Knight 36). As Vasoli notes, Dante’s opinion in this respect is not expressed only in the *Convivio* but rather appears in Ep., VII, 11-2 in which Dante states that the “Romanorum gloriosa potestas nec metas Ytalie nec tricornis Europe margine coarctatur” and although “vim passa in angustam gubernacula su contraxerit,” still “iudique ... de inviolabili iure fluctus Amphitritis attingens vix ab inutili unda Oceani se circumcingi dignatur.”

<sup>123</sup> *Convivio* IV, v, 6 “E tutto questo fu in uno temporale che David nacque e nacque Roma, cioè che Enea venne di Troia in Italia che fu origine de la cittade romana, sì come testimoniano le scritture.” As Vasoli points out, the “scritture” to which Dante refers are, for the foundation of Rome, *Aeneid* I, I, sgg. and for the birth of King David, Orosio, Eusebio di Cesarea and Livio.

<sup>124</sup> Vasoli cites Busnelli and Vandelli with respect to the dubious conclusion drawn by Dante in this regard both of whom note that any of the authorities available to Dante at the time of the *Convivio*’s writing, would reveal a difference of almost a century between the two events.

<sup>125</sup> *Convivio* IV, v, 8 “Né ‘l mondo mai non fu né sarà sì perfettamente disposto come allora che a la voce d’un solo, principe del roman popolo e comandante, fu ordinato, sì come testimonia Luca evangelista.” In

The merger of the two narrative threads is also evident stylistically, particularly in Dante's incessant and often tedious reliance on ordinal and hierarchical structure. Each argument on every topic he addresses is broken into parts of a whole and then again into sub-parts. The conspicuous use of deductive reasoning<sup>126</sup> makes it obvious that Dante is seeking to depict himself in the commentary as a philosophical thinker capable of creating order and harmony out of an apparently chaotic world. When Dante suggests that if only the present-day rulers had a philosophical adviser at their sides such a reconciliation might be achieved<sup>127</sup> the purpose of his self-depiction becomes clear.

By the latter part of Trattato IV we see an interesting development. While Dante is still enlisting his literary evolution to express his political and social views, he seems to rely less and less on the philosophical models and looks with increasing frequency to Virgil, to whom he refers as "lo maggiore nostro poeta" (*Convivio* IV, xxvi 8) and "questo altissimo poeta" (*Convivio* IV, xxvi 13), as the authority for his political and social recommendations. This is especially noticeable in Trattato IV, xxvi, the entirety of which is taken up with Dante's opinion as to how one should comport oneself at a

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fact, Luke merely attests to the existence of such a ruler, and does not conclude that this implies that the world was perfectly disposed at that time to the birth of Christ. (Luke 2, 1; "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.")

<sup>126</sup> Vallone points out that much of Dante's didactic style reflects the structure of the medieval Latin prose (15) in which Dante had immersed himself at the time of writing the *Convivio*, as opposed to the love poetry of his contemporaries the language of which is so prevalent in the *Vita nuova*.

<sup>127</sup> *Convivio* IV, vi, 18; "Ciò è a dire: Congiungasi la filosofica autoritade con la imperiale, a bene e perfettamente reggere. Oh miseri che al presente reggete! e oh miserissimi che retti siete! ché nulla filosofica autoritade si congiunge con li vostri reggimenti né per proprio studio né per consiglio, sì che a tutti si può dire quella parola de lo Ecclesiaste: 'Guai a te, terra, lo cui re è fanciullo, e li cui principi la domane mangiano!', e a nulla terra si può dire quella che seguita: 'Beata la terra lo cui re è nobile e li cui principi si cibano nel suo tempo, a bisogno e non a lussuria!'"

particular age. Unlike so many other Trattati wherein Dante cites a variety of sources in confirmation of his argument, in Trattato IV, xxvi<sup>128</sup> Virgil is the only authority on which Dante relies. And while in these instances Dante does not rewrite Virgil as he did in *Convivio* IV, iv and v, he does nonetheless offer an interpretation of the *Aeneid* which differs from the generally accepted interpretation of the time and of which he was likely aware,<sup>129</sup> indicating again that Dante is prepared to offer revised readings of his *auctores* to facilitate the expression of his own story. This shift in influence may signal still further development in Dante's literary evolution but, because of the *Convivio*'s

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<sup>128</sup> *Convivio* IV, xxvi, 8: "E così infrenato mostra Virgilio, lo maggiore nostro poeta, che fosse Enea, ne la parte de lo Eneida ove questa etade si figura; la quale parte comprende lo quarto, lo quinto e lo sesto libro de Eneida. E quanto raffrenare fu quello, quando avendo ricevuto da Dido tanto di piacere quanto di sotto nel settimo trattato si dicerà, e usando con esse tanto do dilettazone, elli si partio, per seguire onesta e laudabile via e fruttuosa, come nel quarto de l'Eneida scritto è! Quanto spronare fu quello, quando esso Enea sostenette solo con Sibilla a intrare ne lo Inferno a cercare de l'anima di suo padre Anchise, contra tanto pericoli, come nel sesto de la detta istoria si dimostra!," *Convivio* IV xxvi, 11: "E questo amore mostra che avesse Enea lo nomato poeta nel quinto libro sopra detto, quando lasciò li vecchi Troiani in Cicilia raccomandati ad Aceste, e partilli da le fatiche; e quando ammaestrò in questo luogo Ascanio, suo figliuolo, con li altri adoloscentuli armeggiando. Per che appare a questa etade necessario essere amore, come lo testo dice," *Convivio* IV, xxvi, 13: "È questa cortesia mostra che avesse Enea questo altissimo poeta, nel sesto sopradetto, quando dice che Enea rege, per onorare lo corpo di Miseno morto, che era stato trombatore d'Ettore e poi s'era raccomandato a lui, s'accinse e prese la scure ad aiutare tagliare le legne per lo fuoco che dovea ardere lo corpo morto; come era di loro costume. Per che bene appare questa essere necessaria a la gioventute, e però la nobile anima in quella la dimostra, come detto è," *Convivio* IV, xxvi 14: "E basti che esso seguiti la legge, e in quella seguitare si diletta: sì come dice lo predetto poeta, nel predetto quinto libro, che fece Enea, quando fece li giuochi in Cicilia ne l'anniversario del padre; che ciò che promise per le vittorie, lealmente siede poi a ciascuno vittorioso, sì come era di loro lunga usanza, che era loro legge. Per che è manifesto che a questa etade lealtate, cortesia, amore, fortezza e temperanza siano necessarie, sì come dice lo testo che al presente è ragionato, e però la nobile anima tutte le dimostra."

<sup>129</sup> Vasoli cites Busnelli and Vandelli who have noted that the interpretation of Virgil's *Aeneid* as an allegory for the human lifespan can be traced to Fabio Fulgenzio Planciade who lived between the fifth and sixth centuries and who was a well known author in medieval schools. His *Expositio virgilianae continentiae* equates each of the four ages of man into a particular section of the poem. Dante's allegorical interpretation of the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, for example (*Conv.* IV, xxvi, 8), according to Vasoli is substantially removed from that of Fulgentius who understands Aeneas's descent into Hades as a symbol of the human initiation into "sapientiae obscura secretaque misteria" (dark and secret mysteries of knowledge - translation mine) whereas for Dante the episode is an allegory for strength or rather greatness of spirit, demonstrated by the hero when he confronts the frightening secrets of the underworld. Similarly, as Vasoli notes, Dante's interpretation of the episode in which the games are celebrated in Sicily to commemorate the anniversary of Anchise's death, differs from Fulgentius's. For Fulgentius the games represent the age of in a man's life in which "iam prudentior aetas paternae memoriae exempla secuta liberalibus corpus exerceat causis." For Dante, however, the episode represents the attribute of "lealtate." That Dante was

unfinished status, it is impossible to say with any certainty to what extent Dante may have continued to express such a development.<sup>130</sup> However, this shift away from Aristotle and the apparent movement to yet another literary model may, in light of the *Commedia*, be read as evidence of Dante's dissatisfaction with rational philosophy and the reason for the *Convivio*'s unfinished state.

As we have seen, the *Convivio*, though considerably more detailed in its telling, is very much a continuation of the story commenced in the *Vita nuova* and to which the character of Beatrice was essential. The *Convivio* uses a format similar to that of the *Vita nuova* and many of the same strategies to track Dante's evolution since his youth. The influence of Beatrice, however, is substantially less noticeable and it becomes apparent that if once Dante thought the road to his own redemption, literary and spiritual, lay with his love for the now dead Beatrice, he now also believes that he is the one who must redeem not only the authors who preceded him but the society which rejected him. Dante's attempts to demonstrate this progression in terms of the *donna gentile*, as was noted in Chapter 2, has caused intense discussion amongst critics.<sup>131</sup> The principal

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aware of the accepted interpretation is evident from *Convivio* IV, xxiv, 9 "E lasciando lo figurato che di questo diverso processo de l'etadi tiene Virgilio ne lo Eneida, e lasciando stare ..."

<sup>130</sup> Ulrich Leo associates this shift in model with the very reasons the *Convivio* remains unfinished. In his comprehensive article "The Unfinished *Convivio* and Dante's rereading of the *Aeneid*," Leo suggests that aside from reasons which are philosophical and religious in nature, there was a literary and aesthetic reason for the halt in work on what Leo posits was to have been Dante's "*Summa philosophiae* in volgare." Looking to formal shifts in the way classical authors are cited in the *Convivio*, Leo concludes that "Dante, while writing the last chapters of the fourth book of the *Convivio*, and at the same time the end of the fragmentary *De Vulgari eloquentia*, read again, or in part for the first time classical Latin poetry and prose. Among the poetry read by him was - perhaps suggested by the allegorical explanations of Virgil used in *Conv.* IV - the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, which tells the story of Aeneas's descent into Hell."

<sup>131</sup> Richard Lansing takes the position that the two works and the treatment of the *donna gentile* in both are irreconcilable. Luigi Pietrobono is adamant that there is no way to reconcile the two. Charles Singleton takes the position that Beatrice becomes an allegory in the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*. (*An Essay on the*

difficulty lies in the fact that in the *Vita nuova* the *donna gentile* is purportedly a real woman whom Dante ultimately deserts in order to stay true to the memory of Beatrice. In the *Convivio*, however, Dante narrates a struggle between the memory of Beatrice and his love for the same *donna gentile* (there is no doubt that he is referring to the same woman for he tells us so<sup>132</sup>) and chooses to stay with the latter. The key to resolving the issue, it would appear, lies in remembering that Dante explicitly tells us that in the poems of the *Convivio* the *donna gentile* represents the study of Philosophy and that the

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*Vita nuova*) Kenneth MacKenzie, however, feels that the two versions don't contradict each other, suggesting that "Some years later in exile, with his usual method of ascribing to real events an allegorical meaning, Dante hit upon the idea of making this lady a symbol of his philosophical studies - the idea being suggested by Boethius, who in the book cited personifies Philosophy as a sympathizing lady. As one seeks silver and finds gold, so these studies, undertaken as a consolation, led Dante to comprehend the real nature of Beatrice. It is not necessary to make the allegory correspond in every detail with the original facts. The method of Dante, we must remember, is to start with a literal meaning and proceed thence to the allegorical; the latter being more 'true' because in accord with permanent underlying principles. Understood in this way, the two accounts of the episode do not contradict each other; and the account in the *Convivio*, cannot properly be taken as proof that the *gentile donna* of *Vita nuova* was nothing but a symbol. Still less does it support the view that Beatrice was a purely imaginary person; in the *Convivio* she is always spoken of as real. (*La Vita nuova* 128). Francis Fergusson, (note 91 above) says he simply doesn't believe Dante. Bruno Nardi resolves the issue by hypothesizing revisions to the *Vita nuova* made after the *Convivio* was written; "... siffatta conclusione della *Vita nuova* è perentoriamente esclusa dall'autocitazione che Dante ne fa nel *Convivio*, commentando la Canzone *Voi che 'ntendendo*. La fine della *Vita nuova* cui Dante fu esplicito e preciso reiferimento nel trattato secondo del *Convivio* e che è presupposta dalla canzone *Voi che 'ntendendo* era cosa assai diversa da quella che ora vi si legge. Dunque è evidente che Dante stesso ebbe più tardi a dare alla *Vita nuova* una conclusione diversa da quella che aveva in origine." (Dal "*Convivio*" alla "*Commedia*" 7) Even less satisfactory is the suggestion by Gioacchino Natoli of a second Beatrice; "Filosofia è la donna gentile destinata a diventare gentilissima, o Beatrice." (70) Cesare Vasoli provides a concise summary of the various critical options in respect of the issue favouring the approach suggested by Barbi in which the two episodes are seen as distinct; "quali sono narrativi, prima nella *Vita nuova* e poi nel *Convivio*, in quanto 'manifestazioni d'arte di due periodi distinti e successivi' vanno tenuti separati." In conformity with this approach, he distinguishes as well between the interpretation of the two episodes noting that in the *Convivio* "la vicenda prende il ritmo e le misure delle nuove esperienze intellettuali di Dante e il vecchio episodio, immaginato per la *Vita nuova* serve ora, come 'dichiarate finzione retorica', e giustificare l'immaginazione della filosofia come 'donna gentile', e l'uso del 'vecchio linguaggio' per parlare di un nuovo 'amore di scienza e non di creature umana' conciliabile e integrabile con quello di Beatrice." (*Convivio* I, vi) Similar in its practicality is the approach taken by Cudini; "Inutile rivedere ora la posizioni della critica ... Basti ... ricordare come Dante stesso sia cosciente della diversità di modi e funzione tra le due opere (pur nella loro sostanziale continuità), spesse volte riaffermata (e più che altrove esplicita in I i 16-17)." (*Convivio* 133)

<sup>132</sup> *Convivio* II, ii; 1 "... quando quella gentile donna, cui feci menzione ne la fine de la *Vita nuova*, ..." Vasoli also notes this saying "Dante ... sembra dichiarare esplicitamente che la verità narrata nella canzone non è tale di fatto, bensì è un'invenzione poetica che gli permetterà di esprimere e comunicare verità e dottrine altrimenti inaccessibili per il pubblico al quale è destinato il *Convivio*." (*Convivio* xxii)

narrative of the poems was constructed to tell this story.<sup>133</sup> The events, as narrated, are not real, that is, they did not occur in actuality. Or at least, and perhaps more importantly, Dante wants us to perceive the events as fictional. That being the case, there appears to be little difficulty in reconciling the two episodes. At the end of the *Vita nuova* Dante chose not to remain with a purportedly real woman and instead decided to remain true to the kind of love which the memory of Beatrice represented; the kind of love which finds its reward in the act of praise itself.

What Dante *does not* say in the *Convivio* is of utmost importance. He does not say that in hindsight he realized that this woman (whom he described as an “avversario de la ragione” and the desire for whom he described as a “malvagio and vana tentazione”<sup>134</sup>) was Philosophy in the same way that he realized in hindsight that Beatrice was a nine and, therefore, a miracle. What Dante does say is “E immaginava lei (referring to Philosophy) fatta come una donna gentile.”<sup>135</sup> Dante has simply adopted a method used often in Christian iconography, such as San Francesco’s likening of poverty to a woman or, perhaps, more telling, in Boethius’s representation of philosophy as a woman.<sup>136</sup> The

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<sup>133</sup> *Convivio* II, xii, 8 “ Per che io, sentendomi levare dal pensiero del primo amore a la virtù di questo, quasi marvegliandomi apersi la bocca nel parlare de la proposta canzone, mostrando la mia condizione sotto figura d’altre cose: però che de la donna di cu’ io m’innamorava non era degna rima di volgare alcuna palesemente po[e]tare; né li uditori erano tanto bene disposti, che avessero sì leggere le [non] fittizie parole apprese; né sarebbe data loro fede a la sentenza vera, come a la fittizia, però che di vero si credea del tutto che disposto fosse a quello amore, che non si credeva di questo).” See also: *Convivio* II, i 1 and *Convivio* II, xii, 8.

<sup>134</sup> *Vita nuova* XXXIX [XL], 1, 6.

<sup>135</sup> *Convivio* II, xii, 6 (204, 205)

<sup>136</sup> Richard Lansing notes that the personification of philosophy is likewise a familiar image, for Dante is directly indebted to the paradigm Boethius employs in *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, a work he cites as one of his two principal models. The figure of the poet as lover of an abstraction is, he continues, “a narrative device familiar to much of medieval literature.” (xiv) Bruno Nardi notes “Boezio ha tramandato

choice of the metaphor of the pursuit of a lover as the frame for this episode, what Vasoli refers to as “l’uso emblematico del linguaggio d’amore” (*Convivio* xvi), merely underlines the popularity of love as a favourite subject or catalyst for discussions of everything from philosophy to metaphysics and conveniently continues the motif of the *Vita nuova* which also dealt with literary endeavour in terms of a love story.

As was the case with Beatrice in the *Vita nuova*, the actual existence of the *donna gentile* is not nearly as important as our perception of her as actual. She may or may not have existed and Dante may or may not have turned to her at a time in his life when he was otherwise inconsolable, but this is of little consequence. What does matter is that for the purposes of the *Vita nuova*, the *donna gentile* is purportedly real and is depicted as a distraction from Dante’s praise of the now dead Beatrice. In the *Convivio*, Dante chooses to represent his new pursuit in the form of a character who had, in the *Vita nuova*, constituted a distraction from Beatrice and who was, therefore, a diversion from his primary pursuit at that time. The *donna gentile*, in both works then, represents a departure from Beatrice and of whatever she may represent. She must replace the Beatrice of the *Vita nuova* so that Dante can mark a new direction, so that he can “correct” the error of the earlier work and demonstrate a literary progression. In using a figure that he has previously used, he creates a continuity between the two works, but also changes direction. At this point Dante is not willing to attach to Beatrice the broad range of meanings with which he imbues her in the *Commedia*. In the *Convivio*, Dante

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al medioevo l’immagine allegorica della filosofia che si vede ancora scolpita nelle facciate di alcune cattedrali.” (*Dal “Convivio” alla “Commedia”* 11)



associates Beatrice only with love. At the stage of the *Convivio*, Dante sees reason and philosophy as distinct from love and, therefore, must find another referent for them. The *donna gentile*, therefore, represents one of Dante's earliest attempts at palinodic revision. The primacy of the *donna gentile* in the *Convivio* signals clearly that, at this point at least, philosophic wisdom and the language of love are not compatible and that if Dante thought his destiny lay in the field of lyric poetry he was mistaken.

Thus we can reconcile the literal meaning of the *Convivio* poems with the apparently incompatible ending of the *Vita nuova* if we read them in the same way as we read the entirety of the *Convivio*, as relegating the *Vita nuova* to "then" status, and if we read the *Convivio* and its poems as a continuation of the story commenced in the *Vita nuova*. In this case, we can see that Dante has simply elongated the struggle between the two forces making it seem that, although at the end of the *Vita nuova* he had decided to stay with Beatrice, the struggle continued even after that with the "true" ending to the episode being found in the *Convivio*. Such a reading is compatible with Dante's evident attempt to present the two works as linked and suggests as well that the meaning of the *Vita nuova* ought to be considered in light of this newer truth; that Dante's new destiny is much broader than he believed it to be at the end of the *Vita nuova*.

A greater problem, however, arises from Dante's directive as to how the poems of the *Convivio* are to be interpreted.<sup>137</sup> If, in the *Convivio*, the poems are constructs and the

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<sup>137</sup> See *Convivio* II, i.

events narrated in their literal level are also constructs, then what are we to make of the *Vita nuova*? Is its literal meaning also a *bella menzogna*? If that were so, such an interpretation could negate the divine selection implied in its events and ignores the importance Dante places on the reader perceiving Beatrice as actual. On the other hand, if the poems of the *Convivio* were to be interpreted as representing events which did occur in actuality then it becomes even more difficult to reconcile the apparent contradiction. To suggest that the poetry of both works should be interpreted according to two different methods seems, at first, no more satisfying an explanation. However, a distinction in interpretive method may indeed be justifiable as still another indication of an ideological shift in Dante's project and is consistent with the differing moods of the two works.<sup>138</sup> More importantly, in either case, the significance of the poems, the allegorical meaning, which in both interpretive schemes is considered "true," conveys an autobiographical intent.

We see then that while the *Convivio* certainly does continue the project commenced in the *Vita nuova*, it was by no means the culmination. What we do see is a more pronounced direction in terms of strategies which Dante employs to transform his story into a form that will express not only the facts as they existed but will convey the connotation which he intends to attach to them. Dante's shift in Book IV away from

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<sup>138</sup> Ulrich Leo (42-44) gives a concise overview of the main positions in this respect, citing Pietrobono as a proponent of the opinion that the Dante of the *Vita nuova* is a mystic while in the *Convivio* Dante follows human reason." The Pietrobono position holds that in the *Convivio*, Dante's reason leads to a Christian faith but that it is a faith void of superrational illumination. The position taken by Michele Barbi also notes a distinction in mode suggesting that while the *Vita nuova* is a highly poetic love story set on a background of reality, the *Convivio* is marked by its rationalism.

commentary which is strictly tied to an interpretation of the poetry suggests an evolving vision of what form his story should take. As the focus of the work shifts from the more general view of the cosmos as a scientific entity capable of being mapped and catalogued, to a more politically oriented exploration into how man should exist daily within that cosmos, there is a parallel shift from a mere transfer of knowledge to an effort at solving some of the problems confronting the author.<sup>139</sup> This movement suggests an evolving Dante and comprises perhaps one of the most telling if not intentional manifestations of his actual story. But of course the *Convivio* was abandoned and it is not until the *Commedia* that we see the finished portrait in the light in which the artist found most appropriate.

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<sup>139</sup> Vasoli notes the shift in emphasis in Book IV, suggesting that the narration shifts to resemble a “‘quaestio’ scholastico.” (xvii)

## Chapter 4

### The *Commedia* as Dante's Love Story

As a poetic narrative devoid of an accompanying prose commentary<sup>140</sup> the *Commedia* immediately signals a substantial departure from the *Convivio* and the *Vita nuova*. However, the distinctions between the *Commedia* and the earlier two “autobiographical” works are not only in form. Indeed, while most critics agree that the works (though to differing extents) are related, philosophical variations and differences in their expression have generated a large part of Dante scholarship.<sup>141</sup> I would suggest that what most distinguishes the *Commedia* is the fundamental distinction in Dante's point of view. The difference in point of view not only affects how the *Commedia* tells Dante's stories but how the *Commedia* may be situated in terms of genre. In the *Commedia*,

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<sup>140</sup> It is perhaps this lack of a prose commentary that has led to the great debate as to whether the journey of the *Divine Comedy* is a metaphor or not. Bruno Nardi, for example, has argued that Dante considered his own experience as a “visione verace” and that those who view the poem as a literary fiction misread it. (“Chi considera la visione dantesca e il rapimento del poeta al cielo come finzione letteraria, travisa il senso.” (*Dante e la cultura medioevale* 392)) The critics have pondered whether Dante really did in fact take the journey he describes, whether he did not actually take the journey but instead uses the journey to describe a vision he actually experienced, or whether the entirety of the *Commedia* is simply a fiction which Dante may or may not have intended his readers to believe happened in actuality or not. Charles Singleton, on the other hand, is renowned for his statement that “the fiction of the *Divine Comedy* is that it is not fiction.” (*Dante Studies 1: Commedia, Elements of Structure* 62) The letter to Can Grande, whether authentic or not, is proof only of the way in which Dante suggests the events of the *Commedia* should be interpreted; that is, that the allegorical level is to be true. However, since the autobiographical story is not located expressly in the literal level of the *Commedia*, this debate is little more than incidental to the examination before us now and, for the purposes, of this thesis, the journey will be treated as a metaphor. cfr. William Franke's view of the debate Note 32.

<sup>141</sup> Ulrich Leo gives a comprehensive yet concise summary of the prevailing schools of thought with respect to the apparent philosophical distinctions between the *Vita nuova*, the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*. While Pietrobono suggests that the *Convivio* reflects a temporary renunciation of the inspiration which produced the *Vita nuova* and a return to it with the *Commedia*, Barbi sees no break between the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*, except that the “form used is now poetic.” Beatrice, for Barbi, symbolizes this change of expression. Gilson adopts Barbi's approach, proposing that faith and metaphysics are excluded from the *Convivio* because they had “no practical part there” though they are “at the centre of the *Commedia*.” (45)

Dante defines himself in comparative terms, in a type of comparison that Birge Vitz sees as “vertical” comparison as opposed to distinguishing himself on a horizontal scale from his fellow man. Here, the extraordinary quality of his life is marked by the same kind of distinction Birge Vitz noted in Abelard’s and in other typically medieval “autobiographies,” that is, the *Commedia* marks Dante’s attempt to reconcile himself within the paradigm of the lives of others, to see the meaning of his life in an inclusive rather than in an exclusive way.

This inclusive aspect of the *Commedia* is signalled from the moment Dante places himself “Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita” (*Inferno* I, 1). He enunciates first that the narrative which follows will involve the “us” of “nostra vita.” Only after he establishes that this will be the story of *our* journey does he make reference to himself (“mi ritrovai” *Inferno* I, 2), suggesting that his story is a mere variant extracted from within a greater pattern, emerging upon that same road. The *Convivio* raised this issue, but here the relationship between “we” and “I” is resolved through the levels of imagery and both voices are presented much more clearly as components of a single paradigm rather than as alternative narrative voices. That is, here in the *Commedia*, “I” is presented as being included in “we” rather than being a state of existence outside of “we.” Though exile in the *Convivio* begot only the unrequited desire to reintegrate, in the *Commedia* exile is transformed into the very means by which reintegration is made possible. Dante accomplishes this through the framing metaphor of the journey. In contrast to the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio*, where Dante was telling only his own story and in which the

events bore a significance particular to him, in the *Commedia* Dante presents a series of events or episodes which have both particular and universal significance. The journey is still Dante's story for Dante, like each one of us, shares the universal experience of the journey of life, a passage through time and space from point to point. But the particular events of Dante's life are here distinguished within that journey by a vertical pattern of descent and ascent. If we visualize the linear journey as a horizontal line at the middle of which ("Nel *mezzo* del cammin..." *Inferno* I, 1 (emphasis mine)) a vertical descent and ascent is imposed, we find that Dante has created a cruciform narrative. While Iannucci has noted the overwhelming presence of the "discesa" (descent) pattern,<sup>142</sup> he has primarily associated that descent with the role of Beatrice in Dante's salvation and its typological relationship to Christian salvation. What I am suggesting is that the "discesa" has an even broader role than that envisaged by Iannucci, one which, together with its counterpart, "ascesa" (ascent), informs the entire narrative structure of the *Commedia* and which has implications for all of Dante's stories. However, while Dante's own stories are located within the vertical pattern, they are by no means independent of the basic journey structure. Indeed the two patterns are inextricably bound. Without the journey there can be no ascent and descent and, therefore, nothing to distinguish Dante's particular story. The journey metaphor, therefore, provides the canvas, the universal on which to paint the particular. It provides not only the basis for the *Commedia*'s narrative structure but it also accommodates multiple layers of significance. The cruciform created by the

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<sup>142</sup> "Strutturalmente, il processo della salvezza assume la forma di una discesa all'inferno." (*Forma ed evento nella Divina Commedia* 65)

intersection of the vertical with the horizontal affirms that the *Commedia* offers salvation not just for one but for many.

All of the theological, doctrinal differences and narrative structures between the earlier efforts and the *Commedia* make sense if we consider this integrated approach as the feature which most distinguishes the *Commedia* from Dante's other "autobiographical" works. Dante's stance in the *Commedia*, his new manner of distinguishing his life, leads to a reconciliation of the issues raised by his previous efforts. This stance, therefore, reflects one of the key functions of the *Commedia*; that is, to finally resolve all of the issues left open by the narrative attempts of the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio*. In expressing his life as a particular example of a universal meaning, Dante is able to make sense not only out of his life but of his previous attempts at telling it. The narrative form, therefore, reiterates the *Commedia*'s significance and thereby serves to buttress the *Commedia*'s ultimate truth and by extension, Dante's own authority as its author.

At the same time the new stance solves the narrative issues presented by the timing of the various works. Although the *Commedia* was written after the *Convivio* and the *Vita nuova*,<sup>143</sup> the events of the *Commedia* pre-date the composition of the *Convivio*. How then can the narrative of the *Commedia* be said to absorb or indeed even consider the *Convivio*? The question is easily addressed if we recognize another aspect inherent in

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<sup>143</sup> See Ulrich Leo 41.

the cruciform narrative. While the “journey of our life” embodies the temporal and spacial progression from point to point, the presence of the vertical ascent and descent pattern marks a departure which now enables Dante to assume the perspective required by the Augustinian model. He can place himself “outside” of the previous life, indeed he can situate himself on a different existential plane. Accordingly, Dante’s removal also removes the *Commedia* from the confines of the temporally and spatially bound narratives of the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio*. Here in the *Commedia*, the *nunc et tunc* distinction is not tied so much to temporality but instead has its genesis in its completely different view of things. It would probably be more accurate to refer to the distinction as one of “this and that.” Accordingly, within this vertical pattern, the problems generated by temporal chronology cease to exist. Indeed the further Dante ascends towards a final vision of the *Paradiso*, the more it becomes apparent that temporality is an essentially earthly concern, not the concern of the vertical plane in which the journey of the *Commedia* exists.

It is within this dual context that I will examine, over the next two chapters, how Dante continues the stories of the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio* to tell two of the three separate plot lines identified by Iannucci (“*Paradiso XXXI*” 470<sup>144</sup>); the love story and the story of his political vicissitudes. What will become apparent is that through a number of narrative and exegetical strategies, such as, for example, the use of parallel

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<sup>144</sup> In that article Iannucci identifies three separate plot lines contained within the *Commedia*; the story of Dante’s love for Beatrice, the story of Dante’s political vicissitudes and the story of Dante’s development as a writer.



episodes<sup>145</sup> Dante gradually reveals that these stories are not only variants of each other but representations of a greater truth. In the *Commedia*, Dante finally finds the structure within which to fuse his own life and his own books with mankind and with God's book of the universe. The *Commedia* then is truly Dante's life story for it satisfies all of the requirements set out by both modern and medieval notions of autobiography. It is a retrospective telling of the author's life in order to find meaning in it.

Within the love story the intersection of the *Commedia's* dual narrative modes is introduced in *Inferno* II, 57, 70-72 when Virgil explains how he has come to be in a position to help Dante. Beatrice descended from heaven, Virgil tells Dante, and sent him to bring Dante to her. ("Io son Beatrice che ti faccio andare;/vegno del loco ove tornar disio;/ amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare.") Beatrice's first movement within the context of the *Commedia* is, therefore, a vertical descent expressly linked to the love story by the inclusion of the fact that it was motivated by love. The spatial character of the descent is underlined by Virgil who reports that he asked Beatrice, "... Ma dimmi la cagion che non ti guardi/ dello scender qua giuso in questo centro/dell'ampio loco ove tornar tu ardi." (*Inferno* II, 82-84 (emphasis mine)) Although her corresponding ascent is not expressly narrated it is made very clear that Beatrice did not remain in the nether regions but of course ascended to heaven, returning to her place among the blessed in the Celestial Rose. Following her descent and ascent, the internal construction of *Inferno* and

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<sup>145</sup> Amilcare Iannucci has referred to as parallel episodes those episodes which act as "implicit" commentary on each other and which share common narrative structures and elements. ("*Paradiso* XXXI" 471)

*Purgatorio* then necessitate Dante's descent and subsequent ascent before he can catch up to her. The *iter* of this love is made clear; to reach the object of one's love one must first descend and then ascend. In terms of models, it can be noted that the ascent portion of the pattern was seen as early as the *Vita nuova* where, according to Charles Singleton (*An Essay on the Vita nuova* 106), the pattern of ascent of love closely resembled the pattern of mystic ascent to God in the tradition of Saints Augustine and Bonaventure. However, it also gradually becomes evident that this will not be enough to complete the *Commedia* or complete Dante's journey of love for this descent and ascent does not unite the lovers. A further action is required. Dante must pass through another "inferno," the baptism of fire<sup>146</sup> before he can see Beatrice. Beatrice's descent to earthly paradise, like Dante's metaphoric descent just before her arrival, reiterates the significance of the pattern and its narrative importance. It is descent and ascent which will unite Dante with Beatrice. Once united, Dante and Beatrice ascend together to the final and promised heights, completing the descent and ascent pattern.<sup>147</sup>

If we look carefully we see that, at first, Dante's pattern of descent and ascent does not always coincide with Beatrice's descent and ascent. We see, for example, that prior to their meeting in *Purgatorio* XXX, Dante's and Beatrice's paths do not cross. Dante is, in essence, still pursuing Beatrice. Dante's descent and ascent up to the apex of

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<sup>146</sup> At *Purgatorio*; XXVII, 34-36 Virgil says, "Quando mi vide star pur fermo e duro, / turbato un poco, disse: - Or vedi, figlio: / tra Beatrice e te è questo muro."

<sup>147</sup> As we shall find out definitively in *Paradiso* XXXIII, 22-27 reaching Beatrice is only part of this journey that there is in fact another and ultimate "salute" to which he aspires ... "Or questi, che da l'infima lacuna/ de l'universo infin qui ha vedute/ le vite spiritali ad una ad una,/ supplica a te, per grazia, di virtute/tanto, che possa con li occhi levarsi/più alto verso l'ultima salute."

Mount Purgatory reflects the courtly love that formed the basis of his early relationship with Beatrice. In that convention, the love, however ennobling it may be, is still love of the object of desire. It is a love for a human creature not for its creator. Moreover, it seeks something in return; the lady's love, her salutation or at very least the ennoblement of the lover, but it always involves a pursuit on the part of the lover. The structural character is also reflected in the text for we see that Beatrice's descent into Limbo to enlist Virgil's help is described within the traditions of courtly love which informed so much of the *Vita nuova*.<sup>148</sup> In *Inferno* II, 76, Virgil calls Beatrice "donna di virtù," recalling *Vita nuova* (X, 2) where Beatrice is described as "distruggitrice di tutti li vizi e regina de le virtudi." (Sapegno *La Divina Commedia* 1985, 25) In particular when Beatrice tells Virgil she will speak kindly of him to her lord, we are reminded of the hope of recompense for one's adoration so prevalent in the doctrine of courtly love.

After the meeting in earthly paradise there is much more interaction between Dante and Beatrice and their relationship assumes a symmetry not seen in the *Inferno* nor in *Purgatorio*. Rather than shadowing Beatrice, Dante now shares a pattern with her. Beatrice ascends to Paradise and Dante ascends with her. Dante's actions are now enclosed within Beatrice's, their patterns have become synchronized. Accordingly, we will find this portion of narrative coloured greatly by language and imagery which reflect this transformation in the nature of their relationship. In contrast to Francesca and Paolo whose entanglement described in *Inferno* V keeps them forever in their descent and

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<sup>148</sup> Both Sapegno (*La Divina Commedia* 1985 22) and Iannucci (*Forma ed evento nella Divina Commedia* 65) have remarked upon the *stilnovistic* flavour of the scene.

whose episode is so often associated with courtly love, the union of Dante and Beatrice carries them together towards heaven. The last line of the *Commedia* signals not only this culmination with its final ascent<sup>149</sup> but testifies to its ultimate connection to Beatrice's initial descent through the use of the word "mossa"<sup>150</sup> which recalls our earliest notice of the love story ("amor mi mosse") (*Inferno* II, 72). Love, however, has an expanded scope in this sphere, no longer moving only lovers but the stars themselves.

Accordingly, from the double narrative emerge two layers of meaning. The earlier portion of Dante's journey, his descent into Hell and his ascent as far as the earthly paradise corresponds to a particular, temporal and earthly configuration of love. His continued ascent beyond earthly paradise corresponds to a more universal and timeless concept. Here particular and temporal love is revealed as a mere variant of a greater love which has universal implications. While Dante was pursuing the particular object of his love he could not effectively integrate himself within the universal.

The turning point of the passage from the particular, earthly and temporal to the universal, transcendent and timeless is found in *Purgatorio* XXX. In that canto we see the apex of Dante's individuality when his name is pronounced and the details of his love for her are enumerated by Beatrice. Within her rebuke, Beatrice gradually turns from Dante's past errors to a new focus, correcting the particular and moving beyond into the

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<sup>149</sup> Both Iannucci ("*Paradiso* XXXI" 480) and Mazzotta (*Dante: Poet of the Desert* 254) note as well that in the closing cantos of *Paradiso* the entirety of this work (including the love story) is brought to a close.

<sup>150</sup> "All'alta fantasia qui mancò possa;/ ma già volgera il mio disio e 'l velle,/ sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,/l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle." (*Paradiso* XXXIII, 142-145)

realm of the universal. As a result, the episode itself is revealed as a reflection of the cruciform structure in which the particular is merely a component of the universal and the dual focus of the love story is, therefore, dramatically highlighted. It is not surprising that so many critics have identified it as the point in which Dante's personal story merges with the exemplum. Natalino Sapegno, for example, sees Beatrice and Dante as real creatures tied to "una cronaca di esperienze intellettuali e affettive personalissime." At the same time, he suggests that they are "figure di una realtà soprasensibile, partecipi di un'arcana vicenda, investite di un peso esemplare." He characterizes theirs as a story of an earthly love which is suddenly transferred to the plane of a universal and extratemporal lesson. (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 736) Theodolinda Barolini notes the *Commedia's* "intersecting of the universal with the singular" which she says is "never more on display than in these cantos, where the Pilgrim's encounter with Beatrice and personal confession are literally enfolded by universal history." (*The Undivine Comedy: Dethologizing Dante* 158)

How Dante arrives at this turning point, how he narrates the progress of his love story within the context of the universal involves a series of narrative strategies. However, his reliance on the intertextual absorption of his earlier works is one of the most obvious and complex of these strategies. For example, the love story is introduced immediately, although not explicitly, into the *Commedia* through the recall of its most recent incarnation prior to the commencement of the *Inferno*; that portion chronicled in the *Convivio*. Not only does the "via smarrita" in *Inferno* I locate the work thematically

but it echoes language used constantly throughout the *Convivio*<sup>151</sup> and recalls the earlier work in which Dante sought to redeem those who had lost their way. This time, however, he uses the language to refer to himself, individualizing his situation while also locating himself within the context of a group which is lost. Although the reference is all encompassing in terms of all of the narrative threads in the *Commedia*, within the context of the love story, we can understand “lost” to mean far away from the object of one’s love either spatially or morally.<sup>152</sup> From this point, Dante the author, works backwards in time towards that moment in which he first met Beatrice, doing so through the use of language which was found in the earlier versions of this story. Thus in *Purgatorio* XXIX 50-51 where Dante describes the holy procession coming towards him as follows “si com’elli eran candelabri apprese e nelle voci del cantare ‘osanna’”<sup>153</sup> we are reminded of the ending of the *Vita nuova*. As Hollander notes, in *Purgatory* XXX Beatrice’s angelic choir seems to pick up where it left off in the *Vita nuova*. (*Studies in Dante* 55) Finally, Sapegno points out, the arrival of Beatrice (*Purgatorio* XXX, 28-33) recalls the imagery used to describe her in the *Vita nuova* XXIII, 7, 25:

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<sup>151</sup> *Convivio* IV, i, 9: “...proposì di gridare a la gente che per mal cammino andavano, acciò che per diritto calle si dirizzassero;”; IV, xii, 19: “...lo buono camminatore giugne a termine e a posa; lo erroneo mai non l’aggiugne, ...”; IV, xvi, 10: “E per lo cammino dritto è da vedere ...”; IV, xxii, 6: “...così questi umani appetiti per diversi calli dal principio se ne vanno, e uno solo calle è quello che noi mena a la nostra pace.”; IV, xxiv, 12: “...che entra ne la selva erronea di questa vita, non saprebbe tenere lo buono cammino, ...”; IV, xxviii, 2: “... l’altra sì è, che ella benedice lo cammino che ha fatto ...” Also the image of the “selva oscura” in *Inferno* I, recalls *Convivio* IV, XXIV 12, “la selva erronea di questa vita.”

<sup>152</sup> Iannucci suggests that, indeed, Dante’s state at the opening of the *Inferno* is attributable to his having been “attratto dalla figura di sirena-Eva della donna-gentile” and, therefore, having fallen so deep into his sin that the descent of Beatrice, a Christ-figure, was all that could free him from the “selva oscura.” (*Forma ed evento nella Divina Commedia* 67)

<sup>153</sup> Sapegno in his commentary to the *Commedia* describes the use of Osanna thus; it is the Hebrew augural word, entered into liturgical use through the scriptural language here it probably alludes to the words to the words with which Jesus was greeted upon his entrance to Jerusalem: “Hosanna, son of David; blessed it he who comes in the name of the Lord, hosanna in the highest.” (Matthew 21, 9). Sapegno cites Tommaseo who notes that “Osanna cantano gli angeli in una canzone giovanile del poeta [*Vita nuova* XXIII, 25] accompagnando al cielo l’anima di Beatrice.” (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 737)

e pareami vedere moltitudine d'angeli li quali tornassero in suso, ed aveano dinanzi da loro una nebulletta bianchissima. A me pareva che questi angeli cantassero gloriosamente, e le parole del loro canto mi pareva udire che fossero queste: *Osanna in excelsis*; e altro non mi pareva udire. (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 737)<sup>154</sup>

The closer Beatrice comes, the further back in time we move so that when we finally see her clothing (*Purgatorio* XXX, 23-33), as Sapegno says, we can't help but be reminded of "l'accento di raffinata fantasmagoria di certe pagine della *Vita nuova*, s'illuminano proprio per quel riferimento a un paesaggio reale di un sapore nuovo di freschezza e di verità" since the "vestito rosso 'sanguigno' e il bianco comparano già, portati da Beatrice, nella *Vita nuova*. (II, 3; III, 1 e 4; XXIII, 8; XXXIX, 1)." (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 736, 737)

But we continue to slide back in time so that in the same canto (*Purgatorio* XXX, 42: "Prima ch'io fuor di puerizia fosse ..."), we are brought back precisely to that moment in the *Vita nuova* when Dante first met Beatrice:

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<sup>154</sup> Further, as Sapegno notes, when Beatrice appears and turns to "rivelarsi agli occhi del suo poeta; silenziosa e remota come una sacra icona, con gli atteggiamento stilizzati del libello giovanile è la mirabile, 'la gloriosa', non femmina, anzi '... uno delli bellissimoi angeli del cielo,' la benedetta Beatrice, la 'Beatrice beata' (cfr. *Vita nuova*, III, 1; XXVI, 2; XXVIII, 1; XLII, 3, ecc.) e nell'ambito di una analoga stilizzazione si mantiene anche l'atteggiamento di Dante che trema e lo smarrisce." (*La Divina Commedia* 1955 737) In *Purgatorio* XXX, 36 "non era di stupor, tremando, affranto ..." can be compared with (per Sapegno *La Divina Commedia* 1985 338) *Vita nuova* II, 4: "in quello punto dico veracemente cho lo spirito de la vita, lo quale dimora ne la secretissima camera de lo cuore, cominciò a tremare si fortemente, che apparia ne li menimi polsi orribilmente," XI, 3: "quando questa [...] in animata," XIV, 4-5 "nel fine del mio ... li spiriti del viso," XXIV, I.

Ella era in questa vita già stata tanto, che ne lo suo tempo lo cielo stellato era mosso verso la parte d'oriente de lo dodici parti l'una d'un grado, sì che quasi dal principio del suo anno nono apparve a me, ed io la vidi, quasi de la fine del mio nono. (II, 2)

Most importantly, the direct use of the words “vita nova” draws the reader’s attention back to the earlier work. (*Purgatorio* XXX, 115-117: “questi fu tal nella sua vita nova/ virtualmente, ch’ogni abito destro/ fatto averebbe in lui mirabil prova.”) Eventually, Beatrice’s use of a temporal reference (“Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto: mostrando li occhi giovanetti a lui meco in menava in dritta parte volto”)<sup>155</sup> not only recalls much of the language of the *Vita nuova*<sup>156</sup> but brings us back to the present thus completing a circle. It is Beatrice, therefore, who transforms the temporal and linear into the timeless circularity of the *Commedia*. But this circle is a closed circle, consisting of Dante’s story alone. The message is clear. Love as envisaged by Dante can go no further; this individual love has reached its apex.

Here in *Purgatorio*, where we have reached the summit of Dante’s individuality, Beatrice too is at her most particular. While the entire build-up to Beatrice’s arrival has been allegoric and symbolic in nature, her appearance and the way she speaks to Dante create one of the most realistic episodes in the entire *Commedia*. Beatrice’s first direct

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<sup>155</sup> *Purgatorio* XXX, 121-3. Sapegno suggests that “Alcun tempo” refers to “da quando mi vide la prima volta fino della mia morte,” i.e. 1274-1290. (*La Divina Commedia* 1985 343)

<sup>156</sup> XI, 1: Quando ella apparia da parte alcuna, per la speranza della mirabile salute nullo nemico mi rimaneva, anzi mi giugnea una fiamma di caritate, la quale mi faceva perdonare a chiunque m’avesse offeso.” Cfr. also *Vita nuova* XIX, 9, XXI, 2; XXVI, 3, 10, 11 ecc.



discourse is stunning. The first word we hear her utter is “Dante.”<sup>157</sup> From a narrative perspective, in a single word, Dante has found the most effective way to identify his actual existence with the poetic “I.” In a word he has removed all doubt as to the identity of the pilgrim. There is no issue here, no question as to whether the reader knows whose poetry is being glossed. The reader here is told in no uncertain terms that Dante is the empiric “I” of the narrative and it is Beatrice who makes the pronouncement. She continues to display this intimate knowledge of his writing, addressing him in words taken from his own works. A perfect example of this is found at *Purgatorio* XXX, 66 where Beatrice’s words; “e sé riconoscendo e ripentiti” recall *Convivio* IV, XIX, 10 “buono e ottimo segno di nobiltade è, ne li pargoli e imperfetti d’etade, quando dopo lo fallo, nel viso loro vergogne si dipinge.” Similarly, Beatrice’s order “per udir se’ dolente, alza la barba” (*Purgatorio* XXX, 67), though decipherable independent of any other works, also echoes *Convivio* I, xii, 8 where Dante suggested that “qui è di sapere che ogni bontade propria in alcuna cosa, è amabile in quella: sì come ne la maschiezza essere ben barbuto.” In this way Beatrice emphasizes the autobiographical nature of the early works. But the discourse also lends meaning to the works which may not have been evident when they were first written. Dante’s reference to Beatrice’s “seconda etade”<sup>158</sup> (*Purgatorio* XXX, 125) not only recalls the discourse in *Convivio* IV, XXIV, 2 in which he talks of the various ages but reinforces the temporal nature and focus of the first stages of love. Moreover, in placing the language of the *Convivio* alongside that of the *Vita*

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<sup>157</sup> “Dante, perché Virgilio se ne vada, non pianger anco, non piangere ancora” (*Purgatorio*; XXX, 56-57)

<sup>158</sup> Here Dante means “giovinezza; che sottentra secondo Dante al termine dei venticinque anni” according to Sapegno. (*La Divina Commedia* 1985)

*nuova*, Dante relegates both the *Convivio* and the *Vita nuova* to the same plane outside of the *Commedia*.

When Beatrice exhorts, “Né l’impetrare ispirazion mi valse con le quali ed in sogno e altrimenti lo rivocai; sì poco a lui ne calse!” (*Purgatorio* XXX, 133-135), she recalls the episodes in the *Vita nuova* XXXIX and XLII and in *Convivio* II, vii, 6 in which she tried to call Dante back to her and further reinforces the link between the two works. At the same time, the comment also allows Dante to address one of the issues created by the two previous autobiographical works, that is, the issue of the *donna gentile*. When Beatrice says “questi si tolse a me, e diessi i altrui” (*Purgatorio* XXX, 126), we must assume, given the nature of the discussion thus far, that she is also recalling events in these works. In the *Vita nuova* Dante told us of another woman in particular. In the *Convivio* Dante spoke of a philosophical education, his studies. Further, his *Rime* include a variety of other women.<sup>159</sup> Here now, Beatrice is unconcerned about their possible allegorical meanings, the timing issues<sup>160</sup> or apparent contradictions. She simply gathers them all together and says clearly that Dante was wrong in devoting himself to anything which distracted him from her.<sup>161</sup> In one sense

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<sup>159</sup> The rebuke with its reference to the *pargoletta* which Sapegno suggests (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 749) can be taken as not only an undetermined allusion to other loves of the poet after the death of Beatrice but also recalls the existence of “una *pargoletta* appunto bella e sdegnosa” in some of Dante’s lyrics (*Rime* LXXXVII and LXXXIX) or indeed to the women referred to as *pargoletta* in the rime “pietose.”

<sup>160</sup> I am referring here to the issue referred to above in Chapters 2 and 3; that is whether the ending of the *Vita nuova* was rewritten or added after the commencement of the *Commedia*. See also Barbi on the date of the *Vita nuova* in *Problemi di critica dantesca*.

<sup>161</sup> Sapegno cites Buti who suggests that this reference means “ad altri studi et amori”. (*La Divina Commedia* 1955 744) Sapegno, like so many other critics, suggests that this is an indetermined allusion to the *donna gentile* of the *Vita nuova* (*Vita nuova* XXXV - XXXVII) “che, secondo l’interpretazione allegorica dell’*Convivio* II, XII, è simbolo degli studi filosofici, cui l’autore rivolse per consolarsi della morte di Beatrice; e anche ad altri amori e vanità, di cui è traccia nelle *Rime*.”

Beatrice is suggesting that how one characterizes one's actions is irrelevant, that the truth will continue to exist, the truth being the real meaning as manifested in the result or effect of the action. Her words have such a personal ring to them, a genuine anger that we are unconcerned about the allegorical significance of the rebuke. The dramatic effect is such that we can almost hear her saying, "I don't care what you called them elsewhere, but all of the *pargolette* and other women, would never have brought you to me." Dante employs the striking realism noted by Auerbach (*Mimesis* 166) to emphasize the spatial and temporal nature of the kind of love that engenders such behaviour, not only on Dante's part but on Beatrice's. It seems natural then that Beatrice should proceed to de-allegorize the distractions and the indulgences, exposing them as mortal, fleeting and ultimately without a further or true meaning. All of the distractions including both of the *donne gentili* are simply relegated to the temporal. Any attempt on Dante's part to give them a higher more timeless significance has been dismissed summarily by Beatrice who has in fact become his judge, his Tribunal, in these matters. (*Purgatorio* XXXI 37-42) Moreover, Beatrice does not restrict her rebuke to those distractions which are chronicled in Dante's writing explicitly. She presents knowledge external to the text when she refers to "altra novità." ("Non ti dovea gravar le penne in giuso, ad aspettar, più colpi, o pargoletta o novità con sì breve uso." *Purgatorio* XXXI, 59-60) The extra knowledge adds to the realism and at the same time continues to generalize Dante's experiences after her death. By not dwelling on any one incident in particular, Beatrice, in effect, dismisses them all as meaningless ventures. Similarly when she points out the inadequacy of his education in *Purgatorio* XXXIII she does not focus on the education he

embraced and which he characterized in the *Convivio* as a *donna gentile*. (“Perché conoschi,” disse, ‘quella scuola/ c’hai seguitata, e veggi sua dottrina/ come può seguitar la mia parola.’” *Purgatorio* XXXIII, 85) Instead, her words again generalize, leaving us with an ambiguity that can as easily include not only the education of the *Convivio* but perhaps also the “scola” described in *Inferno* IV (“Così vidi adunar la bella scola/ di quel de l’altissimo canto/ che sovra li altri com’aquila vola.” 94-96).

The rebuke also represents one of the most obvious manifestations of Dante’s programme of rewriting because here Dante is attributing to earlier episodes a meaning that will contextualize them within the latest work. With respect to Dante’s ignoring her call (*Purgatorio* XXX, 133 cited above), as Sapegno notes “solo qui per altro esse sono rappresentate come inefficaci ai fini di una duratura conversione dello scrittore.” (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 745) That is, though at the end of the *Vita nuova* we had been led to believe that Dante reverted to the memory of Beatrice after the dalliance with the other woman, we are now being told otherwise. For, if Dante had heeded Beatrice sufficiently in the *Vita nuova*, then the *Commedia* would be superfluous. But Beatrice clearly states that he did not heed her. Something must have occurred after the ending of the *Vita nuova* as we know it or Dante would not have found himself in the *selva oscura* in the first place. Similarly, the love described in the *Convivio* must, in the *Commedia*, be written as having been similarly averse to the Beatrice of the *Commedia* or her descent into the underworld and Dante’s resulting journey would not have been necessary. In this way, Dante effects a certain reconciliation between the events of the *Vita nuova* and those

of the *Convivio*, confirming that while his readers may have initially thought that he returned to Beatrice at the end of the *Vita nuova*, he certainly did not remain with her. The reconciliation merges the two works, makes them both mere antecedents to the narrative of the *Commedia*. The *Commedia* is the “now.” The *Vita nuova* is once again, this time along with the *Convivio*, relegated to “then.” But perhaps it is more accurate to suggest that, in accordance with the cruciform pattern, both works are exposed as belonging to the temporal, to the early part of Dante’s journey in which he continued to try to set himself apart from mankind instead of trying to surpass in a vertical sense.

The significance of the episode between Beatrice and Dante perhaps can be best encapsulated by two elements in particular. Just as Dante is beginning to sense Beatrice’s approach he says “conosco i segni dell’antica fiamma” (*Purgatorio* XXX, 48). Apart from recalling the burning heart of the first vision in the *Vita nuova* and the way he first loved Beatrice it recalls the kind of love found throughout the mundane and temporal. The words are taken almost entirely from Virgil and are cited at the moment in which Virgil disappears. The comment, therefore, signals very clearly that earth-bound love, the kind felt by Dido (“agnosco veteris vestigia flammae” *Aen.*; IV, 23),<sup>162</sup> that is, the kind of

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<sup>162</sup> Peter Hawkins, in his article “Dido, Beatrice, and the Signs of Ancient Love,” notes the juxtaposition of the Virgilian poetic with the image of Beatrice as a Christ figure: “The acclamation of her arrival in the double cry of ‘Benedictus qui venis!’ (v. 19) and ‘Manibus, oh, date lilia plenis’ (v. 21) - a Christological salutation and a Virgilian lament - alerts us to the kind of juxtaposition that the whole canto will entail, as the two worlds of discourse meet at an impasse to reveal the great gulf fixed between them.” (113) Hawkins also notes the summarizing effect of the language suggesting that the appearance of Beatrice “is the rehearsal of a career in poetry that stretches from the visions of boyhood (‘pūerizia’) up to the poem’s present; it is the reworking of a lifetime.”(115) Hawkins, however, notes an aspect to the insertion which is worthy of note and suggests that the inclusion of the Virgilian allusion facilitates Dante’s correction of love in the *Commedia*: “Dante gives us a revision of the Virgilian script that transforms tragedy into romance, that turns the disclosure of darkness visible into the unveiling of eternal light: ‘O splendor di viva luce eterna’. [O splendor of living light eternal! *Purg.* 31. 139]” (122)

love which could not bear to relinquish Aeneas and allow him to fulfil his divine mission cannot progress past this stage. Further, Beatrice's use of language associated with flight recalls the "folle volo" of Ulisse. This, combined with the fact that she has earlier been described in nautical terms, ("Quasi ammiraglio che in poppa e in prora/ viene a veder la gente che ministra," *Purgatorio XXX*, 58), suggests that Beatrice will be included in this metaphor but will move towards a new reading of it, a positive reading. She will counteract the madness and chaos of the temporal world and steer Dante's flight in the right direction. Like Aeneas, Dante must leave the burning love behind and move on. However, within the temporal Dante has gone as far as he can go, the circle is closed and progress will require a transfer to another stage. Outside of the text, we can assume that this next step is the *Commedia*. Within the text, however, we find that next step represented by the ascent with Beatrice beyond the earthly paradise. For here where the particular and the universal intersect, Beatrice's dual nature is revealed. She is the vessel of both temporal and timeless love, particular and universal significance, of then and now.

While Dante continues to use parallel episodes to illustrate meaning within the later stage of the ascent, he also uses the appearance of Beatrice to introduce a number of new exegetical strategies. Whereas in the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio* the prose commentary explained the meaning of the poems and the events which led to their composition, here in the *Commedia* Dante uses Beatrice as his commentator. In the moment she pronounces his name (*Purgatorio XXX*, 55), Beatrice's role expands from

the mere object of Dante's love to his commentator. Given that she has already identified herself as a great friend of Dante's (*Inferno* II, 61 "l'amico mio" referring to Dante), it is clear that Beatrice need not pronounce his name to cement this relationship. Rather, I believe the purpose is more structural. As Beatrice becomes the commentator, increasingly, it is Beatrice who connects the poetry to the events of a mundane life outside of its record.

Whereas in the *Vita nuova* Dante was both character and narrator, in the *Commedia* it is Beatrice who assumes this dual role. As both character and commentator, Beatrice expresses knowledge external to the poem. She tells us of the events which led to the poetry we are reading and in which she is also a character. The effect is much like that of a hall of mirrors. Beatrice brings us back to the events which are reflected in the poem. It is Beatrice who introduces the autobiographical elements most explicitly. Similarly, in *Purgatorio XXXI*, Beatrice, as Dante's confessor, reveals and emphasizes Dante's sins. According to Sapegno "Alla visione sottentra il dramma dove Beatrice è la voce stessa della coscienza di Dante, rimorsa del peccato e anelante alla redenzione." Thus as commentator Beatrice can illuminate the true meaning of the poetry which she glosses. (*La Divina Commedia*, 1985, 337)

Just as the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio* had their respective defining moments which revealed the true meaning of antecedent events, so too does the *Commedia*. Whereas in the *Vita nuova*, first Beatrice's withdrawal of her salutation, and then her

death evoke steps in the evolution of Dante's love so too does her appearance in the earthly paradise mark such a moment. In the *Commedia* Beatrice's entrance effects a cataclysmic shift in perspective. The turning point is expressed in the finality of the particular and its subtle flow into the universal. As Sapegno notes, in *Purgatorio XXX*, after all the spectacle and symbolism, the entire situation is gathered up and we finally arrive at the theme which gives it meaning. (*La Divina Commedia*, 1985, 336) However, the perspective which will be gained in the *Commedia*, unlike that gained in the *Convivio* or the *Vita nuova* is not so explicitly marked as temporal. It is temporal in the sense that there is a before and after but it is also a distinction between "in this world" and "beyond this world." By the time we arrive at *Paradiso III*, Dante the character, has started to recognize a distinction between then and now and its effects on his feelings towards Beatrice. He now refers to her as "Quel sol che pria d'amor mi scaldò 'l petto,/ di bella verità m'avea scoperto," (*Paradiso III*, 1). Beatrice's role has been expanded beyond the object of love expressed in the flames of descent and now, as commentator, she is the illuminator of truth, associated with ascent. The events of the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio*, though relegated to the past, are distinguished from the issue now confronting Dante (for example "Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto:/ mostrando li occhi giovanetti a lui/ meco in menava in dritta parte volto"<sup>163</sup>) not so much because they happened in the temporal past but because they happened on another plane within the cruciform pattern. It is important to note as well that Beatrice illuminates a new meaning

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<sup>163</sup> *Purgatorio XXX*, 121-3. Sapegno suggests that "Alcun tempo" refers to "da quando mi vide la prima volta fino della mia morte" (i.e. 1274-1290). (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 744)



during this final ascent beyond earthly paradise which will differ from the type of exegesis we have seen in the past.

While throughout the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio* parallel episodes and typologically relevant characters express the autobiographical dimension of the *Commedia*,<sup>164</sup> in the *Paradiso*, the role of Beatrice provides another interpretive device lending the earlier stories even broader significance. As Beatrice's new role as commentator gradually enlightens Dante and his readers to the new perspective with respect to the events of Dante's descent into the *Inferno* and ascent as far as earthly paradise, we see that her role within the love story starts to evolve so that more and more the literal level of the story evokes the allegorical level. While in *Purgatorio*, Beatrice merely enunciated the distinction between then and now, in *Paradiso* she demonstrates it. Now Beatrice has Dante look down to see how far he has come ("...prima che tu più t'inlei,/ rimira in giù, e vedi quanto mondo/ sotto li piedi già esser ti fei" *Paradiso* XXII, 127). The same effect is achieved when she has Dante look down again to see the "varco folle" of the ill-fated Ulysses. (*Paradiso* XXVII, 82-84)<sup>165</sup> Here more than ever the difference in perspective, the ability to see the truth is enunciated clearly. The moral distinction is expressed vertically. For indeed suddenly, Dante and Ulysses are existing within the same temporal plane. Their distinction lies in their different locations on the same vertical scale. Here time coincides and temporal distinctions are discarded. This

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<sup>164</sup> Robert Hollander says "the function of the allegorical sense is to relate two historical events or things or persons, each of which has a discrete and particular historical reality in time so that the relationship between them may express spiritual significance." (*Allegory in Dante's Comedy* 59)

<sup>165</sup> "sí ch'io veda di là da Gade il varco/folle d'Ulisse, e di qua presso il lito/nel qual si fece Europa dolce carco."

recalls the emphasis placed on descent in *Inferno* I and contrasts with the importance of temporality in the first stages of love. Accordingly, we have come to understand through Beatrice that on the higher plane, temporal and spatial distinctions are not nearly as relevant as is spiritual or moral distance. From here, outside of the world, Beatrice is now able to assume her new role showing Dante the true state of things and especially the true nature of love. Conversely, those matters described prior to Dante's arrival at the summit of Purgatory are increasingly characterized as false, mere imitation. For example, in *Purgatorio* XXX, 130 Beatrice says "e volse i passi suoi per via non vera,/ immagini di ben seguendo false,/ che nulla promission rendono intera."<sup>166</sup>

The subtle shift from the ascent to the peak of Mount Purgatory to its continuation above earthly paradise, occasions considerable narrative shifts as well, most notably in the role of Beatrice. Whereas prior to her appearance in *Purgatorio* XXX, her most obvious role was as the object of Dante's love, in *Paradiso* that role is gradually transformed into the means through which Dante explains the nature of love and ultimately she is transformed into love itself. And so we notice also a concomitant adjustment in the role of Dante the pilgrim, from the lover seeking his lady, to disciple seeking to know the very nature of love. This shift in role is also facilitated by the insertion of parallel episodes which gradually reveal the meaning of both aspects of the earlier and later portions of Dante's descent and ascent pattern. We see, therefore, that in

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<sup>166</sup> According to Sapegno, we ought to compare these words to those of Boezio in *De Cons. phil.* III, pr. 9: "[res mortales et caducae] vel imagines veri boni vel imperfecta quaedam bona dare mortalibus videntur; verum autem atque perfectum bonum conferre non possunt." (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 744)

his descent and, to a certain extent, in his ascent to earthly paradise, love is most often portrayed as illicit, sexual and conducive to jealousy, dissatisfaction and death. It often transgresses societal rules and is most often characterized as “folle.” Above all, it remains forever earthbound and narrow in scope. This characterization is most prevalent in *Inferno* V in the circle of the lustful. Structurally, Dante reinforces the particular and the universal applications of the meaning by creating within each episode the dichotomy of particular and more universal characters. Accordingly, in *Inferno* V, we see illicit love personified both by Francesca,<sup>167</sup> a local and somewhat contemporary character to Dante, as well as by Dido, who is widely known and belongs to the distant past.

Just as the episodes prior to the appearance of Beatrice within the first pattern were structured to accommodate both local or particular and more universal examples, so too do we see a similar duality beyond the earthly paradise where love is illustrated through examples of both particular experience and more universal renown. Accordingly, in *Paradiso* III we see Piccarda Donati and Costanza appearing in the same canto. But here the object of both stories clearly pertains to the higher vision of love found above Purgatory. Using a narrative construction similar to that of *Inferno* V it recalls and contrasts those stories of false love and cupidity with the universal “vero amore” and “castità.” At the same time we hear “amore” less and less and instead the word “carità” (*Paradiso* III, 43 “La nostra carità”) is introduced thereby creating yet another contrast.

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<sup>167</sup> Contini (*Un'idea di Dante* 48) and Iannucci (“Forbidden Love: Metaphor and History (*Inferno* V)”) have both characterized Francesca as the diametric opposite of Beatrice.

Here the flames of love are directed not at some unknowable beloved but to the creator of love. (52 “li nostri affetti che solo infiammati/ son nel piacere de lo Spirito Santo.”)

As Dante and Beatrice ascend throughout *Paradiso* the discussion and ambiance is more focused on the true nature of love and it becomes apparent that Dante is gradually transforming Beatrice from the object of love into love itself. In *Paradiso* IV, 118 Dante calls Beatrice “O amanza del primo amante, o diva” signalling that she has, therefore, replaced “Amore” of the *Vita nuova*. In *Paradiso* V, 7 Beatrice says to Dante, “Io veggio ben sí come già resplende/ ne l’intelletto tuo l’eterna luce,/ che, vista, sola e sempre amore accende.” In *Paradiso* XIV Beatrice speaks to Dante from the centre of a circle and we are reminded of the speech of Amore in the *Vita nuova* XII, 4 “Ego tanquam centrum circuli, cui simili modo se habent circumferentie partes, tu autem non sic.” Love, therefore, is a circle; it is not linear. It is not a pursuit. It is a communion, a continuum. By the time we arrive at this conclusion, it seems perfectly logical since Dante has been preparing us for this for some time. Beatrice, in fact, ceased to be the object of sexual love as early as *Purgatorio* XXXIII, 23 where she referred to Dante as “frate” and indeed by *Paradiso* VII she is calling him “frate” (58, 130) with increasing frequency. In *Paradiso* X, 59 Dante notes that there are those to whom he can give his love without arousing Beatrice’s jealousy.<sup>168</sup> This is in stark contrast to the earlier rebuke in the last cantos of *Purgatorio* where Beatrice chastised Dante for having turned his

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<sup>168</sup> 55-61 “ Cor di mortal non fu mai sí digesto/ a divozione e a rendersi a Dio/ con tutto ‘l suo gradir cotanto presto, / come a quelle parole mi fec’io;/ e si tutto ‘l mio amore in lui si mise che Beatrice eclissò ne l’oblio./ Non le dispiacque, ma sí se ne rise.”

attentions elsewhere and serves to underline the distinction between the earthly love we saw before Dante encountered Beatrice in the earthly paradise, and the kind of love which characterizes the ascent through Paradise. In keeping with this familial nature of love, Dante has also been painting Beatrice as the giver of maternal love. In *Purgatorio* XXXIII line 4-6 Dante describes Beatrice as the essence of motherly love; Mary: “E Beatrice, sospirosa e pia/ascoltava sì fatta, che poco più alla croce si cambiò Maria.” In *Paradiso* I, 100 “Ond’ella, appresso d’un pio sospiro/ li occhi drizzò ver’me con quel semblante/ che madre fa sovra figlia deliro.” In *Paradiso* XXII, 2-6 Dante turns to Beatrice “come parvol che ricorre sempre colà dove più si confida.” Her reply is considerably less impatient than her earlier responses to his childlike behaviour and she is described “come madre che socorre/ subito al figlio palido e anelo/ con la sua voce, che ‘l suol ben disporre.” In *Paradiso* XXIII, 121<sup>169</sup> Beatrice in fact cedes to Mary and it is a simple task to transfer the mother and child language between Dante and Beatrice to describe the new relationship between Dante and Mary. This transfer also serves to contrast the new love, the family of love, of *Paradiso* with that which pervaded the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, that is, courtly or sexual love. The contrast is also implied in Dante’s description of Mary in *Paradiso* XXIII, 73 “Quivi è la rosa in che ‘l verbo divino/ carne si fece.”<sup>170</sup> Mary is still metaphorically a rose, but as Iannucci points out (*Paradiso* XXX 473), she is associated with a white rose as opposed to the red rose of earthly courtly love.

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<sup>169</sup> “E come fantolin che ‘nver’ la mamma/ tende le braccia, poi che ‘l latte prese,/ per l’animo che ‘nfin di fuor s’infiamma.”

<sup>170</sup> According to Grandgent, this is Mary and the lilies are the Apostles. (*La Divina Commedia* 488)

As Dante's guide and teacher, Beatrice will also teach him in matters other than love. She exposes the falsity of the wisdom of earthly pursuits and provides Dante with examples of the truth. We, therefore, notice that throughout *Paradiso*, Beatrice's language affirms the truth of the things they see and the words they hear during their ascent.<sup>171</sup> The journey as far as the summit of Mount Purgatory is exposed as mere *figura*, to use Auerbach's<sup>172</sup> term, whereas its continuation beyond earthly paradise is revealed as the fulfilment. *Paradiso* I, 88 provides a perfect illustration of this, "Tu stesso ti fai grosso/ col falso imaginar, sí che non vedi ciò che vedresti se l'avessi scosso." Having exposed the falsity, Beatrice then proceeds to illuminate the true nature of the cosmos. The inability of mortals to see past the *imitatio* is highlighted by the fact that the universe, as it is shown to Dante, is merely a representation in order to allow him to comprehend and is not the true reality. In the context of the love story, the explanation has the effect of exposing the *donna gentile* of the *Convivio* and the *donna gentile* of the *Vita nuova* as the mere imitations they are. But like the representations in the scriptures they are not entirely without value. They are not merely ignored or rejected; rather they are absorbed and transformed in the new context. Here they are subsumed by Beatrice. Beatrice in *Paradiso* shows Dante that she is in truth the reality of which both *donne* were pale imitations. Dante was caught up in the *figura* without realizing that he was

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<sup>171</sup>*Paradiso* II, 24; *Paradiso* III, "Io veggio ben che già mai non si sazia/ nostro intelletto se 'l ver non lo illustra/ di fuor dal qual nessun vero si spazia."

<sup>172</sup>Auerbach suggests "l'interpretazione figurale stabilisce fra due fatti o persone un nesso in cui uno di essi non significa soltanto se stesso, ma significa anche l'altro, mentre l'altro comprende o adempie il primo. I due poli della figura sono separati nel tempo, ma si trovano entrambi nel tempo, come fatti o figure reali." (*Nuovi studi su Dante* 206). Cfr. the use of "figura" in *Paradiso* XXX, 76-78.

chasing false images. Beatrice absorbs the *donna gentile* of the *Convivio* for she not only speaks of pagan philosophy but of all philosophy. Here then is where we see the reconciliation of Dante's ambivalence with respect to the *donna gentile*. As well we find that the polemic raised by opposing critical views, in particular those of Barbi and Nardi, may be resolved.<sup>173</sup> Whether the *donna gentile* is another manifestation of the role fulfilled by Beatrice in the earlier works or whether she stands in opposition to Beatrice ceases to be an issue for now her independent existence is not relevant. Beatrice, that is, the Beatrice of the *Commedia*, absorbs all that is right and corrects all that is wrong. Moreover, as we see in *Paradiso* IV, Beatrice actually goes beyond the philosophers for she can see the truths that they could not. This is a reflection of Thomist thought in which the role of Beatrice contains philosophy but also perfects it and, therefore, transcends it. (Singleton *Dante Studies 2: The Journey to Beatrice* 134) Iannucci also notes that Beatrice in *Paradiso* IV echoes St. Thomas. (*Forma ed evento nella Divina Commedia* 87) Barolini suggests that Beatrice, at times, is also the spokesperson for St. Augustine. (*The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* 102) Clearly in this new sphere, wisdom is shared and expanded beyond the confines of Dante's descent into the Inferno. This absorption fulfills the project first attempted within the *Convivio*; the reconciliation of sexual love with the love of philosophy.<sup>174</sup> Here on the higher plane,

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<sup>173</sup> See note 131 above on the various views of the *donna gentile* and her relationship to Beatrice. See also Barbi in *Problemi di critica dantesca* in particular in his essay "La questione di Beatrice" (113-137). In that essay he considers the relationship of Beatrice to philosophy in the *Convivio*, observing: "Più tardi il pensiero di Dante circa i rapporti fra Beatrice e la Filosofia può essere stato diverso." (117) He concludes, nonetheless, that for the purposes of the *Convivio*, at least, she is simply Dante's previous love interest, a corporeal woman.

<sup>174</sup> Nardi sees the pursuit of knowledge in the *Convivio* as one which is expressed in philosophical terms. In the *Commedia*, however, the reconciliation takes the form more of that expressed by Gilson in his writings on Saint Bernard and courtly love.

love and knowledge become one and Beatrice becomes both. Beatrice's transformation into wisdom was foreshadowed as early as *Purgatorio* XXX, 11, where her arrival was heralded with words taken from the *Song of Solomon*, "Veni de Libano, sponsa mea, veni di Libano, veni" and in which, according to the Catholic interpretation, the bride is the wisdom of God. (Sapegno *La Divina Commedia* 1955, 735) Moreover, the way Beatrice is dressed in *Purgatorio* XXX, 31-33, ("sopra candido vel cinta d'uliva/donna m'apparve, sotto verde manto vestita/ di color di fiamma viva."<sup>175</sup>) also evokes theological wisdom. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Virgil disappears at this point<sup>176</sup> not just because he belongs to the earthly but so that Dante can distinguish between pre-Christian and post-Christian wisdom. As Beatrice speaks the words of wisdom, we see that her words often echo Dante's earlier statements in other works. For example, when in *Purgatorio* XXX, 109-111 ("Non pur per ovra delle rote magna/che drizzan ciascun seme ad alcune fine/secondo che le stelle son compagne") Beatrice explains that it is not just through the natural influence of the heavens but that each seed is directed to a determined end, she echoes what Dante suggested in *Convivio* IV, xxi, 7: "E però che ... la disposizione del cielo puote essere buona, migliore e ottima la quale si varia per le costellazioni che continuamente si trasmutano, incontra che de l'umano seme e di queste vertudi più pur [e men pura] anima si produce." The education continues into *Paradiso* III, 3 where Dante

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<sup>175</sup> Sapegno (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 737) cites Landino who notes, "i colori del velo, del manto, della veste alludono alla fede, alla speranza, alla carità: le quali tre virtù sono solo della Teologia, e per questo sono dette teologiche." The olive wreath may signify "la pace, la quale è nell'animo quando si è adornato da fede; e la vittoria imperò che niuna cosa li è poi dura a credere o intendere e operare; e la sapienza imperò che l'ulivo è consecrato a Pallade [cfr. il V. 68], che è la dia de la sapienza, la quale è corona de la santa teologia."

<sup>176</sup> *Purgatorio* XXX 49, according to Sapegno, is used to denote that moral philosophy cedes to the supernatural and to the divine, as a more noble science and one that is worthy of her. (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 738)



notes how Beatrice was continually “provando e riprovando.” Thus Dante attributes an expertise to his own knowledge without creating an appearance of being proud. Again, where Dante describes angelic vision (“Queste sustanze, poi che fur gioconde/ de la faccia di Dio, non volser viso/ da essa, da cui nulla si nasconde:/ però non hanno vedere interciso/da nono obietto, e però non bisogna/ rememorar per concetto diviso.” *Paradiso* XXIX, 76-81) we are reminded of *Convivio* III, vi, 4-5.<sup>177</sup> Within the context of this new truth, Dante is, therefore, able to continue the absorption and reinterpretation of his earlier works as we see in *Paradiso* II, 51-57 where Beatrice shows Dante the limitations of reason and then uses reason or rather, enlightened reason to correct Dante’s moon theory. In *Paradiso* VII, 10-12, “Io dubitava, e dicea ‘Dille, dille!’/ fra me ‘dille’ dicea, a la mia donna/che mi diseta con le dolci stille,” serves the same purpose with respect to the *Vita nuova*. This explicit echo suggests that the *dolce stil nuovo* praise is appropriate only when it is directed towards the creator of the object of love and not towards the object of love alone.

When Beatrice advises Dante that “s’elli erra l’oppinion” ... “de’ mortali/ dove chiave di senso non di serra,/ certo non ti dovrien punger li strali/ d’ammirazione omai, poi dietro ai sensi/ vedi che la ragione ha corte l’ali” (*Paradiso* II, 51-57), she recalls both

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<sup>177</sup> “Poi quando dico: Ogni Intelletto di là su la mira, commendo lei, non avendo rispetto ad altra cosa. E dico che le intelligenze del cielo la mirano, e che la gente di qua giù gentile pensano di costei, quando più hanno di quello che loro diletta. E qui è da sapere che ciascuno Intelletto di sopra, secondo ch’è scritto nel libro de la cagioni, conosce quello che è sopra sé e quello che è sotto sé. Conosce adunque Iddio sì come sua cagione, conosce quello che è sotto sé sì come suo effetto, e però che Dio è universalissima cagione di tutte le cose, conoscendo lui, tutte le cose consosce in sé, secondo lo modo de la Intelligenza. Per che tutte le Intelligenze conoscono la forma umana, in quanto ella è per intenzione regolata ne la divina mente; e massimamente conoscono quella le intelligenze motrici, però che sono spezialissime cagioni di quella perfettissima, tutto quanto esser puote, sì come loro regola ed esemplo.”

the Ulysses and Icarus episodes (*Inferno* XXVI and XVII, 109-111 respectively). We see again how Dante uses parallel episodes to contrast proper reasoning with the pride and folly of both of their flights and to emphasize the distinction between the earthly and the transcendent. The image is also supported narratively for Beatrice and Dante are in fact rising, well above the earth, unlike Icarus who fell and Ulysses who remained earth-bound despite using his oars as wings. We see, therefore, that the ascent beyond the earthly paradise will complete the parallel side of the episode introduced in *Inferno* XVII and XXV. While the argument Beatrice uses to point out Dante's error is particularly remarkable in terms of its method,<sup>178</sup> it is also an example of Dante using Beatrice as his voice to express his own advanced scientific knowledge while Christianizing his own logical methods by having them pronounced in heaven.

A new relationship has been forged between Beatrice and Dante, one in which Beatrice is the teacher and Dante is the pupil. In *Paradiso* XXV, 64, Dante describes the relationship thus: "come discente ch'a dottor seconda/pronto e libente in quel ch'elli è esperto,/ perché la sua bontà si disasconda." The image provides the parallel to the relationship described in the *Inferno* between Dante and Virgil and between Dante and Brunetto Latini. Beatrice, however, is the true teacher, the light that he himself tried to be in the *Convivio*, not because he loves her but because she is love. Dante the writer has, therefore, found a way in which he can continue to effect the role he sought for himself in the *Convivio*, but denude it of the pride such an aspiration implies. In *Paradiso* VIII we

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<sup>178</sup> As Grandgent notes (*La Divina Commedia* 372) "Beatrice enforces theory by experiment, the modern method, here praised as the fountainhead of the arts. This is remarkable in a medieval poem."

see that Beatrice has in many ways continued the project commenced towards the end of the *Convivio*, specifically in Trattato IV. In that trattato, Dante moves increasingly away from a mere recital of information towards a format which more closely resembles a *quaestio*. Whereas Dante in the *Convivio* was attempting to find answers to the cosmos in the *donna gentile* (philosophy), in the *Commedia* (*Paradiso* VIII) it is Beatrice who provides the answers. Beatrice has become the light that Dante aspired to be in the *Convivio*. But Dante can share in this light and so too can his readers. What becomes evident is that the higher Dante rises, the more he becomes a participant in the discussion. He is no longer simply being lectured to but in fact has become part of a scholarly discussion. Of course he is still the pupil whose responses are mostly to spur on the discussion but the nature of the relationship between Dante and Beatrice has altered considerably since the stern rebuke of *Purgatorio* and we see that this is one way that Dante continues his story of love. Beatrice will show Dante, and, therefore, Dante will show us the readers that the *donna gentile* of the *Convivio* was inadequate as a lover, that what Dante really needed was a dialogue with Beatrice, the true Beatrice. Beatrice could just as easily have discoursed with him on the fine points of philosophy. Similarly, Beatrice's ability to provide Dante with all of the answers, and indeed all of the true answers is in direct contrast to Virgil who as we have seen, especially in *Purgatorio*, is at times as lost as Dante. Gradually Beatrice's and Dante's knowledge are revealed as one. Dante hints at this in *Paradiso* II, 26, "e però quella/ cui non potea mia cura essere ascosa." In *Paradiso* XIV and XV Beatrice anticipates Dante's questions on theology. She is his self-exegesis and is ultimately the incarnation of Dante the writer sent to create

a position of opposition to that of Dante the protagonist and, as we reach the summit of his ascent, the distinction between the two becomes less distinct. Thus in *Paradiso* VII<sup>179</sup> Beatrice reads Dante's mind again and dispels certain difficulties he has concerning redemption, giving him an explanation of the difference between those created things which are corruptible and those which are incorruptible. The closer Dante and Beatrice come to their mutual apex, the more they become merged within the concept of the continuum. Having received Beatrice's blessing Dante has been imbued with the necessary grace not only to ask the questions but to answer some of them. The message is clear, Dante was not so much wrong before as misdirected. In *Paradiso* XXV when Beatrice speaks for Dante to spare his modesty, Beatrice is not only reading his mind and correcting his sin of pride but reminding us of the distinctions between this realm and that in which Dante previously existed. Her words recall the issue of when it is appropriate to speak for oneself which was raised in the *Convivio*. Here in *Paradiso* even this problem is solved. There is no need to speak for oneself to correct an injustice, for here there can be no injustice. Nor does Dante need to speak to prove the truthfulness of his testimony for here all words are true and of exemplary value. A new equation of love and wisdom has emerged. While in the particular, earthly attributes such as vanity and pride are the norm and talking of oneself is the major characteristic, on this universal plane, humility is the normal comportment and there is no need to speak of or for oneself. All members of the continuum know each other's minds and all speak for each other. Love is not linear

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<sup>179</sup> *Paradiso* VII, 19-24 "Secondo mio infallibile avviso,/ come giusta vendetta giustamente/ punita fosse, t'ha in pensier miso;/ ma io ti solverò tosto la mente;/ e tu ascolta, ché le mie parole/ di gran sentenza ti faran presente." (Sapegno sees *sentenza* as meaning "di grande verità, dottrina." (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 863) )

but circular and in contrast to the false imitation, the closed circle of the temporal, the circle here is limitless and all inclusive.

But Beatrice's transformation into love and knowledge is paralleled by yet another role which in turn reveals the true nature of love. By drawing Beatrice in terms which liken her to Christ we see that Dante perceives love as salvation. However, while Beatrice's many resemblances to Christ have been well-documented,<sup>180</sup> I believe that the true meaning of this resemblance can only be completely understood within the context of the pattern of descent and ascent. When seen from this perspective we can liken Beatrice's descent into Limbo to enlist Virgil's help and her implied return to heaven, to Christ's appearance on earth during the Roman empire. His mission of salvation was more limited, being aimed initially at the Hebrews alone. The second coming of Christ, on the other hand is to have more universal scope.<sup>181</sup> Accordingly, Beatrice's appearance in *Inferno* to Virgil coincides with the first coming of Christ in that she is still being perceived in the *stilnovistic* sense within Dante's particular story. We see as well, that

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<sup>180</sup> Many critics have noted a marked resemblance in the actions of Beatrice to those of Christ. Erich Auerbach in particular, has noted how often Beatrice is presented as a "figura of Christ." (Figura 221). Charles Singleton specifies that her appearance in *Purgatorio* XXXI is more precisely a second coming of Christ (emphasis mine) and draws an elaborate pattern of analogy in which Virgil represents the Roman people, Dante represents Everyman, and Beatrice represents Christ. (*Dante Studies 1: Elements of Structure*). And as Sapegno notes, the language of *Purgatorio* XXX, 19 ("Benedictus qui venis ...") recalls Christ's entrance into Jerusalem. (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 735) In *Purgatorio* XXXIII, 10-12, Beatrice says "Modicum, et non videbitis me ..." These are the words of Christ to his disciples to warn them that he would soon be dead and later resurrected (John 16, 16). According to Sapegno, many have understood them in this context as a prophecy of the transfer of the papal court to Avignon and together with a promise that the vacancy of the roman papal seat would not last long; but it is perhaps more opportune, says Sapegno, to attribute to them a less precise and circumscribed meaning: they say that the decadence of the Church has touched its lowest point and announce the coming of a profound moral reform. (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 767)

<sup>181</sup> We see for example in Revelations that the words of Christ are now addressed to the seven churches established among the gentiles (Revelations 2, 3) Moreover, the letters speak of the "hour of trial which will come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth."

like the Jews who sought a terrestrial messiah and looked for the kingdom of God on earth, Dante will not find salvation in this world. Beatrice's second incarnation brings the kingdom of God, the kingdom which is not of this earth. As the universal Christ, Beatrice has become the true incarnation of all of Dante's pursuits. She is knowledge and love. But more importantly she is both at the same time. She has merged love and knowledge. Dante need no longer choose between the two. The union seems somehow familiar and we become increasingly aware that these two have been joined elsewhere. As we look back with the benefit of hindsight we realize that this association was prefigured in the temporal sphere before Dante's arrival in earthly paradise. Ulysses's quest for knowledge and Francesca's quest for love were both expressed in terms which recalled flight<sup>182</sup> but flight which remained unfulfilled. The final praise of the *Commedia* represents the culmination of the love story and the evolution of love itself. While Saint Bernard's prayer to the true *Donna* counteracts the perversity of Francesca's prayer to Dante it also provides the universal exemplum of love that leads always to wisdom and the true flight of the soul.

Beatrice's resemblance to Christ has an importance that expands beyond the confines of the love story. In her constant exhortations to Dante to write what he sees<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> *Inferno* V, 82-84 "Quali colombe dal disio chiamate/ con l'ali alzate e ferme al dolce nido/ vegnon per l'aere, dal volere portate."

<sup>183</sup> *Purgatorio* XXXII, 100-105 "Qui sarai tu poco tempo silvano;/ e sarai meco senza fine cive/ di quella Roma onde Cristo è romano./ Però, in pro del mondo che mal vive,/ al carro tieni or li occhi, e quel che vedi,/ritornato di là, fa che tu scrive." Sapegno says this "rieheggia frasi analoghe di *Apoc.*, I, 11, 'Quod vides, scribe in libro.'" (*Revelations* I, 11: "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.") (*La Divina Commedia* 1955, 763) Cfr. *Revelations* I, 19: "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this," *Revelations* 21, 5:

she not only attributes to him a role which he himself denied in *Inferno* II, 32 (“Io non Paulo sono”) but recalls and legitimizes those portions of the *Convivio* in which Dante created analogies between himself and Paul, drawing himself as a new redeemer. His context there was wrong because he was not looking at Beatrice and the truth she could show him. Now, however, he will see the true nature of what he sought before in imitations and, therefore, will be able to fulfil the goal of the *Convivio* and of the *Vita nuova* before it. The *Convivio* and the *Vita nuova*, therefore, become the Old Testament, mere prefigurations, while his new work in this post-salvation context becomes the fulfilment. Dante is indeed writing a new gospel.

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“Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new’. And he said to me, ‘write for these words are true and faithful;’” *Purgatorio* XXXIII, 55-57: “E aggi a mente, quando tu le scrivi,/ di non celar qual hai vista la pianta/ ch’è or due volte dirubata quivi.”

## Chapter 5

### The Way Home: Exile

Just as the journey metaphor of the *Commedia* provides the framework within which Dante expresses both his love story and his concomitant evolving theory of love so too does the metaphor furnish a narrative form within which to depict the actual political events of his life and the parallel evolution in his political thinking. However, while the presence of a second story attests to the metaphor's capacity to accommodate more than one narrative thread, it also reveals, perhaps more importantly, an exegetical function to the framing metaphor. That is, the metaphor permits Dante to interpret his political vicissitudes, both in terms of their significance in the cosmos, and in terms of the other stories of his life. Dante attempted to find common meaning in apparently divergent events as early as the *Convivio* in which he tried to create a coherence between emotional love and the zeal for knowledge. He was trying to create a common language in which each could be seen as analogous to the other. It is here in the *Commedia* that he finally finds the means to effect such a reconciliation. With the journey metaphor and its component parts, Dante has created a structure capable of providing a common denominator which allows all of his events and indeed the stories which emerge out of them, to be viewed through the same filter. The journey metaphor provides not only a structural link but a common source of images through which both stories can be told and compared. Moreover, the journey metaphor comes already imbued with the richness of



connotation<sup>184</sup> necessary to support the breadth of meaning that Dante will ascribe to both stories. By creating a narrative unity in which two stories share a pattern, Dante is able to reveal a meaning in his political thought which is consistent with his theory of love, enhancing the value of both. This chapter then will consider not only how Dante uses the metaphor to transform his political story into the narrative of the *Commedia* but how the metaphor and the stories within it work together to interpret all of Dante's stories and effect the gradual emergence of a unified significance.

In the context of the political story, as in the love story, the cruciform pattern created by the encounter of the particular with the universal is the key to understanding Dante's representative and exegetical project. The initial progression of the pilgrim coincides with the "journey of our life" and may be seen as horizontal, linear. However, the journey is distinguished at a certain point by the narrative interruption of this unremarkable progress when another voice, that of the poetic "I," is superimposed. The narrative voice utters "Mi ritrovai" (*Inferno* I, 2) and the shape of this journey is changed. This new voice does not locate itself horizontally, but rather introduces a new paradigm of movement between two new coordinates: one below, the other above this imaginary horizontal line; the first representing the nadir of *Inferno* and the second the pinnacle of Paradise. The "io" of "mi ritrovai," therefore, introduces a second aspect to the journey, expanding its context from backward and forward to include up and down. By locating the "up/down" paradigm, his particular story, along the journey of our life, Dante is able

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<sup>184</sup> John Freccero in his "Introduction to *Inferno*" discusses the close resemblance between this metaphor and the imagery used by St. Augustine in *Confessions* Book 7.

to tell his own story (or stories) in such a way as to ensure that it retains a universal significance. As John Freccero suggests, Dante's story "like Augustine's life [...] was meant to be both autobiographical and emblematic, a synthesis of the particular circumstances of an individual's life with paradigms of salvation history drawn from the Bible." (*Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* 179) However, Freccero's reliance on the Augustinian model misses a certain subtle distinction between the Augustinian model and the dual scope of the *Commedia*. In the Augustinian model, events from the life of the author form the literal narrative while the universal lesson lies in the allegorical interpretation of those events. In the *Commedia*, Dante's actual life, the life outside of the text, furnishes the allegorical meaning. The result is that while in the Augustinian model the true meaning is extracted or extrapolated from the events of the author's life, in the Dantean model, the events of his life *are* the truth. They are the *veritas* or fulfillment while the narrative is the mere *imitatio* or *figura*. Dante's real life is the truth of which the narrative is mere representation. This distinction is crucial to understanding the way in which Dante proposes his story be read and how the character of the pilgrim ought to be viewed. By placing his autobiographical aspects within the allegorical level of meaning and constructing a literal narrative, Dante lends more authority to his own events. More importantly, he is able to create a relationship between the literal and allegorical levels in which the literal can be interpreted in light of its fulfillment. For example, it is only with reference to the actual events of Dante's life that the political meaning of the pilgrim's state at the inception of the *Commedia* can be fully understood. Here Dante has stepped out of the ranks of Everyman but is nonetheless still located

outside of the vertical descent and ascent pattern noted above. He is in a state which Theodolinda Barolini characterizes as “the middle of nowhere” and “nonlocatable, a nonevent” (*The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* 21). Through the use of a number of narrative strategies, what was earlier revealed as representing Dante’s estrangement from Beatrice, also emerges as a *figura* of his actual exile.

Given the plethora of documentary evidence attesting to Dante’s exile it would appear to be a simple matter to attribute a political connotation to this spatial location with no need to resort to complicated exegetical analysis. However, I would suggest that such documentation merely confirms what is evident from the *Commedia* itself. Moreover, to rely on the external existence of documents attesting to Dante’s political focus loses sight of Dante’s project of autoexegesis. Yes, the documentary evidence is consistent with the allegorical meaning but the ultimate significance of both the literal and the allegorical meanings must be sought intertextually for the *Commedia* not only tells Dante’s story but interprets and, therefore, provides an expanded meaning to its events. While the documentary evidence of Dante’s life provides an historical record it lacks the analysis that can only be found in the *Commedia* and which characterizes the work as autobiographical. If it is to have the significance or educative value its author intended, the exile event must be interpreted within the context Dante creates for it. A mere reading of the documents,<sup>185</sup> for example, would not assist us in terms of the role

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<sup>185</sup> Piattoli’s *Codice diplomatico dantesco* catalogues the numerous documents which attest to Dante’s political career, including the charges brought against him in absentia, his conviction in absentia and the resulting sentence of exile. In particular see documents 83, 84, 86-88, 90-92, 95, 98, 99, 114 and 115 found at pages 94-155.

and purpose Dante proposes for it in the *Commedia*. A.C. Charity suggests that while Dante's journey may be "mythologized," this "stylizing" of Dante's life is a "necessary means of expressing something he felt about it." (253) Charity concludes that this stylizing or "figuring" exists "not to replace Dante's personal history but to interpret it." (254) Therefore, by presenting his story as the literal narrative of the *Commedia* Dante can locate himself socially and express exile as an interruption of the ordinary course which removes him from the ranks of other men. It is this exile which marks Dante's passage from Everyman to the particular and takes Dante from one paradigm to another. At the same time, the "stylizing" tells us that his removal from the universal is not absolute for, owing to the cruciform structure, the vertical movement is always contained within a larger pattern so that Dante's story is actually a synecdochal representation of the greater journey. This point is made clear through the gradual revelation that Dante's "particular" journey will lead back to a fusion with the universal.

Within Dante's particular story, just as the death of Beatrice altered the course of his love story and provided him with a new perspective and direction, so too does exile change Dante's perspective to that of an outsider looking in, and compel him to seek a new direction. By transforming the state of exile into the spatial location, "la selva oscura" (*Inferno* I, 2), and himself into the pilgrim who has lost "la diritta via" (*Inferno* I, 3), Dante expresses the exile event within the context of the primary narrative structure of the *Commedia*; the journey metaphor, and thereby establishes a link between this story

and the love story which is expressed in the same terms.<sup>186</sup> At the same time, Dante proposes aspects to the actual exile which might not otherwise have been evident. When Dante writes the literal version of his allegorical meaning he takes imagery which he uses to prefigure his political life, altering its components in such a way as to colour the incidents which will take place “subsequently.” He is thus able to suggest a significance which will in turn be ascribed to the actual events which the narrative expresses chronologically. Taking actual locations and events and reshaping them with the benefit of hindsight disguised as foresight, Dante thus transforms retrospect into prophecy.

The exile, when depicted this way, becomes part of a pattern which itself has already, in the love story, been identified with salvation. In a very real way, the *Commedia* allows Dante to throw off the shame of his exile by transforming it into something necessary to his role as a societal redeemer. At the same time, the figural character of the *Commedia* provides a means of interpreting all of Dante’s “subsequent” political writings so as to ensure that they present a vision consistent with that of the *Commedia*. Let us not forget that it is Dante himself who creates this “prequel” and is, therefore, able to paint what it means not just for the reader but for Dante, in whatever colours he chooses. As Amilcare Iannucci has pointed out, “Dante’s pilgrim is not just an abstract figure of the exiled Christian soul nor do his two cities belong solely to moral and spiritual categories as Augustine’s do. Dante’s pilgrim is modeled on the historical Dante, the exiled Florentine poet.” (“*Paradiso XXXI*” 475) The ability of the souls in

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<sup>186</sup> Within the love story, “the selva oscura” corresponded to the protagonist’s alienation from Beatrice. See Chapter 4 above.

Hell to read the future enables Dante to “pre-interpret” the people, places and events which will also figure in his subsequent political vision. Thus when Farinata degli Uberti predicts Dante’s exile,<sup>187</sup> it lends an enhanced significance to the actual occurrence of the event, presenting the exile as preordained as opposed to random. The fulfilment of so much of this “foresight” lends an accuracy to those “predictions” which are not otherwise verifiable, such as the fate of Boniface VIII,<sup>188</sup> and transforms Dante’s opinion into prescience. Thus from the narrative representation of Dante as outside the ordinary course we assume the “true” version will similarly provide such a perspective. When Giuseppe Mazzotta suggests that it is Dante’s exile which is the “stance affording the detached vantage point from which he can speak to the world and impose his sense of order on it” (*Dante: Poet of the Desert* 112), he is implicitly referring to Dante’s actual exile. We must not, however, forget that within the literal narrative of the *Commedia*, Dante the pilgrim has not yet been exiled, at least not politically. His political exile is, chronologically, still in the future. All that we have in the *Commedia* is the *figura* of exile. The “sense of order,” to use Mazzotta’s terminology, which Dante imposes upon it within the literal narrative is intended to prefigure Dante’s world view, again elevating Dante’s actual extratextual view to fulfilment as opposed to *figura*. The *figura* of the *Commedia* attests to the perspective which the “real life Dante” will attain from his real life exile and thereby imbue his post-exile vision with a truthfulness it might not have enjoyed otherwise.

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<sup>187</sup> *Inferno* X, 79-81: “Ma non cinquanta volte fia raccesa/ la faccia de la donna che qui regge,/ che tu saprai quanto quell’arte pesa.”

<sup>188</sup> *Inferno* XIX: 53-55: “Ed el gridò: ‘Se’ tu già costí ritto,/ se’ tu già costí ritto, Bonifazio?/ Di parecchi anni mi mentí lo scritto.’”

In the same way that Dante anchored his love story primarily within the context of emotional relationships and thereby rendered certain characters emblematic, here he sets the political story within the context of civic relationships represented by cities which, in the same way that emotional relationships revealed a variety of types of love, reveal a variety of political systems. So we see that just as in the love story, the movement from one type of relationship to another illustrated evolution in Dante's own personal experience and in his own theory of love, so too does the pilgrim's movement from one city to another mark Dante's own political journey and his attendant evolution in political theory. This particular journey, like the love story, finds expression in a descent and ascent pattern. The pattern commences with Dante's movement in a direction away from the horizontal line of the linear journey, to a place somewhere below; towards the point below the line in the heart of the Inferno. Although this place is clearly removed geographically from the world of the living, it is clear that it is not completely detached from it either. Just as the bodies of the damned have been transformed into recognizable shades, at times disfigured in accordance with Dante's strategy of *contrapasso*, so here the physical city of Florence while transformed, is still recognizable, "la città c'ha nome Dite,/coi gravi cittadin, col grande stuolo." (*Inferno* VIII, 68-69) Though its baptistry and churches are gone and in their places are graveyards and woods of suicides, its gates and walls remain as a reminder of its power to exclude and shut out. Since in the world of the living Florence excluded the virtuous (such as Dante) its inhabitants are now limited to thieves, traitors and murderers. The pilgrim and the reader are aware almost from the

start of the descent that Dante's first destination is associated at least in some way with Florence. As early as *Inferno* VI, we start to encounter Florentines. Ciaccio (*Inferno* VI, 114) introduces the theme of Florence by representing its excesses as Theodolinda Barolini has noted "when we 'reach hell' we reach Florence as well." (*The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* 43). In the fourth circle we see Florence's spendthrifts and misers including "cherci, che non han coperchio/piloso al capo, e papi e cardinali,/ in cui usa avarizia il suo superchio." (*Inferno* VII, 46-48) Filippo Argenti's discussion on wrath is the perfect introduction to the city of Dis which the majority of critics have associated with Florence.<sup>189</sup> Amilcare Iannucci points out that in his opinion, "The Florentine suicide at the end of the canto (*Inferno* 13, 130-151) represents figuratively the whole city." ("Paradiso XXXI" 478) Perhaps the meaning of Hell in the *Commedia* was best expressed by A.C. Charity who saw the issue in terms of Auerbach's theory of *figura* and fulfilment and concluded that Hell is fulfilled in Florence. (245) Hell in Dante's pre-exile journey prefigures what Florence is to become for Dante after his real-life exile.

But the mere likening of Hell to Florence, the suggestion that one is the fulfilment of the other, does not complete the expression of Dante's political story: it merely provides the setting. It is the pilgrim's interaction with this Florence which hones its political meaning. As Dante descends into Hell, for example, his presence is always marked not only with surprise but with contempt and exclusion. He is not welcome there.

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<sup>189</sup> Joan Ferrante offers an extensive discussion as to the similarities between medieval Florence and the City of Dis, enumerating the "the several hints within the *Comedy*" that Dante equates Florence with Hell. (67)



In fact in Canto VIII outside the City of Dis, Dante is prohibited from entering. Though Dante has been divinely ordered to descend, the message is clear; he does not belong here. Since it has been established that Hell will be fulfilled in Florence, then we can deduce that Dante will, allegorically, not be made welcome in Florence. Moreover, the descent of the angel to open its gates expands upon this to show that it will require divine intervention for Dante to reenter. The episode outside the walls is a virtual reenactment of Dante's exile. Rather than say "I was excluded from Florence and could not get back in without divine intervention," he paints Florence as Hell, as the City of Dis, and stands outside its doors awaiting entry. But the likening of Hell to Florence does not only prefigure Dante's allegorical, or actual events, it gives them meaning. Since Hell excludes the virtuous and prefigures Florence, if Florence excludes Dante, Dante must be virtuous. The episode at the same time reinforces the importance of the descent and ascent to the entire structure of the poem. Here the descent of the angel is a repetition of Christ's descent into Hell<sup>190</sup> and also of Beatrice's descent. Reintegration will only be possible through descent and ascent. And so we see that not only is Dante's exile integral to his ultimate reintegration to the universal but that his political story repeats the pattern of his love story and Christ's story.

But as was noted above, Dante's exile is not his entire story; it is an episode, the catalyst of an evolving political thesis played out in the *Commedia*. While D'Entrèves<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the episode, see Iannucci *Forma ed evento nella Divina Commedia* and specifically the chapter on the descent of Beatrice.

<sup>191</sup> According to D'Entrèves, one can discern in Dante's writing three consecutive stages of political thought; an initial concern with the issue of the city as a state, followed by a growing concern with the larger issue of the place of the empire and then, after suffering substantial disappointment and

sees Dante's evolution in terms of a traceable progression and Ferrante<sup>192</sup> suggests that Dante thought more in terms of opposing political forces, both approaches are rather restrictive and risk missing the interpretive aspect of the *Commedia* vis-à-vis the political issues. An approach that examines the extent to which Dante attempts within the *Commedia* to catalogue and characterize the various questions is not only more useful in interpreting the work but is also more in keeping with the purpose of the *Commedia* at least in terms of the political story. The *Commedia* is not merely an alternative representation of Dante's political views but rather an attempt to reap meaning from his own vicissitudes while consolidating and reconciling his own, at times, seemingly divergent political theories. To that end Dante uses the cruciform to create parameters and a mechanism through which he can divide political issues into those with temporal or earthly significance and those of eternal or spiritual significance. Within this scheme each political issue is relegated to a particular location within the purview of the narrative pattern. To a large extent, this approach coincides with the descent and ascent pattern of the love story as those issues which Dante locates prior to his arrival at the summit of Mount Purgatory tend to correspond to the earthly<sup>193</sup> while those above it, in Paradise are more timeless in scope. Accordingly, the great emphasis placed on Florence in the *Inferno* does not merely reflect Dante's view of Florence but situates that stage in his

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disillusionment with the notion of empire, the question of how the Church might figure in the governance of man. He labels these stages *Civitas*, *Imperium*, *Ecclesia* respectively.

<sup>192</sup> Joan Ferrante approaches the issues in terms of opposing interests; City and Empire, Church and State, and corrupt versus ideal society.

<sup>193</sup> Barolini suggests that "Spatially, hell is treated as tangible and concrete, while temporally, the fact that it is eternal means only that it will last forever, that its torments are perpetual. Eternity in the context of hell signifies duration;" (*The Undivine Comedy: Dethologizing Dante* 15) thus distinguishing it, she says, from *Paradiso* of which "Transcendence of space and time is the essence." (171 -172)

political thought which related to the local issues of the city state and thereby assigns it a value and meaning.

Within the text this function is also served by characters inserted into the literal narrative not only to express the relationship Florence bears to Hell but to underline the highly local and temporal nature of the issues which revolve around the governing of a city state. Farinata degli Uberti (*Inferno X*) is the epitome of this intertextual gloss and the encapsulation of the political meaning of Florence as Hell. Certainly not the only character to provide political commentary, Farinata is the anthropomorphosis of the essence of Florence and its sins. While other characters will tell us of replaced statues, brazen women and expanding city limits, it is in Farinata that these are all fused into a single characteristic, shortsighted pride. Farinata's epicureanism is merely symptomatic of a greater caustic feature. The pride of Florence is what has made it blind to the destruction and trauma it has wrought but it is also symptomatic of its myopic view of the world. This myopia is the quintessence of political thought which concentrates on the city state and local concerns. Farinata's apparent ignorance with respect to his surroundings and his inability to see the present exclaims this loud and clear and prefigures the fate of those who similarly limit their vision.

In his encounter with Farinata, Dante shares, to a certain extent, this pride. Dante the pilgrim smugly tells Farinata of the ultimate defeat of the Ghibellines taking part in the political tit-for-tat which has become the bane of Florence. How do we explain this?

The answer lies in remembering that Dante spent much of his time early in his exile trying to regain entry to Florence and continuing to consort with other exiles. Notwithstanding Dante's exile and the bitterness he bore Florence because of it he still wished to be there. In the depths of the *Inferno* Dante is still mired in his Florentinism. He has not yet turned his back on Florence and looked for a new direction. Dante has drawn the pilgrim as the figural representation of his own political behaviour. It is for this reason then that Dante enters into the debate with Farinata. The issue of who will hold the reigns of power in Florence is the essence of the local and timebound character of Dante's early political thought. It reflects Dante's early thoughts on the issue of the City State and reflects the prevailing Florentine opinion that Florence was subject to no power but its own. Dante's discussion with Farinata and where he locates the discussion speaks volumes as to the value Dante now places on such discussions. But it also resituates the *Convivio*, placing its thought alongside those who still concern themselves with what are, in essence, minor or timebound issues in the grand scheme of things. Dante's descent into Hell, therefore, figures not only his exile but the early steps of his own political journey.

While Florence expresses Dante's own entanglement with local politics, the lesson does not end there for lurking in the dark places of Hell alongside the City on the Arno, Dante paints the shadows of another city blinded by pride and concerned with its own self-importance, Babylon. Amilcare Iannucci has commented substantially on the presence of Babylon in the *Inferno* and in Canto V in particular where, he says, the souls

have, instead of a world of charity “forged on earth the realm of cupidity” and “perpetuated the chaos of Babylon.” (“Forbidden Love: Metaphor and History (*Inferno* 5)” 99) Iannucci’s thesis considers the presence of Babylon primarily with respect to the connotation it has in terms of the love story.<sup>194</sup> However, a political connotation and more specifically the issue of the city attaches just as easily to it especially when we consider that the earliest mention we have of Babylon in the Bible<sup>195</sup> refers to it in terms of man’s first attempts at city building.<sup>196</sup> The insertion of Babylon represents the universal or exemplum aspect of the Florence lesson. While Florence is the particular, Babylon is the universal. This distinction is underlined by the fact that Dante the pilgrim does not have contact with the sinners most closely associated with Babylon. Their existence in Hell suggests a story which shares meaning with Dante’s albeit with wider connotation. That the Florence found in Hell is anchored securely in Dante’s particular meaning is confirmed by the characters Dante has placed there. They speak of families and local struggles. They make local references. Babylon belongs much more to that layer of significance which I have labelled “universal.” Babylon holds a lesson for all. When we consider the *Commedia* from this perspective we see clearly that Hell can be

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<sup>194</sup> Iannucci suggests that Babylon, through the figure of Semiramis in this scheme represents the *civitas mundi*, the corrupt, degenerate society which Augustine opposes to the *civitas Dei*. Semiramis, according to Iannucci, “typifies lawlessness, or better, how passion creates its own laws.”

<sup>195</sup> Genesis 10, 10.

<sup>196</sup> Genesis 10, 8-10 describes the generations of Noah. At verse 8 we reach Nimrod: “And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.” Chapter 11 goes on to assert how these “families of the sons of Noah,” i.e. “the nations divided in the earth after the flood” (Gen. 10, 32) dwelt on a plain in the land of Shinar and there decided to build a “city and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto heaven.” (11,4). The Lord came down to see the “city and the tower, which the children of men builded.” (11, 5) To stop them doing “what they have imagined to do,” (11,6) “the Lord scattered them abroad” (11,8) “and they left off to build the city.”

both Florence and Babylon at the same time because they are types of each other. Though their implications differ somewhat both stories share and teach the same lesson; man-made cities will not reach heaven and those who foster a closed, myopic, prideful preoccupation with the City will travel nowhere but down. At the same time likening Florence to Babylon not only justifies Dante's calling the Florentines a second race of Babylonians in Epistle VI<sup>197</sup> but can be seen also as almost a prophecy of their actions towards the emperor whom Dante supports.

Thus we see again how Dante's particular journey is at all times a part of a larger more universal lesson. Dante's story of Florence also suggests a greater story, that of Babylon. And we see that both lead downwards as the literal narrative takes the pilgrim ever closer to the nadir of Hell where the consequences of the closed city state culminate in the murder of a Roman Emperor. The message is relatively simple to glean; preoccupation with the city state results in a betrayal of the Empire as Dante himself suggests in Epistle VI. More importantly, the juxtaposition of this crime with Judas's betrayal of Christ, alerts us to another layer of meaning. Clearly, Dante is imposing another filter through which his events can be viewed. The political story may also have a spiritual sense. The preoccupation with the city state, its resulting ignorance and ultimate betrayal of the empire shares meaning with the betrayal of Christ. Betrayal of the empire is the earthly equivalent of the betrayal of God, and recalls a paradigm

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<sup>197</sup> Written March 31, 1311: "Wherefore, then, stirring up so vain a thought as this, do ye, a second race of Babylonians, desert the compassionate empire and seek to establish new kingdoms, making the civic life of Florence one and that of Rome another?"

introduced by Augustine in *The City of God*. According to St. Augustine both realms, the City of God and the Earthly City exist concomitently and man freely chooses his path. It is not difficult to see similarities between Dante's earthly cities and Augustine's *civitas mundi*. Similarly, Dante's *Paradiso* may be said to correspond to Augustine's vision of the *The City of God*. However, the city which Dante chooses to represent his City of God differs substantially from Augustine who, in his *City of God*, associates Rome with Babylon. In the *Commedia*, however, Dante will give Rome a very different treatment than that which Augustine affords it. Dante will associate Florence with Babylon, the infernal city and Rome with Jerusalem, the City of God.<sup>198</sup> Thus while the characterization of certain cities as infernal and others as paradisaical may find its roots in Augustinian thought, in the *Commedia*, Dante uses only Augustine's method, not Augustine's judgments, to further his own political agenda.

In terms of the cruciform pattern, the Pilgrim's first trajectory takes him away from the City of God and toward the *civitas mundi*. While Dante's pilgrim protests "I am not Eneas, I am not Paul"<sup>199</sup> and would have us believe that his descent is not of his

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<sup>198</sup> This revision of Augustine's vision is made clear where Dante describes his stupor upon seeing the white rose: "Se i barbari, venendo da tal plaga/ che ciascun giorno d'Elice si cuopra,/ rotante col suo figlio ond'ella è vaga,/ veggendo Roma e l'ardua sua opra,/ stupefaciensi, quando Laterano/ a le cose mortali andò di sopra;/io, che al divino da l'umano,/ a l'eterno dal tempo era venuto,/ e di Fiorenza in popol giusto e sano/ di che stupor dovea esser compiuto!" (*Paradiso XXXI*, 31-40). He makes it clear that the city which is "giusto e sano" is Rome and that its antithesis is Florence. This reiterates his invective against Florence in *Inferno XXVI*, 1-12: "Godì, Fiorenza, poi che se' sì grande ..." As Iannucci notes, this "radical revision" of the Augustinian paradigm of the two cities is discernible as early as *Inferno IV*, in Limbo. ("Forbidden Love: Metaphor and History (*Inferno 5*)" 99) There, says Iannucci, the castle in which the classical authors are segregated "is a projection of pagan Rome and the *pax romana*, which prepared for the coming of Christ and the establishment of the Church." Here as in other places noted by Iannucci, Dante "disassociates Rome from Babylon and assimilates it to Jerusalem: 'quella Roma onde Cristo è romano' [the 'Rome in which Christ' is Roman' (*Purg.* 32.102; cf. *Par.* 31.31-40)]."

<sup>199</sup> *Inferno II*, 32-33: "Io non Enea, io non Paulo sono:/ me degno a ciò né io né altri 'l crede."

choosing, Dante has chosen this route through his own sinfulness. He, like Adam, has sunk so low that only a descent into Hell can save him. The journey is, therefore, a necessary part of the redemption process. As he descends into the history of mankind entombed in Hell he must come to terms with his own sinful past - the very essence of autobiography medieval or modern. Thus we see that the descent also corresponds to his actions in the early days of his exile when he sought yet again to embroil himself in the factional strife by allying himself with the exiled Ghibellines. This correspondence helps Dante to contextualize his actions and to consider them in the context of his ongoing political journey.

To move away from this realm, to progress towards God, the pilgrim literally and figuratively must turn around. Visualized within the context of the cruciform proposed above, he can go no further. If the pilgrim is to progress, he must change direction and embark on a long journey up from below the peak of Mount Purgatory. The similarities in the imagery at the beginning of *Purgatorio* and the beginning of *Inferno*<sup>200</sup> emphasize the futility of his actions and his voyage towards the earthly city. He is no further ahead and has barely escaped death. But there are indications that the next progression, though similarly situated will have a somewhat different focus.<sup>201</sup> Although Dante's voyage back will still take place below the line and, therefore, still in the realm of the temporal,

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<sup>200</sup> Cfr. *Inferno* I, 22-26: "E come quei che con lena affannata/ uscito fuor del pelago a la riva/ si volge a l'acqua perigliosa e guata,/ così l'animo mio, ch'ancor fuggiva,/ si volse a retro a rimarar lo passo/ che non lasciò già mai persona viva" and *Purgatorio* I, 4: "che lascia dietro a sé mar sí crudele:"; *Inferno* I, 5: "la selva selvaggia" and *Purgatorio* II, 52-53: "La turba che rimase lí, selvaggia/ pareva del loco."

<sup>201</sup> *Purgatorio* I, 4-5: "e canterò di quel secondo regno/ dove l'umano spirito si purga/ e di salire al ciel diventa degno" and *Purgatorio* I, 118-120: "noi andavam per lo solingo piano/ com'om che torna a la perduta strada,/ che 'nfino ad essa lí pare ire invano."



there will be a different destination. The motion will be up rather than down. Dante will still be situated in the temporal but this time he will be facing a different direction and will be travelling on a different trajectory, one that will ultimately take him to the City of God. And just as love in and of itself was not wrong and had its place in *Paradiso*, neither is Florence, *per se*, evil. However, Florence's inability to look beyond itself dooms it to damnation. The choice between damnation or salvation then depends upon perspective, direction and scope.<sup>202</sup> When, for example, we reach Cacciaguida, we will see a different view of Florence, one that looks beyond itself and its confines towards God and has, therefore, become timeless.

This different focus again corresponds to and "prefigures" not only Dante's journey but also his evolving political focus. While it may be possible to suggest that this stage of the *Commedia* corresponds to the stage which D'Entrèves terms *Imperium* it is perhaps more important to bear in mind where Dante places such thoughts. For here, at the opening of *Purgatorio*, Dante is again located outside of the two points, in neither city, and so the journey back will still be concerned with and informed by his perspective of exile. However, this time he will also be concerned with issues of restoration; regaining lost ground. In *Purgatorio* the issue is no longer confined to Dante's desire to return home but to restoring that home to how it had once been.

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<sup>202</sup> The importance of looking in the right direction is omnipresent in the *Commedia*. Lina Bolzoni notes the multitude of examples in which the "guardare fisso" figures in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. ("Costruire immagini. L'arte della memoria tra letteratura e arti figurative" 64-65)

The theme of paradise lost was introduced early in the *Inferno* with the inclusion of the old man of Crete. Giuseppe Mazzotta refers to *Inferno* XIV, 94 and Virgil's explanation that the "rivers of Hell have their origin in the cracks in the weeping statue of the Old Man of Crete" suggesting that this image is tied in with Dante's vision of salvation. At the same time he suggests that the "renewed" man is not Christ but an old man drawn from the secular order. This, says Mazzotta, is in accordance with Dante's notion of man's *restauratio* referred to in the *Convivio*. (*Dante: Poet of the Desert* 14 - 18) When we see the old man of Crete crying the tears for the corruption of society, we are reminded not only of Adam and paradise lost but of Francesca saying that there is nothing sadder than in times of unhappiness to remember happiness.<sup>203</sup> The similarities in theme suggest a meaning common to the love story and to the political story. To demonstrate that he sees Florence as paradise lost Dante uses a number of methods. The voyage away from God in the *Commedia* is always associated with the loss of a Golden Age and a yearning for past happiness. It looks back rather than forward and, therefore, is similarly associated with being turned around and looking the wrong way. This imagery which recalls the tragic fate of Lot's wife, or equally with the pagan Orpheus, is severely rooted in the sin-filled atmosphere of *Inferno* where there exists no hope of redemption. The tone changes considerably when Dante starts the arduous journey up through *Purgatorio* and is remedied in *Purgatorio* XXX when Beatrice's voice finally turns Dante around to look at her instead of back to see where Virgil has gone.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> "Nessun maggior dolore/ che ricordarsi del tempo felice/ ne la miseria." *Inferno* V, 121-123.

<sup>204</sup> *Purgatorio* XXX, 61-65: "quando mi volsi al suon del nome mio,/ che di necessità qui si registra,/ vidi la donna che pria m'appariò/ velata sotto l'angelica festa,/ drizzar li occhi ver me di qua dal rio."

Logically, this moment also coincides with Dante's arrival at paradise regained. But it is important to note that paradise, while regained, has also been renewed and transformed. As Theodolinda Barolini says, "In the *Commedia*, too, God makes things new: by causing the Apocalyptic end of the purgatorial journey to coincide with Eden, the place of our beginnings, Dante causes mankind's first place to transform from the oldest place ('primus') to the newest of places - 'novissimus' (not coincidentally does the poem's only use of 'novissimo' belong to these cantos)." (*The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* 159) This is abundantly clear in the political context. Earthly paradise is by no means the Florence of the *Inferno*. The message is clear, Paradise can be regained but it will not be in the same place. It will be somehow transformed and seeing it requires a similar change of state on the pilgrim's part. In terms of the political story, the regaining of paradise also coincides with a new formulation of political thought. In this new trajectory, Florence and its local earthbound focus has been left behind. Dante has moved away from the nadir of locality and climbed back up to the point on the horizontal line where particular and universal coincide. He is back at the point on the line from which he started and can this time choose God's city or man's city. But this is a second beginning, occasioned by his descent which Charity calls a " 'forehaving' of death." (246) That this terminus is marked by the garden motif is not coincidental and is essential to the recognition that the descent has occasioned a change of state. As Amilcare Iannucci notes, Dante's use of the garden motif is structural; "The major way stations on the pilgrim's journey through the afterlife are set in garden-like

places, and usually bring into focus a structurally defining spiritual condition: paradise lost and regained, or about to be recovered.” (“*Paradiso XXXI*” 474) Precisely the nature of this new Paradise is easily inferred from Dante’s reference to Rome as the “Garden of the Empire.” If Rome is a garden and Paradise is a garden then Rome may be paradise. And thus we move from a city that tries to stand alone (Florence) to a city whose fame comes from being a component (albeit the ruling one) in a greater structure. Both Rome and Florence are cities but Rome’s focus is outwards to the Empire. Florence’s is inwards and ultimately sterile. A message starts to emerge; if preoccupation with the City as a city state will take us down to the core of Hell, preoccupation with the City as a cornerstone of an Empire can help us get back up to the point from which we started. If the City provides the road to Hell, then the Empire provides the road to Heaven.

From this point we see that Dante continues to associate the pilgrim’s destinations with historical cities in order to enhance meaning. However, more and more the places and figures in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* are associated with Jerusalem and Rome rather than Babylon and Florence. It is important, however, to note that, although Florence was present in Hell, Rome itself is not present in Purgatory. Nor is the earthly paradise Rome or Empire. What is restored in earthly paradise is the place of beginning from which the voyage to Rome can start. Purgatory, if anything, is an anti-Inferno representing the journey back to the place where we can start again. It represents transition in thought and is the literal manifestation of Dante’s long journey back from the concern for city politics

and his growing concern for the issue of the Empire. Just as the culmination of *Inferno* reveals a spiritual aspect to the political lesson so too does the culmination of *Purgatorio* reveal a broader connotation. As Giuseppe Mazzotta suggests, the Earthly Paradise is the “point of convergence between nature and grace; here, memory of the Fall and quest for redemption mingle.” (*Dante: Poet of the Desert* 115) It is the new starting point, the clean slate.

If we concentrate for a moment on the pilgrim’s movement in terms of the cruciform pattern, it becomes easier to understand why the journey to his ultimate destination, the pinnacle of *Paradiso*, is twice as long as the journey to the centre of *Inferno*. Having descended to the point below the line, the pilgrim must first make his way back up to the line to the point from which he started before he can embark upon the final ascent. In terms of the intersecting journeys, this means that Dante must descend and ascend before his particular journey can again intersect with the universal. Accordingly, Dante’s descent into Hell takes up only a third of the narrative of the *Commedia*. His ascent up through *Purgatorio* constitutes the next third. From earthly paradise, from the regained ground, Dante can start the voyage away from the realm of the temporal and the earthly and move vertically above the line and onto the true path towards God.

By keeping the empire at a prospective distance rather than materializing it within the context of the *Purgatorio*, Dante is able to suggest that the quest for Empire is not

earthly, that it is instead a necessary step on the road to Heaven, to a heavenly kingdom. Moreover, he is able to distinguish it from the earthbound local politics of Florence and suggest that his theory of Empire belongs in the timeless state of Paradise. Finally, by placing the issue of Empire here, Dante is able to create a relationship between the earthly (but not earthbound) particular empire, Rome and the heavenly universal empire, Jerusalem.<sup>205</sup> Joan Ferrante notes the interplay between the two kingdoms stating, “The rose is the heavenly city (30.130), the joyful kingdom (31.25), the just and pious empire (32.117) whose emperor is God; it is the model for the political and moral life on earth.” (253) But perhaps more to the point Ferrante recognizes the dependence of one model on the other; “On earth, the model of the ideal society can be realized within the secular sphere only in the empire.” (255) By situating the empire above the earthly realms, Dante is able to situate the earthly empire alongside Augustine’s heavenly city thus radically redefining Augustine who had identified the pagan Rome with the *civitas mundi*.<sup>206</sup> It is important to realize that Rome although earthly is not earthbound, for Dante does make such a distinction. Earthly in and of itself is not bad, of more concern is the direction of one’s focus. Therefore, while the Roman empire<sup>207</sup> has existence in time and space as much as Florence does, it exists on a different trajectory and on a different path. In the *Commedia* Dante expresses this distinction by associating Rome with the realm of the timeless and on the road to God. This association also provides a basis for Dante’s political position that the Empire is not subordinate to the church but instead

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<sup>205</sup> Iannucci suggests that *Paradiso* is the typological fulfilment of Jerusalem. (*Paradiso* XXXI 475)

<sup>206</sup> See note 198.

<sup>207</sup> In *Monarchia*, Dante defines his ‘empire’ (Book 1, chapter II, 2) as a temporal monarchy, “a single sovereign authority set over all others in time, that is to say over all authorities which operate in those things which are measured by time.” (Tran. Prue Shaw)

divides jurisdiction with it. This association also reinterprets *Monarchia* III, xv to suggest that directing temporal power to God is as essential to peace as limiting the power of the Church to spiritual matters. More importantly, it justifies the rapt tone taken in the earlier<sup>208</sup> Epistle V on the divine mission of Henry VII, in which Henry is likened to the bridegroom in language so frequently found in praise of Christ. At the same time it dismisses the possible reading of the same letter which might suggest that Henry was to rule by virtue of permission of the papacy and concentrates more on the notion at the end of the letter that there is an equal division of power.<sup>209</sup> The journey to Rome and the journey to Jerusalem take place along one road. To travel to one is to travel to the other. Hence we see a constant mingling of the language used to indicate the journey of the pilgrims. This allusion is first introduced in *Purgatorio* in the song of the new arrivals “*In exitu Israel de Aegypto ...*” (*Purgatorio* II, 46) which recalls the journey of the Jews to Jerusalem and which Dante in his *Convivio* and in his letter to Cangrande (if it is his) had indicated could be interpreted anagogically as signifying the exodus of the soul from sin.<sup>210</sup> At the same time we are told that “Tiber’s water”<sup>211</sup> is the source of the journey to Purgatory. Mazzotta suggests that “in *Purgatorio* the language of secular history (‘*qui sarai tu poco tempo silvano/ e sarai meco senza fine cive/ di quella Roma onde Cristo è*

<sup>208</sup> Written October 1310 whereas the *Monarchia* was probably written at very earliest in 1314.

<sup>209</sup> “He it is whom Peter, the vicar of God, extorteth us to honor, whom Clement, the present successor of Peter, doth illuminate with the light of the apostolic benediction; that where the spiritual ray sufficeth not there the splendor of the lesser luminary may give light.”

<sup>210</sup> These are the first words of Psalm CXIII which refer to the liberation of the people of Israel from the slavery of Egypt; and in the anagogical sense mean “come ne l’uscita de l’anima dal peccato, essa sia fatta santa e libera in sua potestate” (*Convivio*, II I, 7; *Epist.*, XIII, 21). (Sapegno *La Divina Commedia* 1985 18,19, note 46.)

<sup>211</sup> *Purgatorio* II, 101: “dove l’acqua del Tevero s’insala.”

Romano.’ *Purgatorio* XXXII, 100-102) is used to prefigure the City of God at the end of time.” (*Dante: Poet of the Desert* 115)

Associating Rome with the journey towards beatification is found early in Dante’s writing, in the *Vita nuova*, for example.<sup>212</sup> But more important is the connection that Dante now creates between the pilgrimage site and the celestial vision. Iannucci discusses the comparison Dante makes of his stupor upon seeing the celestial city to that of a pilgrim seeing Rome: “Dante also remembers this famous relic (ie. the Veronica) at the end of the *Vita Nuova*: the pilgrims passing through the desolate city of Florence (desolate because of Beatrice’s death) are traveling to see ‘quella imagine benedetta la quale Iesu Cristo lasciò a noi per esemplo de la sua bellissima figura (40.1).’” (*Paradiso* XXXI” 476) However, although the pilgrim will reach Rome in heaven, we must also remember that, just as the earthly paradise was not the same earthly paradise from which man had been expelled so many years before, neither is this empire the same as that which was the ancient glory of Rome. Yes it is still Rome, but a Roman Empire transformed and Christianized. The old Rome was a *figura* of this Rome and nowhere is this made more clear than in Dante’s use of the Virgilian model on which Dante relies to reinforce the providential nature of Rome’s Imperial power. The journey of Aeneas is, for Dante, the epic model of exile that ends in the founding of a divinely predestined civilisation, the Roman Empire. Aeneas’s journey suggests typologically Dante’s own

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<sup>212</sup> In Chapter XL Dante presents as image of pilgrims on their way to Rome to see the relic known as the “Veronica.” (“Dopo questa tribulazione avvenne, in quello tempo che molta gente va per vedere quella imagine benedetta la quale Iesu Cristo lasciò a noi per esemplo de la sua bellissima figura, la quale vede la mia donna gloriosamente ...”)



voyage to this new Rome. The connection between the two is made explicit in *Inferno* II<sup>213</sup> and kept current through the insertion of a number of intertextual references to Virgil's hero. Aeneas's exile and journey, like Dante's, was necessary to bring about the founding of an empire. But we must always remember that Aeneas was a pagan as was the Rome he founded. This is crucial for it is the feature which anchors the Virgilian model to the temporal and earthly. The Virgilian voyage cannot infiltrate the secondary level; it cannot move above the line which separates the earthly from the transcendent and the temporal from the timeless. Virgil's voyage cannot reach the City of God; at most it can prefigure that voyage. The confines of this voyage are found at the earthly paradise where everything is made new, including Rome and it is here where Virgil slips out of sight.

The voyage which, on the other hand, will culminate in a new empire will be more akin to that of Paul, for Paul reached Rome and, in his attempts to Christianize it, he ultimately made the heavenly kingdom possible. If, as Charity explains, the purpose of typology as used by Dante is "not to replace Dante's personal history, but to interpret it" (254) then we can see here what interpretation Dante wants to suggest: politically he is a new Paul, a christianizer of an Empire, and one who can bring about the Kingdom of God and implicitly be the redeemer he sought to be in the *Convivio*. D'Entrèves has argued that in his latter years Dante turned his sights more towards the issue of the church and distinguished between Dante's theory of Empire and his theory of Church, but I would

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<sup>213</sup> *Inferno* II, 32-33: "Io non Enea, io non Paulo sono:/ me degno a ciò né io né altri 'l crede."

argue that the *Commedia* suggests that Dante saw the issues as compatible, two sides of the same coin. Dante suggests that with the proper Empire, the City of God is inevitable and that peace can reign in this world as it does in the next. In this vision Dante has described the City of God not so much in accordance with Augustine but in accordance with his own political vision, transforming his views into *figurae* of their own fulfillment. While in *Monarchia* Dante relied on the views of Aristotle, albeit through Christian eyes, to justify his theory of empire,<sup>214</sup> *Monarchia* and the views contained therein will now be transformed into the fulfilment of the vision of the *Commedia*. As Ferrante suggests, Dante's *Paradiso* conforms to his vision of the empire, to his vision of the ideal society. Narratively, he expresses this through the "gran mar de l'essere" which, Barolini suggests, "effectively absorbs the many into the oceanic one." (*The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* 176) There can be no mistake then, Dante sees that peace is only possible in the absorption of the many into the one. As Barolini suggests, "This theme is carried forward in the *Monarchia*, where the need to justify a single ruler leads to the explanation that what can be done by one - 'per unum' - is better done by one than by many - 'per plura'." "Dante goes on to align oneness - 'unum' - with goodness and multiplicity - 'multa' - with evil." (*The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* 181) Yet at the same time, *Paradiso* represents an attempt on Dante's part to provide a solution as to how oneness can co-exist with multiplicity. Or as Barolini sees the issue "The posture of the *Paradiso* ... reflects a willingness to accommodate difference as an essential aspect

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<sup>214</sup> *De monarchia*, I, v. "So the first question is this: is temporal monarchy necessary for the well-being of the world? That it *is* necessary can be shown with powerful and persuasive arguments, and neither reason nor authority provides any strong counter-argument. The first of these arguments may be taken from the authority of Aristotle in his *Politics*." (Trans. Prue Shaw 9)

of the created universe.” (*The Undivine Comedy: Detheogizing Dante* 181) In this sense Dante’s Jerusalem stands in direct contrast to Babylon which was emblematic of linguistic chaos and the concomitant loss of societal cohesion. In this *Paradise*, through a series of discourses, Dante illustrates the peace which is ultimately attainable amongst those of difference, illustrating that there can be peace in divergence. The theme was introduced as early as the *Purgatorio* in which Sordello represents political unity. (Barolini, *Dante’s Poets: Textuality and Truth in the “Comedy”* 161) The notion is affirmed in *Paradise* where the earthly law is transformed into a divinely ordained rule. Here Dante takes his political vision out of the realm of the particular and beatifies it giving it the divine seal of approval, rewriting his *Monarchia* with the divine hand of God and echoing the ultimate significance of the narrative cruciform; that the merger of the particular with the universal means redemption.

In *Paradiso* Dante expresses this notion as well through the pilgrim’s interaction and relationship with the characters and the destination itself. In contrast to the reception the pilgrim encountered in the *Inferno*, in *Paradiso* he is made to feel welcome and indeed his presence in *Paradiso* is apparently of no surprise to its denizens. Here Dante takes part in discussions not only with particular or local characters but with those of more universal renown. The pilgrim here is part of both paradigms. In *Paradiso* Dante’s particular story merges with the universal story. Dante’s story in this regard is not simply another type of a lesson with universal application, Dante’s story here in the realm above

the earthly paradise is the universal. The temporal has found its fulfilment in the timeless and the particular in the universal. The pilgrim is home.

Thus here, as in the *Inferno*, Dante will continue to meet Florentines but now they bear differing associations. Cacciaguida, in contrast to Farinata, is not just tied to the Florence which Dante associates with Hell. He recalls Florence's glorious past and like Dante laments the city's fall into licentiousness. Rather than continue to stubbornly attach significance to the differences which have resulted in petty local turf wars, Cacciaguida is depicted as having died during the crusades, on his way to Jerusalem instead of in the infernal Florence. Cacciaguida's fight is one in which all Christendom is united against a common enemy. This echoes the sentiment expressed with respect to the papal wars<sup>215</sup> in sharp contrast to Dante's opinion with respect to the validity of the Crusades and marks a clearly expanded significance to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is universal in scope. It is not local or particular. Dante has, therefore, taken a character who is particular in nature and attached a universal significance to his story.

Cacciaguida's episode does more than illustrate Dante's political evolution. Structurally, the episode creates an immediate backward glance to the other Florentine who predicted Dante's exile, Farinata. The discussions about family fates only reinforce the parallel. The two episodes help interpret each other in that similarities in the episodes

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<sup>215</sup> *Inferno* XXVII, 85-90: "Lo principe di novi Farisei,/ avendo guerra presso a Laterano,/ e non con Saracin né con Giudei,/ ché ciascun suo nimico era Cristiano,/ e nessun era stato a vincer Acri/ né mercatante in terra di Soldano."

highlight the contrasts. Thus we see that Florentines are not inevitably damned but rather that it is a question of perspective of focus and direction which determines their fates. Florentines, and presumably Florence, can be saved if they look beyond themselves just as lovers can be saved if they look beyond the object of their love. The episodes, therefore, also reinforce the narrative structure of the *Commedia* in their conformity to the parallel, or perhaps more accurately, opposing trajectories of the cruciform narrative in which the temporal journey is the antithesis of the journey through Paradiso. Moreover the episodes may be said to be structurally determining, as the term is used by Iannucci, inasmuch as they represent the focus of Dante's particular political story. Farinata is the embodiment of all that Dante sees wrong with Florence yet, as the episode makes clear, Dante's own life is inextricably bound up in its people and its intrigues. Farinata, therefore, is also the touchstone of the despair and the seemingly inescapable downward spiral of hell and the city state. Cacciaguida, on the other hand, is at once the paradise that was lost and paradise regained. He represents the hope of redemption both personal and civic and together with Farinata presents a microcosm of the structure of Dante's political story.

These parallel episodes, however, serve a structural and exegetical function beyond this particular narrative thread. The existence of two parallel characters that represent the two faces of Florence, one turned to face the wrong way (inward and downward) and one turned to face the right way (outward and upward), parallels the existence of the two kinds of love presented in the love story, represented by the *donna*

*gentile* and by Beatrice. Love itself was not wrong so much as the object at which it was directed. The affinity between the two stories is forged through the revelation of similar meanings in the Farinata/Cacciaguida parallel and *donna gentile*/Beatrice parallel. Though within a different context, both reveal that salvation is a matter of direction. It is not the action so much as the object to which the action is directed which counts. The revelation of the shared meaning then makes sense of the political story and aligns it with that of the love story. Indeed they can be substituted almost one for the other but more importantly they both share meaning with spiritual salvation. In Charity's terms, both narrative threads might be seen as types of each other. Thus Dante's narrative depiction of his political theory urges a reading of his political works in which his theory of the empire is not seen as exclusively secular nor detached from spiritual issues by reconciling the apparently divergent interests of the Kingdom of God and the Earthly Empire. At the same time, the *Commedia* situates Dante's political writing and theories vis-à-vis the Empire within the allegorical level and thereby ascribes to them a truth akin to that ascribed to the New Testament.

Once again we see the sagacity of having chosen the journey metaphor to frame the story. Religious and philosophical literature had long used journeys to represent spiritual progression. Further, the city had also been used to represent the ultimate destination of the soul. Finally, exile had often been used to depict the state of the soul before it reaches heaven.<sup>216</sup> Accordingly, Dante is able to draw a relationship between all

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<sup>216</sup> "Behind the image of Paradise as a city lies the medieval *topos* of the Christian as an exile, which we find, for example, at the beginning of St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei*." (Iannucci, "Paradiso XXXI" 474)

of those voyages, in particular, the voyage of the soul, with his own political voyage. By creating a narrative which echoes a number of journeys, the voyages of Eneas, of Paul and of Jesus Christ and indeed that of Dante's own literal narrative are relegated to the realm of history and Dante can present his own actuality as a new testament, one whose meaning is interpreted by those earlier journeys and which is the fulfilment of those other stories. Charity explains the purpose of the inclusion of the other stories; "Without the historical basis, the myth would be meaningless, with it Dante's claim can be made: this Dante may say, is my own self-conforming with Christ, Christ's truth has become mine, and I believe that my truth points to his." (254) Dante has, therefore, placed two of his stories, the love story and the political story within the same form, which by itself signifies redemption. Onto this form he places a series of filters which distinguish one story from the other or rather express the meaning in two different ways. In this way he achieves a synthesis of his various stories and illuminates the connection between their meanings, showing that the narrative threads may interact as "types." The political story is merely a type of the love story. When Iannucci notes that only with the help of Beatrice can Dante reacquire his true *patria*, not the city of Florence but the city of God in the Empyrean (*Forma ed evento nella Divina Commedia* 138) he is implicitly recognizing this connection.

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As John Freccero suggests, Dante the pilgrim may be seen as the symbol in Platonic thought for "the return of the soul to its heavenly *patria* by the exercise of philosophical wisdom." (*Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* 137)

Ultimately we see that, although the sins and virtues of the inhabitants of the *Commedia* may fall into different classes, they share common characteristics. All of the souls in Hell and to a certain extent, in Purgatory, are there because of a perverted love; a love that was misdirected. As opposed to loving God they were loving his creations (in the case of the love story) or the things of the Earthly City (in the case of the political story). The love story tells of lust which is in stark contrast to the charity described in Augustine's *De doctrina christiana*. The sinners of the *Commedia* loved the wrong things or loved in the wrong way. Politically, sinners are excluded from heaven for the same reason: they moved or looked in the wrong direction. They looked to the Earthly City or they looked to the City of God but not with sufficient devotion.<sup>217</sup> These two notions are synthesized in *Purgatorio* XVIII with the discussion on the nature of love which is then followed by *Purgatorio* XIX, 112 where Adriano V says "Fino a quel punto misera e partita/ da Dio anima fui, del tutto avara:/ or, come vedi, qui ne son punita." The message is clear to both groups: Dante will show them the right way, turn them in the right direction and, once they are converted, he will take them to the end of the journey, home.

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<sup>217</sup> "This distinction has its genesis in Augustine, who refers to the ensemble of men that lead the existence of the 'homo vetus', of the terrestrial man and those who find themselves united by their common love of the temporal things from the earthly city as distinguished from that ensemble of men who are united by the chain of divine love and thereby forming a second city the City of God." (Gilson 200)



## Conclusion

Given the depth and complexity of the *Commedia*, the enormity and longevity of Dante studies is not surprising. It would seem that almost any episode, canto or indeed individual line of the great poem could easily engender an entire study in and of itself. Perhaps it is this richness combined with the inevitable urge to understand each small thing that Dante says, that has produced the meticulous and microscopic examination of even the most minute details that characterizes the classic and enduring *Lectura Dantis*. Such an approach, however, runs the risk of missing the forest for the trees. Even the broader approaches, which look at particular aspects from a global perspective, such as Barolini's work on the poetic influences in the *Commedia*; *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the "Comedy"*, Freccero's *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, and Iannucci's *Forma ed evento nella Divina Commedia* do not directly confront the broad question of the autobiographical intent of the *Commedia*. This is not to say these works are lacking, for they more than adequately respond to the questions they pose; it is just that, to my knowledge, no one thus far has considered that Dante's primary purpose in writing the *Commedia* was to create a comprehensive and lasting record of his own life.

As I have suggested, the reluctance to consider the *Commedia* as substantially autobiographical is likely due to the fact that it bears little resemblance to modern autobiography. However, as I have shown, the *Commedia* follows many of the conventions belonging to an earlier life-writing tradition, which I have termed the

“medieval model,” and ought not to be excluded from the genre of autobiography on the basis of its narrative style or structure. In any event, the *Commedia*, like the medieval model to which it adheres, does exhibit features which are also integral to “modern” autobiography: most importantly, the need to reconcile the meaning of apparently arbitrary and unrelated events within the context of a greater significance. It is this feature which underlies the entire narrative structure of the *Commedia* and which most characterizes the work as autobiographical. This attempt to contextualize and interpret the events of a single life within a greater context is initially highlighted by the intersection of Dante’s journey, “mi ritrovai,” with the journey of “nostra vita” but it is also present in the structure of the *Commedia* through Dante’s use of what Amilcare Iannucci has termed “parallel episodes” (“*Paradiso XXXI*” 471). Such episodes extend the meaning of events beyond their particular settings and across the broader spectrum of the entire *Commedia*. But the quest to contextualize and interpret events is perhaps most evident in the *Commedia*’s persistent adoption of literary models, its absorption of other literary works and its revision of Dante’s earlier attempts at chronicling his life.

Thus we see that in each of the *Vita nuova*, the *Convivio* and the *Commedia*, Dante looks to classical and biblical sources as well as religious writing in order to interpret and contextualize the events which he narrates. In the *Vita nuova*, the presence of techniques and stylistic elements borrowed from the secular lyric (most noticeably, the prosimetric form which recalls the inclusion of *razos* and *vidas*) situates the work in terms of genre. However, Dante’s use of the Augustinian model takes the *Vita nuova*

beyond the lyric tradition and expresses a conversion aspect to the story which unfolds within its pages. Further, biblical allusions hint at a redemptive role of the love which the *libello* chronicles, a spiritual and mystical redemption not contemplated in the *dolce stil nuovo*. This first “Life of Dante”, therefore, not only marks a young writer’s debut on the particular literary scene but also represents an attempt to make sense of the devastating passion of love and to find in it a greater meaning.

The absorption of the *Vita nuova* into the post-exile *Convivio* continued Dante’s quest for meaning in love but infused that quest with a new dimension. Here, Dante’s use of biblical allusion broadens the scope of the *libello* and looks to find meaning in the political events of Dante’s life. The image of Dante as the host of a banquet meting out knowledge allows him to forge a new identity as a redeemer. At the same time, Dante struggles to reconcile this role and the events that precipitated it with the role he carved out for himself in the *Vita nuova*, where he was the redeemed and where redemption came from the mystical love experience and the rejection of the *donna gentile*. Dante attempts to solve this apparent contradiction in roles through the fusion of love and knowledge. By introducing philosophy as the object of his love, Dante proposes that he can be both redeemer and be redeemed. Yet this redemption has a decidedly secular tone notwithstanding its Biblical imagery and its palinodic approach to the *donna gentile* of the *Vita nuova* fails to neatly resolve the apparently different treatment of love in the two works.

It is only in the *Commedia* that Dante satisfactorily reconciles the personal issue of love, the political aspects of his life and his earlier attempts at life-writing. The framing metaphor allows Dante the breadth of scope he needs to address adequately any inconsistencies he may have created between the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio*, between his role as redeemer and redeemed, the true source of redemption, and between the secular and spiritual meaning of the events which comprise both his love story and his political story. Dante's struggle to present an orderly integration of the dominant concerns of his life, his love story and his political story, is also facilitated by the journey metaphor which provides a unifying force through which Dante interprets all of these stories.

Within the journey metaphor, the intersection of Dante's journey with the journey of Everyman is essential to this reconciliation but it is the pattern of descent and ascent which Dante superimposes on this juncture that is the key to understanding it. Dante's descent into Hell and ascent through Purgatory and Paradise create a narrative grid upon which Dante is able to locate all of the events of his life including his previous literary efforts. At the same time, the strong presence and import of this vertical movement within the *Commedia* reflects, narratively, a conventional medieval mode of self-expression. As we have seen, in medieval life-telling the trend was to define oneself in comparative terms, a type of comparison which William Spengemann (36, 37) and Evelyn Birge Vitz (19) referred to as "vertical." That is, the medieval autobiographer sought only to distinguish himself comparatively: in relation to any given attribute the

distinction is expressed in terms of more or less, greater or smaller but not in terms of uniqueness. Dante of the *Commedia*, in his downward and upward journey, typifies this convention and at the same time illustrates how much he is like Everyman even while surpassing him. So while Dante's encounters along this journey contain a myriad of messages, and reflect a variety of agendas, each of which deserves critical attention, they are all, to a certain extent, subordinate to the greater narrative structure of the *Commedia* which is essentially autobiographical. Accordingly, the exemplum aspect of the *Commedia* which is so frequently noted, ought not to overshadow the fact that the story used as an exemplum, the journey toward the divine community, is nonetheless Dante's own. While Dante's intention is that we read the story as representative of Everyman, it is Dante's individual presence which is the basis of the exemplum, the source of his narrative and the bedrock upon which the entire *Commedia* is based.

Finally, Dante's adoption of the vertical scale of comparison demonstrates clearly that he has found a way to include himself in the cosmos and to end the estrangement he encountered in his love life and in his political life. The exercise in personal reconciliation is, therefore, a microcosm of a broader quest, the reconciliation of one's life with the cosmic community of all souls, a quest that is expressed through the intersection of the universal with the particular. The final vision of the *Commedia* is the most telling in terms of the ultimate purpose of the work. Here in the *Paradiso* all of Dante's stories meld into one. The vision of God completes the fusion and provides closure to Dante's life. It affirms his decisions, forgives his trespasses, and prophesies

his afterlife. He may never return to earthly Florence and he may never be united with the corporeal Beatrice but he will reach the City of God and he will know love.

The *Commedia*, therefore, completes the journey started in the *Vita nuova* and resolves the issues presented in the *Convivio*. In presenting not only Dante's own view of the world and its many stories but of his own particular world and his own particular stories, it represents the culmination of his project of self-examination. In predicting Dante's own fate as much as the fate of others, the *Commedia* stands as a testimonial to self-knowledge. As a portrait, painted in the colours of the artist's choosing and autographed by the subject himself, as a "Life of Dante," written and edited by Dante, the *Commedia* represents the essence of autobiography, medieval or otherwise.

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