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so that the literary and literal moments of the poet's life are fused together in a highly suggestive pattern.

In the same way that the personal encounters of the Comedy have furnished clues to Dante's actual biography—for instance, by allowing us to date the canzone "Voi che 'ntendendo" with respect to the year in which Charles Martel visited Florence—so the Comedy's autocitations may furnish clues to a more internal poetic biography. The linking of all three self-quotations to episodes that relate to Dante's previous life is a signpost; as those meetings reflect an experiential history, so the autocitations reflect a poetic history. In that they are depositories of a poetic past, deliberately inscribed into a poetic present, the autocitations are markers of a space in the text, a space defined as the relation between their previous existence outside the poem and their new existence within it. Why did Dante choose these specific poems for inclusion in the Comedy? Why did he place them where he did? Such questions face us with authorial decisions whose unraveling yields a definitive autobiography of the poet's lyric past, Dante's final statement regarding the way he wants us to perceive his poetic development, from its origins to the engendering of the great poem.

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The complexity of the issues raised by the choice of these particular incipits becomes apparent when we consider their provenance: one from the Vita Nuova and two from the Convivio. Thus, each of the major stages in Dante's poetic develop-

* Following the evidence of Paradiso VIII, the terminus ante quem of this canzone has been placed by most critics as March of 1294, the date given by Villani for Charles Martel's three-week visit to Florence; Foster and Boyd accept Santangelo's suggestion that the canzone could not have been written substantially later than the spring of 1294 (Commentary, pp. 345-346). See their Appendix, "The Biographical Problems in 'Voi che 'ntendendo,'" Commentary, pp. 341-362, for a lucid exposition of the debate surrounding the dating of this canzone and the other poems to the donna gentile.

opment before the Comedy is involved. The Vita Nuova and the Convivio are both texts in which Dante overtly reassesses his previous performance and seeks to revise his audience's perception of his poetic production. Indeed, these texts are both primary examples of Dante's tendencies toward autoexegesis, for the genesis of each can be located in an act of revision.

Dante's quintessential authorial persona first manifests itself in the reflexivity that generates the Vita Nuova: circa 1292 to 1294 the poet looks over the lyrics he has already composed, which run the gamut from those in his earliest Guittonian mode of a decade earlier to more recent poems of the most rigorous stilnovist purity, and he chooses some of them to be set in a prose frame. The lyrics thus chosen undergo not only a passive revision in the process of being selected for inclusion, but also an active revision at the hands of the prose narrative, which bends them into a new significance consonant with the poet's "new life." The violations of original intention that occur result in certain narrative reversals; poems written for other ladies in other contexts are now perceived as written for Beatrice. The prose is the chief witness to the author's revised intentions, since through its agency poems composed as isolated love lyrics are forced into a temporal sequence that places them in a pre-determined and significant relation to each other. In such a context, "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore," for example, is no longer a beautiful canzone that develops the themes of its precursors in some striking ways, but is emblematic of a moment described in the prose: the moment in which the poet finds his own voice and creates the "new style."

This line of reasoning is even more applicable to the Convivio, for whereas the Vita Nuova is the result of an implicit revaluation of the rime, the Convivio finds its pretext in an explicit revaluation of the donna gentile sequence of the Vita Nuova. In chapter XXXV of the libello, after the anniversary of Beatrice's death, Dante sees in a window a "gentile donna giovane e bella molto" who looks pitingly at him. He writes the next two sonnets to her (chaps. XXXV and XXXVI): in both she is characterized by her "pietate," and in the prose of XXXVI he
gentile of begins to the gentilissima. Subsequently, the pendulum begins to swing back to his first love: in chapter XXXVII he rebukes his eyes for taking pleasure in the donna gentile; in chapter XXXVIII his heart, defending the newcomer, is in litigation with his soul, which represents Beatrice. Beatrice herself then appears to Dante in a “forte imaginazione” in chapter XXXIX, prompting him to regret his temporary inconstancy and to return his thoughts entirely to her. The donna gentile episode thus extends from chapter XXXV, when he first sees the new lady, to chapter XXXIX, where he reconverts to Beatrice.

This brief sequence from the Vita Nuova has become the subject of much critical speculation because Dante, true to his pattern of autoexegesis, returns to it in the Convivio. At the treatise’s outset, in the first chapter of Book I, Dante places his new work in relation to its predecessor, explaining that where the Vita Nuova was “fervida e passionata,” the Convivio will be “temperata e virile” (I, i, 16). He further explains that the treatise will consist of fourteen previously written sonnets which will be expounded according to both their literal and allegorical senses. The first of these canzoni, commented on in Book II, is “Voi che ‘ntendendo il terzo ciel movete”; it describes the same struggle between the new love for the donna gentile and the old love for Beatrice previously described in the sonnets of the Vita Nuova. Indeed, the canzone is essentially an expansion of the sonnet “Gentil pensero che parla di vui,” from Vita Nuova XXXVIII, in which the heart defends its new attraction to the disapproving soul. The key difference between the sonnet and the canzone is, of course, that the sonnet is followed by a return to Beatrice, while in the canzone the new love triumphs.

In his commentary to the canzoni of the Convivio, Dante begins with the exposition of the literal meaning. Regarding “Voi che ‘ntendendo,” therefore, he begins with the identity of the new love, who is specifically introduced as the donna gentile of the Vita Nuova. She is presented, moreover, not in a temporal vacuum but in strict chronological relation to Beatrice, whom she will supplant; we learn that Venus had completed two revolutions after the death of Beatrice when the donna gentile first appeared to him: “... quando quella gentile donna, cui feci menzione ne la fine de la Vita Nuova, parve primamente, accompagnata d’Amore, a li ochi miei e prese luogo alcuno ne la mia mente” (“when that gentle lady whom I mentioned at the end of the Vita Nuova first appeared to my eyes, accompanied by Love, and occupied a place in my mind” [II, ii, 1]). Continuing, Dante describes the psychomachia waged within him between the thoughts supporting the donna gentile and those supporting Beatrice. This image of mental combat, deriving from Vita Nuova XXXVIII where “la battaglia de’ pensieri” was the subject of the sonnet “Gentil pensero,” is dramatized and escalated in “Voi che ‘ntendendo.”

The three central stanzas of the canzone take the form of an internalized tenzone in which the Beatrician thought is the first to state its case, only to be overcome by the thoughts of the donna gentile. Before being vanquished, Beatrice is memorialized in precisely the terms in which she last appears in the Vita Nuova. In the libello’s final sonnet, “Oltre la spera che piu larga gira” (chap. XLI), Dante’s thoughts (specifically, his sighs) follow Beatrice beyond the farthest of the circling heavens to the presence of God. The fortunate sospiro witnesses Beatrice in splendor:

Quand’elli è giunto là dove disira,
vede una Donna, che riceve onore,
e luce si, che per lo suo splendore
lo peregrino spirito la mira.

When he arrives there where he desires, he sees a lady who receives honor, and gives off such light that for her splendor the pilgrim spirit gazes at her.

(5-8)

In “Voi che ‘ntendendo” the Beatrician thought is described as undertaking just such a journey:
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Suol esser vita de lo cor dolente
un soave penser, che se ne gia
molte fiate a' pie del nostro Sire,
ove una donna gloriar vedia,
di cui parlava me si dolcemente
che l'anima dicea: ‘Io men vo' gire.’

The life of my sorrowing heart used to be a sweet thought,
who would go many times to the feet of our Lord, where
he would see a lady in glory of whom he would speak to
me so sweetly that my soul would say: “I wish to go to
her...”

[14-19]

Here the celestial vistas are described in better detail; where
the Vita Nuova's pilgrim-sigh simply saw the lady in glory,
the canzone specifies that the location achieved by the poet's
evangelist, the “soave penser” of line 15, is “a' pie del nostro Sire”
(16). However, this recapitulation and expansion of the Vita
Nuova's last sonnet is not the canzone's final statement; “Voi
che ‘ntendendo’ ends not with the pursuit of Beatrice “oltre la
spera” but with her defeat, and with an injunction to accept
the newcomer as his lady: “e pensa di chiamarla donna, omai!”
(“and resolve to call her your lady from now on!” [48]). The
narrative overlap between the Convivio's beginning and the Vita
Nuova's ending makes the later text's reversal of the former
all the more striking.

The transfer of allegiance from Beatrice to the donna gentile
is complete in the Convivio's next canzone, “Amor che ne la
mente mi ragiona,” expounded in Book III. This is a song of
praise dedicated to the triumphant new lady, not a debate like
“Voi che ‘ntendendo” but an unqualified celebration. It is in-
teresting that Dante removes Beatrice from his treatise in the
course of the prose commentary of Book II, before achieving
the victorious stasis of “Amor che ne la mente.” In chapter viii
of Book II Dante suggests that he deliberately inserts his last
mention of Beatrice into a digression on the immortality of the
soul, because this lofty topic is an appropriate one with which
to commemorate her final appearance: “perchè, di quella [la
immortalità de l’animal] ragionando, sarà bello terminare lo par-
lare di quella viva Beatrice beata” (“it will be beautiful to ter-
minate our speaking of that living blessed Beatrice while dis-
scussing the immortality of the soul” [II, viii, 7]). Although
tactfully accomplished, the implication nonetheless remains that
there is no place for Beatrice in a text dedicated to another lady:
“... quella viva Beatrice beata, de la quale più parlare in questo
libro non intendo per proponimento” (“that living blessed Be-
atrice, of whom I do not propose to speak further in this book”
[II, viii, 7]). Shortly after this dismissal Dante completes the
literal exposition of “Voi che ‘ntendendo” and begins, in chapter
xii, to explain the poem's allegorical significance; it is here that
we first learn that the donna gentile is to be identified with
Lady Philosophy.

When, in chapter xii of Book II, Dante finally reveals the true
identity of the donna gentile, the context is overtly Boethian.
He recounts that, finding himself inconsolable after the death
of Beatrice, he turned to philosophy as a form of comfort that
had revived others in similar straits. Thus, he begins to read
Boethius (“e misiemi a leggere quello non conosciuto da molti
libro di Boezio” “and I began to read that book by Boethius not
known to many” [II, xii, 2]) and Cicero’s De Amicitia (“E
udendo ancora che Tullio scritto avea un altro libro ... trat-
tando de l’Amistade” “and hearing further that Tully had writ-
ten another book ... touching on Friendship” [II, xii, 3]).
Although both texts are of great importance to the Convivio,
Dante’s treatise is more explicitly modeled on the Consolatio
Philosophiae; in fact, in Book I he justifies his first-person
confessional narrative by invoking Boethius and Augustine (I,
ii, 13-14).10 If the Consolatio Philosophiae influenced Dante’s

10 On the importance of the De Amicitia and its medieval epigones for Dante,
see Domenico De Robertis, Il libro della Vita Nuova, 2d ed. rev. (Florence:
Sansoni, 1970), pp. 21-24 and 93-115. De Robertis links Cicero's notion of
disinterested friendship with the Vita Nuova's elaboration of a disinterested
love. See also Alessandro Ronconi, “Cicerone,” Enciclopedia Dantesca, vol. I,
pp. 991-997. Marziano Guglielminetti, in “Dante e il ricupero del parlare di
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adoption of alternating prose and verse in the Vita Nuova, we should remember that the Convivio too is a modified form of prosimetrum. Most significantly, Boethius offers Dante, in the topos of the consoling lady, the way out of his impasse with the donna gentile.

The critical controversy surrounding the donna gentile may be reduced to essentially the following question: are we to believe Dante when he claims that she is Philosophy? Scholars are to be found at all points of the critical spectrum: the realists believe that the donna gentile is real (or conceived as real) in the Vita Nuova and that all the poems written about her, including “Voi che ‘ntendendo” and “Amor che ne la mente,” were originally composed with a real woman in mind; the allegorists believe that the donna gentile was always a symbol of philosophy, even in the Vita Nuova, and that all poems about her, including “Voi che ‘ntendendo” and “Amor che ne la mente,” were originally composed with allegorical intentions. Perhaps the single most authoritative position on this issue has been Barbi’s, endorsed by Perlone in his commentary to the Rime se medesimo,” “ch. 2 of Memoria e scrittura: l’autobiografia da Dante a Cellini, stresses the role of Boethius as Dante’s confessional model in the Convivio over that of Augustine, esp. pp. 74-75 and 97-99. For Dante and Boethius, see Rocco Murari, Dante e Boezio (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1995); Marie Thérèse D’Alverny, “Note sur Dante et la Sagesse,” Revue des Études Italiennes, 11 (1965), 5-24; Francesco Tateo, “Boezio,” Enciclopedia Dantesca, vol. I, pp. 654-658.


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as well as by Foster and Boyd in theirs; Barbi argues for a middle course, claiming that the original donna gentile of the Vita Nuova was indeed conceived as flesh and blood, but that, by the time Dante came to write the later poems in the sequence devoted to her, he had already come under the sway of Lady Philosophy. With regard to “Voi che ‘ntendendo” and “Amor che ne la mente,” therefore, he suggests that we accept the statements of the Convivio, reading them as allegorical lyrics composed for Philosophy.

Barbi’s thesis is doubtless correct at least with regard to the Vita Nuova; an impartial reader of that text would be hard pressed to make a case for the donna gentile as Lady Philosophy. The Vita Nuova does not admit the type of personification allegory employed by Dante in the Convivio, where he refers

12 Barbi states his position in his Introduction to the Convivio, ed. G. Busnelli and G. Vandel; his insistence that we distinguish the problems inherent in the Vita Nuova from those of the Convivio (“Bisogna risolverci... a intendere ciascun’opera di Dante secondo la reale ispirazione del momento” [I. xxii]) is picked up and endorsed by De Robertis, who stresses the disjunction between the two texts in his title “Il libro della Vita Nuova e il libro del Convivio.” This line of reasoning eventually leads, however, to pondering what Dante deliberately conflated, and thus bypassing the problem altogether; as an example of this tendency, see Maria Simonelli, “‘Donna pietosa’ e ‘donna gentile’ fra Vita Nuova e Convivio,” in Atti del Convegno di studi su aspetti e problemi di critica dantesca (Rome: De Luca, 1967), pp. 146-159.

13 In order to support his thesis Nardi was forced to defend Pietrobono, who had postulated the existence of a first version of the Vita Nuova in which the donna gentile was victorious; accordingly, we possess the second version, to which the author returned after the experience of the Convivio with the intention of providing a new ending (Beatrice victorious) that would be consonant with the Comedy. See “Dalla prima alla seconda Vita Nuova,” in Nel mondo di Dante, pp. 3-20; “Filosofia dell’amore nei rimatori italiani del Duecento e in Dante,” in Dante e la cultura medievale, 2d ed. rev. (Bari: Laterza, 1949), esp. pp. 49-51; “Sviluppo dell’arte e del pensiero di Dante,” Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance, 14 (1952), 29-47; “Dante e Guido Cavalcanti,” in Saggi e note di critica dantesca (Milan: Ricciardi, 1961), pp. 190-219. This theory of two redactions of the Vita Nuova (which unfortunately runs through all of Nardi’s work on the subject) never gained general acceptance and was laid definitively to rest by Mario Marti, “Vita e morte della presunta doppia redazione della Vita Nuova,” in Studi in onore di Alfredo Schiaffini, 2 vols. (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1965), vol. II, pp. 657-669 (= Rivista di cultura classica e medievale, 7 [1965]).
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to it as the allegorical mode used by the poets (II, i, 4); instead the libello adumbrates, perhaps unwittingly, the figural allegory of the Comedy, in which a literal reality is revealed to be miraculous.\(^4\) The historical level—i.e. Beatrice—exists in the Vita Nuova; the poet’s task is to discover that she is a signifier, that she has come “from heaven to earth to show forth a miracle,” that she is the number nine. Once he has discerned her significance, he must hold fast to his knowledge without the assistance of her presence, a presence from which he is weaned gradually through the revoking of her greeting. Like Christ, whose analogue she is, she makes the invisible visible; after her death the poet assumes this responsibility for himself. It is in this context, as a lapse into an opaque nonsignifying but visible and literal reality, that the donna gentile episode fits into the Vita Nuova. As an alternative to Beatrice, the donna gentile must possess an equally historical identity.

Dante’s concern regarding the public repercussions of his inconstancy is already evident in the Vita Nuova, where he worries that the donna gentile episode may continue to reflect negatively on him even after his return to Beatrice, and says that the sonnet of chapter XXXIX is intended to lay the matter to rest once and for all.\(^5\) In the Convivio this concern for his reputation and the impulse to present the donna gentile episode in a less derogatory light are recurrent: from the start of the treatise, Dante treats the Vita Nuova as a product of his youth whose evidence, it may be inferred, is suspect; moreover, his insistence that he does not wish to detract from the Vita Nuova, but only to promote the Convivio, does little to enhance the credibility of the earlier work. He openly states his fear that the content of the canzoni will brand him as one who passes lightly from one passion to the next: “Temo la infamia di tanta passione avere seguita, quanta concepe chi legge le sopra nominate canzoni in me avere segnoreggiata’” (“I fear the infamy of having yielded to and having been conquered by such passion, as will be conceived by him who reads the above mentioned canzoni” [I, ii, 16]); he believes that the treatise will restore his integrity by revealing that the motive force behind the canzoni is “non passione ma vertù” (“not passion but virtue” [I, ii, 16]). It seems noteworthy that such sentiments are consistently followed, in the Convivio, by an appeal to allegory; to show that the canzoni deal not with passion but with virtue he must uncover their true—allegorical—significance: “Intendo anche mostrare la vera sentenza di quelle, che per alcuno vedere non si può s’io non la conto, perché è nascosa sotto figura d’allegoria …” (“I intend also to show their true meaning, which no one will see if I do not explain it, since it is hidden under the figure of allegory” [I, ii, 17]).

The Convivio owes its existence to a convergence of new interests, concentrated primarily in the areas of classical culture and philosophy. The countless citations from philosophical and religious authors, the opening sentence under the sign of Aristotle, the new prominence of classical poets—all testify to the extent of Dante’s development away from the primarily vernacular and courtly world of his earlier texts. To this philo-

\(^4\) Singleton stresses the analogical rather than allegorical nature of the Vita Nuova in An Essay on the Vita Nuova (1949; repr. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1977), esp. pp. 22-24 and 110-114. In “Dante Theologus-Poeta,” Dante Studies, 94 (1976), 91-136, repr. in Studies in Dante (Ravenna: Longo, 1980), pp. 31-89, Robert Hollander argues that “Had Dante assigned a designation to the mode of signifying of the Vita Nuova, using the same two possibilities he set before us in the Convivio, he would not have hesitated to have told us that the Vita Nuova was written in the allegory of theologians” (p. 56). At this point I should like to alert the reader to my fundamental agreement with Singleton as regards Dante’s use of the so-called allegory of theologians in the Comedy: for bibliography on this subject, see Hollander’s Allegory in Dante’s Commedia and “Dante Theologus-Poeta,” and Jean Pépin, Dante et la Tradition de l’Allegorie (Montréal: Institut d’études médiévales, 1971).

\(^5\) “Onde io, volendo che coste desiderio malvagio e vana tentazione paresse distrutto, si che alcuno dubbio non potessero inducere le rimaste parole chi’io avea dette innanzi, proposti di fare uno sonetto ne lo quale io comprendesse
The qualification is intended to leave room for the Fiore as possibly Dante's first allegorical venture, in imitation of the Roman de la Rose. The attribution of the Fiore to Dante is now widely accepted in the wake of the internal evidence demonstrated by Gianfranco Contini; see his "La questione del Fiore," *Cultura e scuola* 4, nos. 13-14 (1963), 768-773, and his article in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. II, pp. 895-901. A recent book that takes Dante's authorship of the Fiore for granted is that of Luigi Vanossi, *Dante e il Roman de la Rose: Saggio sul Fiore* (Florence: Olschki, 1979). The Fiore is not discussed at greater length in this study because it lacks explicit literary references; although the text is a sustained tribute to the *Roman de la Rose*, and although it names philosophers (Socrates in XLIII, Sigier of Brabant in XCII, Ptolemy in CLXXI), kings (Solomon in LXV and CIX, Justinian in CX), and literary lovers (Tristan and Isolde in CXIV, Dido and Aeneus in CLI, Jason and Medea in CXLI), it names no precursor poets.

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17 One of the most striking features of the *Convivio* is its exultation of the *Comedy’s* metaphors, in the "pane de li angeli" (I, i, 7), the "selva erronea di questa vita" (IV, xxiv, 12), and especially in the recurrent images of wayfaring, by land and by sea, that run through the treatise. The sustained metaphorization of life as a pilgrimage in *Convivio* IV, xii, 14-19 renders explicit what in the *Vita Nuova* is implied by the pilgrims who pass through the city. On the *Convivio* as the most important source of the *Comedy*, see the article on the treatise by Maria Simonelli, *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. II, pp. 193-204.
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indication of the direction in which Dante was moving; “Le dolci rime” is but one of a number of moral poems that cap Dante’s lyric career, poems like “Poscia ch’Amor” on the chivalric virtue leggiadria and “Doglia mi reca” on avarice. By mirroring the social and ethical concerns of the contemporaneous prose treatises, these late lyrics are an important part of Dante’s preparation for the Comedy.

The essential fact, then, regarding the Convivio’s first two canzoni, is that they eventually receive an allegorical dress. Although this fact is finally more significant than the question of Dante’s original intentions, the basic arguments on either side of the debate should be noted. There are cogent reasons for questioning Dante’s retroactive assertions regarding the two canzoni: first, they belong stylistically, like the Vita Nuova sonnets to which they are thematic sequels, to the climax of Dante’s stil novo period, i.e. they are written in a style appropriate for love poetry. Second, they repeat the same erotic hyperbole that had heretofore been addressed to Beatrice and they function admirably as love poems, an assertion that Dante himself corroborates by dedicating lengthy glosses to their literal senses and expressing concern lest they tarnish his reputation. Dante’s very preoccupation with disjoining the Convivio from the Vita Nuova strengthens one’s impression that he was casting about for a way to change his image, and that he found it in allegory.18

18 This view is shared by Montanari, L’esperienza poetica di Dante, p. 118, and De Robertis, “Il libro della Vita Nuova e il libro del Convivio,” p. 20. For the stylistic homogeneity of these canzoni with Dante’s stil novo phase, see De Robertis, p. 11; Foster and Boyde comment as follows on the style of “Voi che ’ntendendo”: “There are no describable innovations in style with respect to the preceding sonnets: this and the following poems represent the climax of Dante’s stil novo period” (Commentary, p. 161). Dante himself essentially admits that his canzoni do not appear allegorical, for instance when he writes “E con ciò sia cosa che la vera intenzione mia fosse altra che quella che di fuori mostrano le canzoni predette, per allegorica esposizione quelle intendendo mostrare” (“And since my true intention was other than that revealed by the surface of the aforementioned canzoni, I intend to reveal them through an allegorical exposition”) (Convivio 1, 1, 10).

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On the other hand, one cannot categorically discount the allegorical potential harbored by the texts of the canzoni themselves. In the case of “Voi che ’ntendendo,” allegorists point especially to the congedo, where the poet alludes to the difficulty of his poem and distinguishes between its abstruse content and beautiful form. Also interesting is the characterization of the new lady as “saggia e cortese ne la sua grandezza” (“wise and courteous in her greatness”) [47]); it has been noted that Beatrice is never called grande, and that grandezza does not belong to the lexicon of the conventional love lyric.19 Regarding “Amor che ne la mente,” the pro-allegory arguments are based on the contention that certain verses go beyond the domain of erotic hyperbole and cannot designate a real woman, no matter how miraculous. The verses most often singled out are those in which the poet paraphrases or translates passages from Scripture referring to Sapientia: for instance, “però fu tal da eterno ordinata” (“for this she was established from eternity”) [54] echoes Sapientia’s words about herself, “ab aeterno ordinata sum,” from Proverbs viii, 23.20

“Voi che ’ntendendo” and “Amor che ne la mente” are also noteworthy for their textual situation prior to the Convivio. They belong to an interlocking sequence of lyrics, which consists, besides the two canzoni, of a ballata, “Voi che savete ragionar d’Amore,” and two sonnets: “Parole mie che per lo mondo siete” and “O dolci rime che parlando andate.” “Voi che ’ntendendo” initiates the series by announcing the sovereignty of a new lady, whom, in the ballata “Voi che savete,” the poet renounces because of her cruelty. This renunciation is then retracted in the congedo of “Amor che ne la mente,” where

19 Foster and Boyde, Commentary, p. 167. On the other hand, grandezza need not have allegorical implications; it could serve merely as a means of distinguishing the new lady from Beatrice.

20 Other verses seized on by the allegorists are “Ogni intelletto di là su la mia” (“All the intelligences from above gaze on her”) [23]) and “costei pensò chi miro l’universe” (“He who moved the universe thought of her”) [22]). In his gloss to line 72 (Convivio III, xv, 16) Dante makes the connection to Sapientia, citing Proverbs viii, 27-30.
This sonnet is in turn narrated in the following sonnet, “O dolce zona...” where the poet declares, “Prode mio,” and recounts the events of the canzona, Le Dolc rime, which effectively brings this canto to a close. Here too the poet refers to the hardness of the lady, not as a motive for retorting her but as an excuse for his own letter to her...

Words of mine are throughout the world, you who were born when I began to write for that lady whom I adored. “Voif che ‘ntendendo il terzo ciel movev’...”

This first cycle of contrapuntal and resolution by the second line of one of your sisters, because this lady, whom you considered so humble, she calls harsh and disdainful...

The poetic use of the term “Voi, che ‘ntendendo...” points this sonnet to the last. The opening of the text of this sonnet is interesting because it specifically names “Voi, che ‘ntendendo il terzo ciel movev’...”

Parole che la per mondo dite...”

The sonnet begins with the words: “In the poetic and the poetic...”

The poet asserts that the ballads (as referred to as the “sorella” of the canzona) and other poetic forms are mistaken in their harsh judgments...
of the *libello* leaves off, the departure itself would not be conceivable without the mediating experience of the *Convivio* and the poems to Lady Philosophy. Thus, although retrospectively all the texts written before the *Comedy* and after the *Vita Nuova* could be similarly classified as mistaken but necessary, the *Convivio* is in this respect first among equals: it is the most necessary of the erring prerequisites for the *Comedy*. For, unlike the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and the *Monarchia*, which address themselves (albeit sweepingly) to single issues, the *Convivio* knows no limits; it sets itself the *Comedy’s* task, and fails.

In one of the sonnets in which he temporarily renounces the *donna gentile*, Dante calls her “quella donna in cui errai.” Although “errai” is variously translated as “I erred,” “I suffered,” “I was deceived,” “errare conserves its primary meaning of “to wander,” hence “to stray.” This use of *errare* with respect to a poet’s mistake reinforces our sense of a textual *sola oscura*, a poetic wandering which only from the providential perspective of the *Comedy* could be retrospectively arranged as a *diritta via*. From this point of view, the strange shifts and turnabouts of the *donna gentile* poems begin to fall into place as signs of textual stress, external indicators of a profound uneasiness. Indeed, Dante’s restlessness during this period is confirmed by his irresolution; the unfinished status of two major works from these middle years, the *Convivio* and the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, indicates his recognition of being textually on the wrong path. And, of course, from the perspective of the *Comedy*, the substitution of another for Beatrice would constitute an unparalleled failure; for the later Dante any lady who is not Beatrice

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21 Numerous possibilities for “errai” are listed in M. Barbì and V. Pernicone, eds., *Rime della maturità e dell’esilio* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1969), p. 461. Contini notes that the verse is usually interpreted as referring to the lady “in whom I erred” (“nella quale presi errore”), but prefers Barbì’s suggestion “because of whom I suffered” (“per la quale soffersi”); see his edition of the *Rime* (1946; repr. Turin: Einaudi, 1970), p. 107. Although Foster and Boyle translate the verse with “the lady in whom I was deceived,” they note that “the sense could be ‘through whom I went astray’” (Commentary, p. 184).

"Amor che ne la mente" is “quella donna in cui errai,” as any poetic path not directed toward her is, by definition, a false one.

The issues raised in the above discussion are all implicit in the *Comedy’s* autocitations. Thus, a problem facing decipherers of *Purgatorio* II is whether Dante intends us to view “Amor che ne la mente” as an allegorical poem. Two points should be borne in mind: (1) the central fact regarding the canzoni of the *Convivio* is that they are not dedicated to Beatrice; (2) the poet who places these incipits in the *Comedy* surely expects us to know that they have a history of being singled out. As “Donne ch’avete” was selected for the *Vita Nuova*, so “Voi che ‘ntendendo” and “Amor che ne la mente” were placed in the *Convivio*. We may reasonably believe, therefore, that Dante intends us to read these incipits in the light of their previous histories; indeed, it seems not unlikely that he chose these poems precisely for the archeological resonance they afford.

"Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona"

The autocitation of *Purgatorio* II has received considerable attention of the kind we are here concerned with; Casella’s song has been studied in the context of the episode and in the light of its past associations.22 The canto has also generated a great deal of speculation regarding such issues as the reasons for Casella’s delay on the banks of the Tiber, his identity, and whether a “doctrinal” song like “Amor che ne la mente” may be sung—this despite the fact that in *Purgatorio* II it is sung. Marti answers this last question by drawing on musicological data which shows that the canzone form was still set to music

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