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Love and Civitas: Dante's Ethical Journey in the Vita Nuova

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This dissertation examines Dante’s love for Beatrice, which begins as erotic passion accompanied by reason, and slowly develops into a well-ordered passion defined by the poet/lover’s interaction with the people of Florence. My study investigates Dante’s Vita Nuova through the lens of ethics, specifically literary ethics as it is formulated by the twentieth century philosopher Emanuel Levinas. Informed by Levinas’s philosophy, which defines ethics as an infinite responsibility to the other, I argue that Dante creates an ethical link between his poetry and the civitas. As I discuss the development of Dante’s love, I frame the three phases of the Vita Nuova in light of St. Bonaventure’s teaching, which outlines the mind’s journey to God, in his Itinerarium mentis in Deum. Here he delineates three stages through which the mind passes as it journeys toward God: the extra nos, with its focus on things external; the intra nos with the focus on things internal; and the supra nos, focused on things above. Dante’s libello establishes the poet’s idea of love, which is also connected to moral philosophy, and hence is the expression of his responsibility, as poet and lover, vis-à-vis Beatrice and the citizens of Florence.
Love and Civitas: Dante’s Ethical Journey in the Vita Nuova

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Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Love and Civitas: Dante’s Ethical Journey in the Vita Nuova

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# Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 7

Chapter One  

The Link between Love and Civitas ................................................................. 16

Chapter Two  

St. Bonaventure, the “Chorus of Ladies,” and the Ethics of Poetry ............................ 34

Chapter Three  

The Ethics of Representation:  
The God of Love and the Donne Schermo .................................................. 59

Chapter Four  

The Loss of Beatrice and the Ethics of Pilgrimage ............................................. 79

Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 100

Bibliography ........................................................................................................... 105
Introduction

The *Vita Nuova* is the work of a young poet at the inception of his career\(^1\), as he contemplates natural love which points to *caritas*. Embedded in the tradition of troubadour poetry, the *Vita Nuova* establishes Dante’s new poetics of praise. In the *Vita Nuova*, Dante investigates the essential link between poetry and ethics, which he further develops later, in the *Convivio*, and especially in the *Commedia*. My dissertation examines Dante’s love for Beatrice, which begins as erotic passion accompanied by reason, and slowly develops into a well-ordered passion defined by the poet/lover’s interaction with the people of Florence, as well as with the pilgrims (strangers who come from afar), who cross the city. My study investigates Dante’s *Vita Nuova* through the lens of ethics, specifically literary ethics as it is formulated by the twentieth century philosopher Emanuel Levinas. Informed by Levinas’s philosophy, which understands ethics as an infinite responsibility to the other, I explore the prose commentary and poems of the *Vita Nuova* as they relate to the concepts of “le dit” (the said) and “le dire” (the saying) and how they help to interpret a new perspective on Dante’s ethics of poetry. For Levinas, the Said is ontological, it is the language of being, that which makes the poetic word identifiable and human. Critchley explains it as the substance of the poet’s words and their distinctive meaning through which truth or falseness can be determined: “The said is a statement, assertion or proposition of which the truth or falsity can be ascertained.”\(^2\) The said preexists our act of communication, for as Levinas

\(^1\) Dante had already written several poems, and some of these were included in the *Vita Nuova*.

points out, “Being would… manifest itself as already invoked in silence and non-human language” (Otherwise than being, or, Beyond Essence 135).³

Saying, by contrast, is ethical – our exposure and undeniable responsibility to the other. It is infinite and beyond our comprehension as it moves the Ego toward the Other. While the said may be identified as the distinctive meaning of one’s words, the saying may be identified as the fact that those words are addressed to an interlocutor⁴, and thus reflect the subject–object relationship; “The saying and the said in their correlation delineate the subject-object structure,” (OB, 46) writes Levinas.

In this study I argue that Dante creates an ethical link between his poetry and the civitas. Throughout the Vita Nuova, the protagonist is continually defined by the vital connection which exists between eros, ethics, and caritas.

The first chapter begins with an examination of the prose of Chapter III in which Dante describes his dream of the god of Love, who appears with Beatrice in his arms. This episode brings to mind Newton’s argument that the narration of a story and the fictionalizing of a person or persons has ethical consequences which bind the teller, listener, and reader.⁵ Dante, thus, creates an ethical relationship between the episode of the narration of the dream – the said – and the address to the interlocutors – the saying. “Narrative, as a participatory act,” writes Newton, “is part ’said’ and part ‘saying,’ the latter – the level of intersubjective relation – being the site of surplus, of the unforeseen, of the self-exposure” (Newton 3). Dantes’ presentation of his dream to the fedeli d’Amore – the elite group of his fellow poets – confirms Newton’s statement:

³ Hereafter I abbreviate Otherwise than Being as OB.
⁵ Adam Zachary Newton, Narrative Ethics (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
“Pensando io a ciò che m’era apparuto, propuosi di farlo sentire a molti li quali erano famosi trovatori in quello tempo” (VN III:9). The subject-object structure is evident, and thus substantiates the ethical relationship between the said and the saying. It simultaneously underscores the poetic ethos which Dante interjects in the next line: “E con ciò fosse cosa che io avesse già veduto per me medesimo l’arte del dire parole per rime, 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” (VN III:9). This is also manifested in Dante’s sonnet as he invokes the response of Love’s élite. Such an ethos brings to mind Levinas’s understanding of the said as the esse ipsum, when he states, “To make the evocation of being, which makes a poem possible resound in a poem would be to make a said resound” (OB 135).

Dante’s sonnet A ciascun’alma presa is the resounding said which elicits a reaction from both the poets and the reader, underscoring the sonnet’s phenomenological characteristics as, in the words of Levinas, “the language which poetry puts into human words” (OB 135). My examination of this episode and of the sonnet A ciascun’alma presa logically leads to an analysis of Guido Cavalcanti’s corresponding sonnet Vedeste al mio parere onne valore, in which he responds to Dante’s request in an attempt to interpret the dream, which ultimately fails. The focus of my analysis is the ethical relationship between Dante’s said and Cavalcanti’s saying,

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6 All the citations and translations from the Vita Nuova in this dissertation come from D. Cervigni and E. Vasta’s edition, (Notre Dame, IN: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). “Thinking upon that which had appeared to me, I resolved to make it known to many who were famous troubadours at that time.”

7 “And since I myself had already seen to the art of saying words in rhyme, I resolved to compose a sonnet, in which I would greet all the faithful of Love; and requesting them to judge my vision.”

8 See Otherwise than Being, p. 135
nearly the said “called to account in the saying”\textsuperscript{9} In the first two lines of his sonnet Cavalcanti addresses Dante’s request, thereby imprinting the traces of his saying on Dante’s said:\textsuperscript{10} “Vedeste, al mio parere, omne valore / e tutto gioco e quanto bene om sente”(Vedeste al mio parere, vv. 1–2).\textsuperscript{11} While Dante initiates the subject-object relationship – in petitioning the fedeli d’Amore – Cavalcanti’s response acknowledges his irrefutable responsibility as interlocutor, in which, in Levinasian terms, the concept of universality is apparent. Ciaramelli emphasizes Levinas’s claim of universality when he states: “the claim made upon me by another, insofar as it is addressed not only to me but to everyone, is the basis of the universality of ethics” (Ciaramelli 92).\textsuperscript{12} I treat these two sonnets more extensively in my first chapter as they are fundamental to my discussion of the ethics of poetry.

In the second chapter of my study, as I discuss the development of Dante’s love, I frame the three phases of the Vita Nuova in light of St. Bonaventure’s teaching, which outlines the mind’s journey to God. In his Itinerarium mentis in Deum, Bonaventure delineates three stages through which the mind passes as it journeys toward God: the extra nos, with its focus on things external; the intra nos with the focus on things internal; and the supra nos, focused on things above. The first phase of the Vita Nuova resembles the extra nos stage as the lover focuses on things external, such

\textsuperscript{9} In his book Narrative Ethics, Adam Zachary Newton discusses Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” of which he claims is constructed around a framework of “intersubjective relation accompanied through story,” which he then goes on to identify as ethics. “That armature is what I call ethics: narrative as relationship and human connectivity, as Saying over and above Said, or as Said called to account in Saying; narrative as claim, as risk, as responsibility, as gift, as price.” Narrative Ethics (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995)
\textsuperscript{10} Here I paraphrase Wyschogrod.
\textsuperscript{11} All citations and translations of Cavalcanti’s poetry in this dissertation come from M. Cirigliano’s Guido Cavalcanti: The Complete Poems, (New York: Italica Press, 1992). “If it were mine, you’d see every value / and joy and good feeling.”
\textsuperscript{12} See Fabio Caramelli’s “Levinas’s Ethical Discourse between Individuation and Universality” in Re-reading Levinas (Indiana Press, 1991), p.92
as the greeting of his beloved as well as on other events or experiences which cause him to focus on external reality. My examination centers on the significance of Beatrice’s greeting, and its role in the development of Dante’s love, especially how he moves from the extra nos stage to the intra nos.

With the canzone *Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore* (Ladies who have intelligence of love), the lover progresses from the stage of *extra nos* to that of *intra nos*, the second level in Bonaventure’s progression in which love manifests itself within the lover. This progression is essential to the total economy of the work as the poet/lover realizes that his beatitude does not come solely from the greeting of his beloved, but from his own words which praise her. Dante’s realization reinforces the role of Beatrice as the essential link between the power of *eros* and divine grace:

> E quando trova alcun che degno sia
di veder lei, quei prova sua vertute,
ché li avvien, ciò che li dona, in salute,
e si l’umilia, ch’ogni offesa oblia. (VN XIX:10, vv.37-40)\(^\text{13}\)

This link, I argue, is the catalyst through which ethics is perfected into the Christian theological virtue of *caritas*. The phrase *alcun che* refers to the stranger, the other, whom Beatrice deems worthy of her greeting (saluto), through which this “other” receives salvation (salute).

My examination of the canzone *Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore*, which initiates Dante’s new poetics of praise, leads to a discussion of the concept of *morum probitas*, as articulated in the *De Amore* by Andreas Capellanus. While love may begin as erotic passion, it must be tempered by the guiding light of reason as it refines the virtue and moral character of the lover. Inherent in the concept of *morum probitas* is the idea that

\(^{13}\)“And when she finds someone worthy / to behold her, he experiences her power, / for what she gives him turns to salvation, and so humbles him that he forgets every offense.”
love is the source of all goodness, and that a lady will accept a lover only after he has proven that he is sufficiently probus. Capellanus emphasizes that strong moral character is essential to the lover’s proper advancement in the ways of love. Based on Capellanus’s concept Dante creates an association between Beatrice and the coro delle donne. As the ladies question the lover about his love for his lady, he comes to realize that he has focused too much on Beatrice’s greeting, and has ignored “quello che non [mi] puote venire meno” (VN XVIII:5). In his realization that his true beatitude comes from the praise of his lady, the lover advances from the extra nos to the intra nos stage. More importantly, however, Beatrice becomes a fundamental link between the natural power of eros and divine grace, and thus ethics is perfected into the Christian theological virtue of caritas, as exemplified by his dialogue with the coro delle donne, which is emblematic of the civitas.

Finally, in this chapter, I examine the last sonnet of the Vita Nuova, in which Dante proclaims that his heart is drawn upward by an “intelligenza nova” (VN XLI:10). His focus on things above, in conjunction with this new intelligence, demonstrates to the reader that the lover has achieved the final stage of love – supra nos – and thus comes to understand that eros, accompanied by virtue and reason, has the potential to develop into caritas.

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14 In his essay “Dante: Within Courtly Love and Beyond,” Singleton argues that Beatrice guides Dante “toward that Good beyond which there is nothing to aspire to”. He goes on to point out that “the reader too has his will directed by this miracle named Beatrice”. C. Singleton, “Dante: Within Courtly Love and Beyond” in The Meaning of Courtly Love, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1967).
15 “that which cannot fail [me].”
16 See Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologica in which he argues that grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it: “gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit” (Summa I:1, 8).
17 “a new intelligence.”
The third chapter focuses on the function of the god of Love and the \textit{donne schermo} (screen ladies), as poetic elements, within the parameters of the ethics of poetry. In the first part of the chapter, I examine how Dante’s representation of the god of Love, as the “said,” within the \textit{Vita Nuova}, functions as an echo of the troubadour tradition. At times speaking in the vernacular and at others in Latin, the god’s words emphasize the connection between the ethics of poetry and the \textit{civitas}. This examination opens a discussion of the importance of the vernacular, which is informed by my reading of Picone, Gorni, and DeRobertis. The vernacular is the medium through which the human experience is expressed. Imitating the Creator, the poet – on behalf of humanity – employs the vernacular to generate beauty and symmetry through language, while establishing a connection with the divine. As Picone notes, “La creatura si avvicina così al Creatore, e lo strumento di approximazione le è dato dal linguaggio” (Picone 6).\footnote{See the first chapter of Picone’s \textit{Vita Nuova e tradizione romanza}, (Padova: Liviana, 1979) in which he discusses the importance of the vernacular. “The creature becomes like the Creator, and the instrument of approximation is given to him through language” (My translation).} Dante establishes, at the very beginning of the work, the god of Love as master and guide to the protagonist, while in a dream the lover hears the god utter the words “Ego dominus tuus.”

The \textit{donne schermo}, two ladies whom Dante chooses to serve as a “schermo de la veritade,” (VN V: 3)\footnote{“screen to the truth.”} are an essential element of Dante’s ethics of poetry. These women point to the ethics of love as expressed in Cappellanus’s concept of \textit{morum probitas}; they hide Dante’s love for Beatrice from the people of Florence who would gossip and mock their love. Thus they function as a fundamental example of
representational ethics, as described by Newton. He argues that at some point the power of fiction to represent submits to the absolute power of ethical responsibility. The idea of the “doubling of reality” connects the very act of representation to the poet’s responsibility to the entire civitas, as well as to his reader. In light of Newton’s statement, I examine the function of the donne schermo as a representation of the beloved, and thus as an essential element of Dante’s ethics of poetry.

Following the death of Beatrice two themes emerge in the Vita Nuova which are the focus of my fourth chapter. The first is the theme of loss which emphasizes the link between love and the civitas, as the poet urges the city to share in his grief. The poet expands his audience from his previous interlocutors to the entire civitas, as he calls upon his fellow citizens to join in his loss. My examination of the theme of loss brings about a discussion on Levinas’s philosophy of responsibility to the other, and how the face of the other demands a response. While my discussion focuses on the reciprocal responsibility between Dante and the members of the civitas, I also explore the poet’s responsibility to his reader as explained by Newton.

The second theme which I explore in Chapter Four is the theme of pilgrimage (peregrinatio) with its deep link to the theme of civitas. Following Beatrice’s death, Dante encounters a group of pilgrims who pass through Florence on their way to Rome. These pilgrims become part of Dante’s larger audience and they bring the ethics of his poetry to the civitas and beyond. As pilgrims they are exiles away from their homes and

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20 Newton’s definition of Representational Ethics is “the cost incurred in fictionalizing oneself or others by exchanging ‘person’ for ‘character’” Narrative Ethics, pp. 17-18.

21 After a lengthy quote from Levinas, Newton discusses the “idea of essential doubling of reality” which he states, “ties acts of representation to responsibilities in a way which parallels... the underlying conditions of actually telling a story... fiction’s modus vivendi – its power to represent – at some level gives way before the more severe and plenary power of ethical responsibility” Narrative Ethics, p. 19.
in search of a final destination or spiritual home. The poet/lover identifies with them for since the loss of his beloved he, also, is an exile on a journey, in search of the source of his happiness. My examination of the sonnet “Deh peregrini” leads to a discussion of how Dante’s use of language (his said) becomes a link between him and the pilgrims, and that the reciprocal responsibility between the pilgrims and the lover (the saying) is revealed through the sonnet. I argue that the saying transcends the said, which through Dante’s responsibility creates the fundamental link between love and civitas. Equally significant is the reader’s responsibility of interpretation which is comprised of both the private act of reading the text, and the public act of discussing it.\(^\text{22}\)

Dante’s *libello* establishes the poet’s ethics regarding the lover and the *civitas*, which he later develops and emphasizes in his *Commedia*. My analysis of the *Vita Nuova* demonstrates the essential link between *eros*, ethics, and *caritas* defined by the poet/lover’s interaction with the people of the *civitas*.\(^\text{23}\)

\(^{22}\) See Newton’s *Narrative Ethics*, p. 19.

\(^{23}\) It is important to note that throughout the *Vita Nuova* Dante never mentions Florence by name, thus giving a “universality” to the concept of *civitas*.\(^\text{23}\)
Chapter One

The Link between Love and Civitas

With its roots in the tradition of troubadour poetry, the Vita Nuova distinguishes itself as it introduces Dante’s new poetics of praise. It also functions as a foreshadowing or a first stage in Dante’s exploration of the importance of linking ethics to poetry, as seen later, in the Convivio, and especially in the Commedia. In this chapter I examine the vital link between eros, ethics and caritas, offering a fresh interpretation of Dante’s philosophy of love. I argue that as his love becomes more virtuous, that is to say more disinterested, there is a fundamental shift from the ethos that links Dante to the courtly love tradition and the fedeli d’Amore (his fellow poets and stilnovisti) to the ethos that links him to the “coro delle donne” (chorus of ladies) who have “intelligence of Love,” whom Dante addresses as his new audience and interlocutors. As I examine Dante’s ethics of poetry, I use Levinas’s philosophy of the “said” and the “saying” as a lens through which one is able to gain a distinct perspective and appreciation for Dante’s ethical treatment of the people with whom he interacts.

For Emanuel Levinas, the concept of the said and the saying is the basis of the ethical relationship between the self and the Other. He emphasizes that the said – a statement or the identifiable word – is ontological, while the saying – an infinite response to the Other – is ethical.24 The concept of the saying and the said is essential to my study, as

I examine Dante’s ethical interaction with the civitas. Below I discuss, in greater detail, the elements of the said and the saying, and how they are reflected in Dante’s ethics of poetry. I find the correlation between the said and the saying, to be fundamental to Dante’s Vita Nuova, for it is through this relationship that Dante establishes an ethical connection between his poetry and the civitas.

The domain of ethics, as Edith Wyschogrod states, is not a symmetrical plane on which everyone is equal. Instead, she argues, the “self and the other are absolutely asymmetrical”\(^{25}\). This asymmetrical structure is visible in the relationship in which the self (subject) – in extreme passivity – accepts unlimited responsibility for the other (object). This relationship is reflected in the correlation between the said and the saying, which, as Levinas articulates, “delineates the subject-object structure” (OB 46). For Levinas, the saying thematizes the said, while signifying it to the other. Such a signification, however, is defined by the words in the said, and occurs, as he indicates, in proximity\(^{26}\) of the self to the Other. What, then, is the significance of one’s ethical relationship with the other, and how is it to be understood? How is the ethical link between love and civitas manifested in Dante’s Vita Nuova?


\(^{26}\) Levinas understands proximity to be a relationship of responsibility to the Other, and I shall discuss this concept in greater depth later in this chapter.
La maravigliosa visione – part said, part saying

Beginning with his first dream, the poet/lover, through the recounting of the “maravigliosa visione,” (VN III:3) creates a bond which joins him ethically to his listeners and readers. It is helpful to recall the discussion of Adam Zachary Newton, who distinguishes three categories within narrative ethics. The first of these is narrational ethics, which he understands as the structure of exchanges which exists between the storyteller, listeners and readers, and the responsibilities that result from the act of narration. The other two are representational ethics and hermeneutic ethics, which I discuss in depth in the third and forth chapters of this study.

Applying Levinas’s philosophy, Newton equates narrational ethics with the saying, as it is the “intersubjective responsibility” (Newton 18) which is borne out of the act of storytelling. Narrator and interlocutor are joined in a discursive relationship prompted by the text – the narrative – which results in exposure to both the storyteller and the reader. Newton’s claim that narrative is “part said and part saying” (Newton 3) underscores my thesis that there exists in Dante’s poetry an ethical dimension through which his love for Beatrice is manifested and which binds him to the people of Florence.

How does Newton’s statement relate to the Vita Nuova? The combination of prose and verse, which constitute the Vita Nuova, establishes Dante’s said in his narration of the events and encounters of the work. His saying is established in his relationship and approach to the many characters and groups of people with whom he comes into contact, which he relays through his said. It is evident that both the ontological said and

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27 "Marvelous vision".
the ethical saying are united to create a literary work whose narrative is ethical in its essence.

As Dante narrates the story of his meeting Beatrice, he reveals himself, in an ethical manner, to both the people of Florence, and his readers. From the very beginning when Beatrice first appears to him, Dante assigns her several attributes which immediately establish her nobility: “Apparve vestita di nobilissimo colore, umile e onesto, sanguigno, cinta e ornata a la guisa che a la sua giovanissima etade si convenia” (VN II:3-4). The terms nobilissimo, umile, and onesto, emphasize the virtue of Beatrice, while simultaneously underscoring her ontological qualities. Honesty, humility and nobility create the foundation upon which the character of Beatrice is built, and which is described by De Robertis as “quell’ideale di vita e di umanità perfetta che in essa è esaltata” (De Robertis 14). The virtue of nobility is reinforced in the color of her clothing. As the color red represents nobility, could Dante give his lady anything but a shade of this noble color? Gorni points out that, “se il colore rosso per eccellenza è il rosso, sanguigno, che ne tempera il cromatismo con tinte più cup e violette, tendenti al nero, sarebbe perciò detto nobilissimo” (Gorni 7). While the color of Beatrice’s vestments reinforce her virtue, it also points to her role as figura Christi, as Graziano indicates in her association of the blood-red clothing and the blood of Christ’s passion.

28 “She appeared humbly and properly dressed in a most noble color, crimson, girded and adorned in the manner that befitted her so youthful age.”
29 D. De Robertis, Il libro della “Vita Nuova”, Firenze: Sansoni, 1970. “…that ideal of life and of perfect humanity which in her is exalted.” (My translation)
30 See G. Gorni’s edition of the Vita Nova, Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1996, “…if the color par excellence is red, blood-red, which tempers the chromatic with somber and violet tints, stretching toward black, would be as stated most noble.” (My translation)
While I have made a case for the virtuous significance of the color of Beatrice garment, I would suggest that the eroticism is also represented in this color. Dante tells us that upon seeing Beatrice for the first time his senses were awakened: “In quello punto lo spirito animale, lo quale dimora ne l’alta camera ne la quale tutti li spiriti sensitivi portano le loro percezioni, si cominciò a maravigliare molto” (VN II:5). In this episode we recognize *eros* as the life force which draws two lovers toward each other. Dante, however, is quick to inform the reader that this is not a selfish, self-serving *eros*, but one guided by reason:

> E avvegna che la sua imagine, la quale continuatamente meco stava, fosse baldanza d’Amore a segnoreggiare me, tuttavia era di si nobilissima vertù, che nulla volta sofferse che Amore mi reggesse senza lo fedele consiglio de la ragione in quelle cose là ove cotale consiglio fosse utile a udire (VN II:9-10).

A love guided by reason, while it may have a passionate element, is ethical, as is evident later in the work when the poet explains that the mere greeting of his beloved filled him with charity, and caused him to forgive anyone who may have offended him. The narration of this episode underscores the ethical aspect of Dante’s poetry. Beatrice becomes the connection between Dante and the *civitas*, and thus indirectly the conduit which carries Dante’s poetic ethics to both his city and the reader. Focusing on Beatrice’s *ineffabile cortesia*, Dante strengthens the enigmatic link between love and ethics:

> e passando per una via, volse li occhi verso quella parte ov’io era molto pauroso, e per la sua ineffabile cortesia, la quale è oggi meritata nel

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32 “At that point the animal spirit, which dwells in the upper chamber to which all the spirits of the senses carry their perceptions, began to marvel greatly.”

33 “And although her image, which constantly stayed with me, gave Love its strength to rule over me, it was nevertheless of such noble power that at no time did it allow Love to rule me without the faithful counsel of reason, in those things where such counsel was useful to heed.”
The words *ineffabile cortesia*, *virtuosamente*, and *beatitudine* reflect the narrative ethics of Dante’s *libello*, in light of Newton’s statement that prose fiction has the ability to produce “its own transactional procedures within the text” (Newton 59). The lover’s fear, which he feels in the presence of his lady, is replaced with understanding of her virtue and ineffable courtesy. The character of Beatrice is ethical in that she extends her courtesy, not only to the poet/lover, but to all with whom she comes into contact. Thus the circumstance, borne out of the act of narration, accentuates an ethical relationship between the poet and his lady. The “transactional procedures,” lead to the formation of power relations, which are created both in and by the text. Beatrice’s greeting is one example, for it serves as a strong connection between her and the protagonist, as well as the basis for their relationship. The greeting of the beloved demands a response from the lover, ultimately binding the author and the character. When Dante tells the reader that Beatrice’s greeting leads him to forgiveness, he creates a link between poet and protagonist which underscores the ethical element of the narrative act. I shall revisit this concept below in my discussion of Dante’s relationship with the *fedeli d’Amore*.

The meeting of his beloved leads the poet/lover to retreat to his room, where he falls asleep, only to dream of her being embraced by the god of Love:

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34 “...and passing along a street, she turned her eyes to that place where I stood in great fear, and in her ineffable courtesy, which today is rewarded in life everlasting, she greeted me with exceeding virtue, such that I then seemed to see all the terms of beatitude.”

35 See Newton p. 13.
e ricorsi a lo solingo luogo d’una mia camera, e puosimi a pensare di questa cortesissima. E pensando di lei, mi sopragiunse uno soave sonno, ne lo quale m’apparve una maravigliosa visione” (VN III:2-3).36

The dream becomes the catalyst for the first sonnet of the Vita Nuova which he offers to the fedeli d’Amore for interpretation. The prose, which precedes the poetry, establishes the structure of the Vita Nuova as it interprets the lyrics which follow. De Robertis writes that the “prosa ripropone le immaginazioni della poesia con mezzi e in termini nuovi, sotto un’altra luce,” (De Robertis 5)37 thereby reinforcing the hermeneutic quality of the prose.

Apart from its hermeneutic function, the prose of Chapter III of the Vita Nuova establishes the subject-object relationship between Dante and Beatrice, as the poet/lover recounts the dream – the manifestation of his desire. In the dream the god of Love appears to the protagonist, holding in his arms “una persona dormire nuda” (VN III:4)38 emphasizing the natural power of eros. As I have mentioned above, Dante has already stated that his love was always accompanied by the guiding light of reason (VN II:9), and he quickly mitigates the erotic image of the sleeping Beatrice by qualifying that she was “involta…in un drappo sanguigno” (VN III:4),39 thus emphasizing her virtue, which for Dante is part passion and part nobility, as he clarifies later in the Convivio:

E rende esempio ne li colori, dicendo: sì come lo perso dal nero discende, così questa, cioè vertude, discende da nobilitade. Lo perso è uno colore misto di purpureo e di nero, ma vince lo nero, e da lui si dinomina; e così la vertù è una cosa mista di nobilitade e di passion; ma perché la

36 “and resorted to the solitary place of my room, and set about thinking upon this most courteous one. And thinking of her, I was overcome by a sweet sleep, in which there appeared to me a marvelous vision.”
37 De Robertis: “the prose suggests anew the immaginations of the poetry with new means and in new terms, under a different light.” (My translation). See also Raffaele Pinto, who elaborates on the hermeneutic importance of the prose in his essay “Il sogno del cuore mangiato (VN III) e i due tempi di Beatrice”, in Quaderns d’Italià 13, 2008.
38 “a person asleep, naked”.
39 “wrapped in a crimson cloth”.

22
nobilitate vince quella, è la vertù dinominata da essa e appellata bontade (Convivio IV, xx:2).  

In the dream, Dante notices an object engulfed in flame, explained by the god of Love as the poet/lover’s heart, “Vide cor tuum,” (VN III:6) which the god then feeds to the lady. Having fed the heart to the lady, the god of Love bursts into tears as he, with the lady wrapped in his arms, seems to ascend to heaven. The scene so disturbs the poet/lover that he wakes from sleep. In the very act of narrating the dream Dante establishes an ethical relationship with his readers. The narration – his said – is his statement or declaration, his words and their identifiable meaning. This is the essence of the said, an assertion through which the truth can be determined, which Levinas claims is the “intersubjective representation of being” (OB 135). Thus we understand the said to be ontological in its articulation of being, or better stated, the said is the language of ontology. The I who narrates the events, “che essendo una esperienza tutta interna,” as Pinto writes, is the Da-Sein – that being which looks at its surroundings, its “place” – and comes to interpret itself in that locus (Da). Dante’s narration of his dream, therefore, the interpretation of his world, renders his said ontological.

40 “It provides an analogy based on colors, saying that just as perse derives from black, so does this, namely virtue, derive from nobility. Perseis a color composed of purple and black, but black predominates, so it takes its name form black. Likewise virtue is a thing composed of nobility and passion, but because nobility predominates in it, virtue takes its name from it and is called goodness.” All quotes from the Convivio, throughout this study, come from the Edizione critica a cura di Maria Simonelli, (Bologna: Casa Editrice prof. Riccardo Pàtron, 1966); the English translations come from the translation by Richard H. Lansing, (New York:Garland, 1990). Graziano echoes Dante when she writes, “Il sanguigno è un colore nobilissimo perché semplice nelle sue proporzioni calcolabili,” reinforcing the connection between the color red and virtue. See Graziano, “Sul colore rosso di Beatrice: L’epifania poetica sella lingua del si” in Critica Letteraria, 2, 2009.

41 “Behold your heart.”


43 In the Cambridge Companion to Levinas, John Llewelyn gives a very thorough explanation of the concept of Da-Sein, comparing Levinas’s understanding to those of Heidegger and the Structuralists.
The said, however, makes up only one portion of the relationship. For this relationship to be ethical the poet/lover must reveal himself to an interlocutor, for it is through this self-disclosure that the saying is brought to light. Ontology, as Levinas argues, is interrupted by the saying, which is “the very enactment of the movement from the same to the other” (Critchley 18). The saying which is “over and above” (Newton 7) the said, underscores the ethical relationship as one of human connectivity. The narration allows the storyteller to interact with the listener or the reader, while simultaneously revealing the author’s responsibility. What does this mean for Dante’s readers? There is a dialectic between the poet and his readers, as Dante’s words, whether his prose, or his verse, emphasize the reciprocity of the said and the saying. It is useful to recall Newton’s position that there exist ethical consequences which accompany the narration of a story.\textsuperscript{44} The story teller must be cognizant of the reciprocity which binds him to the listener or the reader, as well as the consequences which are borne out of the act of narration. These consequences or “exigent conditions,” as Newton identifies them, are the essential elements to narrative ethics.\textsuperscript{45} What then are the consequences of Dante fictionalizing his lady, and what “reciprocal claims” bind Dante to his reader?

In his understanding of narrative ethics, Newton maintains that due to the transactional nature of narration, the literary text produces solid relationships, which he refers to as “power relations” (Newton 58). These relations serve to emphasize the influence of representation as they underscore the performative function of narration. Evidence of this can be seen in Dante’s relationship, not only to Beatrice, but to the

\textsuperscript{44} Adam Zachary Newton, Narrative Ethics, p. 11
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., p. 17 - 18
entire civitas. The ethical nature of Dante’s poetry is framed by the protagonist’s relationship with the fedeli d’Amore, to whom he reveals himself when he elicits their response to his sonnet in which he explains his dream of the god of Love. This elite group of poets is an essential link which connects Dante to the school of stilnovismo. In contrast to his fellow stilnovisti, Dante expands his audience to include those who are not learned – li più semplici (the common folk or the unschooled, VN IV:1) – clearly demonstrating his poetic ethics. Newton’s claim that power relations ultimately give way to ethical relations\textsuperscript{46} comes to mind. Through the act of narration the ontological qualities of the said opens a space filled with the ethical saying. Dante reaches out and engages the entire civitas which is evident in the gloss following the first sonnet of the Vita Nuova. The poet explains that the true significance of his dream escapes the elite, but is instead understood by the common people, “Lo verace giudizio del detto sogno non fu veduto allora per alcuno ma ora è manifestissimo a li più semplici.”(VN III:15)\textsuperscript{47} While this statement is fundamental in understanding Dante’s ethos within his poetics, it clearly demonstrates his ability to expand his audience to include not only the learned elite, but the unschooled, li più semplici of the civitas, analogous to the episode of the Gospel, in which, the Jewish leaders fail to comprehend the message of Christ, while the poor and common people often understand His words. As the Sanhedrin questions Jesus after arresting Him, Jesus responds that they should ask the people to whom he preached: “Quid me interrogas? Interroga eos qui audierunt quid locutus sum ipsis. Ecce hii sciunt quae dixerim ego” (John 18:21).\textsuperscript{48} Even Jesus’ disciples are often confused by his words and their meaning, and are unable to fully understand His

\textsuperscript{46} See Newton, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{47} “The true meaning of the said dream was not seen by anyone then, but now it is perfectly clear to the simplest.”
\textsuperscript{48} “Why do you question me? Question those who have heard what I said to them. They know what I said.”
message until after His resurrection. It is necessary for time to pass, and for the
disciples to ponder and contemplate the mysteries which they had experienced, before
they are able to comprehend the words of Christ. Dante mirrors this time lapse in the
Vita Nuova, juxtaposing the terms allora and ora to make it clear to the reader that our
first experiences can often be ambiguous, but after the passing of some time we can
gain understanding.

I fedeli d’Amore and responsibility

In addressing his sonnet to the fedeli d’Amore, Dante creates a bond between
himself and his fellow poets:

A ciascun’alma presa e gentil core
nel cui cospetto ven lo dir presente,
in ciò che mi rescrivan suo parvente
salute in lor segnor, cioè Amore (VN 3:10 vv. 1-3)\(^49\)

This bond, uniting the said and the saying, establishes a reciprocal relationship, at the
center of which is responsibility. The first quatrain of the sonnet assigns this
responsibility to both Dante and the fedeli d’Amore in their proximity to one another.\(^50\)

Perperzak’s statement that “the saying and the said are united” (Peperzak 65) comes to
mind. He holds that every said is presented by a saying and that there can be no
saying without a said, which leads him to conclude that “their interwovenness must be
constitutive for the modes of being characteristic of both of them” (Peperzak 65). In

\(^{49}\)“To every captive soul and gentle heart / into whose regard shall come the present words, / so that they intern
may inscribe their views, / greeting in their lord who is love”.

\(^{50}\)Levinas describes his concept of proximity as responsibility to the other regardless of location or time. It is a
relationship understood as reciprocal. “Proximity,” writes Levinas, “…is responsibility. It is a response without a
question,…it is the humanity of a man not understood on the basis of transcendental subjectivity…Proximity is
fraternity before essence and before death, having a meaning despite being and nothingness” (OB, 139). See also
Ethics and Infinity, pp. 97-98. On Levinas’s concept of proximity see also Ciaramelli, Re-reading Levinas, pp. 90-91;
74-76.
Otherwise than Being Levinas states, “The veracity of a subject would be the virtue of a saying in which the emission of signs, insignificant in their own figures, would be subordinate to the signified, the said, which in turn would be conformed to the being that shows itself” (OB 134). When applied to Dante’s sonnet, this means that the poem which he offers to his fellow poets as “said” is dependent upon their reading and interpretation, which will in turn produce a response from them, or what Ciaramelli refers to as “an endless thinking back from the Said to the Saying” (Ciaramelli 97), thus highlighting the cyclical relationship characteristic of the saying and the said.

Peiperzak’s description, which he calls “the alternation of dire-dédire-redire” (Peiperzak 65) is based on Levinas’s proposal, and describes the movement from the dimension of logos to the dimension of saying (saying, exposure, responsibility) and then back to that of logos. This “jumping back and forth an infinite number of times” (Peiperzak 65) suggests that we are aware of the “secret passage” (Peiperzak 65) which joins the two dimensions. The first quatrain of Dante’s sonnet uncovers this “secret passage” as the he invites his fellow poets to “rescrivan suo parvente” in response to the words of his said. The saying of the fedeli d’Amore blossoms in the light of “lo dir presente,” which Dante offers to the elite group of poets, as well as to his readers. In so doing, Dante encourages the “jumping back and forth” from his words, to their response, and then back to their words, thus revealing the ethics of, not merely his own poetry, but the ethics of poetry in a universal sense.

In the two final tercets of the sonnet Dante gives details of the dream, describing the actions and the demeanor of the god of love:

Allegro mi sembrava Amor tenendo meo core in mano, e ne le braccia aveau
In the beginning of the first tercet, the god of Love is happy, as he holds Dante’s heart in his hand. At the end of the final tercet, however, the god turns away in tears. As we examine these two stanzas it is very important to remember Newton’s description of narrative ethics as part saying and part said. What can be characterized as ethical in these two tercets?

On the surface it seems that the saying has been overshadowed by the said, and that ontological characteristics of the sonnet have trumped the ethical nature of the poem. Levinas warns that the saying “runs the risk of being absorbed as soon as the said is formulated” (OB 46), however, it is the intersubjectivity of the poem, it’s examples of human connectivity, which displays the saying above the said, or in Newton’s words, “the said called into account in the saying” (Newton 7). This is what Levinas means when he writes: “In correlation with the said…the saying itself is indeed thematized, exposes in essence even what is in the hither side of ontology, and flows into the temporalization of essence” (OB 46). When this concept is applied to Dante’s sonnet, the connection between the poet and reader is highlighted through key terms which underscore the ontological elements of the said. The terms allegro and piangendo produce a tension within the sonnet, communicating to the reader an emotional conflict, which is reinforced in the juxtaposition of dormendo and svegliava.

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51 “Joyous to me seemed Love, holding / my heart in his hand, and in his arms he had / my lady wrapped in a cloth asleep. / Then he awakened her, and this burning heart / to the frightened one he humbly fed: / afterward I saw him turn away weeping”.

and culminating with the term *paventosa*. These terms create an emotional link between the reader and the narrative which bring to light the thematization of the saying through the said.

Dante informs us that many poets responded to his sonnet with very different interpretations. This reaching out by Dante, and the poets' responses, underscore the human connectivity which defines the saying: “A questo sonetto fue risposto da molti e di diverse sentenzie” (VN III:14).\(^{53}\) Newton recognizes the importance of such a relationship as fundamental to narrative ethics. It is the human connectivity that causes the narrative to be ethical, which emphasizes the link between the text, the poet and the reader, calling the said to account in the saying. Newton understands the narrative “as claim, as risk, as responsibility, as gift, as price” (Newton 7), and as such, ethical. The *fedeli d'Amore* are bound together by the enigmatic force of poetry, as a community of poets and readers, whose discourse is directed toward the other. The bond – Dante’s sonnet – between author and interlocutor encumbers this community with the burden of intersubjective responsibility which manifests itself through poetry.

**Cavalcanti's “saying” and “said”**

For Dante, the most important response to his sonnet comes from Guido Cavalcanti, which Dante regards as the catalyst to their friendship. Cavalcanti’s response to Dante’s said, creates an ethical relationship between the two poets which is based on their mutual responsibility to each other, and causes Dante to proclaim Guido

\(^{53}\) “This sonnet was answered by many and by diverse interpretations.”
as his best and closest friend: “tra li quali fue risponditore quelli cui io chiamo primo de li miei amici” (VN III:14).  

Cavalcanti discloses his obligation to Dante through his said, which becomes the basis of his saying:

\[
\text{Vedeste, al mio parere, omne valore} \\
\text{e tutto gioco e quanto bene om sente,} \\
\text{se foste in prova del segnor valente} \\
\text{che segnoreggia il mondo de l'onore (Vedeste al mio parere vv. 1-4).}
\]

Moved by the younger poet’s interest in his friend’s opinion, Cavalcanti begins his sonnet with an appreciative tone, which sets the stage for an ethical exchange – the saying – between the two poets. “Every joy and every good a man can feel” is expressed in the saying, however, it is important to note that Cavalcanti’s sonnet focuses on the phenomenological, hindering the saying’s transcendence of the said, as we shall see in the remaining stanzas.

In the second quatrains Cavalcanti’s said reveals his philosophy of love which is based on a naturalistic philosophy:

\[
Poi vive in parte dove noia more, \\
e tien ragion nel cassar de la mente; \\
sì va soave per sonno a la gente, \\
che ‘l cor ne porta senza dolore (Vedeste al mio parere, vv. 5-8).
\]

In response to Dante, Cavalcanti employs physical images well rooted in the dolce stil nuovo. Images such as cassar de la mente, sonno a la gente, and ‘l cor, highlight the physical elements of the sonnet, while underscoring the distance between the two

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54 “among the respondents was one whom I call first among my friends”.
55 All citations and translations of Cavalcanti’s poetry in this dissertation come from M. Cirigliano’s Guido Cavalcanti: The Complete Poems, (New York: Italica Press, 1992). “If it were mine, you’d see every value / and joy and good feeling / if you knew of the worthy lord / who rules the world of honor.”
56 “living where trouble dies / reasoning in the mind’s citadel / visiting people’s dreams / painlessly transporting their hearts”.

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poets. While Dante provides his friend the opportunity to interpret the dream, Cavalcanti’s commentary remains attached to a phenomenological approach. It is important to remember that for the elder poet, love was a passionate force which manifested itself in a violent and destructive manner, which Cavalcanti associated with the chaos of Mars, and which Maria Corti refers to as the “stupende metafore cavalcantiane della battaglia d’amore” (Corti 21). In the subsequent tercet, the images Cavalcanti employs suggest his philosophy on the pathologies of death, which he sees as connected to the passions and instincts of desire:

Di voi lo core ne portò, veggendo
che vostra donna la morte chedea:
nodriallo dello cor, di ciò temendo. (Vedeste al mio parere, vv. 9-11)\(^{58}\)

In his response, Cavalcanti quite possibly is the first to suggest the death of Beatrice, and in so doing portrays her more as a victim of love, rather than its catalyst. For Cavalcanti, passionate desire can lead to the end of rational and contemplative life. The word death is associated with the demise of the “ideal form,” and comes to signify deformation through inordinate passion. This notion is essential to Cavalcanti’s philosophy, and as Corti indicates, “questo significato del vocabolo <<morte>> è fondamentale per intendere…tutta l’opera del Cavalcanti” (Corti 28).\(^{59}\)

The extremely erotic image of the beloved ingesting the flaming heart of the lover reinforces Cavalcanti’s notion of destructive passion. Both Dante and Cavalcanti allude to Beatrice’s demeanor as the heart was fed to her; Dante tells us she was “paventosa”, while Cavalcanti uses the term “temendo”. Pinto confirms that “la morte di Beatrice è


\(^{58}\) “he took your heart away seeing / your Lady ask for your death / nourishing her with your trembling heart.”

\(^{59}\) “The significance of the term ‘death’ is fundamental to understanding...the entire work of Cavalcanti” (My translation).
quindi, in un primo momento, solo estensione analogica, sulla donna, della pulsione di morte che accompagna la patologia del desiderio, come Guido insegna” (Pinto 52). Beatrice’s death, in Cavalcanti’s interpretation of the dream, allows her to escape her lover’s overbearing desire, and in so doing, denies Love his triumph:

Quando v’apparve che se ’n gia dolendo,
fu ’l dolce sonno ch’allor si compiea,
chè ’l su’ contraro lo venìa vincendo (Vedeste al mio parere, vv.12-14).

Ultimately Dante tells us that Cavalcanti missed the mark, for he fails to understand the significance of the dream. Cavalcanti’s saying is formulated within the sphere of a conventional ethos of love that is ennobling (the cor gentile) on one hand, while on the other it remains bound to the perspectives of naturalistic philosophy or phenomenology. Cavalcanti’s saying never transcends the said, in contrast, as Dante states, to the ability of the unschooled (li più semplici) to be receptive to the saying when, later, the mystery of Dante’s dream will be unveiled. I would add that this unveiling announced by the poet-narrator, hence the saying implicit in the dream, is also not revealed to Dante-the-character, who in fact addressed his friend Guido, and other fedeli d’Amore seeking their interpretation of his dream.

Based on the troubadour and courtly love traditions, Dante’s love poetry is extended to the whole civitas, as he expands his audience to include all the citizens of Florence from the poetic elite – i fedeli d’Amore – to common folk – li più semplici. Dante’s said – his lyrics – addressed to his interlocutors, serve as the basis of his ethics of poetry, and his saying is borne out in the words of his said. Paradoxically, for li più

60 “The death of Beatrice is therefor, in a first instance, only an analogical extension, of woman, of the catalyst of death which accompanies the pathology of desire, as Guido teaches”.
61 “When you see him leave sorrowing / the sweet trance ends / defeated by its enemy”.

32
simplici, unhindered by lofty thoughts and complex intellectualism, the words of Dante’s said are able to penetrate and reveal the ethical saying, which ultimately escapes the poetic elite. This becomes more evident as we see Dante interact with others, as he extends his poetic ethics to the entire civitas, as in his exchange with the coro delle donne, the noble ladies who question Dante about his love for Beatrice, and who become the catalyst for his new poetics of praise.
Chapter Two

St. Bonaventure, the “Chorus of Ladies,” and the Ethics of Poetry

In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine speaks of a series of degrees through which the heart ascends to God. There is a general consensus that, within the mystic tradition of the Middle Ages, the number of these degrees was three. Singleton discusses these degrees in his seminal study on the *Vita Nuova*, in which he writes, “This itinerary of the mind to God, as Augustine had conceived it, began at its first level, outside of man. It turned inward at its second level or degree. And in its third and last stage, it rose above man” (Singleton 105-106).

Following Augustine’s teaching regarding the ascent of the heart and mind towards God, St. Bonaventure delineates the degrees with the names *extra nos, intra nos* and *supra nos* in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. Bonaventure teaches that while our ultimate goal is the *Summum Bonum*, in order to arrive at this goal, we must first “transire per vestigium, quod est corporale et temporale, et extra nos, et hoc est deduci in via Dei” (*Itinerarium* I:2). Thus, that which is outside of us, that with which we interact, becomes the vestige which constitutes the initial stage of our journey to what Bonaventure calls the *Primum Principium*.

During the second stage of our journey, as it is described by Bonaventure, we must turn inward, entering our mind, and focus on that which is inside of us. The mind,

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62 “we must pass through vestiges which are corporeal and temporal and outside us. This is what is meant by being led in the way of God.” All citations in Latin come from St. Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, (Saint Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, Saint Bonaventure University, 1956).
Bonaventure tells us, is the image of God; therefore, we must, “intrare ad mentem nostram, quae est imago Dei aeviterna, spiritualis, et intra nos, et hoc est ingredi in veritate Dei” (Itinerarium 1:2).63

The third and final step of our journey to God requires that we go beyond the animalitas and the sensibilitas, and reach toward that which is eternal, that which is most spiritual, that which is above us. Doing so allows us to revel in the great majesty of the Almighty, or as Bonaventure writes, “oportet, nos transcendere ad aeternum, spiritualissimum, et supra nos aspiciendo ad primum principium, et hoc est laetari in Dei notitia et reverentia maiestatis” (Itinerarium 1:2).64

In this chapter, I examine Bonaventure’s three stages of the mind’s journey to God, and apply them to what I see as the three phases of Dante’s Vita Nuova, as I argue that the poet/lover’s love for Beatrice is marked by three distinct phases, which have their origin in Bonaventure’s Itinerarium. I contend that the first stage of Dante’s love is marked by the poet/lover’s focus on the greeting of his beloved, as well as other externals, which correspond to Bonaventure’s sensibilitas stage. I then suggest that the first canzone of Dante’s libello – Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore – demonstrates the poet/lover’s progress to the next phase. His poetry of praise, represented by the concept of morum probitas (the moral development of a lover, through the perfection of his character and virtue, as described by Andreas Capellanus in his treatise De Amore), is evidence that he is searching within himself in his contemplation of his beloved. Finally, Beatrice’s death in conjunction with the poet/lover’s previous experiences – including dreams and visions, and his journey from extra nos to supra nos – culminating

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63 “we must enter into our mind, which is the image of God, an image which is everlasting, spiritual, and within us.”
64 “we must go beyond what is eternal, most spiritual, and above us. This is to rejoice in the knowledge and reverence of the majesty of God.”
in the final sonnet, “Oltre la spera,” define the third phase of the Vita Nuova as Dante focuses on that which is eternal and most spiritual. As the poet moves through these three phases, I will demonstrate how the beloved – Beatrice – is the essential link between the power of eros and divine grace, and thus the means through which ethics is perfected into the Christian theological virtue of caritas.

Singleton acknowledges the three phases of the Vita Nuova and their similarity to the stages of the mystic tradition when he writes, “The three stages of Love in the New Life, even though they are not explicitly named, bear such an unmistakable resemblance to the mystic stages that they might also bear their names” (Singleton 107). In order to fully understand these parallels, it is necessary to first examine Bonaventure’s three stages.

St. Bonaventure begins his Itinerarium with a simple statement regarding man’s pursuit of the Summum Bonum, in which true happiness is found. Given the fact that the Summum Bonum is above us, in order to obtain true happiness, we must then rise above ourselves, not in a physical manner, but through an ascent of the heart. Such an ascent, well founded in the Christian mystic tradition, is a process which is defined by self-awareness, prayer, and contemplation, and Bonaventure bases his three stages – or what he calls the “triplicem progressum” – on these three essential elements. He teaches that the stages are analogous to the threefold enlightenment of each day, in which the extra nos stage represents evening, the intra nos represents morning, and the supra nos represents noon. Finally, as he seeks to arouse the pilgrim, Bonaventure

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65 Et summum bonum sit supra nos: nullus potest effici beatus, nisi supra semetipsum ascendent, non ascensu corporali, sed cordiali. St.Bonventur, Itinerarium, I.1. (And the Supreme Good is above us, no one can enjoy happiness unless he rise above himself, not , indeed, by a bodily ascent, but by an ascent of the heart.)
argues that these three stages are reflective of the threefold substance in Christ, whom he refers to as “scala nostra” – our ladder, who helps us reach the true Object of our desire.

In order to understand how the three stages of Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium* guide the mind and heart toward the *Summum Bonum*, it is essential to understand his teaching on sinfulness and the inner powers we possess, whereby sinfulness may be overcome. Bonaventure perceives man as bent over beneath his heavy burden of sin, which we incurred after Adam’s fall from grace, and which “infecit humanam naturam” (*Itinerarium* I:7) in the mind through ignorance and in the flesh through lust, which Bonaventure refers to as *concupiscence*. It is this burden of sin which deprives man of God’s light.

All is not hopeless, however; through the assistance of divine grace and with the aid of justice and wisdom, we can combat concupiscence and oppose ignorance freeing us to escape the darkness and ascend toward the light. Bonaventure’s three stages help us to shed this burden of sin and stand erect in the knowledge and majesty of the *Primum Principium*, for it is through prayer that we are able to discern the steps which mark the soul’s path to God. With this newfound clarity, we must pass through the *extra*

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66 haec etiam respicit triplicem substantiam in Christo, qui est scala nostra, St.Bonventure, *Itinerarium*, I.3. (it reflects the threefold substance in Christ, Who is our ladder.)
67 “infected human nature”.
68 *ita quod excaecatus homo et incurvatus in tenebris sedet et caeli lumen non videt nisi succurrat gratia cum iustitia contra concupiscentiam, et scientia cum sapientia contra ignorantiam*. St.Bonventure, *Itinerarium*, I.7. (The result is that man, blinded and bent over, sits in darkness and does not see the light of heaven, unless grace comes to his aid – with justice to fight concupiscence, and with knowledge and wisdom to oppose ignorance.)
nos stage, where our journey begins, and in which we recognize “ipsa rerum universitas” (Itinerarium I:2)\(^{69}\) as the stairway by which we make our ascent.

The extra nos stage is fundamental to our journey, for through it we come to see the likeness of God in visible things. God’s creatures, as vestiges of Him, allow the soul to see God in them, for he is present in all his creation, _per essentiam, potentiam et praesentiam_ (Itinerarium II:1).\(^{70}\) Through our senses, we interact with those things that are outside of us, and gain knowledge of the physical world; in turn, we see God as through a mirror, our senses serving as doors to the soul,\(^{71}\) allowing it to comprehend these visible and external things. It is this comprehension which causes us to derive pleasure from what Bonaventure refers to as “suitable objects”.\(^{72}\) Pleasure allows external delights to enter the soul through likeness, whether through sight (beauty), smell and hearing (sweetness), or taste and touch (wholesomeness). Thus pleasure is central to our comprehension of the physical world.

When we understand that pleasure is the unification of two suitable objects, and that the essence of God is comprised of that which is most beautiful, sweet, and wholesome,\(^{73}\) it is clear to see that God is the _fontalis et vera delectatio_ (Itinerarium

\(^{69}\) In his translation of the _Itinerarium_, Philotheus Boehner translates this phrase as “the material universe itself.” See _The Journey of the Mind to God_, Translation by Philotheus Boehner, Edited, with Introduction and Notes, by Stephen F. Brown, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1993).

\(^{70}\) “His essence, His power, and His presence”.

\(^{71}\) Homo igitur, qui dicitur minor mundus, habet quinque sensus quasi quinque portas, per quas intrat cognitio omnium, quae sunt in mundo sensibili, in animam ipsius. (Itinerarium II:3). (Man, therefore, who is called a microcosm, has five senses that serve as five portals through which the knowledge of all things existing in the visible world enters his soul.)

\(^{72}\) See Philotheus Boehner’s translation, p. 12.

\(^{73}\) Si ergo « delectatio est coniunctio convenientis cum convenienti »; et solius Dei similitudo tenet rationem summe speciosi, suavis et salubris..., (Itinerarium II:8). (Therefore, if delight is the union of the suitable with the suitable, and if the Likeness of God alone has the character of that which is most beautiful, most sweet and most wholesome...)
II:8)\(^{74}\) whom we seek through all other delights. Thus, the *extra nos* stage, through which we are led to see God in vestiges, enables the contemplative soul to advance toward its Object of Desire, for as Bonaventure reminds us, “omnes creaturae istius sensibilis mundi animum contemplantis et sapientis ducunt in Deum aeternum” (*Itinerarium* II:11).\(^{75}\)

As the *extra nos* stage marks the beginning of the soul’s journey, the *intra nos* stage marks the central portion of the journey, where we reenter ourselves and become more reflective. Just as the vestiges of God allow us to see Him through His creations, as we reenter our minds, we perceive the divine image in all its brightness. “Ubi ad modum candelabri relucet lux veritatis in facie nostrae mentis,” writes Bonaventure, “in qua scilicet resplendet imago beatissimae Trinitatis” (*Itinerarium* III:1).\(^{76}\) Thus, the very act of reentering ourselves enables us to see that the soul truly loves itself; however this love is only possible when the soul knows itself, which can only happen through memory. Bonaventure urges his reader to consider the “three powers” of the soul, which he explains permit us to “videre Deum per te tanquam per imaginem,” (*Itinerarium* III:1)\(^{77}\) and thus are fundamental to our introspection. Memory is the first of these powers, and is followed by intellect and will.

According to Bonaventure, the function of our memory is the retention of information. He teaches that through remembrance, our memory retains the past; through grasping,\(^{78}\) it retains the present; and through foresight, it retains the future. In

\(^{74}\) “fountain of true delight”.

\(^{75}\) “all creatures in this visible world lead the spirit of the contemplative and wise man to the eternal God”.

\(^{76}\) “in which the image of the most blessed Trinity appears in splendor”.

\(^{77}\) “to see God through yourself as through an image”.

\(^{78}\) In his text, Bonaventure uses the term *susceptionem*, which translates as “capture”. I have taken the liberty of translating it as “grasping”.

39
the retention of the past, present, and future, our memory thereby bears a likeness to eternity, which through the memory’s indivisible present, has the ability to extend itself into all times. Following memory is the power of the intellect, whose function assists in our understanding of the meaning of terms, the meaning of propositions, and the meaning of inference. The intellect, therefore, allows the soul to see the truth within itself, as long as that truth does not become obfuscated by images and desire. Finally, the function of the will is to draw the soul toward the Summum Bonum, which it does through counsel, judgment, and desire. Working in conjunction, these three elements – counsel, judgment, and desire – lead the soul to seek the true Object of its desire, or a likeness to It.

The *intra nos* stage of the journey guides the soul to eternity through memory, to Truth through intellect, and to the *Summum Bonum* through the will, a process which Bonaventure likens to the Holy Trinity, stating that they – memory, intelligence, and will – are consubstantial, coequal, and coeternal. Thus, through introspection, the mind “consurgit ad speculandam Trinitatem beatam,” (Itinerarium III:5) and so enlightened can be led, through looking at itself, to God.

The final stage of the journey is the *supra nos*, in which we come to see God not through vestiges, nor through an image, but as the true essence of being. In the *supra*

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79 Ex prima igitur retentione actuali omnium temporalium, praeteritorum scilicet, praesentium et futurorum, habet effigiem aeternitatis, cuius praesens indivisibile ad omnia tempora se extendit. (*Itinerarium* III:2). (In its first activity, the actual retention of all things in time – past, present, and future – the memory is an image of eternity, whose indivisible present extends itself to all times.)

80 Haec tria scilicet mens generans, verbum et amor, sunt in anima quoad memoriam, intelligentiam et voluntatem, quae sunt consubstantiales, coaequales et coaevae, se invicem circumincidentes. (*Itinerarium* III:5). (These three – the generating mind, the word and love – exist in the soul as memory, intelligence, and will, which are consubstantial, coequal, equally everlasting and mutually inclusive).

81 “rise to the speculation of the Blessed Trinity”.

82 Et ideo mens nostra tantis splendoribus irradia et superfusa, nisi sit caeca, manuduci potest per semetipsam ad contemplandam illam lucem aeternam (*Itinerarium* III:7). (And thus our mind, enlightened and overflooded by so much brightness, unless it is blind, can be guided through looking at itself to contemplate the eternal Light).
nos stage, the soul, illuminated by the light shining upon the mind, turns its focus on Being Itself (ipsum esse), as it contemplates the “invisible things of God.” Bonaventure emphasizes the eternal quality of this “ipsum purissimum esse” by virtue of the fact that it has no beginning and no end. Among its qualities, Bonaventure names simple and absolute, primary and eternal, most actual and most perfect, and thus, supremely one. He then hypothesizes that if the name of the being which is defined by the aforementioned qualities is “God”, it is illogical that He could not exist, nor exist as anything other than one Being.

Bonaventure concludes his treatise by explaining that having completed the three stages, and arrived at the end of its journey, the final step which the soul must execute is to pass over and transcend itself. “After our mind has beheld God,” writes Bonaventure, “outside itself through and in vestiges of Him, and within itself through and in an image of Him, and above itself through the similitude of the Divine Light shining above us and in the Divine Light itself...when the mind has done all this, it must still, in beholding these things, transcend and pass over, not only this visible world, but even itself” (Itinerarium VII:1).

Having discussed St. Bonaventure’s Itinerarium, an examination of Dante’s Vita Nuova will reveal that the structure of the libello is based, as Singleton suggests, on the medieval mystic tradition of the three stages, and specifically on St. Bonaventure’s model. I suggest, as mentioned in the previous chapter, that as the poet/lover advances through the three phases of the Vita Nuova, there is a shift away from the

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83 Volens igitur contemplari Dei invisibilia quoad essentiae unitatem primo defigat aspectum in ipsum esse (Itinerarium V:3). (He, therefore, who wishes to contemplate the invisible things of God in relation to the unity of His essence should fix the attention of his soul on Being Itself).
courtly love tradition and toward a new audience, represented by the coro delle donne, interlocutors with whom Dante shares his ethics of poetry. In contrast to his first audience – his fellow poets – his interaction with the coro delle donne produces a dialectic which ultimately leads to a new poetic style, lo stilo de la loda.

At the beginning of the Vita Nuova, Dante experiences passion when Beatrice appears to him. Not an inordinate carnal passion, (as I mentioned in Chapter One) his is an eros tempered by the guiding light of reason. Especially significant is Dante’s linking eros to the larger ethical concerns which bind him to other men, including his enemies, and which constitute the natural love that is elevated into caritas. In chapter XI of the Vita Nuova, Dante writes: “Dico che ella apparia da parte alcuna, per la speranza de la mirabile salute nullo nemico mi rimanea, anzi mi giugnea una fiamma di caritade, la quale mi facea perdonare a chiunque m’avesse offeso” (VN XI:1).84 Beatrice’s greeting functions, much like God’s creatures in Bonaventure’s extra nos stage, as a vestige which creates a connection between the poet/lover and the object of his desire, and causes him to extend this caritas to all with whom he comes into contact, including those who may have offended him. The greeting is something outside of the lover, which draws him toward the beloved, analogous to Bonaventure’s “suitable objects”, allowing delight to enter through the senses, in Dante’s case, through the sight of his lady and her miraculous greeting.

The poet/lover is at the sensibilitas phase, in which, Bonaventure suggests, our perception is influenced by corporeal things outside of us. Beatrice’s greeting so influences the poet/lover, it causes him to act ethically toward the people of the civitas,

84 “I say that when she appeared from any direction, in the hope of her miraculous greeting I was left with no enemy, but rather there arose in me a flame of charity that made me forgive whoever might have offended me”.
as a replication of the love which he feels for the beloved. Dante acknowledges the importance of Beatrice’s greeting when he writes, “ne le sue salute abitava la mia beatitudine,” (VN XI:4)\(^{85}\) reinforcing the concept that our first way of seeing is through objects outside of us.

As important as the greeting is, the denial of Beatrice’s greeting is equally important as it helps the poet/lover realize that his true beatitude is not found merely in the greeting of the beloved, but that there must be something more, something deeper which will lead him to the object of his desire. The denial of the greeting, as Singleton confirms, is a “step in the upward way of love,” (Singleton 88)\(^{86}\) as it forces the protagonist to understand the limitations of the extra nos stage. His focus must not remain on things outside of him, but he must transition to the next phase in which he becomes more reflective.

This reflection and introspection is brought about by the coro delle donne in their questioning Dante regarding his love for Beatrice. As these noble ladies challenge the protagonist, they cause him to realize that he has focused too much on his lady’s greeting, while neglecting to express the praise of which she is so worthy. In questioning the poet/lover, these ladies, who have knowledge of love, usher Dante into the next phase of his journey, which corresponds to Bonaventure’s intra nos stage.

Dante’s interaction with these ladies is essential to his advancement to the intra nos stage. He acknowledges his meeting with them as fortuitous: “io passando appresso di loro, sì come da la fortuna menato” (VN XVIII:1).\(^{87}\) The link between the

\(^{85}\) “in her greetings lay my beatitude”.

\(^{86}\) See also M. Picone, Vita Nuova e tradizione romanza, pp. 150-151

\(^{87}\) “and passing near them, as if guided by fortune”.

43
civitas and the protagonist underscores Dante’s ethics of poetry in that these noble ladies seek a deeper understanding not only of Dante’s love for Beatrice, but of love in the general sense. Through his interaction with the ladies, Dante becomes more contemplative and introspective. We, as readers, know that these women are often in Beatrice’s company, and they are intent on what Dante has to say. Their question is an appeal to the lover to help them comprehend the extraordinary nature of his love. What causes a man to love a woman so deeply the he is unable to “sostenere la sua presenza?”

For Dante, however, the question is a challenge through which he comes to a realization that the focus of his love must change. After acknowledging that his lady’s greeting was the pinnacle of his love, he now apprehends that his true happiness lies in the praise of Beatrice, which he considers as “quello che non mi puote venire meno” (VN XVIII:5).

This realization is critical to the Vita Nuova. “This is a complete reversal,” writes Singleton. “Happiness now comes from within and flows from the inside out” (Singleton 90). This epiphany introduces the second phase of the Vita Nuova, and with the first canzone of his libello, Dante’s poetry takes on a fresh focus, with Beatrice at the center. Equally important, is Dante’s shift, as mentioned above, from the poetics of his contemporaries to his new poetics of praise.

As I demonstrate how the structure of the Vita Nuova mirrors that of Bonventure’s Itinerarium, it is essential to examine the canzone Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore with which Dante initiates his stilo de la loda. Characterized by the concept of morum probitas, of which Andreas Capellanus writes, “O, quam mira res est

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88 “cannot bear her presence?”
89 “In that which cannot fail me”.

44
amor, qui tantis facit hominem fulgere virtutibus, tantisque docet quemlibet bonis moribus abundare!,” (De amore, I:4)\(^90\) Dante’s canzone underscores the importance of the ethics of poetry in relation to the \textit{civitas}. While love is an amalgamation of \textit{eros} and reason, it must advance the moral development of the lover, toward a refinement of virtue and character.

Love, according to Andreas, is the source of all good and thus the catalyst for moral development; only a virtuous man may call on a lady, who will determine if he is sufficiently \textit{probus}. “Sapiens igitur mulier,” writes Andreas, “talem sibi comparare perquirat amandum qui morum sit probitate laudandus” (De amore I:6).\(^91\) A person’s character is essential in attracting the proper type of lover, as only an ethical and prudent lover is able to maneuver the ways of love: “Morum probitas acquirit amorem in morum probitate fulgentem. Doctus enim amans vel docta deformen non reiicit amantem, si moribus intus abundet. Qui enim probus inventiur et prudens nunquam facile posset in amoris semita deviare vel suum coamantem afficere turbatione” (De amore I:6).\(^92\) Andreas emphasizes the strong moral character of the lover who is less interested in beauty, and more interested in character.

Foster explains that there exist two essential elements of love, one moral, the other sensual.\(^93\) While love may begin as a sexual attraction, it is the moral character of the lover which guides him in the proper ways of love, and with which ultimately he

\(^90\) All quotes from the \textit{De amore} come from \textit{Andreae capellani regii Francorum De amore libri tres}. (Castellon de la Plana: Sociedad castellonense de cultura, 1929). The translations come from \textit{The Art of Courtly Love}, translation and notes by John Jay Parry. (New York: Colombia University Press, 1990). “O what a wonderful thing is love, which makes a man shine with so many virtues and teaches everyone, no matter who he is, so many good traits of character.”

\(^91\) “A wise woman will therefore seek as a lover a man of praiseworthy character.”

\(^92\) “A person of good character draws the love of another person of the same kind, for a well-instructed lover, man or woman, does not reject an ugly lover if the character within is good. A man who proves to be honorable and prudent cannot easily go astray in love’s path or cause distress to his beloved.”

\(^93\) See Kenelm Foster’s \textit{The Two Dantes}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 27.
will achieve his goal.\textsuperscript{94} As Andreas writes, “Sola ergo probitas amoris est digna corona” \textit{(De amore} I:6).\textsuperscript{95} This crown of love, which is physical in nature, is the reward presented to the lover who has ethically developed his character and proven himself to be of high moral standard, which Foster argues “connotes a final \textit{probitas}” (Foster 27).

Within Andreas’s system of love based on strong moral character, one sees a progression analogous to that of the medieval mystics, in which love begins at the base level of sensuality and moves through stages toward an apex of high morals. In one of the dialogues of the \textit{De amore}, Andreas speaks of the four stages of love which culminate with sexual fulfillment\textsuperscript{96}, only, however, for the man whose good deeds substantiate his strong moral character, deeds which are extended to the entire \textit{civitas}.

“As antiquo,” writes Andreas, “quatuor sunt gradus in amore constituti distincti. Primus in spei datione consitit, secundus in osculi exhibitione, tertius in amplexus fruitione, quartus in totius personae concessione finitur.”\textsuperscript{97} Like Augustine’s series of degrees, and Bonaventure’s (albeit much later) \textit{Itinerarium}, Andreas establishes a progression through which the lover obtains the acceptance of the beloved through his ethical development.\textsuperscript{98} While in the Augustinian and Bonaventurian models the pilgrim’s ultimate goal is the Divine, Andreas’s stages focus on the moral character of the lover, for if the beloved determines that he is unworthy of her love, she may terminate the relationship: “Debet enim primo spei uti largitione mulier, et si cognoverit amantem spei

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{94}Ibid., p. 27.
  \item \textsuperscript{95}“Character alone , then, is worthy of the crown of love.”
  \item \textsuperscript{96}Singer emphasizes this point in the second volume of his book \textit{The Nature of Love}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), in which he states, “The goal of love is no longer calculated frustration, but rather sexual fulfillment within an ethical system” p.69.
  \item \textsuperscript{97}“From ancient times four distinct stages have been established in love: the first consists in the giving of hope, the second in the granting of a kiss, the third in the enjoyment of an embrace, and the fourth culminates in the yielding of the whole person.”
  \item \textsuperscript{98}Singer emphasizes that both systems – Andreas’s stages of love and the medieval theologian’s degrees of salvation – relate to “love as a striving for goodness”.
\end{itemize}
largitione accepta in bonis moribus augmentari, ad gradum mulier non vereatur devenire secundum. Et sic gradatim usque ad quartum deveniat gradum, si ipsum hac re invenerit per omnia dignum” (De amore, 1st Dialogue). Foster reminds us that “a man may only respond to this or a woman allow him to respond, if he is probus” (Foster, 27).

How, then, does the concept of morum probitas manifest itself in Dante’s canzone, and how does it influence his ethics of poetry? With his apostrophe, “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore,” he gathers the elite of the civitas around him, and commands their attention, as they come together to hear the poet/lover praise his lady. He separates these select few from those who are unfamiliar with courtly ways. This has binary significance; the poet establishes the coro delle donne as his new interlocutors, whom he finds worthy to discuss the praise of his beloved. They, therefore, are the recipients of his saying through the words in his said: “tratterò del suo stato gentile a respetto di lei leggeramente, donne e donzzelle amorose, con vui, ché non è cosa da parlarne altrui” (VN XIX:6, vv. 11-14). They are the first to experience Dante’s new poetic style, and they, as courtly ladies, are the most worthy members of the civitas to whom the marvels of Beatrice are made known. There is an ethos in Dante’s poetry not simply because he praises his lady, but because he invites the entire community to join him in praising her. While the said of the canzone lavishes

99 “First a woman should make use of the granting of hope, and then if she sees that her lover, after receiving this, improves in conduct, she need not fear to go on to the second stage. And so step by step she may come to the fourth stage, if she finds that he is in every respect worthy of it.”

100 See the first chapter of this study in which I discuss Levinas’s philosophy regarding the saying and the said.

101 “but I will speak of her gentle estate / with respect for her discretely, / ladies and amorous maidens, with you, / for it is not a subject to address to others”.

47
praise upon Beatrice, the saying of Dante’s poem is extended to the civitas, as they are represented in the coro delle donne.

Equally important is the essential link which Dante creates between the noble ladies and Beatrice. While they act as a catalyst for Dante’s stilo de la loda, causing him to realize that his true happiness is found in praising his lady, Beatrice is the focus of his praise, and therefore the source of his beatitude. The noble ladies’ curiosity about the type of love Dante experiences compels him to acknowledge that he has placed too much emphasis on the greeting of his beloved – an external vestige – when he should be more focused on his praise of her. As he realizes that his true beatitude emanates from praise of Beatrice, he turns away from the external and toward that which “est imago Dei aeviterna, spiritualis” (Itinerarium I:2). Beatrice thus serves as the fundamental link between the natural power of eros and divine grace. She is the junction between what Ginsberg sees as “the activities of the sensible and intellectual souls” (Ginsberg 9), as she is simultaneously a living being and the essence of beatitude.102 This is borne out in the canzone Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore, in which she is loved both on earth and in heaven, by mortals and the angels, and thus bridges the corporeal world to the spiritual realm.

In the first stanza of the canzone, Dante acknowledges that he must focus less on her greeting and more on praising his lady:

Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore,
I’vo’ con voi de la mia donna dire,
Non perch’io creda sua laudare finire,

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Ma ragionar per isfogar la mente (VN XIX:6, vv. 1-4). As he speaks to these ladies who have intelligence of love, he does so to clear his mind, which by his own admission, has been clouded by external vestiges, vestiges which led him in the wrong direction, vestiges which caused him to lose focus, rather than to identify his genuine beatrix. By speaking to the ladies, however, his words pour out (isfogar) allowing his mind to refocus on that which cannot fail him —“quello che non mi puote venire meno” (VN XVIII:5) – namely, the praise of his lady.

In turning from the external, Dante encounters a new poetic direction through which he moves away from the traditional mechanics of medieval love poetry, and initiates a new poetic style. Now that il saluto is no longer the focus of his desire, his poetry, rather than being self-focused, is centered on the beloved, through whom happiness is generated. This happiness – the foundation of the lover’s praise – is based on “quelle parole che lodano la donna mia,” (VN XVIII:7) and leads the poet to instituting his stilo de la loda, rendering his poetry ethical, as he engages the civitas, and focuses on the Other.

It is interesting to note that in the prose which introduces the canzone, Dante speaks of walking along “uno rivo molto chiaro” (VN XIX:1). The image of the clear stream reflects the poet/lover’s realization that his true path lies in praising his lady, and the fount of these words comes from deep within himself. Just as in Bonaventure’s intra nos stage in which the pilgrim perceives the Divine in all its brightness, Dante, having entered the second phase of his journey, clearly sees his way forward, and thus he

103 “Ladies who have understanding of love, / I wish to speak to you of my lady, / not that I believe I may exhaust her praise, / but to converse to ease my mind”.
104 “those words that praise my lady”.
106 “a very clear stream”.

49
proclaims, “a me giunse tanta voluntade di dire, che io cominciai a pensare lo modo ch’io tenesse” (VN XIX:1). As he now has a clear understanding of how he must proceed, his will to write in praise of Beatrice becomes instinctive, his words coming forth almost on their own accord: “Allora dico che la mia lingua parlò quasi come per se stessa mossa” (VN XIX:2). In the first phase of the work, as the poet adheres to the “dualistic mechanics” (Barolini 44) of traditional love poetry, his words are egocentric; conversely, having established his praise style, his words are focused on the Other, and are therefore more ardently expressed.

Later in the first stanza of *Donne ch’avete*, Dante makes a distinction between himself and his fellow *stilnovisti*. While I believe this may have been unintentional, one cannot deny that in establishing his praise style, Dante does, in fact, break with his contemporaries and initiates a new poetic style. As he states in the canzone, he wishes to speak not in a lofty style, but in a manner that all can appreciate, and in doing so, Dante extends his poetic ethics to the entire *civitas*, unlike his fellow poets:

Io dico che pensando il suo valore,  
Amor si dolce si fa sentire,  
che s’io allora non perdessi ardire,  
farei parlando innamorar la gente.  
E io non vo’ parlare si altamente,  
ch’io divenisse per temenza vile (VN XIX:5-6, vv. 5-10).

Dante’s claim that his praise of Beatrice’s virtue could make all people love, is reflective of Andreas Capellanus’s concept that love is the source of all goodness, and that the

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107 “I felt such a strong desire to write that I began to conceive the mode I might follow”.
108 “Then I say that my tongue spoke as if it moved by itself”.
109 Barolini indicates a paradox between Bonagiunta in *Purgatorio* XXIV, who, she observes, “failed to ‘open his mouth’ in praise and Dante, whose “Donne ch’avete” initiates his praise-style. See *Dante’s Poets*, p. 52.
110 “I say that as I think of her worth, / Love so sweet in me makes himself felt, / such that if I then were not to lose heart, / I would through speaking enamor the people. / And I do not wish to speak so loftily / as to become through daring inept”.

50
woman enjoys a status through which she embodies the qualities of nobility and happiness, within what Foster refers to as “the complex of values” (Foster 28) – the courtly love system. Dante takes the ideals of this system and greatly expands upon it\textsuperscript{111} in his poetry of praise. The ethics of Dante’s \textit{stilo de la loda} indicate that while Beatrice is the source of all goodness, she also compels others to love on a much higher order; as in Andreas’s \textit{De amore}, the woman is the source of transformation for the man toward improvement and growth in virtue. As Dante explains, the mere presence of Beatrice leads men to forgiveness and ultimately salvation:

\begin{center}
\begin{flushright}
E quando trova alcun che degno sia
di veder lei, quei prova sua vertute,\newlinech\`e li avvien, ci\`o che li dona, in salute,\newlinee si l’umilia, ch’ogni offesa oblia (VN XIX:10, vv. 37-40).\textsuperscript{112}
\end{flushright}
\end{center}

This stanza underscores the courtly love ethos, but also its being transcended or perfected by Dante’s new poetics, for through the virtue of the beloved, man not only experiences humility, but also grows in morality, and is ultimately brought to salvation. Thus, as Dante states in the first stanza, in speaking of Beatrice’s virtue, he is able to bring all men to \textit{caritas}. Her virtue, however, as Dante avers, is recognized both in heaven and on earth:

\begin{center}
\begin{flushright}
Angelo clama in divino intelletto\newlinee dice: “Sire, nel mondo si vede\nmaraviglia ne l’atto che procede\nd’un’anima che ’nfin qua su risplende (VN XIX:7, vv.15-18).\textsuperscript{113}
\end{flushright}
\end{center}

As Auerbach explains, “She is transfigured and transformed while preserving her earthly form” (Auerbach 62). Therefore, as a mortal woman, \textit{una maraviglia}, she bridges the

\begin{flushnote}
\textsuperscript{111} See Foster’s \textit{Two Dantes}, p. 28, note 30.
\textsuperscript{112} “And when she finds someone worthy / to behold her, he experiences her power, / for what she gives him turns into salvation, / and so humbles him that he forgets every offense”.
\textsuperscript{113} “An angel entreats within the divine mind, / and says: Lord, in the world is seen / a marvel in the act that comes forth / from a soul that to this very height shines”.
\end{flushnote}
gap between erotic passion and divine grace, bringing men to the Christian virtue of caritas. By more deeply contemplating his beloved, and employing words of praise to honor her, the poet/lover comes to a more profound understanding of his lady, just as in Bonaventure’s intra nos stage, the soul perceives the divine image in all its brightness.

In the fourth book of his Convivio Dante reemphasizes the importance of moral character as he philosophically expresses the ethics of his poetry. Disputing the claim that a person is noble only through birth, Dante holds that one acquires nobility according to their moral character, as opposed to their financial status or birth right. As in Andreas’s De amore, the link between virtue and nobility is ethics, not wealth, and the person who develops his moral character becomes truly noble. According to Dante, while a wealthy person who is self-serving and unethical would not be noble, an altruistic person of lesser means would be worthy of true nobility. This concept is manifested in, what Lansing refers to as “the pinnacle of artistic refinement” (Lansing 228), the third canzone of the Convivio, “Le dolci rime d’amor,” while simultaneously highlighting Dante’s ethics of poetry. In the canzone Dante first presents an emperor’s view that fine manners and ancestral wealth constitute nobility, only to later dispute this claim, and argue that all people are capable of attaining nobility.

Tale imperò che gentilezza volse,
secondo ‘l suo parere,
che fosse antica possession d’aver
con reggimenti belli (Convivio IV, vv.21-24).\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{114} All the citations from the Convivio in this dissertation come from M. Simonelli’s edition, (Bologna: Casa Editrice Prof. Riccardo Pàtron, 1966). The English translations come from R. Lansing’s Dante’s Il Convivio: The Banquet, (New York: Garland, 1990). “One ruler held that nobility, / according to his view / consisted of ancestral wealth / together with fine manners”.

52
Dante offers the anonymous ruler’s view as an ancient standard against which he – Dante – may compare his broader understanding of nobility. In line 22 he specifies that this is merely the king’s opinion, although others of lesser wit, or even less mannered may be inclined to agree with him:

E altri fu di più lieve savere,  
che tal detto rivolse,  
e l’ultima particula ne tolse,  
ché non l’avea fors’elli! (Convivio IV, vv. 25-28).  

Dante casts aspersions on those who would agree with the king, suggesting that their lack of knowledge and refinement renders them base. As he continues, he mocks those who hold that a man’s son or grandson is noble “benchè,” as Dante states, “sia da nïente,” that is to say while he may be from a wealthy family, if he is not probus, he is not noble. This is repeated later in the canzone when Dante asserts that nobility exists wherever there is virtue, conversely however, this may not be the case:

È gentilezza dovunqu’è vertute,  
Ma non vertute ov’ella (Convivio IV, vv. 101-102).  

Dante juxtaposes the qualities of one who is noble against one who is not, making very clear that nobility always implies good, which is manifested in virtue.

Dico che nobiltate in sua ragione importa sempre ben del suo subietto,  
come viltate importa sempre male;  
e vertute cotale  
dà sempre altrui di sé buono intelletto (Convivio IV, 89-93).  

Thus the person who develops a strong moral character is worthy to be called noble, echoing Andreas’s statement, “Sed si me morum probitatis cultura perlustrat, intra

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115 “And someone else of lesser wit, / recast this saying, / dispensing with the second half, / since he himself was likely lacking”.
116 “Nobility resides wherever virtue is, / but virtue not wherever there is nobility”.
117 “Nobility, I say, by definition, / always implies a good in one who is noble, / as baseness always implies what’s bad; / and virtue so defined / will always manifest itself as good”.

53
nobilitatis me credo moenia constitutum et vera generis coruscare virtute, et sic me morum probitas intra nobilitatis ordinem facit esse repositum” (De Amore, 2nd Dialogue).\textsuperscript{118}

The fourth stanza of Le dolci rime d’amore reiterates what Dante writes in the third stanza of the Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore, in which he speaks of Beatrice’s virtue, through which one can attain nobility:

Madonna è disiata in ommo cielo:
or voi di sua virtù farvi savere.
dico, qual vuol gentil donna parere
vada con lei, che quando va per via,
gitta nei cor villani Amore un gelo,
per che omne lor pensero agghiaccia e pere;
e qual soffрисse di starla vedere
diverria nobil\textsuperscript{119} cosa, o si morria (VN XIX:9, vv. 29-36).\textsuperscript{120}

In this earlier canzone, Dante establishes the link between virtue and nobility. Beatrice is the destroyer\textsuperscript{121} of all vices, and through her virtue, those in her company cannot help but to attain nobility. There is an ethos in Dante’s two canzoni as the poet’s words invite the reader to contemplate true nobility, while keeping in mind the essential role of virtue.

The Vita Nuova is the work of a young poet at the inception of his career, as he contemplates natural love which points to the divine, while in the Convivio Dante philosophically expresses the ethics of poetry against the backdrop of Aristotelian thought. While the two works are certainly distinct\textsuperscript{122} through his ethics of poetry Dante

\textsuperscript{118} “But if I have cultivated a character excellent through and through, I think that puts me inside the walls of nobility, and gives me the true virtue of rank, and so my character puts me among the nobles.”

\textsuperscript{119} The italics are mine for emphasis.

\textsuperscript{120} “The lady is desired in highest heaven: / now I wish to have you know of her virtue. / I say, let who wishes to appear a gentle lady / go with her, for when she goes along the way, / into villainous hearts Love casts a chill, / whereby all thoughts freeze and perish; / and who might suffer to stay and behold her / would change into a noble thing, or die”.

\textsuperscript{121} See Gorni’s Vita Nova, (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1996) p. 98, note 34.

creates a connection between them. Beatrice, in the *Vita Nuova*, is the reflection of divine love. In the *Convivio, la donna gentile*, whom we meet in the *Vita Nuova* becomes Lady Philosophy. Paradoxically, these women represent tension between the two works, while simultaneously linking them.

The *donna gentile* first appears after Beatrice’s death as Dante notices her looking down on him from her window: “Allora vidi una gentile donna giovane e bella molto, la quale da una finestra mi riguardava sì pietosamente, quanto alla vista, che tutta la pieta parea in lei accolta” (VN XXXV:2-3).\(^{123}\) The ethos in the *donna gentile’s* compassion moves Dante, causing him to temporarily turn his focus from Beatrice. The *donna gentile* functions to rouse Dante’s love\(^ {124}\). It is important to remember that the poet/lover has already crossed over to the *intra nos* stage. Now, upon seeing the “gentile donna giovane e bella molto,” the lover returns to the *extra nos* stage. This digression is necessary, for the function of the *extra nos* stage is to awaken the lover to a deeper inner awareness, thus enabling him to cross back to the *intra nos* stage, as he realizes that the lady’s beauty and the love she embodies are an integral part of her compassion. As Dante notes in the *Convivio*, “…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 de la mia mente” (*Convivio* II, II, 1).\(^ {125}\) These folds in the text\(^ {126}\) indicate a mysterious connection between the *extra nos* and the *intra nos*

\(^{123}\) “I then saw a gentle lady, young and very beautiful, who from a window watched me so compassionately, to judge by her look, that all pity seemed to gather in her”.

\(^{124}\) See Corti, p. 148.

\(^{125}\) “when that gentle lady, of whom I made mention at the end of the *New Life*, first appeared before my eyes, accompanied by Love, and took a place within my mind”.

\(^{126}\) The folds also underscore the circularity of the saying and the said. As Critchley asserts, the saying interrupts the said, but simultaneously is conceptualized in the said. Evidence of this is Dante’s sonnet to the *donna gentile* in which he acknowledges her compassion. The poetry then is ethical as the poet conceptualizes the lady’s pity, and as we – the readers – read the poem in silence, it in turn causes us to feel pity for the poet/lover. This
stages, a connection which is essential to the lover’s progress, as they mirror the link between passion and virtue.

The final sonnet of the *Vita Nuova* indicates that the poet/lover has reached the final phase of his “book of memory”, which corresponds to Bonaventure’s *supra nos* stage. Having experienced the death of his beloved, the “temptation” of the *donna gentile*, and the interaction with the pilgrims who pass through Florence, Dante brings his *libello* to a close having attained an “*intelligenza nova*” (VN XLI:10, v. 3), which he claims draws his heart ever upward:

Oltre la spera che più larga gira
passa ’l sospiro ch’esce del mio core:
intelligenza nova, che l’Amore
piangendo mette in lui, pur su lo tira (VN XLI:10, vv.1-4).\(^\text{127}\)

Dante’s apostrophe frames the sonnet, placing the action beyond the *Primum Mobile*, the ninth sphere which Dante declares is contiguous with the Empyrean.\(^\text{128}\) Dante’s sigh reaches God, and, guided by his new intelligence, he is able to – as Bonaventure states – revel in the great majesty of the Almighty.\(^\text{129}\) Beyond the *Primum Mobile*, the soul contemplates God as the true essence of being, and basks in the pure and eternal Light.

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\(^{127}\) “Beyond the sphere that circles widest / penetrates the sigh that issues from my heart: / a new intelligence, which Love, / weeping, places in him, draws him ever upward”.\(^\text{\textsuperscript{127}}\)

\(^{128}\) In his *Convivio*, Dante explains the order of the heavens, emphasizing that the ninth heaven is the swiftest due to the profound desire of the souls within, and thus is linked to the Empyrean, in which God dwells. “E questo è cagione al Primo Mobile per avere velocissimo movimento; ché, per lo ferventissimo appetito ch’è ‘n ciascuna parte di quello nono cielo, che è immediato a quello, d’essere congiunta con ciascuna parte di quello divinissimo ciel quieto, in quello si resolve con tanto desiderio, che la sua velocitate è quasi incomprehensibile” (*Convivio* II:3, 9-10). (This is the reason why the Primum Mobile has the swiftest movement; for because of the most fervent desire that each part of the ninth heaven has to be conjoined with every part of that divinest, tranquil heaven, to which it is contiguous, it revolves beneath it with such desire that its velocity is almost incomprehensible).

\(^{129}\) “...et hoc est laetari in Dei notitia et reverential maiestatis” (*Itinerarium* I:2).
In the second quatrain of his sonnet, Dante speaks of his contemplation of his lady:

Quand’elli è giunto là dove disira,
vede una donna, che riceve onore,
e luce sì, che per lo suo splendore
lo peregrino spirito lo mira (VN XLI:11, vv. 5-8).  

Analogous to Bonaventure’s theory of how the soul contemplates God, the lover beholds the beloved bathed in light and splendor, and cannot help but to gaze upon her, thereby contemplating her essence, which he is unable to truly comprehend. Thus for Dante, the collaboration between love and intelligence enables him to complete his journey, and ultimately contemplate his lady who is the poetic symbol of a new “intelletto d’amore” (VN XIX:4).  

The contemplation of his lady, however, brings about a miraculous vision which causes the poet to stop writing about her, until he is able to do so more worthily.

In Bonaventure’s third stage of ascent, the soul’s focus is on the most pure Being Itself, as it contemplates the invisible things of God. Dante, too, in the final phase of the Vita Nuova, directs his attention to “la qualitade di costei in grado che lo mio intelletto non puote comprendere” (VN XLI:6), and as he contemplates his lady, who now is counted among the blessed, his thoughts are of her, even though he is unable to understand her true essence.

As Holmes confirms, we see a “gradual passage from lower to higher objects of love” (Holmes 35), as Dante passes from the extra nos stage of Beatrice’s greeting,

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130 “When he arrives where he desires, / he sees a lady, who receives honor, / and so shines that, because of her splendor, / the pilgrim spirit gazes upon her”.


to the *intra nos* stage of his poetry of praise, to the *supra nos* stage as he contemplates her essence. Ultimately, this mortal woman, this *maraviglia*, whom the god of Love calls *Amore*, is the ladder upon which Dante climbs from the natural power of erotic passion to the heights of divine grace, where he attains the Christian virtue of *caritas*. 
Chapter Three

Representations of the Ethics of Poetry: The God of Love and the *Donne Schermo*¹³³

From the very beginning of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante employs images which find their origins in the troubadour traditions, the most prominent being the god of Love who echoes the tradition of the *langue d’oc*. In his first appearance, the god of Love is quickly established as the lover’s master. He appears as a fearsome deity coming on a cloud of fire and speaking in Latin, rendering an image of power and authority; later, in a paradoxical image, he appears as a timid beggar who walks with his head down. Finally, at mid-point of the *Vita Nuova*, the god of Love disappears, giving way to Beatrice’s authority, and Dante’s realization that she alone is the image of true love.¹³⁴

While the god of Love echoes the tradition of the troubadours, the two *donne schermo* point to the ethics of love as expressed in Capellanus’s concept of *morum probitas*. Acting as screens to protect Dante’s love for Beatrice, these two ladies assist the poet/lover (albeit unwittingly) in developing his worthiness of the beloved. The development of the lover’s moral character is an essential element – which I discussed in the previous chapter – to the link between Dante’s ethics of poetry and the entire *civitas*. In this chapter, I examine the importance of these three characters in relation to Dante’s ethics of poetry. I demonstrate that the god of Love functions as the said within the *Vita Nuova*, as knowledge handed down from the troubadour tradition. Dante’s

¹³³ As noted earlier in this study the *donne schermo* are two women who act as, in Dante’s words, *uno schermo de la veritade* (a screen to the truth), protecting Dante’s love for Beatrice from those in Florence who are apt to mock him. The function of the *donne schermo* is the focus of the second half of this chapter.
responsibility (the saying) to enlighten his generation and those of the future through the ethics of poetry, is linked to the said in the tradition of the god of Love. The \textit{donne schermo}, on the other hand, point to the beloved, and thus prepare the lover for future events, especially the death of his lady. Within the concept of \textit{morum probitas}, the \textit{donne schermo} serve to protect the secret of Dante’s love for Beatrice from the \textit{lauzengiers}, or the people of Florence who would gossip and mock their love. I reveal how, as a function of representational ethics – as described by Newton – the loss of the first screen lady prepares the protagonist, as well as the reader, for the death of Beatrice.

\textbf{The god of Love}

Singleton describes the god of Love as a “sign of a tradition,” and as such his existence is public.$^{135}$ Love, thus depicted, is part of an established custom familiar not only to Dante, but to his fellow poets and their ladies. Their verse and their prose confirm their participation in the rites of this tradition, which is reserved for a select elite, but presented to the entire \textit{civitas}. The “public existence” of the god manifests his function as the poets’ words and their identifiable meaning. The god of Love as tradition and identifiable meaning, reveals the said, and thus constitutes Love’s ethical role within the poetry of the \textit{stilnovisti}.

In examining Love’s function as the said, it is instructive to recall Newton’s claim that “narrative situations create an immediacy and a force, framing relations of provocation, call, and response that bind narrator and listener, author and character, or

\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 58.
reader and text” (Newton 22). Newton’s statement, when applied to Dante’s encounters with the god of Love, reveals the poet’s link between himself and his reader. The god of Love, as the said and hence a conventional message of the poet, represents love as an essential element of Dante’s ethics of poetry. The god’s first words to the lover, “Ego dominus tuus,” establish love as lord and master, revealing an ethical relationship between the author and reader, for while the poet’s said is proclaimed in Latin, it reveals the saying which transcends the said, proclaiming love as a universal force for all humans. The god of Love proclaims himself lord and master of Dante, the lover; however, Dante, the poet, shares this love with his readers. The act of narrating is then ethical and the character created by the author (the said) is essential to forming a bond between the poet and his readers.

This link between the author and his readers is reinforced and extended to the fedeli d’Amore, the first readers of the first sonnet of the Vita Nuova. As I argue in the first chapter of this study, this bond between Dante and the elite of Love, is the basis of an ethical relationship which forms out of the said and the saying. The dialogical aspect of this relationship reveals the reciprocal nature of responsibility, which centers on Dante’s offering the sonnet to the fedeli d’Amore. The relationship is ethical in that Dante’s words elicit a response from his fellow poets, causing them to recognize their responsibility. It is helpful to recall Ciaramelli’s words: “Moral obligation binds us because it takes hold immediately, before understanding or decision on the part of the subject” (Ciaramelli 85). Applying this statement to Dante’s first sonnet which he sent to

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136 See Newton, Narrational Ethics, p. 18
the *fedeli d’Amore*, it is easy to see the reciprocal responsibility between the poet and his first readers.

As I continue to examine the role of the god of Love in Dante’s ethics of poetry, it is essential to investigate the interaction of this ethical said with the poet lover. The next time the lover meets the god, Dante has left Florence, and is traveling to another city. He is exceedingly disheartened, for in leaving Florence, he has left behind the source of his true happiness – Beatrice. The god of Love, appearing to him in his imagination, reflects the lover’s sadness:

“…l’andare mi dispiacea sì, che quasi li sospiri non poteano disfogare l’angoscia che lo cuore sentia, però ch’io mi dilungava de la mia beatitudine. E però lo dolcissimo segnore…ne la mia imaginazione apparve come peregrino leggeramente vestito e di vili drappi. E lì mi parea disbigottito, e guardava la terra…” (VN IX: 2-4).\(^{137}\)

Here Dante depicts a stark difference between the authoritative figure which appeared in his dream, and this image of a pilgrim, dressed in humble garb. The poet juxtaposes the adjective *dolcissimo* with *disbigottito*, referring to the same being, but describing conflicting demeanors. The god’s diminished status is apparent in his clothing, which Dante emphasizes in his sonnet:

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\text{Cavalcando l’alt’ier per un cammino pensoso de l’andar che mi sgradia,}
\text{trovai Amore in mezzo de la via in abito legger di peregrino.}
\text{Ne la sembianza mi parea meschino,}
\text{Come avesse perduto segnoria (VN IX:9, vv.1-6).}^{138}\]

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\(^{137}\) “…the journey so displeased me that my sighs could hardly relieve the anguish that my heart felt, because I was distancing myself from my beatitude. Therefore, the sweetest Lord…appeared in my imagination as a pilgrim dressed meagerly and in simple vestments. He seemed to be frightened, and he stared at the ground…”

\(^{138}\) Riding the other day along a road / musing upon the journey I disliked, / I met Love in the middle of the way / in the meager dress of a pilgrim. / In his aspect he seemed to me poor, / as if he had lost his lordship;
The poet links *peregrino*, *meschino*, and *avesse perduto segnoria*, underscoring Love’s humbled state, analogous to the lover’s condition. Now *leggeramente vestito e di villi drappi,* the god of Love appears in stark contrast to the figure who appeared in Dante’s bedroom as *uno segnore di pauroso aspetto,* his changed appearance reflecting the shifting mood of the lover, now himself a pilgrim, as he journeys outside of his city. His departure from the city causes the lover great pain, for as he explains: “…l’andare mi dispiacea sì, che quasi li sospiri non poteano disfogar l’angoscia che lo cuore sentia, però ch’io mi dilungava de la mia beatitudine” (VN IX:2). The ethics of Dante’s poetry emphasizes the link between love and the *civitas*, for Beatrice’s presence in the city, causes Dante to share his love with all the members of the *civitas*. Therefore, while his journey takes him away from the city and the people that he loves, more importantly it creates a distance, a space, a disconnect between himself and the woman who defines his happiness. This distance, reflected in the image of the lover as pilgrim, evokes the concept of the faithful separated from God, the believer outside of paradise, his true home, wherein dwells his true happiness. “Essere, o essere stati, *peregrini,*” writes Picone, “significa, o ha significato, essere lontani da Dio. L’opposizione lontananza/vicinanza ne richiama subito un’altra: quella di presenza/assenza” (Picone 136). The relation of opposites in the presence/absence model refers directly to Dante’s unhappy state while away from Beatrice.

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139 “meagerly and in simple vestments”
140 “a lord of frightening aspect” (My translation)
141 “...the journey so displeased me that my sighs could hardly relieve the anguish that my heart felt, because I was distancing myself from my beatitude.”
142 See Michelangelo Picone’s *Vita Nuova e tradizione romanza*. “To be, or to have been, pilgrims means, or has meant, to be far from God. The opposition distance/nearness immediately recalls another: presence/absence.” (My translation).
At times the god of Love speaks to the lover in Latin and at other times in the vernacular, which prompts one to question the significance of the vernacular. Why does Dante have his character speak in both Latin and the vernacular, and how is this significant to the *civitas*?

The most notable episode in which Love uses both the vernacular and Latin is found in Chapter XII, when Dante is once again in his room, this time weeping because Beatrice has withheld her greeting from him. Appearing to the lover in a dream, Love begins his conversation in Latin: “Fili mi, tempus est ut pretermicciontuntur simulacra nostra” (VN XII:4).\(^1\) When the lover notices that the god is also weeping, he asks him (in Italian) why. The god answers in Latin: “Ego tanquam centrum circuli, cui simili modo se habent circumferentie partes; tu autem non sic” (VN XII:4).\(^2\) The lover, however, does not understand the answer, and asks for an explanation, but this time Love answers in the vernacular: “Non dimandare più che utile ti sia” (VN XII:6).\(^3\)

Singleton proposes that Love’s use of Latin emphasizes a dignity in the language of oracle, and sets it on a higher plane, while the use of Italian signifies the god descending to the poet’s level.\(^4\) I propose that when Love addresses the lover in the vernacular, Dante, the poet, is emphasizing the importance of this language in his work, and not the language of the learned few, Latin. There is an ethics in the use of the vernacular, as the poet communicates to the reader. The ethics of narrative demands responsibility on the part of the author. These responsibilities are intersubjective and

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\(^1\) “My son, it is time to end our fabrications.”

\(^2\) “I am like the center of a circle, to which all the points of the circumference bear the same relation; you, however, are not.”

\(^3\) “Ask no more than may be useful to you.”

\(^4\) See Singleton’s *Essay*, p. 17.
emphasize the human connectivity which is fundamental to the act of storytelling.\textsuperscript{147}

Likewise, reading and interpreting carry their own set of responsibilities, for as Newton points out, the act of reading followed by the discussion or teaching of a piece of fiction constitute respectively the private and public responsibilities of textual interpretation.\textsuperscript{148}

Picone indicates, “L’incarico di scoprire e di indicare agli altri, ai profani, la lingua originaria è affidato unicamente alla poesia e ai suoi cultori” (Picone 11).\textsuperscript{149} The poet becomes the disseminator of knowledge expressed through the vernacular. He imitates the Creator, for just as God created the universe, the poet also molds and fashions his creation with his words and poetic language. For Dante, the vernacular is equated with natural language, the language we speak with our parents. Conversely, Latin is associated with artificial language, and is reserved for formal situations. Is the god coming down to the lover’s level in a condescending move, or does he decide to speak lovingly as a parent to a child? It is important to remember that the god begins his first statement with “Fili mi” (VN XII:4). I suggest, realizing that the lover is unable to understand the imagery of the center of the circle, and the reference to all the points on the circumference, which he expresses in Latin, the god finds it more useful to speak in the natural language. The Latin phrase “Ego tanquam centrum circuli, cui simili modo se habent circumferentie partes; tu autem non sic,” (VN XII:4)\textsuperscript{150} emphasizes the distance between the god and the lover, analogous to the distance which separates the \textit{fedeli d’Amore} from \textit{li più semplici}.

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\textsuperscript{147}See Newton, \textit{Narrative Ethics}, p. 18
\textsuperscript{148}Ibid. p. 18
\textsuperscript{149}“The charge of uncovering and indicating to others, the profane, the original language is entrusted to poetry and her followers” (My translation).
\textsuperscript{150}“I am like the center of a circle, to which all the points of the circumference bear the same relation; you, however, are not.”
\end{flushright}
Picone notes that one of the fundamental characteristics of the vernacular is its association with nature; “è un dono della Natura, che è figlia di Dio”\textsuperscript{151} writes Picone, echoing Dante. In his *Convivio*, Dante links the vernacular with nature when he identifies it as the language of his parents, as well as the language through which he gained knowledge: “Questo mio volgare,” writes Dante, “fu congiungitore de li miei generanti, che con esso parlavano; …questo mio volgare fu introduttore di me ne la via di scienza, che è ultima perfezione…E così è palese, e per me conosciuto, esso essere stato a me grandissimo benefattore” (*Convivio* I, xiii, 4-5).\textsuperscript{152} Its natural aspect renders the vernacular ethical, as it is more accessible to the entire *civitas*. Only the learned were able to understand Latin, as it was the language of the elite and intellectuals. The vernacular, however, was the language of the common people, and therefore understood by the entire community. Given that he writes in the vernacular, Dante’s poetry is ethical in that he offers it to both the learned and the lay readers. “Italian, not Latin,” notes Lansing, “is to be the language of communication because that is the language of the many” (Lansing 29).\textsuperscript{153} Dante’s use of the vernacular serves to expand his audience to include all members of the *civitas*.

Writing in the vernacular, the poet acknowledges his responsibility to the Other. When Emanuel Levinas addresses the issue of language, he stresses our responsibility for the other human being, and in his treatment of language, he places responsibility for the Other absolutely first.\textsuperscript{154} “Language as the presence of the face does not invite

\textsuperscript{151} “it is a gift of Nature, who is the daughter of God” (My translation). See *Vita Nuova e tradizione romanza*, p.8.

\textsuperscript{152} “This vernacular of mine was what brought my parents together, for they conversed in it; …this vernacular of mine is what leads me into the path of knowledge, which is our ultimate perfection…So it is evident that it has been a great benefactor to me, and this I acknowledge.”


\textsuperscript{154} See Llewelyn, p.122.
complicity with the preferred being, the self-sufficient 'I-Thou' forgetful of the universe,” writes Levinas. I am obliged to serve the Other, who then assigns me responsibility to a third party. Levinas articulates this in his statement, “The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other – language is justice” (TI 213). Our understanding of Levinas’s philosophy, enables us to comprehend that Dante’s use of the vernacular (albeit many centuries prior to Levinas) fulfilled his responsibility to the Other. The importance of the vernacular – the natural language – is that it expanded Dante’s audience to include intellectuals and lay people, creating a link to all citizens of the civitas. As I have previously mentioned, the understanding of li più semplici as opposed to that of the learned poets, provides us with an example of the importance of language to the community; two essential elements to the civitas.

In Love’s final appearance as a god to the lover, he explains the significance of the relationship between monna Vanna and Beatrice. The god tells Dante that just as John the Baptist preceded Christ, Lady Giovanna precedes Beatrice. While this explanation is important to the chapter on a superficial level, on a more profound level it can be understood that Giovanna represents Guido Cavalcanti who preceded Dante – represented by Beatrice – in the poetics of stilnovismo. More importantly are the final words the god of Love speaks in the Vita Nuova, which immediately follow his previous assertion:

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Ed anche mi parve che mi dicesse, dopo queste parole: ‘E chi volesse sottilmemente considerare, quella Beatrice chiamerebbe Amore per molta simiglianza che ha meco” (VN XXIV:5-6).
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155 “And after these words, Love seemed to say: ‘And who wishes subtly to consider would call Beatrice Love for the great likeness she bears to me’.”
Thus bestowing upon Beatrice the name Love, the god relinquishes his authority over the lover and confers it upon Beatrice. No longer is the sign of troubadour love capable of expressing the love which Beatrice represents, for that love is caritas, which has no part in the troubadour tradition. As Singleton notes, “The revelation is this: that love of Beatrice is something too large to be contained within the ideology of troubadour love. Love of Beatrice reaches far beyond the powers of a God of Love” (Singleton 75).

Such a realization on Dante’s part stirs a dormant spirit in his heart which he articulates in his sonnet: “Io mi senti’ svegliar dentro a lo core / uno spirito amoroso che dormìa” (VN XXIV:7, vv. 1-2). Dante is thus awakened to the truth that Beatrice is a miracle, and the miracle is love. This point is evident in the last part of his sonnet:

\[
io vidi monna Vanna e monna Bice
venire iner lo loco là ’v’io era,
l’una appresso de l’altra maraviglia;

e si come la mente mi ridice,
Amor mi disse: “Quell’è Primavera,
e quell’ha nome Amor, si mi somiglia” (VN XXIV:8-9, vv. 9-14).
\]

In linking Beatrice to Love, Dante dismisses the troubadour god, and declares his lady the image of the love of the true God. This Christian love, this caritas, is too great to be restricted by the troubadour god of love. “One after the other,” confirms Singleton, “the glosses of the Book of Memory disclose that Beatrice is a miracle, that love of her is a love whose other name is charity, being also love of God. For it is charity that bursts the narrow confines of troubadour love” (Singleton 75).

As the said, the god of love is a sign of Dante’s ethics of poetry; however, ultimately that sign gives way to another ethical element within the ‘little book’, and that

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156 “I felt awakening in my heart / an amorous spirit that slept.”
157 “I saw Lady Vanna and Lady Bice / coming toward the place where I was, / one after the other wonder; / and as memory retells me, / Love said to me : “This one is Primavera, / and that other is named Love, so like me is she.”
element is *caritas*, offered through the virtue of Beatrice, the saying. Thus the reader experiences the movement from said to saying as the god of Love gives way to Beatrice,\(^{158}\) who is love.

**Le donne de lo schermo**

In his *Libro della “Vita Nuova”*, De Robertis contends that the *donne schermo* serve to underscore the ideal of human dignity and nobility, while simultaneously emphasizing the “intersociality”\(^ {159}\) of love. It is precisely this aspect of love, within the text of the *Vita Nuova*, which causes the work to be ethical. The *donne schermo* are an essential element of Dante’s poetic ethics which is manifested in three ways: first, they point to the ethics of love as expressed in Capellanus’s concept of *morum probitas*; second, they hide Dante’s love for Beatrice from the *lauzengiers*, or the people of Florence who would gossip and mock their love; and third, they function as a fundamental example of representational ethics, as described by Newton.

Dante introduces the reader to the first *donna schermo* with the words, “pensai di fare di questa gentile donna schermo de la veritate,” (VN VI:3)\(^ {160}\) and of the second his writes, “…in poco tempo la feci mia difesa tanto, che troppa gente ne ragionava oltre li termini de la cortesia” (VN X:1).\(^ {161}\) The terms *gentile* and *cortesia*, inform the reader that these two ladies were noble ladies, and therefore worthy to stand in for the beloved within the precepts of the courtly love tradition.


\(^{159}\) De Robertis employs this term in his discussion of the question of nobility, in which he states, “il problema della <<nobiltà>>, come <<morum probitas>>, come <<prodezza>>, non è forse centrale nel trattato, e sia pure come rivendicazione di un’uguaglianza originaria degli uomini e quindi dell’intersocialità dell’amore” p.49.

\(^{160}\) “I thought of making this gentle lady a screen to the truth.”

\(^{161}\) “…in a brief time I made her my defense to such an extent that too many spoke about it beyond the bounds of courtesy.”
Capellanus’s concept of *morum probitas* – love as the source and catalyst for moral development – is the basis for the episodes of the *donna schermo*, for these noble ladies serve to slowly develop the lover’s moral character, an essential process emphasized by Capellanus: “O quam mira res est amor qui tantis facit hominen fulgere virtutibus, tantisque docit quemlibet bonis moribus abundare” (De amore IV).\(^{162}\) Foster’s description of “love as the principle of ethical perfection, of a growth into the full round of natural virtues” (Foster 22-23) reinforces the concept of *morum probitas*. The process through which the lover’s moral character is perfected requires time and experiences, and to this end, the *donna schermo* play a vital role, for these ladies help to mold the lover’s character as they prepare him for future events.

The sudden departure of the first *donna schermo* prepares the lover – and the reader – for the death of Beatrice. While in the sonnet of Chapter VII, Dante details the sadness he feels in the lady’s departure, he tells us in the preceding prose, that Beatrice is the true target of the words in the poem. Dante’s words in the *prosimetrum* underscore the link between the function of the *donna schermo* and the preparation of the lover. He describes himself as *sbigottito* at her sudden departure: “La donna con la quale io avea tanto tempo celata la mia volontade, convenne che si partisse de la sopradetta città…per che io quasi sbigotito…” (VN VII:1)\(^{163}\) The fearfulness which the lover experiences is a foreshadowing of his fear and sorrow regarding his beloved.

The term *sbigotitto* becomes a link connecting Dante’s sorrow to the loss of Beatrice, first, through her mocking him, and secondly, through her actual death.

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\(^{162}\) “O what a wonderful thing is love, which makes a man shine with so many virtues, and teaches everyone, no matter who he is, so many good traits of character.”

\(^{163}\) “The lady through whom I had for so long concealed my will was obliged to leave the aforementioned city...so that I, rather fearful...”
Dante’s ethics of poetry is demonstrated in the sonnet following the episode in which Beatrice, along with several other ladies, mock Dante for his *trasfigurazione* (transfiguration) in her presence: “Peccato face chi allora mi vede / se l’alma sbigottita non conforta” (VN XV:6, vv. 9-10). The poet makes an appeal to the other – *chi mi vede* – for comfort, for understanding, for human connectivity. His appeal is ethical in that it invokes an obligation, which as Ciaramelli states “arises not from the logical and ontological universality of reason…but rather immediately from the uniqueness of the moral situation” (Ciaramelli 85).

Reinforcing the theme of loss, and linking the departure of the *donna schermo* to the death of the beloved, Dante uses the words of the prophet Jeremiah, through which both the poet and the prophet lament their sorrow. Following the prose, which tells of the departure of the first *donna schermo*, Dante writes a sonnet, upon which the incipit is based on Jeremiah’s words in the Book of Lamentations:

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O voi che per la via d’Amore passate,
Attendete e guardate
S’elli è dolore alcun, quanto mio grave (VN VII:3, vv. 1-3).
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The apostrophe “O voi” is another ethical appeal to the stranger (the other) upon whom the poet calls to join him in his sorrow. While these lyrics are composed in an effort to continue to use the *donna schermo* as a mask, they simultaneously prefigure the sorrow the lover will feel at the death of his beloved.

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164 “One sins who then sees me / and does not comfort my affrighted soul.”
165 See also Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, pp. 95-96, and *Otherwise than Being*, p. 15.
166 The following is the verse from the book of Lamentations I:12. “O vos omnes qui transitis per viam attendite et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus quoniam vindemiavit me.” / “All you who pass by the way, look and see if there is any sorrow as the sorrow inflicted on me.”
167 “O you who along the way of Love pass by, / attend and see / if there be any grief as heavy as mine.”
In describing the *donna schermo* as screens to the truth (*schermo de la veritate*), Dante signals to the reader that he intends to protect the secret of his love for Beatrice from the *lauzengiers*. Why does Dante feel the need to hide his love for Beatrice, and what does this reveal about his ethics of poetry in relation to the *civitas*? A common figure in medieval poetry, finding their origins in *fin’ amors* of the troubadours, the *lauzengiers* are a third party who, as Cholakian describes, “hover over the scene, watching disapprovingly” (Cholakian 2). The troubadours were always cognizant of the omnipresence of these antagonists, who sought to taunt the poet/lover. “I suoi nemici più terribili,” writes Köhler, “sono i *lauzengiers*, cioè gli invidiosi, i calunniatori, gli osservatori malevoli, gli spioni, gli adulatori, i diffamatori, i falsi amanti gelosi di chi ama sinceramente, gente loquace e ingannevole, una schiera maledetta che si insinua nella confidenza della dama” (Köhler 24). The *lauzengier* becomes the symbol of every obstacle around which the lover must maneuver in his pursuit of the beloved. These gossipers represent the negative other, and are in direct opposition with the authentic relationship which exits between the I and the other. Thus they negate the power to link, creatively, the said coinciding with the *donna schermo* to the saying coinciding with Beatrice. Never identified by name, the *lauzengier* – most often more than one person – lurks overtly in the background, making his presence felt.

In the following excerpt from Arnaut Daniel’s sestina, the *lauzengier* is identified as a slanderer who jeopardizes his soul through his *mal dir* – evil talk:

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Lo ferm voler q’el cor m’intra
no·m pot becs jes escoissendre ni onglà
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168 “His most terrible enemies are the *lauzengiers*, that is the envious, the slanderers, the malevolent observers, the spies, the adulators, the defamers, the false lovers jealous of he who loves sincerely, eloquent and underhanded people, an evil crowd that worms its way into the confidence of the lady.” (My translation).
In the second half of the *cobla*, the persona declares that he will enjoy himself “on the sly” – away from the menacing onlookers:

\[
E \text{ car no} \cdot \text{ls aus batr' am ram ni ab verga,} \\
Sivals a frau, lai on non aurai oncle, \\
Jauzirai joi en vergier o dinz cambra (Lo ferm voler, vv.4-6).^{171}
\]

Cholakian points out that the term *oncle* is a disguise which refers to the *lausengier*. In order for the persona to be able to attain his joy, he must do so out of sight of the gossipers and slanderers. “If the discursive persona of this poem is to realize his sexual enterprise,” writes Cholakian, “he must, as he puts it, do it ‘a frau lai on non aurai oncle’” (Cholakian 141).

Dante, in imitation of the courtly love tradition, employs the *topos* of the *lausengier*, and uses the *donne schermo* to block the gaze of these malevolent observers, thereby creating a tension within the *civitas*, between those who blame and those who praise. This tension, for which the *donne schermo* become a remedy, mitigates the effects of the *lausengiers* on the love between the poet and his lady. In this capacity, the *donne schermo* function as a vital element of Dante’s ethics of poetry.

While these *donne schermo* – the said – function to protect Dante’s love, they simultaneously dimly reflect love as one might see a reflection in a mirror. The antithesis of a *simulacrum* is the *exemplum*, which is Beatrice – the saying. Therefore while love is imperfectly reflected in the *donne schermo*, through Beatrice, who is

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169 I take the citations and translations of Arnaut’s poetry from *The Poetry of Arnaut Daniel*, edited and translated by James J. Wilhel, (New York / London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1981). “The firm will that enters my heart / With no beak or nail can ever be torn away from me / By a false flatterer who, through evil talk, loses his soul.”

170 A *cobla* is a stanza in the poetry of the *langue d’Oc*.

171 “And since I don’t dare to bat them with branch or rod, / At least on the sly, where I won’t have any uncle, / I’ll enjoy my joy in an orchard or in a chamber.”
caritas – the love of God – is perfectly reflected. Only a facsimile of the beloved, the 
donne schermo are ultimately identified as the simulacrum, a representation 
manifested through the act of narration. It is important to recall Newton’s words: “the 
performative function of storytelling frequently serves to demonstrate the power of 
representation” (Newton 58). Dante’s narration, then, demonstrates the representative 
power of the donne schermo, not only as a simulacrum of the beloved, but also as 
evidence of Dante’s ethics of poetry.

To understand how Dante’s ethics of poetry are revealed through the 
simulacrum, it is important to review what Newton defines as the “triad structure of 
narrative ethics” (Newton 17) to which narrational, representational, and hermeneutic 
ethics are the contributing factors. In describing narrational ethics, Newton emphasizes 
the exchange which takes place between the narrator and listener, as well as the 
responsibilities which come with the act of narrating and interpreting. The gains and 
risks involved in the fictionalization of oneself or another is Newton’s definition of 
representational ethics. Finally, Newton sees the responsibilities incurred in the act of 
reading and interpreting fiction as the necessary element of hermeneutic ethics.

One example of the benefits of this method of characterization is Dante’s 
servantese in which he includes the names of sixty of the most beautiful ladies of 
Florence, including the first donna schermo and Beatrice. There is an ethos in Dante’s 
poem in praise of the women of the city, and Dante tells the reader that it was the donna 
schermo who serves as his motivation: “Dico che in questo tempo che questa donna 
era schermo di tanto amore, quanto de la mia parte, si mi venne una voluntade di

172 As I have indicated above, the god of Loves appears to Dante, and tells the poet it is time to do away with their 
fabrications: “Fili mi, tempus est ut pretermictantur simulacra nostra.” (VN XII:3).
volere ricordare lo nome di quella gentilissima ed accompagnarlo di molti nomi di donne” (VN VI:1). Through his poetry in praise of the sixty ladies, who are emblematic of the entire civitas, Dante's communicates his ethics to the reader.

In the episode of the second donna schermo, Dante's gamble becomes evident to the reader. As the poet presents this second difesa (defense) to both the reader and the civitas, he finds that he goes too far, as his representation of her causes members of the civitas to act negatively. “Dico che in poco tempo la feci mia difesa tanto,” writes Dante, “che troppa gente ne ragionava oltre li termini de la cortesia” (VN X:1). Especially interesting are Gorni's notes on this passage. He points out that “oltre li termini de la cortesia” (beyond the bounds of courtesy) means a love which is not at all secret, and thus negates the idea of a “screen” or “defense,” and is therefore relegated to literature. Gorni’s point underscores the risks of representational ethics. Dante has gone too far in his representation of this donna schermo, and the duality of the person/character is torn asunder. When we apply Newton’s idea that the doubling of reality unites the act of representation to responsibility, we find that in this episode the author’s representation is disjunctive relative to the necessary responsibilities inherent in representational ethics. His only way of bridging this disjuncture is through his poetry, which as I have previously established, extends his ethics to the civitas.

Therefore, at the behest of the god of Love, Dante writes a ballata whose main purpose is to inform Beatrice of his love for her. It also serves, however, to reconcile the act of

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173 “I say that during that time when that lady was a screen to so much loveas came from my part, the desire arose in me to recollect the name of this most gentle one and to accompany it with names of many ladies.”
174 “I say that in a brief time I made her my defense to such an extent that too many people spoke about it beyond the bounds of courtesy.”
175 See Gorni, p. 50, “oltre li termini della cortesia: <<oltre le convenienze imposte dal galateo cortese>>, di un amore non proprio segreto (perché altrimenti non sarebbe schermo o difesa), ma insomma regalato alla letteratura.”
representation with the responsibilities which it carries. The key term in his ballata is cortesemente, which counter balances the phrase oltre li termini de la cortesia, and thus bridges the gap he had created:

Ballata, I’ voi che tu ritrovi Amore,
e con lui vade a madonna davante,
sì che la scusa mia, la qual tu cante,
ragioni poi con lei lo mio segnore.
Tu vai, ballata, sì cortesemente,
che sanza compagnia
dovresti avere in tutte parti ardire (VN XII:10, vv.1-7).\textsuperscript{176}

Having reestablished the concept of courtesy, and therefore propriety, within the work, Dante’s poetry is once more the ethical device which he offers to the civitas. This ethos is evident in his statement that to go forth without love is imprudent:

ma se tu vuoli andar securamente,
retrova l’Amor pria,
ché forse non è bon sanza lui gire;
però che quell anche ti dee audire,
sì com’io credo, è ver di me adirata:
se tu di lui non fossi accompagnata,
leggeramente ti faria disnore (VN XII:11, vv. 8-14).\textsuperscript{177}

Finally, the ballata is ethical in that the lover is intent on addressing the anger of his beloved. Her anger was caused by actions outside the bounds of courtesy, which (according to the courtly love tradition) renders him unworthy of her. Only through his poetry – renewed within the limits of courtesy – is he able to present himself as probus.

The ontological said, the expression of the poet’s desire to mend his relationship with his lady, brings about the necessary healing between the lover and the beloved.

\textsuperscript{176} “Ballade, I want you to seek out Love / and with him go before my lady / so that my excuse, which you must sing / my Lord may then recount to her. / You must go, ballade, courteously / so that without accompaniment / you may be bold in every place;” I have italicized the words cortesemente and courteously for emphasis.

\textsuperscript{177} “but if you want to go securely / find Love first / for perhaps it is not good to go without him; / because she who must hear you / as I believe, is angry with me: / if you were not accompanied by him / likely she may not do you honor.”
The said then gives way to the saying, through which the poet offers himself to the other (in this case his lady), whose approach he is unable to resist. It is in this exposure, this offering of self to the other, this saying through the said, that Dante’s poetry is ethical, and just as he offers the ballata to the beloved, he extends the saying to the entire civitas through his poetry, that all may benefit from the words of his said.178

The act of writing poetry, as well as the act of narration, offered to the other, whether that other may be the donne schermo, Beatrice, or the entire civitas, underscore Dante’s ethical responsibilities. Recalling Ciaramelli’s words, we understand that the ethical subject is obliged “to morality by the appeal of the other” (Ciaramelli 85)179 which unites us in moral obligation, in a manifestation of the subject-object structure. In his discussion of the correlation between the said and the saying, Levinas assures us that the saying imprints its trace upon the said, rather than being exhausted in the said. How does this assist in our understanding of Dante’s ethics of poetry?180 Wyschogrod’s statement regarding Levinas that “the saying must find its way into the language that is uttered and written, and that identifies entities, the language of the said, in order to make thought and justice in the social order possible” (Wyschogrod 201), helps us to understand how Dante’s words reflect his responsibilities to the people of Florence. Dante’s ethics of poetry, as represented in the god of Love, a sign of troubadour tradition, or the donne schermo, based on the ethical concept of morum

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179 See Ciaramelli in Re-reading Levinas, p. 85, and also Newton’s Narrative Ethics, p. 12.
180 Throughout this study I indicate how Dante’s ethos of love is communicated and shared with the entire civitas, therefore as I recall Newton’s explanation regarding the ethics of hermeneutics I recognize my (private and public) responsibilities to my reader, which come with my interpretation of Dante’s said, and ultimately transcending it as saying to my reader. For as Newton writes, “textual interpretation comprises both private responsibilities incurred in each singular act of reading and public responsibilities that follow from discussing, and teaching works of fiction” (Newton 19).
probitas, emphasize his relationship with the civitas, through which, in the words of Wyschogrod, his saying remains clothed in the language of his said.\textsuperscript{181}

Chapter Four

The Loss of Beatrice and the Ethics of Pilgrimage

At the very midpoint of the *Vita Nuova* is the death of Beatrice. Strategically placing her death at the center of the work, Dante emphasizes her humanity, by confirming that death is a reality of life from which no one is spared. The poet never describes nor discusses the actual moment of her death, but through the words of the prophet Jeremiah, “Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo! facta est quasi vidua domina gentium” (*VNXXVIII*:1), he announces her passing to the entire city as well as to his reader. The incipit of Chapter XXVIII prepares the reader for the solemn tone of the second half of the *Vita Nuova*, in which the loss of the beloved is the central focus. The theme of loss is emphasized by the description of the city’s desolation, once teaming with life, now vacant. It refers to Florence which has lost its most blessed citizen, Beatrice beata, as Dante refers to her later in the chapter. This theme of loss underscores the vital link between love and the civitas, as the poet exhorts the city to share in his sorrow. Simultaneously, this theme is linked to the fundamental theme of pilgrimage of the second part of the work. In this chapter, I examine these two themes and demonstrate how Dante, reaffirming and elaborating his ethics of poetry, employs them to emphasize the essential relationship between love and civitas. How is Dante’s

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182 Beatrice’s death marks Dante’s divergence form the courtly love tradition, in which the domina or the “idealized” lady does not die, but becomes angelicata (angel-like), and is truly the final object of desire for her lover. See Singleton, *Essay*, p. 68, and De Robertis, *Il Libro*, p. 56-57.

183 “How solitary lies the city, once full of people! Once great among the nations, she has become like a widow.” This translation comes from Cervigni and Vasta’s edition of the *Vita Nuova*. 

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narrative ethics manifested through the loss of Beatrice? What is the link between the theme of pilgrimage, love, and civitas?

*The theme of Loss*

Marking the beginning of Chapter II of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante’s words “la gloriosa donna de la mia mente” (VN II:1),\(^ {184}\) clearly indicate, as Singleton demonstrated, that Beatrice has already attained the glory of paradise.\(^ {185}\) These phrases are only the initial indications of the loss of the beloved and serve to prepare the reader for what is to be the climax of the libro della memoria (book of memory). The loss or the disappearance of the beloved is essential to the protagonist’s continual refinement of his love. If the beloved remains, the lover becomes fixed on the status quo, the here and now, unable to advance and grow, analogous to the Gospel episode in which Christ meets two of the apostles on the road to Emmaus. While Christ walks and converses with them, their hearts burn and they beg him to stay for something to eat. As soon as he gives the blessing, they recognize him, and he immediately vanishes from their sight. Upon his disappearance, the two apostles are energized and reinvigorated, “et surgentes eadem hora regressi sunt in Hierusalem,” (Luke XXIV:33)\(^ {186}\) to share this reinvigorated and increasing love with the entire community. Dante, too, like the apostles in the Gospel account, benefits from the disappearance of the beloved, for at the end of the *Vita Nuova*, he proclaims:

\(^{184}\) “the glorious lady of my mind”

\(^{185}\) Later Dante speaks of Beatrice’s ineffable courtesy, “la quale è oggi meritata nel grande secolo” (VN III:1).

\(^{186}\) “They got up immediately and returned to Jerusalem>”
“E poi piaccia a colui che è sire de la cortesia, che la mia anima se ne possa gire a vedere la gloria de la sua donna, cioè di quella benedetta Beatice” (VN XLII:3).\(^{187}\)

Such a proclamation marks the lover’s arrival at the final stage in the development of his love (as demonstrated in the second chapter of this study). Much like the apostles on the road to Emmaus, however, Dante’s journey was essential to his final goal, a journey in which loss and pilgrimage play a fundamental role.

Dante’s first dream, in which the god of Love appears with Beatrice in his arms, gives the reader the first indication of Beatrice’s early demise. In a preview of the grief which will permeate the second half of the \textit{Vita Nuova}, the god’s mood quickly changes from happiness to bitter sadness:

\begin{quote}
Apresso ciò poco dimorava che la sua letizia si convertia in amarissimo pianto; e così piangendo, si ricogliea questa donna ne le sue braccia, e con essa mi parea che si ne gisse verso lo cielo (VN III:7).\(^{188}\)
\end{quote}

The poet juxtaposes the term \textit{letizia} with \textit{pianto} to underscore the contrast between his elation at the beginning of the book when Beatrice deigns to greet him, and his profound sadness which will be caused by her death. The god of Love’s \textit{amarissimo pianto} points to the despair of the solitary city of Chapter XXVIII which \textit{est quasi vidua} (has become like a widow).

The next indication of the loss of the beloved is represented in the departure of the first \textit{donna schermo}. Having already discussed her departure in the previous chapter of this study, I mention it here solely to enhance my examination of how her departure prefigures the death of Beatrice. It is important to understand how the events

\(^{187}\)“And then may it please him who is the Lord of courtesy that my soul may go to see the glory of his lady: namely, that blessed Beatrice.”

\(^{188}\)“After that he abided, but little before his happiness converted into most bitter weeping; and thus weeping he gathered this lady into his arms, and with her he appeared to ascend toward heaven.”
are parallel, and that each provides an opportunity for the poet to express his sadness and call upon the people of Florence to join him in his grief. While the donna schermo cannot be seen as the city’s beatrix, her departure brings to light the movement from the said (the donna schermo) to the saying (Beatrice), imitating the vital link between the poet’s words and caritas. Dante employs his poetry to prevent shaming the donna schermo and demeaning his love for Beatrice. As he explains in the prose which precedes his sonnet, he decides to write a poem to lament his loss. His writing is ethical in that the poet emphasizes the essential link which exists between love and poetry, as well as in the fact that he offers it to the entire city:

E pensando che se de la sua partita io non parlassi alquanto dolorosamente, le persone sarebbero accorte più tosto de lo mio nascondere, propuosi di farne alcuna lamentanza in uno sonetto (VN VII:2).\(^{189}\)

While nascondere emphasizes the role of the donna schermo, dolorosamente and lamentanza allude to the sorrow the lover feels in his loss of both the screen and his beloved.

A comparison of two sonnets “O voi che per la via d’Amore passate” and “Venite e intender li sopiri miei” reveals parallels which support my argument that the departure of the donna schermo prepares the lover for the death of his beloved. The theme of loss is intensified through the poet’s use of the motif of impoverishment, a fundamental element of both sonnets:

Or ho perduto tutta mia baldanza che si movea d’amoroso tesoro;
on’d’io povero dimoro,
in guisa che di dir mi ven dottanza.
Si che volendo far come coloro che per vergogna celan lor mancanza,

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\(^{189}\) “And thinking that if of her departure I did not write somewhat sorrowfully then people would soon become aware of my concealment, I resolved to express a lamentation in a sonnet.”
The juxtaposition of *tesoro* and *povero* strengthens the sense of loss which the lover is experiencing.  

Once content and emboldened (baldanza) in all that Love had to offer, the lover now suffers a miserable impoverishment caused by his loss.  

Dante revisits this theme of impoverishment in the sonnet *Venite a intender*:

> Però che gli occhi mi sarebber rei,  
> molte fiate più ch’io non vorria,  
> lassol, di pianger si la donna mia,  
> che sfogasser lo cor, piangendo lei (VN XXXII:5, vv.5-8).

Cervigni and Vasta translate the term *rei* in this quatrain as “debtor”. This translation takes up the impoverishment theme, while supporting the link between the two sonnets. It is important, however, to look at Barbi’s explanation of *rei* as “regge di piangere” (crying non-stop), which Gorni interprets as the eyes being obligated to cry. Dante, too, in the following line admits he cries more than he wants, revealing this sense of obligation, and reinforcing the link of *povero* in “O voi che per la via” to *rei* in “Venite a intender,” and thus underscoring the parallel of the sonnets.

The most telling portent which gives the lover, as well as the reader, an indication of Beatrice’s impending death is Dante’s delirious dream during his nine day illness. The poet discloses that during his compromised state, he contemplates the frailty of
human life, and thus comes to realize that even “la gentilissima Beatrice alcuna volta si muoia” (VN XXIII:4). The sense of hopelessness in the face of loss overwhelms the lover and he becomes frantic in his delirium:

E però mi giunse uno sì forte smarrimento, che chiusi li occhi e cominciai a travagliare sí come farnetica persona ed a imaginare in questo modo (VNXXIII:4).

The sense of loss is so powerful and so overbearing that the lover becomes delusional. His sorrow at imagined loss, though it will deepen causing him greater misery later in the work, serves to prepare the lover for the death of his beloved, an event he failed to contemplate before his illness, and of which he is now acutely aware. Dante, however, confirms to his reader that death is a reality of human experience, and that we have no recourse but to accept it. Dante initiates this argument earlier in the work, when he recalls the death of Beatrice’s father:

Appresso ciò non molti dì passati, sì come piacque al glorioso sire lo quale non negoe la morte a sé, colui che era stato genitore di tanta maraviglia quanta si vedea ch’era questa nobillissima Beatrice, di questa vita uscendo, a la gloria eternale se ne gio veramente (VNXXII:1).

Dante avers that death provokes a universal pathos, for just as God did not deny Himself death, neither does he deny it to Beatrice’s father, and ultimately, we all share the same destiny. While the pathos of death and the deep sense of loss prepare

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195 “the most gentle Beatrice one day will die.”
196 “And thus came over me so powerful a sense of loss that I closed my eyes and began to be agitated like a frantic person and to imagine in this manner.”
197 “After that, not many days later, as it pleased the Lord of Glory who did not negate death for himself, he who had been the parent of so great a marvel as evidently was this most noble Beatrice, from this life issuing, to eternal glory passed truly.”
198 What does this say about God’s responsibility to the believer? God’s choice to experience death from a mortal perspective, suggests that the Divine feels an “obligation” to the faithful to model the act of death. This example demonstrates God’s love for His people, while providing an exemplum of how each believer has, in imitation of the Divine, an obligation to be responsible for each other. The love which God gives to the faithful must then be reciprocated, and disseminated among all people.
the reader for the death of Dante’s beloved, what are the ethical aspects of the poet’s words, and how do these ethical elements relate to the *civitas*?

In my examination of the text, I find two instances in which Dante’s words reveal his ethos regarding love and *civitas*. In the first case, a relative of the protagonist begins to weep, distressed by the sight of Dante praying for Death to take him:

> E dicendo io queste parole con doloroso singulto di pianto, e chiamando la Morte che venisse a me, una donna giovane e gentile, la quale era lungo lo mio letto, credendo che lo mio piangere e le mie parole fossero solamente per lo dolore de la mia infermitade, con grande paura cominciò a piangere (VN XXIII:11).  

This relative, believing that Dante cries out to Death because he can no longer bear the pain of his illness, is moved to compassion. Thus the text is ethical in that this *donna giovane e gentile* recognizes her responsibility to the other, and is obliged to respond. This compulsory responsibility holds her captive to the other, whose face commands a response, which comes in the form of pity. It is precisely responsibility to the other which renders the episode ethical. It is important to recall Levinas’s words regarding responsibility of the other which he claims “commands me and ordains me to the other” (OB 11). Levinas points out that responsibility goes against one’s will, and that one must substitute oneself for the other. “All my inwardness,” he writes, “is invested in the form of despite-me, for-another. Despite-me, for-another is signification par excellence” (OB 11). Applying Levinas’s concept of “despite-me, for-another” to Dante’s *donna giovane e gentile*, we understand the ethical element of her compassion, and see a connection, by analogy, to Beatrice, the “donna gentile” par excellence.

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199 “And as I was uttering these words with painful convulsions of weeping, and calling on Death to come to me, a lady young and gentle, who stood alongside my bed, believing that my weeping and my words came solely from the pain of my infirmity, with great fear began to cry.”
The tears of Dante’s relative draw the attention of other women in the room who immediately respond to both the weeping lady and the crying infirm. These women reaffirm ethics in their response to both situations; they remove the protagonist’s relative from the room, and they “wake” the lover, who they believe is dreaming. Their response, however, is simultaneously ethical in that they act to relieve the suffering of both people. It is their concern for the other in which the ethical aspect of their actions is most evident. In the faces of the lover and the donna giovane e gentile, these women see raw humanity in all its corporality, and in it recognize the otherness which demands a response. It is important to understand that otherness calls us to action, and that call comes through the face of the other. To understand this concept, it is helpful to recall the words of Levinas, who asserts that the face commands and speaks to us, obligating us to meet the needs of the other. “The face of the Other is destitute,” writes Levinas, “it is the poor for whom I can do all and to whom I owe all. And me, whoever I may be, but as a ‘first person,’ I am he who finds the resources to respond to the call” (Ethics and Infinity 89). Levinas reaffirms that all of us – as members of the civitas – are called to respond to the other through the call of the face, which ultimately serves as a path to God. He states, “The dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face” (TI 70). Indeed, it is through the face of the other, with its compelling impoverishment and emptiness, that one is ultimately led to the divine.

How do Levinas’s teachings on the face of the other apply to the women who comfort Dante and his weeping relative? Prompted by the destituteness of the face, these women find within themselves the resources to respond to the suffering which is before them. The poet recounts that upon seeing him, they resolve to bring him some
comfort, respond to his needs, participate in ‘despite-me, for-another’: “E quando mi videro, cominciaro a dire: ‘Questo pare morto’, e a dire tra loro: ‘Procuriamo di confortarlo’” (VN XXIII:14).\textsuperscript{200} The face of the other in all its suffering spurs them to action. The women focus their attention on the lover, promptly addressing his needs. As Dante explains: “onde molte parole mi diceano da confortarmi, e talora mi domandavano di che io avesse avuto paura” (VN XXIII:14).\textsuperscript{201} These women are emblematic of the poet and his reader. Just as the women recognize the lover’s need, and respond to him, so does the poet act in a reciprocal relationship with his reader. Dante’s appeal elicits judgment and interpretation from the reader, emphasizing the reciprocity between story teller and interlocutor.\textsuperscript{202} This reiterates his interaction with the fedeli d’Amore, the coro delle donne, and i più semplici, underscoring the ethical relationship between the author and reader.

Dante’s decision to describe his vision to the women introduces the second canzone of the Vita Nuova, “Donna pietosa,” which he writes after having recovered from his illness. The canzone treats his illness and the vision of Beatrice’s death, and has as its central theme the inevitability of death. As Martinez observes, “Donna pietosa may also be situated in a larger structure of poems concerning the narrator-protagonist’s vulnerability to death, as this proves to be both the occasion and content of the canzone”.\textsuperscript{203} The larger structure of poems of which Martinez speaks applies to two poems of the Vita Nuova (“Ciò che m’incontra” of Chapter XV, and “Quantunque...”\textsuperscript{200} “And when they saw me, they began to say: ‘This on looks dead,’ and to say among themselves, ‘Let’s try to comfort him’”.
\textsuperscript{201} “whereupon many things they said to comfort me, and at times they asked me what I had feared.”
\textsuperscript{202} See Newton, Narrative Ethics, pp. 10-11.
volte, lasso” of Chapter XXXIII) in which the protagonist is either urged to die or calls upon death to take him out of this world. These encounters with death, I argue, are a manifestation of his anxiety over the potential loss of his beloved which is central to this second canzone. The tone of anguish in the canzone draws the reader into the poet’s deep sense of grief, and, like the women at his bedside, we too feel compassion for the protagonist. The verses of the canzone parallel the prose which precedes it, intensifying the dynamic between them. The poet’s description, in the *prosimetrum*, of his vision of disheveled women announcing his death is later echoed in the verses of the canzone: “visi di donne m’apparver crucciati, / che mi dicean pur: – Morra’ti, morra’ti – (VN XXIII:22, vv. 41-42). The parallels between prose and verse amplify the fear of death and the unknown; chaos looms. The pathos of death is undeniable, underscoring the mournful aspect of the canzone:

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ed essere mi parea non so in qual loco,
e veder donne andar per via discolte,
qual lagrimando, e qual traendo guai,
che di tristizia saettavan foco.
Poi mi parve vedere a poco a poco
turbare lo sole e apparir la stella,
e pianger elli ed ella;
cader li augelli volando per l’are,
e la terra tremare (VN XXIII:23-24, vv. 45-53).
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205 “I seemed to see faces of women disconsolate, / who told me over and over again:— You will die, you will die. –”

206 “I seemed to be in I don’t know which place, / and saw ladies go all disheveled, / some weeping, some crying out their laments, / so that of grief they let fly the fire. / Then I seemed to see, little by little, / the sun grow dim and stars appear / and the one and the others weep; / birds in flight fell from the air, / and the earth shook.” It must be noted that these events recall the events of the Gospel account of Christ’s death (Matthew XXVII: 51-53), reinforcing Beatrice as the *figura Christi*, and paralleling her death with the death of Christ. Martinez remarks, “The parallel of Beatrice and Christ established by cosmic disturbances is placed on a theological footing when the speaker sees the dead Beatrice as the ‘form of true humility,’ which can result from nothing less than an imitation of the death of Christ”. See Martinez, “Mourning Beatrice,” p. 23.
Out of this turbulence appears a man who announces to the lover that his lady has died. This man, in his act of friendship, symbolic of the entire civitas, brings to mind Levinas’s words on discourse and the authenticity of relationship: “It is discourse, and more exactly, response and responsibility which is this authentic relationship” (Ethics and Infinity 88). The man’s declaration is yet another link between the prose and the verse, serving as the solitary announcement of Beatrice’s death in the text. After Beatrice’s actual death, the poet doesn’t announce that she is dead, but instead, through the words of Jeremiah, invites the entire city to mourn with him. In “Donna pietosa,” however, through the delirium of his illness, he explores all the details of the beloved’s death:

Lo imaginar fallace
mi condusse a veder madonna morta;
e quand’io l’avea scorta,
vedea che donne la covrian d’un velo;
ed avea seco umiltà verace,
che parea che dicesse: -- Io sono in pace.-- (VNXXIII:26, vv. 65-70)

Having witnessed Beatrice’s death through the protagonist’s vision, the reader has a clear understand of her actual death. The words of Jeremiah not only confirm the death of the beloved, but also invite the reader to join the protagonist on his pilgrimage to an “intelligenza nova” (VN XLI:10, v. 3) – a new intelligence.

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207 See also Levinas’s comments in Totality and Infinity, p. 215.
208 The text from the prose and the verse read respectfully: “…immaginai alcuno amico che mi venisse a dire: “Or non sai? La tua mirabile donna è partita di questo secolo.” (“I imagined that a friend came to me to say: “Don’t you know yet? Your wonderful lady has departed from this world.” VN XXIII:6). “…ed omo apparve scolorito e fioco, / dicendomi: -- Che fai? non sai novella? / morta è la donna tua, ch’era si bella.” (…and a man appeared, pale and weak, / saying: -- What, have you not heard the news? / Dead is your lady, who was so lovely.--” VNXXIII:24, vv. 54-56).
209 On this point see Singleton who writes, “Somehow, when Beatrice really dies, her death seems less like a death than it does an ascension. Her lover will not write of it, he says, for reasons which point clearly to a miraculous event.” An Essay, p. 19.
210 “My false imagining / took me to see my dead lady; / and after I had seen her, / I saw ladies cover her with a veil; / and with her she had true humility, / that seemed to say: -- I rest in peace. --”.

89
As I mentioned above, the words of the prophet call upon the *civitas* to join the lover in his loss. While Dante’s sorrow is personal, he extends it to the entire *civitas*, rendering it public. In so doing, he expands his audience from what started out as only the *fedeli d’Amore*, then the *donne ch’avete intelligenza d’amore*, and finally includes all the citizens of the city.⁴⁰¹ Dante further expands his audience, as I discuss below, when he addresses the pilgrims who pass through Florence. The city, now compared to a widow who has lost everything, is exhorted to suffer as the lover suffers:

Poi che fue partita da questo secolo, rimase tutta la sopradetta cittade quasi vedova dispogliata da ogni dignitade; onde io, ancora lagrimando in questa desolata cittade, scrissi a li principi de la terra alquanto de la sua condizione, pigliando quello cominciamento di Geremia profeta che dice: *Quomodo sedet solo civitas* (VNXXX:1).⁴⁰²

De Robertis argues that Dante understands Beatrice’s death to be a result of God’s anger in retaliation for the city’s transgressions. “Che poi, confortato dal profeta,” writes De Robertis, “Dante vedesse in quella morte il segno della collera divina per le colpe della città e che col cap. XXX egli riferisse appunto alla storia di Beatrice lo stato della sua patria, non farebbe che accentuare la scarsa rilevanza affetiva dell’avvenimento” (De Robertis 158).⁴⁰³ If we follow De Robertis’s argument, Dante admonishes the *civitas*, (especially the leaders) and holds Beatrice up as an exemplum, suggesting that the city has been unworthy of this *beatrix*. The poet echoes his rebuke in the third and final canzone of the Vita Nuova:

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⁴⁰¹ See Martinez, *Mourning Beatrice*, p. 19 for a discussion on this point in relation to the words of Threni.

⁴⁰² “After she had departed from this century, the entire aforementioned city was left like a widow dispossessed of every dignity; hence, still weeping in this desolate city, I wrote to the princes of the earth somewhat about its condition, taking the beginning from Jeremiah the prophet, who says: *Quomodo sedet sola civitas* [How solitary lies the city].” Dante’s address to the “princes”, those in power, highlights the link between ethics and politics. He will later, in Purgatorio VI, rebuke the self-serving, unethical leaders of Italy and specifically those of Florence.

⁴⁰³ “Then comforted by the prophet, Dante sees in that death the sign of divine anger for the faults of the city, and in Chapter XXX he indeed relates Beatrice’s story to the state of her country, which would only emphasize the insufficient effective relevance of the event.” De Robrtis, *Libro*, p. 158 (My translation).
Finding this “vita noiosa” unworthy of Beatrice, God has called her to himself, leaving the city “dispogliata” (dispossessed) and “desolata” (desolate), a motif repeated by the poet at the end of the canzone:

Pietosa mia canzone, or va piangendo; e ritruova le donne e le donzelle a cui le tue sorelle erano usate di portar letizia; e tu, che se’ figliuola di tristizia, vatten disconsolate a star con elle (VN XXXI:17, vv. 71-76).

The words “tristizia” and “disconsolate” are juxtaposed with the word “letizia,” intensifying the poet’s sense of grief and despair, while the final line underscores the emptiness of the city. However, Dante mitigates this grief by writing poems on behalf of Beatrice’s brother, who shares in that grief. The brother’s request reveals the relationship between poetry and consolation, underscoring the ethical function of poetry. Hence the said of the fiction/poetry is transcended by the ethical responsibility of the poet. Equally important is the friendship which exists between the poet and Beatrice’s brother, who Dante describes as “amico immediatamente dopo lo primo” (VN

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214 “For a ray of her humility / went beyond the heavens with such power / as to make the eternal Lord marvel / so that sweet desire / came upon him to summon so much perfection; / and he made her, from here below, come to him / because he saw that this abject life / was not worthy of so gentle a thing.”

215 “My rueful canzone, now go, weeping; / and find again the ladies and the maidens / to whom your sisters / were accustomed to offering delight; / and you, who are a child of sadness, / go disconsolate to stay with them.”
Writing on behalf of the brother/friend, Dante steps out of the conventional role of love poet, who writes on his own behalf.

**Peregrinatio**

In the midst of his grieving, Dante encounters a group of pilgrims. The lover is struck by their lack of knowledge of Beatrice’s death, and their ignorance of the recent events in the “*città dolente*.” As pilgrims they are exiles – *hombres in statu viatoris* – away from their homes and in search of a final destination. Picone holds that we live a life of exile, that in our human existence we remain far from our true home, our quotidian struggle ever towards a destination which is outside of this world. However, it is important to remember that this earthly existence restores us during our long and tiresome journey, lest we risk losing sight of our final destination. What contributions do the pilgrims who cross Florence, on their way to Rome, make to the total economy of the *Vita Nuova*? How are love and *civitas* linked to the theme of pilgrimage?

Dante recognizes these strangers as pilgrims because since Beatrice’s death he, too, has become *homo viator*, in search of the one who will restore his happiness. These pilgrims serve a dual function within the *Vita Nuova*: first, they extend Dante’s poetry to a larger audience; secondly they bring the ethics of Dante’s poetry to the *civitas* and beyond. The poet, imitating the prophet’s exhortation appeals to the

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216 “a friend to me immediately after the first [Guido Cavalcanti]”.
218 See Picone, *Vita nuova e tradizione romanza*, p. 139.
219 The Confessions of St. Augustine are a fundamental source for the pilgrim motif among the medieval writers, and especially Dante. In Book VII, Chapter XX, Augustine writes: “inter videntes, quo eundum sit, nec videntes, qua, et viam ducentem ad beatificam patriam, non tantum cernendam sed et habitandam (Betwixt those that saw whither they go, but knew nothing of the way: and that path which leads unto that blessed country”). Also: “et qui de longinquo videre non potest, viam tamen ambulet, qua veniat et videat teneat” (and that he who from afar off is not able to see his way, whereby he may at least arrive, and see, and comprehend).
stranger, and thus expands his audience. “O voi” and “Deh peregrini” counterbalance each other, as the former is the second sonnet of the *Vita Nuova*, and the latter is the penultimate sonnet of the work. In each, the poet invites a group of pilgrims to mourn his loss with him. There is a dialectic in that his comments are no longer reserved for love’s elite – “i fedeli d’Amore” – but are now extended (as we saw at the beginning of the *Vita Nuova*, with “li più semplici” and the “donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore”) to the pilgrims/strangers who pass through Florence.

In Chapter Three of this study, I commented on the god of Love, as he appears in the sonnet “Cavalcando l’altr’ier,” as a reflection of the lover’s mood. In conjunction with “O voi” and “Deh peregrini,” however, the god of Love in the sonnet “Cavalcando” serves a different function. Within the theme of *peregrinatio*, the god of Love anticipates the status of the lover at the end of the *Vita Nuova*, as a pilgrim, and thus links him to the pilgrims in the two sonnets here mentioned. In “Cavalcando,” the god travels “in mezzo de la via” (VN IX:9, v.3), an echo of the “via d’Amore” (VN VII:3, v.1) on which the travelers in “O voi” tread. “Cavalcando l’altr’ier per un cammino pensoso” (VN IX:9, v.2) creates a link between the lover and the pilgrims in “Deh peregrini” who “pensosi andate” (VN LX:9 v.1). The commonalities which the three sonnets share underscore the importance of the pilgrim theme within the economy of the *Vita Nuova*, as the “cammino” or the “via” becomes the essential path to *caritas*. The reader experiences

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220 Martinez notes the “linguistic parallelism between the two poems,” (Mourning Beatrice 11) in his comparison of them, while Gorni also notes phrasing similarities between these two sonnets (224).

221 Appearing in humble attire, “E però lo dolcissimo senore...apparve come peregrine leggeramente vestito e di vili drappi,” the god of Love reflects the peregrination of the lover.

222 The translations of the four citations used in this paragraph appear in this note. They are as follows: “in the middle of the way” (VN IX:9, v. 3); “the way of Love” (VVDII:3, v. 1); “musing” (VNNX:9, v.2); “go along in thought” (VNLX:9, v.1).

223 See Martinez on the “three contextualized sonnets” (Mourning Beatrice 11-12).
movement in the transcendence of the saying from the said. Dante provides us an example in the prose of Chapter XL, when, having observed the pilgrims as they pass through the city, he believes that if he could speak to them he would be able to elicit from them sympathy regarding the death of his lady. What method would he employ to make them “piangere anzi ch’elli uscissero di questa cittade” (VN XL:4)?

Dante’s poetry – his said – is the very instrument which he uses to help these pilgrims understand the sorrow of his city, and their role in it. “Se io li potesse tenere alquanto,” writes Dante, “io li pur farei piangere anzi ch’elli uscissero di questa cittade, però che io direi parole le quali farebbero piangere chiunque le intendesse” (VN XL: 4-5). His statement reflects the ontological characteristics of language or, the ability to question the meaning of being. Dante’s desire to speak to the pilgrims is both ontological and ethical, as the said and the saying are united in it. Dante believes that if he could just talk to the pilgrims he could provoke a response:

Onde, passati costoro da la mia veduta, propuosi di fare uno sonetto, ne lo quale io manifestasse ciò che io avea detto fra me medesimo; e acciò che più paresse pietoso, propuosi di dire come se io avesse parlato a loro” (VN XL:5).

The poet’s use of the phrase come se io avesse parlato (as if I had spoken) underscores the poetic distance between the lover and the pilgrims. The reality of not being able to speak to them necessitates the ethics of fiction, through which the poet’s writing provokes pity, and thus deepens the experience of reality for the reader. Dante’s use of three verbs in this excerpt, scrivere – implied by fare uno sonetto – (to write),

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224 “...weep before they left this city.”
225 “If I could detain them awhile, I would nevertheless make them weep before they left this city, because I would speak words that would make anyone weep who heard them.”
226 See J. Llewelyn in The Cambridge Companion to Levinas, p. 121
227 “Therefore, after they had passed from sight, I resolved to write a sonnet in which I would manifest what I had said within myself; and so that it would appear all the more moving, I resolved to write as if I had spoken to them.”

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dire (to say), and parlare (to speak), emphasize the importance of language, and the poet’s desire to communicate with others beyond the space of the civitas.

We find another example of Dante’s interaction with other citizens comes in the episode in which, after Beatrice’s death, Dante is drawing angels:

In quello giorno nel qual si compiea l’anno che questa donna era fatta de li cittadini di vita eterna, io mi sedea in parte ne la quale, ricordandomi di lei, disegnava uno angelo sopra certe tavolette; e mentre io lo disegnava, volsi li occhi, e vidi lungo me uomini a li quali si convenia di fare onore. E’ riguardavano quello che io facea; e secondo che me fu detto poi, elli erano stati già alquanto anzi che io me ne accorgesse. (VN XXXIV:1-2).

What does this episode reveal about Dante's communication with his fellow citizens? Dante communicates with these on-lookers (at first unknowingly) through his drawings, which become his “said.” The art creates a connection between the artist/poet and the gentlemen whereby words are unnecessary to provoke an exchange, which later will be expressed through poetry. This brings to mind Levinas’s claim that “through art essence and temporality begin to resound with poetry or song” (OB 40). Just as the gentlemen look over Dante’s shoulder to admire his drawings, the reader, too, marvels at the words of his poetry, and thus shares in the relationship between Dante and the civitas. Significantly, by drawing angels, Dante metonymically connects his beloved Beatrice with the cittadini di vita eterna (citizens of eternal life), but he also suggests a similar connection between these blessed citizens and his fellow Florentines.

Whether written or spoken, language gives one the ability to offer oneself to the neighbor, the other, in a completely ethical act. This episode is analogous to Dante’s communication with the pilgrims. Levinas notes language as “the first ethical gesture,”

228 “On that day when a year was completed since this lady had become a citizen of eternal life, I was sitting in a place where, thinking of her, I was designing an angel on certain panels; and while I was drawing it, I turned my eyes and saw beside me men to whom it was proper to pay respects. They were watching what I was doing; and according to what I was later told, they had been there some time before I noticed them.”
(TI 174) for it is through language –speaking and writing – that we respond to the other. For Levinas, predication is kerygmatic as it satisfies our desire to proclaim, to engage our interlocutors. It is, as Llewelyn writes, “an engagement of will or desire as wanting to say” (Llewelyn 133). The impetus which makes this desire to communicate so important is our obligation to the other. Levinas holds that it is difficult to remain silent in the presence of the other. One must engage, one must speak about something, about anything, in response. The face of the other requires a response. The face commands me, orders me; “there is a commandment in the appearance of the face as if a master spoke to me,” (EI 89) writes Levinas. My response comes out of obligation to address the other, to answer him, and to answer for him. For as Waldenfels states, “the face is not something seen, observed, registered, deciphered or understood, but rather somebody responded to” (Waldenfels 69). The face of the other, therefore, calls us to action. It obliges us to take an initiative, as members of a society in which I become part of a collective we. To which I am ethically bound.

Applying Levinas’s understanding of language, one sees that Dante’s desire to speak to the pilgrims, and his resolve to write a sonnet, is truly an ethical act which he offers, not only to his fellow citizens, but to strangers who cross his city. The poet’s said – “Deh peregrini” – anticipates the pilgrims’ saying in their weeping, a manifestation of

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229 E. Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, p. 88. See also Auerbach’s essay “Dante’s Addresses to the Reader” in Studi su Dante, (Milano: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 2005). If the reader is the other, Dante’s inability to remain silent in his/her presence foreshadows his frequent addresses to the reader in the Commedia. One example is Canto XXXIV of the Inferno in which Dante addresses the reader directly with the words, “Com’io divenni allor gelato e fioco, / nol dimandar, lettor, ch’i’ non lo scrivo, / però ch’ogne parlar sarebbe poco” (Inferno XXXIV: 22-24).

230 E. Levinas, Ethics and Infinity, p. 88


caritas. The movement from said to saying is evident as he calls on them to take notice of the sorrow which surrounds them as they pass through the città dolente:

Deh peregrini che pensosi andate,
forse di cosa che non v’è presente,
venite voi da sì lontana gente,
com’a la vista voi ne dimostrate,
che non piagete quando voi passate
per lo suo mezzo la città dolente (VN XL:9, vv. 1-6).\textsuperscript{233}

While they proceed pensosi, focused on their destination, unaware of the recent events, the lover senses an obligation to engage them, and “instruct” them about the pain and suffering to which they are clearly oblivious. Dante’s words bear out the circular characteristic of the said and the saying, for the poet’s appeal to the pilgrims is intended to prompt them to respond. Consider the final sextet of the sonnet:

Se voi restate per volerlo audire,
certo lo cor de’ sospiri mi dice
che lagrimando n’uscireste pui.
Ell’ha perduta la sua beatrice;
e le parole ch’om di lei pò dire
hanno vertù di far piangere altrui (VN LX:10, vv. 9-14).\textsuperscript{234}

It is evident that Dante understands that his words (language) have the power to elicit a response from these pilgrims, and although the poet/lover does not speak to them directly, their anticipated response to his words emphasizes the importance of the ethics of fiction upon which the reality of human connectivity relies.

We would do well to recall Newton’s statement regarding narrative situations, which he claims forge “relations of provocation” (Newton 13) ultimately joining the

\textsuperscript{233} “Oh pilgrims who go along in thought, / perhaps of something not present to you, / do you come from such distant folk, / as by your appearance you show us, / that you weep not when you pass / through the center of the sorrowing city.”

\textsuperscript{234} “If you would linger to hear of it, / surely the heart of many sighs tells me / that in tears would you then depart from here. / The city has lost its beatrice; / and the words that one may say of her / have the power to make one cry.”
listener and narrator, or reader and text. Similarly Newton’s assertion can also be applied to the relationship between Dante, the pilgrims, and Dante’s readers who are ethically bound through Dante’s verse. While Dante is certainly the narrator, the pilgrims are his intended listeners, which the poet makes clear in the first line of the sextet, “se voi restate per vederlo audire,” thereby revealing the link which exists between the narrator and the listener, or better stated, between the said and the saying. In his imagined conversation with the pilgrims, Dante explains that they would certainly leave the city in tears (“che lagrimando n’uscireste pui”). This line is reinforced in the last two lines of the sonnet in which Dante acknowledges the full potential of language when he states that words have the power to make one cry. (e le parole ch’om di lei pò dire / hanno vertù di far piangere altrui). The text of the sextet underscores the diachronic relationship between the said and the saying, a relationship which experiences incremental changes over time. More importantly, however, the text also reveals how the said and the saying are united in the act of speaking to the reader, who, in the realm of fiction is also called to pilgrimage. 

Ultimately, it is responsibility, resulting from the saying transcending the said, which forges the link between love and civitas. As previously demonstrated in this chapter, Dante’s words serve as the catalyst which summon his interlocutors – various members of the civitas – to responsibility for the other. Whether the fedeli d’amore, the coro delle donne, the women by Dante’s sick bed, or the pilgrims passing through Florence, each is called to responsibility in response to the poet’s said. As there can be no saying without a said, and every said is introduced by a saying, it is logical that Dante’s verse in his libello offers the civitas a fresh understanding of ethical

\[\text{235 On this point, see Peperzak, “Presentation” in Re-reading Levinas, p. 63.}\]
responsibility, grounded in love, within the confines of an “intelligenza nova” (VN XLI:10, v.3).\textsuperscript{236} which he proclaims in the final sonnet of the Vita Nuova:

\begin{quote}
Oltre la spera che più larga gira
passa 'l sospiro ch’esce del mio core:
intelligenza nova, che l’Amore
piangendo mette in lui, pur su lo tira. (VN XLI:10, vv.1-4)\textsuperscript{237}
\end{quote}

Dante explains that this sonnet is “una cosa nuova,” (VN XLI:1) written for two ladies who requested the poet send them some “parole rimate” (VN XLI:1).\textsuperscript{238} Dante’s responsibility – his saying – introduces his said, resulting in the final sonnet which points to the divine. At the conclusion of the poet’s ethical journey, the reader is cognizant of Dante’s growth, for he has gained a new intelligence, an understanding that love – his love for Beatrice – enables him to offer his poetry, his language, his said to the other, extending the saying among the entire civitas and beyond, as he addresses the pilgrims who come from afar. Correspondingly, at the end of the ‘little book,’ the reader too has grown in his or her comprehension and shared ethics of poetry.

\textsuperscript{236} “a new intelligence”
\textsuperscript{237} “Beyond the sphere that circles widest / penetrates the sigh that issues from my heart: / a new intelligence, which Love, / weeping, places in him, draws him ever upward.”
\textsuperscript{238} Translations: “a new thing” (una cosa nuova), and “rhymed words” (parole rimate).
Conclusion

Throughout this study I have argued that Dante’s experience and expression of love for Beatrice causes him to act in an ethical manner toward all with whom he comes into contact – familiar friends, fellow citizens and strangers. I have demonstrated that his words allow him to share his ethics of poetry with the entire civitas as he ponders the meaning of natural love which extends to the eternal. While the Vita Nuova is Dante’s first step in his exploration of love, he later links it (as I have shown earlier in this dissertation) to the Convivio, in which Dante philosophically expresses the ethics of poetry against the backdrop of Aristotelian thought and ultimately links it – as in the Commedia – to politics and history. I therefore wish to address three fundamental questions in my conclusion. First, how does the Aristotelian movement from potency to actuality correspond to the Levinasian movement from said to saying? Second, what does the transcendence of the saying over the said mean for Dante’s readers? Finally, what is the significance of my said and saying to my readers?

When one understands potency as a force, and actuality as form (as described by Aristotle in the Metaphysics), it is clear that actuality is the terminus toward which all matter is directed. Aristotle states that “because everything which is generated moves toward a principle, its end…and the actuality is the end, and it is for the sake of this that potency is acquired” (Metaphysics IX, viii, 9). Potency, then, assists matter in moving toward its goal. Matter always has the potential to become form, and ultimately is form.

when it actually exists. “Further, matter exists in a potential state, because it may attain to its form” writes Aristotle, “but when it exists actually, it is then in the form” (Metaphysics IX, viii, 9-11). In light of this definition, with pure form as the ultimate goal, potency is analogous to Bonaventure’s ladder which helps the believer reach the Summum Bonum. Singer acknowledges this when he writes: “Aristotle’s ladder of being starts with pure matter and culminates in pure form. At the top of the ladder, pure form – the form of perfection itself – draws everything toward it. All things strive for their completion in pure form” (Singer 108). This concept is evident in Capellanus’s concept of morum probitas, in which the lover develops his moral character and virtue in an effort to gain the affection of the beloved. To address the present question, however, I draw comparisons between the movements from potency to actuality and, in Levinasian terms, from the said to the saying.

The movement from the said to the saying is analogous to the movement from potency to actuality. The saying eludes comprehension. It is, as Critchley states, “the very enactment of the movement from the same to the other (Critchley 18). Therefore, just as matter, according to Aristotle, moves toward actuality – its end – so does the ethical being – through responsibility – move toward the neighbor, the stranger, the Other. For Levinas, words and language function as signs through which the saying is manifested. The saying, however, transcends the said even as it remains cloaked in the language of ontology,240 prompting Newton to describe the narrative act as “Saying over and above the Said, or as Said called into account in the Saying” (Newton 7). The

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240 Levinas writes, “But the signification of the saying goes beyond the said. It is not ontology that raises up the speaking subject; it is the signifyingness of saying going beyond the essence that can justify the exposedness of being, ontology” (OB 37-38). Wyschogrod echoes Levinas, when she states, “Saying undoes the dissimulation of the said, gives sign of itself, yet remains clothed in the language of the said” (Wyschogrod 202).
transcendence of the said by the saying is the element which corresponds to the movement from potency to act, analogically linking the philosophies of Aristotle to Levinas.

Through the use of the vernacular (as I have indicated throughout this study) Dante creates a link between himself and the entire civitas, for the vernacular connects him to all the citizens. While the importance of language is evident throughout the Vita Nuova, the most salient example is li più semplici (the simple folk, the unschooled). While the elite group of learned poets are confounded by Dante’s poetry, li più semplici represent not only the entire civitas, but on a parallel level, his reader as well, underscoring Dante’s responsibility to all his interlocutors. Newton’s description of the narrative act as relationship between teller and listener, author and reader is applicable to Dante’s dialectical relationship with his reader. In the Vita Nuova, as he contemplates natural love, and investigates the link between poetry and ethics, Dante’s infinite responsibility – the saying – is expressed to his readers through the words of his said. His sonnets, canzoni, and ballate, as well as the gloss through which he explains his poetry, is the “thematic statement” (Ciaramelli 96-97) which is transcended by the infinite saying, while retaining traces of that saying within it.\footnote{241 See Ciaramelli in Re-reading Levinas, pp. 95-97.} This is the true meaning and importance of this first work of the young poet to his readers; the communication of his ethics of poetry. As we read Dante’s words of love we participate in the circularity of the saying and the said, for the saying opens the said, which we must read for the words to have any meaning. We are then obliged to internalize their meaning, or they
are nothing less than signs without signification; thus does the poet communicate to his readers. The importance of Dante’s *Vita Nuova* to his readers may be summed up in the words of Levinas: “Saying is communication, to be sure, but as a condition for all communication, as exposure” (OB 48).

If, as I claim, the importance of the *Vita Nuova* is found in Dante’s communication of his ethics of poetry to his readers, what is the meaning and importance of this dissertation to my readers? How does my study contribute to the scholarship regarding Dante’s work, and what is my ethical responsibility to my readers?

When I set out to study Dante’s *Vita Nuova*, I was very interested in Dante’s understanding of love and how it influenced his poetry, not only in the *Vita Nuova*, but in the *Convivio* and the *Commedia* as well. My investigation began as an examination of Dante’s natural love for Beatrice, beginning with the erotic and developing into perfected love. As my research continued, however, I noticed that Dante’s love had a strong ethical component, and while this love was certainly focused on Beatrice, it was also shared with the entire community. Dante’s ethics of poetry is manifested through the many visions, events, and interactions he experiences with Beatrice, the *fedeli d’amore*, le *donne schermo*, the *coro delle donne*, la *donne gentile*, the pilgrims who pass through Florence, and many others. The episode in which Dante explains the effects of Beatrice’s greeting on him causes one to recognize the ethical dimension of Dante’s writing: “Dico che quando ella apparia, da parte alcuna, per la speranza de la mirabile salute nullo nemico mi rimanea, anzi mi giugnea una fiamma di caritate, la quale mi
facea perdonare a chiunque m’avessese offeso” (VN XI:1).\footnote{242 I say that when she appeared from any direction, in the hope of her miraculous greeting I was left with no enemy, but rather there arose in me a flame of charity that made me forgive whoever might have offended me.} My reading of this line brings me to the realization that Dante’s natural love for Beatrice is extended beyond his lady to the other, the entire civitas, and the stranger, who become the recipients of the poet’s universal love.

Dante’s ethics of poetry, expressed in the said, but manifested in the saying leads me to address with a deep sense of responsibility those who will read my dissertation. While they may approach this study in an effort to learn about Dante’s Vita Nuova, they will (through the words of my said) discover an ethos which they may not have realized was so prevalent, nor expected to find. They will learn of the philosophy of Emanuel Levinas, and come to understand ethics as our undeniable responsibility to the other, regardless of time or place, which I hope they will internalize, extending this ethos to all with whom they come into contact, and thus participating in the infinity of the saying. They will realize the importance of language, through which we communicate and respond to each other. It is our written and spoken language which identifies the saying, and through the language of the said that we respond to the needs of the other.\footnote{243 See Wyschogrod, The Cambridge Companion to Levinas, p. 201.} They will learn of Newton’s claim that the narrative act constitutes a relationship of responsibility between the author and the reader. As my readers explore the said and the saying embedded in the Vita Nuova, we – my readers and I – gain an “intelligenza nova” conferred upon us through Dante’s ethics of poetry.
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