The Young Dante

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Archetypes of His Early Intellectual Biography

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To Giovanni Bazoli

Genus vero phylosophie sub quo hic in toto et parte proceditur, est morale negotium, sive ethica; quia non ad speculandum, sed ad opus inventum est totum et pars. Nam si in aliquo loco vel passu pertractatur ad modum speculativi negotii, hoc non est gratia speculativi negotii, sed gratia operis.

The branch of philosophy to which the work is subject, in the whole as in the part, is that of morals or ethics; inasmuch as the whole as well as the part was conceived, not for speculation, but with a practical object. For if in certain parts or passages the treatment is after the manner of speculative philosophy, that is not for the sake of speculation, but for a practical purpose.

—Dante, *Letter to Cangrande della Scala*, 40-41

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I want to express my gratitude to Giorgio Mobili who has translated the sections of this work originally written in Italian.

I dedicate this book to Giovanni Bazoli, who encouraged me to pursue this project when it was still in its embryonic stage suggesting also the first part of its title.

Maria Luisa Ardizzone

INTRODUCTION

The book deals with Dante's Florentine years and in particular those of his early intellectual formation between the late eighties and early nineties of the 13th century. They are the years in which Dante composes his first poems and writes his first book, the *Vita nuova*, the years in which the true and absolute event of his life takes place: his meeting with and love for Beatrice.

The volume focuses on Dante's intellectual and sentimental education as is described in the *libello* and moves from his childhood to the death of Beatrice- and afterwards to the two doctrinal canzoni that reveal a new love for a new lady that will later be indicated as the *Donna gentile* and philosophy. During these years, Dante lives in Florence and, as we read in the *Vita nuova*, exchanges sonnets with the poets close to him in age and interests, participates in public life, and initiates his friendship with the older and fascinating Guido Cavalcanti.

A relationship mostly dialectical, made of attraction and refutations in which Dante however begins to identify his emotional attitudes and his intellectual choices. The *Vita nuova* is a romance of formation that shows a personality full of contradictions. The young poet jerks the enterprise of representing himself in a diegetic narrative way and attempts to find a unitarian principle to rule over his life. He discovers it in the idealistic sentimental love for a woman and in the narrative that locates this unitarian principle in interiority and memory. The young Dante impresses his readers with the different traditions he explores and links together in his writings. In drawing his portrait of a young artist, he reveals a new sense of the human being, frail and strong at once. Tears, weeping, uncertainties, and love for solitude shape his sentimental story. In a continuous dialogue with himself he brings in the vernacular prosody the *interior word* as a nucleus that unifies its almost scattered materials.

While representing himself in the first part of the *Vita nuova* as a tormented self because of discordant thoughts, feelings and passions, he frames his portrait in a Florence that is still mostly a village in which social gatherings and events, deaths, mourning, funerals, mark everyday life. In this civic contest Dante starts to tune his rhetorical and poetic instruments, selects the past he wants to revitalize, and shows his penchant for philosophy and theology. But moreover he shows himself to be a man of his time, extremely interested in all contemporary events, both historical and cultural.

Of these years the four chapters of this book consider a trajectory, poetic, rhetorical, philosophical and theological, that the young poet traces, as he establishes the intellectual as paradigm. He begins to shape this model in the *Vita nuova* when he introduces what he calls the matter of praise ("matera della lode"). Both "praise" and the "intellectual" are archetypes of the world he attempts to create and probably the most important at this time (Chapters I and II discuss this in detail).

Praise, an issue mostly neglected and not understood in the field of Dante studies, opens different perspectives, all of which are linked. This matter of praise, which is the real cement of Dante's early intellectual biography, includes his reaction against the learning of medical doctors and Cavalcanti's cultural perspectives and begins Dante's search into the nature of human language and human ontology. It also inaugurates his tormented quest for establishing our partial likeness to the angels-intelligences and the meaning of this likeness. Praise traces a pathway within the *Vita nuova* that, going beyond the margins of the book, enters inside the canzoni that he writes after the death of Beatrice and will comment on years later in the *Convivio*. Listed here under the rubric of praise, they are: *You whose Intellect the third sphere moves* and *Love that speaks to me within my mind.*

The book traces the early intellectual biography of the young Dante, and identifies and discusses some archetypes or primary forms of a thought in progress. Archetypes of a world to be built.

At the start of this intellectual and sentimental journey, we must ask: who is Dante's master? At the center of his fresco the *School of Athens* Raffaello portrays the young Aristotle with his master Plato, walking and talking. They are both philosophers of antiquity, both Greeks. The two books they hold in their hands, Plato with *Timeus* and Aristotle with *Nicomachean Ethics*, indicate the two different pathways that Raffaello suggests can be seen in their continuity and diversity. Around them a crowd of people both past (such as Pythagoras) and future (such as Plotinus or Averroes) connotes the vital importance of the Platonic school through the centuries.[1]

In the *fresco* of the *Vita nuova* and in the two canzoni near to it, to represent someone close to the young Dante in this attitude of familiarity and intellectual relation would be difficult. In spite of this, and according to what emerges from my exploration, Augustine, though he lived almost 10 centuries earlier, would perhaps be the best candidate. But another candidate, a contemporary of Dante, would be Guido Cavalcanti, indicated in the *Vita nuova* as his first friend. The book shows the reasons for this friendship and anticipates those for its death. Around them more authors, though we cannot mention all

[1] Giovanni Reale, *La scuola di Atene di Raffaello*, Bompiani, Milano 2005.

of them, are part of the background that feeds the young Dante. Poets and philosophers both ancient and contemporary, as well as theologians are all part of the intellectual landscape of Dante's early intellectual biography.

The volume claims the Florentine years as a crucible of great importance. An inner sense of the *Vita nuova* that comes out from my rereading is that a book which does not deal with logic at all, shapes a logic of inclusivity that rules and coordinates aspects different of Dante's early intellectual biography. By virtue of this logic, a new perspective on the human being takes form, heralding the beginning of a new era.

This work starts with the rereading of a sylloge, that is of a collection of lyric texts, that Dante does not accomplish, but merely suggests creating a sequence which can be identified with what, starting with the *Vita nuova*, is defined as the theme (*matera*) and style (*stilo*) of praise (*lode* or *loda*). The texts of the sylloge, which begin with the canzone *Ladies who have intelligence of love* and include a group of sonnets, plus in addition the first two canzones that Dante includes in the *Convivio*, reveal a continuity between the *Vita nuova* and the doctrinal Treatise that is announced on a foretold discontinuity. In fact, praise is the unifying element in his love for two different women, a love which the poet himself experiences as conflictive and which, within this sequence of texts, is eventually resolved in favor of the second lady.

The texts in the collection which must necessarily be tied to prose fragments both from the *Vita nuova* and the *Convivio*, reveal an impulse to stray from the norm that, while transcending the perimeter of the *Vita nuova*, fall squarely within the scope of the Florentine years. In discussing the "discontinuous continuity" that the laude bears on the page, this study signals how the choice of the intellectual dimension as a value forms a strong gravitational center—one constituted through a complex stratigraphy and encompassing theological and philosophical learning—which the term praise allows us to identify. Indeed, praise, starting with the canzone *Ladies who have intelligence of love*, allows the entrance of Biblical and Neoplatonic-Christian influences, by which it imposes the intellectual value as the Beautiful (that is also Good), the speculative nature of poetry, and its formative function. On the other hand, the intellectual desire for the divine being and for what resembles it—i.e., the intellectual creatures or angels—declares the ontology of he who desires, and of love itself.

The open relationship between praise and mental word, introduced in the Latin culture of late antiquity by an *auctoritas* as of Augustine of Hippo, and retaken by Gregorius Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, among others, constitutes one of the layers of meaning of Dante's "matter of praise".

We encounter here a first intuition in the Florentine of the existence of a natural language which precedes verbal language as its precondition; a natural language which belongs to all beings, and which—in Neoplatonic-Christian terms—embodies our natural desire to return to our origin. At a certain level, praise appears to be formulated as *vox reditus*, whether or not it is expressed vocally, and thus also as mental language that human beings share with angelic creatures. In the first chapter, I illustrate how Dante gained this awareness through a fragment by Gregorius Magnus. Other important influences must (or could) have been St. Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Creatures*, the *laudari*, perhaps Jacopone da Todi, and certainly, and importantly, Guido Guinizzelli. Dante recovers this tradition, rethinking it vis-à-vis Augustine's writings (in particular his comments on the Psalms), and with a Dionysian awareness. Praise, which Augustine also related to *logos*, was certainly shaped by the centrality of the Word in the Gospel of John, which Dante takes up and proposes again in an Augustinian light, in a dialectic with Cavalcanti's notion of poetry and language.

Taking its bearings from a text by Augustine on the interior word, this book intends to establish the importance that such a theory assumes in Dante as early as the Florentine years, and also to examine through its lens some of the poet's choices throughout his first oeuvre. The relationship between Augustine's theory of the *verbum-logos* and the language of poetry is the premise for understanding one aspect of Dante's projectuality which has hitherto remained unexplored.

Introduced by *Ladies who have intelligence of love*, praise attests to the choice of a content that can be indicated as an archetype: the intellectual, and portends the development of a method that Dante begins to structure during the Florentine years. Constructed on the *exemplum* of the *auctores*, such an archetype reveals itself in a textuality that identifies the theological with intellectual discourse, making the latter the very *modus* of the former.

A reference of absolute value, the intellectual archetype includes the idea of the Good as the exemplary cause according to whose *rationes* all has been made (Pseudo-Dionysius), the notion of the theological discourse as the appropriate way of discussing the divine (Severinus Boethius), and of the intelligible as morally and spiritually beautiful (Augustine). To such an archetype are related and belong the canonical modes of the longing for the divine typical of late ancient and medieval culture: praise or *modus laudis*, the use of *ornatus difficilis*: the transumptive mode, the enigmatic and speculative technique.

Part of it is also the theory of divine ideas taken as a model or example of creation, whose Platonic and Neoplatonic basis, reformulated by

Christian culture, is attested in such thinkers as Augustine, Severinus Boethius, Dionysius, Anselm, Albertus Magnus, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas etc. And it is John Scotus Erigena (IX century) who, having found the term *paradigmata* in the original Greek text of Pseudo-Dionysius' *De divinis nominibus*, maintains it in his own translation: "paradigmata autem dicimus esse ipsas in Deo existentium […] praetextas rationes"[2], tying existent realities to divine paradigms.

As it follows the development of a composite method, my investigation evaluates how, through praise, Dante introduces contents of a theological-philosophical nature and places them in conscious dialectic with a knowledge and a line of thought produced by a culture of which Cavalcanti is a significant representative.

The attempt to reconstruct the dialogue (and clash) between Cavalcanti and Dante as it is formulated in the Florentine years—a dialogue both poetic and philosophical, but also civil —is one of the active "reagents" in this book. Beyond the textual signposts of such a dialogue, an interlinearity must be reconstructed that includes not only the different notion of human beings and their ontology as manifested in the discourse of love, but also the way of understanding poetry and the role it fulfills when it is thought of as being part of the *scientiae eloquentiae*, and thus of civil conversation. The importance Brunetto Latini had given to politics—an "architectural science", and the most important among the sciences according to him, of which rhetoric is a part—harmonized with the new role played by poetry- was made possible by the curricular changes caused by the advent of the new Aristotelian learning. In the course of those changes, poetics and rhetoric were considered disciplines of civil conversation, and thus part of political life, as well as part of logic (considered as *scientia media*), and therefore suitable for mediating between the *scientiae eloquentiae* and the *scientiae sapientiae*.

In Cavalcanti's most important canzone, it is evident that the rhetorical-poetical modes were tied to demonstration, and demonstration was carried out through Aristotelian physics and logic. In Cavalcanti, the awareness of how poetry and rhetoric were both bound to logic was compounded by another awareness, right where the "natural demonstration" ("natural dimostramento," *Donna me prega*, 8) tied physics to a large spectrum of disciplines authorized by the Aristotelian organigram, among which were medicine, optics, and the science of the soul. Thus, it is no longer the canonical sciences of the old *trivium*—grammar, dialectic and rhetoric—but,

[2] Scotus Eriugena, *Expositiones Super De Divinis nominibus*, V, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. CXXII, p. 1150.

rather, the awareness of the developments which were transforming the models of learning that helps explain the new function poetry is called upon to fulfill, a function also closely bound up with the growing awareness of vernacular. Cavalcanti's vocabulary, constructed out of a broad spectrum of sciences, produced a linguistic paradigm where the world of materiality and physics was preeminent. In the years after his first apprenticeship, Dante sets out to establish his own individuality as a poet, introducing contents and a language different from Cavalcanti's, whom nonetheless he greatly admires.

In fact, even as he acknowledges Cavalcanti's preeminence, Dante is already striving to inaugurate a kind of poetry that is aware of the path marked out by Guinizzelli. Starting from *Ladies who have intelligence of love*—a text already found in a truncated version, as is well-known, in the *Memoriali bolognesi*, and included in the *Vita nuova*—Dante's poetry will exhibit a strong intellectual architecture; the canzone itself appears clearly written with the awareness of an existing line of thought to be countered by validating a different one.

In an *inventio* that entrusts its novelty to an apostrophe to *Ladies who have intelligence of love*, the canzone introduces the intellectual dimension articulated in various ways and on different levels, declaring the intellectuality of love as well as the desire to establish such intellectuality within the language of poetry. It ties rhetoric and poetics to the theological field and, through the introduction of the word "praise", announces a methodological choice.

A new leaf is turned, which will become a reference for the Stilnovist poets; not just Cavalcanti, but above all Cino da Pistoia. It is a thesis of this book that the intellectual value which permeates praise delineates a continuity between the *Vita nuova* and the canzoni that will later be commented on in the *Convivio*. It is here that the intellectual archetype—which the apostrophe to the angelic intelligences of *You whose intellect the third sphere moves* will reiterate—takes its first recognizable form. This is a paradigm which both the first two canzoni commented on in the *Convivio* and, later, the prose in the doctrinal Treatise will identify as an object of strong reflection.

Both in Dante and Cavalcanti poetry builds on a composite knowledge; and if poetry is a science of civil conversation, tied to political awareness, then its reading becomes a formative activity for the community, that is, for the citizens of the State be a commune or larger political entity. For this reason, the discourse on the nature of the human being becomes central and centripetal, and indeed vernacular poetry—which had exhibited encyclopedic instances ever since the Sicilians—will voice this issue clearly

with Cavalcanti. A properly political awareness will not emerge in Cavalcanti, however, but in Dante.

The activity of writing poetry and prose, and social life, after all, were like non-dissonant chords, and the *Vita nuova* attests that a bildungsroman—the story of an education in the virtue of love—was developed in the context of a society which in turn became the commentator on backdrop to and chorus of such a narrative of love.

Between the lines, the *Vita nuova* is also the document of a communal life made up of social encounters and parties; a narrative, nonetheless, where conversations and social occasions enjoy a significant and revelatory role[3].

The tight relation between social and civil life and Dante's reflection about the notion of human language as a fundamental tool for communication are convictions that first take shape during the Florentine years. Dante arrives at this perspective in a very personal way, formulating it through the recovery of Augustine's theory of the inner word and the awareness of the *logos-verbum* as a natural bond between humans. To such awareness he will tie his language of poetry. The death of Beatrice, recorded as a civic mourning—"Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo", in the biblical words of Jeremiah's *Lamentations* and announced in a hypothetical letter written "to the princes of the land" (*Vita nuova*, XXX,1)—signals a center of great interest, insofar as it allows us to grasp the relationship between the acknowledged Christological framework of the *Vita nuova* and the logocentric dimension that is thereby revealed.[4]

Within the difficult, yet never accidental, friendship between Dante and Cavalcanti (the two "eyes of Florence", as Benvenuto da Imola defined them), an intellectual dimension takes form which Dante develops over the *Vita nuova* years: the evolution of this dimension and the textuality which it begets are the object of this study. It is my contention that, while the intellectual archetype or paradigm, set in dialectical opposition to Cavalcanti, achieves its formulation in the *Vita nuova* from a theological-philo-

[3] Teodolinda Barolini has emphasized this issue, see Dante, *Rime giovanili e della Vita nuova*, Ed. and Introductory essays by Teodolinda Barolini, vith notes by M. Gragnolati, 2009; and *Dante's Lyric Poetry: Poems of Youth and of the Vita nuova,* Edited with a general introduction and introductory essays by Teodolinda Barolini, with new verse translations by R. Lansing, 2014.

[4] For a reading of the *Vita nuova* from a Christological perspective, see Charles S. Singleton's fundamental discussion in *An Essay on the Vita nuova*. Another fine study on this subject, through from a quite different viewpoint, is Robert P. Harrison's *The Body of Beatrice*.

sophical lineage, this very intellectual choice becomes eventually responsible for Dante's interest in contents that the Parisian condemnations of 1270 and 1277 would brand as heterodox. These contents, revisited and reassessed by Dante, and whose presence I already detect in the first two canzoni which will later be commented on in the *Convivio*, signal both a continuity and a change of course. We can grasp the continuity with certain instances of the *Vita nuova*—instances already identifiable in the canzone *Ladies who have intelligence of love*—by observing how the textuality on which it is constructed gradually turns from theological-philosophical to philosophical-theological, as the new contents—this must be stressed—undergo reexamination vis-à-vis the scriptural tradition.

The encounter with new texts and readings, more or less synchronous with what Dante, through autobiographical fiction, will describe in the *Convivio* as his falling in love with philosophy, is the event that seems to mark the advent of a platonic-peripatetic learning—whose vehicle must have been, among others, the *Liber de causis*—likely absorbed through the lens of its commentators. And here the central role of the intellectual as an archetype is confirmed (see Chapter III).

Thus, we come to identify a first element of interest: the very thought which was deemed to date from the exile years, and which an acute reader like De Robertis—among others—believes can be detected only in the prose of the *Convivio* (De Robertis, 2005), we find actually already problematically formulated in the first two canzoni. The unorthodox temptations of the author of the doctrinal Treatise—unfinished, abandoned, and no circulating for many years after his death—were being at first and partially disseminated through the canzoni already as early as the Florentine years.

The leitmotiv through the texts that we are going to analyze is what Dante calls praise (*lode* or *loda*), which he enacts first in a few poems, reiterates and reinforces in the prose of the *Vita nuova*, and then in the abovementioned canzonis: *You whose intellect the third sphere moves* (*Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete*) and *Love, that speaks to me within my mind* (*Amor che nella mente mi ragiona*). Praise entails a *modus*, i.e., a method, that constructs the *intellectual* as a model, opening the way to a theological discourse which—following in the footsteps of Severinus Boethius (*De Trinitate*)—is formulated *intellectualiter*, and which Dante carries out also with rhetorical-poetic tools.

Tying Augustinian contents to an awareness of Pseudo-Dionysian texts, Dante fine-tunes a transumptive methodology within which he proclaims not merely the celebration of two different women, but also his choice of the field of meanings that such women personify and induce. By identifying

in praise—in its "theme" and "style"—a complex set, Dante de facto enacts an *impositio nominis* through which he unifies elements of different provenance and proceeds to sanction the intellectual and theological foundation upon which they will be organized.

The first chapter, "*Intellectualiter*: An Archetype" rereads *Ladies who have intelligence of love* and what the text of the *Vita nuova* introduces as the "new matter" (XVII, 1) of praise, and examines the layers of meaning that converge therein; it singles out relations between praise and speculation, and between praise and the rhetorical-poetic *adornatio*; and finally addresses the notion of the intelligible as beautiful, an *inventio* that connotes one of the sonnets defined as laudatory and dedicated to Beatrice.

The linguistic problematic with which praise is associated in ancient-medieval culture is an important element not merely in the relation between the praise and the field of speech, but also in the continuity that is established with the two canzoni later commented on in the *Convivio.*

If praise for the new woman characterizes, indeed, *Love, that speaks to me within the mind*, a *modus laudis* is also constitutive of the first canzone, *You whose intellect the third sphere moves*, as I will argue in the third part of this book. The new phase introduced by *You whose intellect*, which announces itself as love for a new woman, highlights an uncharted territory where the woman—not yet assimilated to philosophy, as she will be in the *Convivio*, nor yet defined as gentle (*gentile*)—allows for an early identification of such love. Indeed, the *denominatio* of the new woman as philosophy is absent from the textual documents of the Florentine years, nor is the woman called *gentile* in the canzoni under scrutiny. Nonetheless, the woman is repeatedly associated with the field of gentility, as gentility gradually becomes prominent as an intellectual value. Once established as the specific nature of the new woman, intellectuality opens the way to her relationship with the divine being.

In our reconstruction, what ties the *Vita nuova* to the recalled canzoni is not the problematic of the identification of the so-called gentle woman (*donna gentile*) as it is introduced first in the *Vita nuova* and later in the prose of *Convivio*, but rather, the intellectual paradigm. The canzoni cryptically structure, and radicalize, an intellectual discourse already underway in *Ladies who have intelligence of love*, but develop it vis-à-vis new texts, and in the awareness of a debate that was not detectable in that canzone or in the sequence of praise in the *Vita nuova*.

The choice of the *intellectual* will now include a new Causistic and Aristotelian knowledge, and indeed, the canzoni show their roots in that cultural synthesis of Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism (also Christian) that was typical among those thinkers whom the *Convivio* would later call—

with a term not generic but technical—*filosofanti* (Michaud-Quantin, 1971).[5]

Thus, a novel perspective emerges from our reading: not only do the two canzoni—the second in particular—initiate contents partially tied to so-called "intellectual happiness", but such happiness assumes a significance of which we have no prior evidence, and which therefore seems to be the product of Dante's original thought. Furthermore, it appears that it was precisely the choice of the celestial-intellectual as paradigm as attested in a few sections of the *Vita nuova* that opens the path toward the philosophical metanoia within the space-time in which it took shape.

The angelic model, assumed on a scriptural and theological basis in the canzone *Ladies who have intelligence of love* opens the way to the angelic intelligences of *You whose intellect the sphere moves* and to the role the text assigns to them as movers of the celestial spheres, qua mirrors of the divine being and his mediators in the world of time. The continuity between the first and the second canzone is another piece of the puzzle. A relational logic runs between them, related as they are in content, yet irreducible to a single entity. Now, our hypothesis of a civil consciousness inherent in Dante's early vernacular writing is confirmed, and ties into a meditation on the nature of human language, which Dante views as a phenomenal expression of humankind's intellectual nature: language makes us capable of communicating with our fellow beings and, insofar as it is also an interior language, assimilates us to the angelic intelligences.

This nucleus, whereby the Christocentric framework of the *Vita nuova* includes its logocentric import, evolves in the canzoni into a problematic on the nature of human intellect, articulated in ways that suggests elements of heterodoxy. The relation of praise to *logos* is propaedeutic to the relation between the new Lady and the problematic nature of human intellect—a theme that the second canzone approaches through a citational mosaic constructed around echoes and assonances both philosophical and scriptural (see Chapter IV).

The language of both the canzoni *You whose intellect* and *Love, that speaks*, made up of broad contaminations, allows us to evaluate, through the linguistic areas it implicates, the contents the author thinks in relation. Without anticipating what I shall have to say at length in each chapter, I suggest that what emerges here is the inclination to think in continuity fields that we are accustomed to viewing as separate. The new woman is not only suggested to be both a separate substance and a divine

[5] Pierre Michaud-Quantin, *Etudes sur le vocabulaire philosophique du Moyen Ages*, pp. 103-111.

idea; she is also conceived in relation to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, evincing contents which, though risky and stigmatized, the poet proclaims with the aid of biblical quotations.

From this the necessity arises to understand the meaning of these juxtapositions, which will return in the prose of the doctrinal Treatise. The canzoni (especially the second) do not seem to point so much to a reconciliation of opposite fields as to the need to identify cognitive spaces that must be explored. Different languages, space-time perspectives, and far-flung cultural geographies suggest parallel contents for which the text circumscribes a space of relation. As Dante takes up the *auctores*—his *inventio* is constructed around them—he broadens the authorial spectrum, not merely because he includes more authors, but also because the terrain of relation on which he places them activates new spaces in which old contents may be rethought. And in the canzone—as we will read in the *De vulgari eloquentia*—Dante finds a poetic form most suited for expressing such complexity.

From the praise bestowed on Beatrice and later on the new woman, from the angel clamoring in the mind of God in *Ladies who have intelligence*, we arrive, in *Love, that speaks to me*, at the problematic assumption of the contemplation of a clearly separate, and also unique, substance. The theological-scriptural authorial spectrum becomes gradually more inclusive of Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism, through the mediation of historical readers who tend to address queries concerning human existence on this earth and the possibility of its perfect realization in the world of time. The contemplation of separate substances in life, a theme branded by some as heterodox, is then part and parcel of a reflection that begins in the Florentine years.

The importance of a poetry viewed as formative and part of civil conversation is tied with the question of knowledge. Far from appearing distant or divided, the social engagement, on one side, and the rhetorical, poetical, and philosophical engagement, on the other, seem rather to intertwine, instituting relations that will continue to prosper in the prose works (even the ones in Latin) of the exile years, and then in the *Commedia*. Although this study does not concern itself with politics, it nonetheless detects, in the poetry, a tension that suggests an awareness of the *civitas*. The relation between the linguistic nature of humans and their intellectual activity evinces a cognitive preoccupation which compounds the civil one, foreshadowing stances that will emerge later on.

Dante had arrived at it through texts far apart from those dear to Cavalcanti and his circle, in particular, through that Augustinian line on which he relied for his opposition to Cavalcanti's love for modernity, a love

propelled by a fast-developing learning within the synthesis of philosophy and medicine, and shared by Bolognese physicians such as Taddeo Alderotti and Dino del Garbo— precisely in this milieu will originate del Garbo's commentary on Guido Cavalcanti's *A Lady asks me.* After all, Avicenna and Averroes, whose medical canons were available and translated into Latin, were themselves physicians-philosophers, as was perhaps also Giacomo da Pistoia, who dedicated his *Questio de felicitate* to Guido (Corti, 1981)[6].

It is my contention that the first and second canzone above recalled (later to be included in the *Convivio*) while developing contents in keeping with the intellectual paradigm, assume eventually a taint of heterodoxy in the wake of the Parisian condemnations of 1270 and 1277. The third canzone *Le dolci rime d'amor* will reprise, and in part modify, the contents of the previous two, but also overtly develops a content of social and political nature.

The second chapter, "Understanding Dante's Method", discusses Dante's inclusive method, and the poetic model he constructs . Moreover, it evaluates the bond between the intellectual paradigm and poetry itself.

The Platonic tradition, filtered through Severinus Boethius, on the one hand, and Augustine, on the other, is the reference point for understanding the operation Dante is carrying out in the heyday of Aristotelianism. During the years which Dante will describe as those of his philosophical apprenticeship—that is his falling in love with the donna gentile—the groundwork was being laid for a relation between poetry, theology, and philosophy that would be predicated on the intellectual dimension. The *Vita nuova* formulated a cultural project that made available to the vernacular the spiritual and intellectual dimensions as paradigms of worth, and within which the corporeal dimension, too, was reassessed: the sensible became beautiful insofar as it was the expression of a "beautiful intelligible", and the Good and the Beautiful came to coincide with each other.

The important dialectical relationship between Dante and Guido Cavalcanti soon translated into the need for the former to create a new kind of writing, one that would obtain an audience different from his first friend's. The apostrophes to the women endowed with intellect, then to the angels-intelligences, signal the identification of a new audience incompatible with the old one. And the emphasis on the intellectual value allows us to reconstruct the identity of Dante's potential readers. Cavalcanti's interlocutors are laics, as, at least in part, would be Dante's[7]. But Dante's interlocutors are not the physicians and natural philosophers who are receptive

[6] Maria Corti, *Dante a un nuovo crocevia*, p. 26, and *Felicità mentale*, p. 13.
[7] For the meaning of "laic" in the 13th century, see Ruedi Imbach, *Dante, la filosofia e i laici*, in particular pp. 16-20.

to his best friend's discourse. The "annoying crowd" (*annoiosa gente*) that Cavalcanti bemoans to Dante in a sonnet (*I' vegno 'l giorno a te 'nfinite volte / I come to you countless times a day*)[8], is a crowd whom he deems responsible for Dante's trivial thoughts ("and find you sunk in such debasing thoughts"), signaling a change in the latter's frequentations, the advent of a new public whom Dante would not just ideally address in his writings, but with whom he could engage in dialogue. It was a public composed of laics, part of the lay community close to convents and in contact with the theologians open to Aristotelianism, and probably also of jurists and politicians—as Marti has also importantly suggested[9]. This new non-academic audience, whose existence is confirmed by the circulation of vernacular studies on Ciceronian rhetoric as early as the 1260s (Cox, 2006)[10], will weigh significantly on Dante's writing choices, as we already notice in the *Vita nova*. It was to this audience that Dante addressed *You whose intellect the third sphere moves*, an audience that would perhaps also be capable of understanding *Love, that speaks to me within my mind*.

In this context, the vernacular becomes a tool suited for communication. The novelty of Dante's writing consists in the importance attributed to poetry, in particular to what constitutes its specific language: rhetoric-poetic figures. Crossing an awareness of the *Poetriae* with modes developed by Augustine in the *De doctrina* and in the *De trinitate*, we arrive at the "difficulty" (*difficilis*) as a value, at the enigmatic as a trope speculative and therefore ascensive. Dante takes up the Augustinian theory of language and transforms it by constructing a fragment of his poetics (see Chapter I). In his developing methodology, the relation of thought and word (*verbum*), of the pre-linguistic stratum and language, finds on an Augustinian basis a plural verbality where the segnic-alphabetical level is constructed upon what is thought (*conceptum*). The *inventio* not only finds in the mental word the basis upon which to build writing; it also finds in poetry the linguistic form suitable for rendering such content. The prose, too, will be written according to the same model. Reading this kind of poetry becomes an intellectual exercise.

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[8] Guido Cavalcanti, *Rime*, pp. 159-161.

[9] Mario Marti, *Realismo dantesco e altri studi*, pp. 1-32. See also Marti's entry "Cavalcanti", in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, I, pp. 891-896.

[10] Virginia Cox, *Ciceronian Rhetoric in Late Medieval Italy*, in particular pp. 109-121, and the Appendix, pp. 136-143 (*Vernacular adaptations of Ciceronian rhetoric*, 1260-1500). Cox highlights the importance of the vernacular tradition of scholarship on Ciceronian rhetoric in Italy—in particular in Tuscany—which takes shape in the late 13th century, runs parallel to the Latin tradition, and which Cox situates within the socio-political context of the commune in which it developed.

Reading and understanding (*intelligere*)—henceforth to be valued as synchronous operations—include a desire to transform the conjunction into verb: to read *is* to understand, this introduces the act of reading qua intellectual exercise constructed on a content and on the linguistic modes suitable for pronouncing that content.

What the *De vulgari eloquentia* will call "tragic" begins certainly with *Ladies who have intelligence of love* by explicit textual reference (*De vulgari*, II, 8), but the tragic *coniugatio* is woven on what the canzone introduces as the *ornatus* of praise. This demands that we understand what can tie what is named "praise" to what is indicated as *adornatio* or *ornatus*. Reading becomes an intellectual exercise, but Dante is not the first to write this kind of poetry; Guinizzelli had already developed it in his vernacular, Augustine had theorized it indirectly in *De trinitate* and *De doctrina christiana*. However, it is Dante who invents—within a dialectic made of both admiration for, and repudiation of, Cavalcanti—a kind of writing where the contents tied to an Augustinian learning—and thus Neoplatonic and Christian—become paradigms of a way to conceive poetry whereby reading, speculation, and intellection come to overlap.

Poetry, intellectual inasmuch as it is tropic, proposes a form of communication which, while bound to the idiom to which it entrusts itself, is aware of the universal level that it voices, as the Augustinian inner word is neither Greek nor Latin (*De trinitate*, 15, 10), but rather—as Anselm explains (*Monologion*, 1, 8-10)—inherent in any language.

Even as it traces an intellectual biography, the *Vita nuova* edifies the preeminence of the language of poetry as the language of an intelligence that communicates by virtue of tropes. Within and behind this notion is a way of conceiving the human being, his essence, and the problematic issue of knowledge. Praise opens up a complex horizon that evinces the attention to the linguistic and prelinguistic problem, as well as the attempt to found poetry as an intellectual and formative experience. Praise, traditionally intertwined with the mental dimension and the inner word, opens up to what will become an important aspect in Dante's speculation. Precisely herein originates the invention of the intellectual qua paradigm, which will continue to play a distinctive role in the doctrinal vernacular Treatise, will return in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, and eventually attain its highest celebration in the *Paradiso*.

In this itinerary that begins in the Florentine years, the interior I that Dante focuses on stands in opposition to physicality qua the center of research and interest proper to Cavalcanti and his *milieu*. Thus, the physical forces motivated by corporeality that live inside the human being become in Dante spiritual forces; Cavalcanti's sensorial network breaks down, and from the

wreckage emerges a new man (*homo novus*) of spiritual sensibility whose tears, like those of the desert Fathers, lead us back to the secret that lives within the human being—to the trace of a Divine likeness that must be individually recovered. The choice of the interior I, freed from any precondition of natural philosophy, dissolves in one fell swoop the physical claim by prompting us to read the sensible as an intelligible beauty (a beautiful that has to be understood).

The Cavalcantian idiom untied from physicality that will be adopted by Cino da Pistoia and then taken up by Petrarch and Petrarchism, has its roots in the operation that Dante initiates in the *Vita nuova* and continues in the canzoni of the *Convivio*. The poems and prose fragments examined in this book contain a path and a method. They entail not only the choice of the intellectual paradigm, of the intellectual as the beautiful, of the "gentle" as noble because intellectual or spiritual, and of the honest as something beautiful to be understood; but also—and most crucially—the relation between the transumptive modus and the Christological event that the vernacular proclaims. In this what is earthly, low, and humble conspire to activate a mental dimension that expresses itself in the activity of *transumere* (one thing is said and another is understood), and that becomes a mental habit.

Thus, the human is transposed into the divine, the heavenly into the bodily and vice versa, and the act of reading always entails crossing the boundary between what is being said and what must be understood (see Chapter II below). Poetry qua language of civil conversation, formative because it requires thought, difficult because based on rhetorical-poetical figures that are proper to each language, and natural because built on the images that the human mind can produce—a patrimony of every human being endowed with an imagination that is not only sensorial—comes effectively to sanction, in the awareness of *logos,* a bond between poetry and civil tension. And in *You whose intellect the third sphere moves*, the speculation of the angels-intelligences entails action and intervention in the world of history. In this canzone, the appeal to the angels-intelligences, movers of the third heaven, opens the way to a discourse that must be understood. This is consigned to a cryptic idiom or to relations suggested but not made explicit, where the model or paradigm issues from the highest of contemplations, which is the one proper to such separate substances (Chapters III and IV below).

Yet the angel-intelligence, contemplative and mover of the heavens as in the first line of *You whose intellect*, strongly signals other goals. The intellectual paradigm is propaedeutic. If the angel-mover is a model of behavior, he who understands can be a mover, too, by intervening in the

world of history. To read is to *intelligere*: the *Convivio* will be built on this presupposition. The angel, qua intellectual model, returns in *Love, that speaks to me within my mind*, where the vision is that of the gentle woman, deemed a separate substance and a divine idea which the celestial intellects look up to. The radicality of Dante's operation, measurable in the semantic burnishing that transforms, for instance, the discourse on the astral influence (as we will read in Chapter II), continues in the intellectualization of the woman upon which the divine light descends just as it does on the speculating angels.

What matters is also the figurative, hermetic power of language and the recourse to a tropic speech. The new woman entails a speech by tropes—and tropes are concepts whose enigmatic nature the commentaries can only partially unveil. In actuality, everything that is said entails something else that must be understood: not simply more words, but rather, the taking shape of an action—something that occurs in the text both in the first and in the second canzone. The *Convivio* will grow out of the poetic text as a way to build blocks of knowledge: the canzoni will be recalled by fragments as already known and circulating texts, and their circulation will be the very premise for the writing of the doctrinal Treatise.

A strong role is played by diachronicity. De Robertis, who has made available in critical editions (2002, and 2005) the texts of the canzoni as they were circulating in the years of the *Vita nuova*, sets the textual premises for a reading of them that is independent from the *Convivio* and allows us readers to evaluate their belonging to an intermediate phase, open to both directions—an opening that shines through in the discourse of praise. The role played by the angel-intelligence—who is moved by love of God by virtue of its likeness to him, who desires insofar as it sees and understands, and moves the heavens by effect of an intellectual desire for what it sees—is essential to understanding the discourse that Dante initiates. It is the angels-intelligences, movers by virtue of being speculating beings, that open to the introduction of the new woman (only later defined "gentle") and to her significance as formulated in the second canzone. The problem posed in *Love, that speaks to me within my mind*, is precisely the speculation of a separate substance, not only by the angels-intelligences, but also by humans. And if, by their likeness to such beings, humans are capable of not only speculating but also intervening in the world of history, then it is in the contemplation of the new woman that humans speculate. Speculation seems to drive to action.

That such speculation may entail a relation between humans is the argument introduced in the second canzone, in a remarkable exercise in subtlety. The rhetorical science associated with the heaven of Venus—which,

however, will be expressed just later and only in the comment of *Convivio*—will reinforce the ideological-political level articulated in this canzone. Particularly eminent is the sense of community we perceive behind these lines, typical of an age in which, for several reasons, the notion of *universitas* is constantly being reassessed (Michaud Quantin, 1970).[11] Praise will find a significant role to play also in this respect.

The (only apparent) paradox emerging from this is that, in *Love that speak to me within my mind*, praise—of clear theological valence and associated, in the *Vita nuova*, to the human *logos-verbum*—opens the way to contents tied to the question of a collective (*intelligere*), which appears to coincide with a way proper to Dante of rethinking the theory of human intellect as debated in the second half of the 13th century. The burgeoning civil tension found in the *Vita nuova* is here confirmed and reinforced. The likeness that the first canzone postulates between humans and the angels-intelligences, the latter's status of movers by virtue of being speculating beings, posits in such likeness an implicit desire to see in contemplation an operational value and goal. The fact that the first two canzoni (in particular the first) are composed around the time of the arrival in Florence of Charles Martel—received in the Dominican convent of Santa Maria Novella and officially greeted by Remigio de' Girolami[12]; the fact that Dante in those years was gaining his first experience in the political arena; and, finally, the fact that the third canzone that the *Convivio* will comment would be a text of clear civil awareness, go a long way toward explaining the political value of these canzoni, and in particular the strong content introduced by the second one, something the sanction of which by Cato in canto II of the *Purgatorio,* that recalls the Canzone only seems to reinforce[13].

In canto VIII of the *Paradiso*, Dante will introduce *You whose intellect the third sphere moves*, neutralizing its risky problematic; but that the heavenly princes could be models for the earthly ones was likely a thought that the Dante of the Florentine years planted on a terrain of composite reflections, and which the other two canzoni commented on in the *Convivio* render at least in part explicit.

In this journey, the importance that poetry assumes is part of the novelty, if we evaluate the role that Dante envisions for it. The *Vita nuova* already suggests that prose should be modeled on the poetic text, a suggestion that the *De vulgari* will turn into a fact, but the manner in which poetry comes to be the idiom par excellence of the vernacular, as both informative

[11] Pierre Michaud-Quantin, *Universitas*, pp. 147-153.
[12] See Giorgio Petrocchi, *Vita di Dante*, p. 60.
[13] John Freccero, *Casella's Song*, now in *The Poetics of Conversion*, pp. 186-194.

and formative, is part of what emerges from our present rereading of these texts.

Brunetto Latini, who according to Giovanni Villani was responsible for giving the Florentines an education, defined "big letter" (*lettera grossa*) as the authoritativeness of the word of tradition and of the writing that transmits it. In fact, in his *Rettorica*, Brunetto distinguishes a big letter from a small one (*lettera sottile*). Cicero's letter was big, that of his commentator was small. In other words, big was the letter of tradition, whereas small was the letter of whoever set out to write a comment on the work of an *auctoritas*. In medieval culture, value resided solely in the *auctoritates*, whose works the medieval author was fatally beholden to the task of annotating; but it is precisely by virtue of such preeminence of the *auctores* that poetry, as it set out to incorporate them into its text, eventually managed to constitute itself as big letter.

This tendency typical of the thirteenth century, attested for instance in *Rhetorica Novissima* by Boncompagno da Signa wherein *inventio* means to recover the *auctores*,[14] leads to the value of a text becoming a function of its authority, where authority means the ability to incorporate those writers who are revered as *auctores*.

The fact that the first authors in vernacular were preeminently notaries or jurists has a direct bearing on the type of writing they inaugurate. It is an environment where authority is a function of authenticity, making it eventually possible for the authors to create authority out of authenticity[15]. But when we read a text of vernacular poetry, the relation between big and small letter is reversed, and the large letter becomes the poetic text insofar as it refers to those texts which give it substance and that contemporaries were able to track down. It is by virtue of this phenomenon that poetry becomes an archive,[16] and also that the commentary on a poetic text is born—an activity taken up by Dante himself (in the service of his own poetry) and several others, such as Dino de Garbo, a physician commenting on Cavalcanti's *A Lady asks me*, and Bartolo da Sassoferrato, a jurist who comments

[14] Boncompagno distinguishes a *naturalis inventio* from a *communis inventio*, and explains the latter thus: "inventio communis est apprehensio auctoritatum et exemplorum, que sunt in scientiis naturalibus et positivis, atque consuetudinis approbatis [...]". Boncompagno da Siena, *Rhetorica novissima*, p. 254.

[15] Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La teologia nel XII secolo*, pp. 398-402.

[16] Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* theorizes poetry as an archive or encyclopedia. See in particular the Introduction, and the first chapter: "Poetry and Encyclopedia," pp. 3-33.

on Dante's canzone *The sweet rhymes of love* (*Le dolci rime d'amor ch'io solia*)[17].

In order to be an author, one must have authority, and such authority was conferred by the *auctoritates*; thus, the *auctoritates* were essential in giving force to the big letter, which thanks to them had become the language of poetry. The *inventio* is built on historical memory, whereas the authorities, not always easily identifiable, stake out a non-localizable space of textual intelligence, which will become one of the cornerstones of Western intelligence. It is not an over-sense, nor an allegory (though it will become a part of it), but a different pathway: it is the big letter of the poetic text, insofar as the poem makes the material it incorporates fully its own and synchronous, entrusting to language and images a knowledge that explains and signifies poetry itself. The strength of lyric poetry in the Italian language is partially born of these premises. To us moderns, that kind of writing provides a potential path to follow. The page written in large black ink becomes something to be deciphered; it postulates the blank page to be filled up by interpreters and commentators, and this is by now part of tradition. To research these fields means to identify the ideal archive that this writing creates. Herein lies the strength of our early vernacular poetry, and it is by virtue of this strength that, for centuries now, the practice of reading has been a tool of increasing refinement for the mind that reads. The subtlety (*sottiglianza*, as Bonagiunta Orbicciani, a poet not unfamiliar to Dante, would say) of such practice is a strong component of the Western *paideia.*

Ugo da San Vittore views reading as a building activity (*Didascalicon*), but the *De vulgari* rather construes writing as such. Here we will read how the canzone is the poetic form most suited for a complex discourse, as its author signals by incorporating words such as "connect" (*ligari,* II, 3, 2), "constrain" (*coartare*, II, 3, I) and then "bundle" (*fascem*, II, V, 8) to indicate the set of contents he weaves into his poetic construction. "Bundle" indicates that complexity is a composite sheaf that the reader has to unpack before they can identify its single components. The mind works at drawing parallels, and the different fields must be recognized. Reading imposes the rule of choice. Reason and sensibility run on adjoining tracks, sounds are evocative just like words and images. The ghost of the Tower of Babel is what must be exorcised. Poetry is the new universal language insofar as

[17] Paolo Borsa, "Sub nomine nobilitatis": Dante e Bartolo da Sassoferrato, in *Studi dedicati a Gennaro Barbarisi*, Edited by C Berra and M. Mari. Milano: Cuem, pp. 59–121.

poetic figures are the shared patrimony of all languages and intellects—as Roger Bacon theorized[18].

In the *De vulgari* Dante exalts a mode of writing proper to romance culture. Poetry was the highest language. In poetry Western culture—that is, the European intelligentsia—posited the closed and difficult as a canon of beauty which must be deciphered. Dante calls both Cino's writing and his own a sweeter, subtler style of writing. In the *Vita nuova* he firmly expresses one of the cornerstones of his system: poetry, its close, difficult, tropic language, has value insofar as it is possible to explain it in prose. He writes so in chapter 25 of the *Vita nuova*, where he also establishes one of the nuclei of his method, and where, on the authority of Latin poets, he identifies in the tropes the model to which vernacular poetry must adhere.

Tradition provides the contents and models of writing. But while the figures may derive from ancient classical authors, the new awareness of their use entails a novel Platonic-Christian sensibility: the notion of the difficult as a ladder to the divine qua the absolute intellectual being accords poetry both a new statute and a new status.

This operation inaugurates the modern concept of authorship (Ascoli)[19]. The author is a reader, insofar as he selects a textuality on which basis he can operate with his own writing. Poetry qua cognitive activity was a paradigm elaborated through different avenues that ended up converging: on one hand, the Arab-Aristotelian heritage, which viewed poetry, like rhetoric, as *scientia eloquentiae* and part of both grammar and logic; and on the other, the Augustinian tradition, which viewed poetic language as a ladder to the divine. Italian poetry, in particular Dante's, is built on those premises. Although the relation between logic and poetry (introduced in our poetry by Cavalcanti) and the relation between inner word and *ornatus* (introduced by Dante) may oppose or complement each other, they both conspire in turning poetry into a vehicle for cognitive contents. What is called the "logic of the Moderns" will see in the complex rhetorical figure of *transumptio* a form of logic proper to poetry. Peter of Spain, one of the Wise in the heaven of the sun testifies to it.

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[18] Irène Rosier, *Le Traitement spéculatif des constructions figurées au treizième siècle;* John A. Trentman, *Speculative Grammar and Transformational Grammar*, in particular pp. 289-290.

[19] Albert R. Ascoli's *Dante and The Making of a Modern Author* is now the best study on the concepts of author and authority in Dante, which Ascoli examines throughout the poet's entire oeuvre.

The Italian 13th century introduces the importance of the poetic, and precisely as *fictivus*. What was traditionally deemed the weakest of languages (as Curtius reminds us[20]), is reassessed by Dante from a radically different perspective. The *fictivus* that looks to the *auctores* is precisely what contributes to make poetry intellectually strong. The prose commentary, both in the *Vita nuova* and *The Convivio*, entails the strength and importance of the *poeticus-fictivus*; the *fictivus* qua tropic and the difficult become a ladder to the highest intellectual being. Severinus Boethius theorizes that God, because the highest intellectual being, demands an intellectual operation; in Augustine, the intellectual and the difficult are tightly bound up; and Alain de Lille, too, ties the tropic-transumptive to the intellectual. A poetry constructed around the tropic and enigmatic, rendered in transumptive language, becomes the appropriate language for discussing what pertains to the intellectual realm. It is only fitting, then, that poetry should be the very nourishment (vivanda) of the *Convivio.*

[20] Ernst R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages,* pp. 223-224.