

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."²¹ This use of *errare* with respect to a poetic mistake reinforces our sense of a textual *selva 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

²¹ Numerous possibilities for "errai" are listed in M. Barbi 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 Barbi's suggestion "because of whom I suffered" ("per la quale sofferai"); see his edition of the *Rime* (1946; repr. Turin: Einaudi, 1970), p. 107. Although Foster and Boyde 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).

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

²² Two studies meriting particular attention are John Freccero, "Casella's Song (*Purg.* II, 112)," *Dante Studies*, 91 (1973), 73-80; and Robert Hollander, "Purgatorio II: Cato's Rebuke and Dante's *scoglio*," *Italica*, 52 (1975), 348-363, now repr. in *Studies in Dante*, pp. 91-105. Gian Roberto Sarolli, "Purgatorio II: dal *Convivio* alla *Commedia*," in *Prolegomena alla Divina Commedia*, pp. 55-74, does not deal with "Amor che ne la mente," but with general thematic convergences between the canto and the prose treatise.

in Dante's time; he also points out that Casella would in any case have few qualms about singing "Amor che ne la mente," since he would be unlikely to consider it a doctrinal poem.²³ Indeed, the poem makes its appearance in canto II in two guises. Vis-à-vis Casella, a musician who died before the composition of the *Convivio* and whose sphere of interest seems to have been far removed from that work's concern with transforming eros into ethos, the canzone "Amor che ne la mente" functions according to its literal sense in the *Convivio* gloss, as a love poem. Thus Casella, who is unacquainted with the *Convivio*, sings the canzone in response to a specific request from the pilgrim for an "amoroso canto":

E io: "Se nuova legge non ti toglie
memoria o uso a l'amoroso canto
che mi solea quetar tutte mie voglie,
di ciò ti piaccia consolare alquanto
l'anima mia, che, con la sua persona
venendo qui, è affannata tanto!"
'Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona'
cominciò elli allor sì dolcemente,
che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi suona.²⁴

And I: "If a new law does not take from you memory or practice of the amorous song which used to quiet all of my desires, with this let it please you to console my soul

²³ Mario Marti, "Il canto II del *Purgatorio*," *Lectura Dantis Scaligera* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1963). On the performance value of "Amor che ne la mente" and Dante's other texts, see John Ahearn, "Singing the Book: Orality in the Reception of Dante's *Comedy*," *Annals of Scholarship* 2, no. 4 (1981), 17-40. Also useful on this canto is the reading of Vittorio Russo, "Il canto II del *Purgatorio*," in *Esperienze e di letture dantesche* (Naples: Liguori, 1971), pp. 53-99.

²⁴ Although Petrocchi replaces the customary "voglie" of line 108 with "doglie," I have followed Singleton in preserving a variant that, in my opinion, is more consonant with the voluntarist emphasis of the episode and of the *cantica* whose paradigm it is; see Charles S. Singleton, trans. and comm., *The Divine Comedy*, 6 vols. (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1970-1975), *Purgatorio*, 2: *Commentary*, p. 40.

somewhat, which coming here with its body is so wearied!" "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona" he began then so sweetly, that the sweetness still rings inside of me.

(*Purg.* II, 106-114)

The emphatic presence of "dolcemente" and "dolcezza" in lines 113-114 further underscores the status of "Amor che ne la mente" as a love lyric, since, from the canzone "Le dolci rime d'amor" to the discourses of *Purgatorio* XXIV and XXVI, "sweetness" is considered by Dante to be the external sign and stylistic prerequisite of love poetry as a genre. The inclusion of the code word *dolce* thus confirms that Casella has complied with the pilgrim's request; he sings what he presumes to be nothing more than a love song.

This stress on the love lyric serves to place *Purgatorio* II in direct contrast to *Inferno* V, opposing the present verbatim citation of the *amoroso canto* to its former misquotation. A number of textual correspondences—the simile of the doves with which *Purgatorio* II ends, the use of expressions that echo *Inferno* V ("persona" for "body" in line 110 is a Franciscanism; "affannata" in line 111 recalls 'O anime affannate'), and especially the reference to the love lyric as "that which used to quiet all my desires" (108)—evoke the lovers of *Inferno* V and put them into purgatorial perspective. As—erotically—fulfillment of desire at the level of canto V is a narcissistic illusion ("lust") that leads to the *bufera infernal*, so—textually—love poetry at the level of canto V lacks the upward momentum that will redeem its physical point of departure. With respect to Dante's poetic autobiography, *Inferno* V represents a stage in which the poet operates entirely within the confines of a tradition and its authorities, a stage of nonexploratory stasis in which desire is prematurely satisfied.

If desire in the *Inferno* is eternally misplaced, in the *Purgatorio* it functions dialectically as both the goad that keeps the souls moving upward and the source of the nostalgia that temporarily slows them down. *Purgatorio* II is a paradigm for the rest of the *cantica* in this respect, dramatizing both these aspects

of purgatorial desire in the lull created by the song and Cato's subsequent rebuke. Whereas formerly scholars tended to underline the idyllic qualities of the interlude with Casella, effectively ending their readings with the poet's strong endorsement in line 114 (where he says that the song's sweetness still reverberates within him), recently they have stressed Cato's rebuke as a correction—and indeed condemnation—of previous events. Thus, Hollander judges Casella's song severely, as a secular poison in contrast to the canto's other song, the Psalm "In exitu Israël de Aegypto."²⁵ Freccero, on the other hand, views the episode in a more positive light, claiming that "The 'Amore' celebrated here marks an advance over the 'Amore' of Francesca's verses in the same measure that the *Convivio* marks an advance over the *Vita Nuova*."²⁶ These views should be integrated as two facets of the same problematic within the dialectical structure of the canto: the quotation of "Amor che ne la mente" does indeed mark an advance over the misquotation of *Inferno* V; Cato's rebuke simultaneously suggests that it too is in need of correction.

The target of the criticism that Dante levels at an earlier self in *Inferno* V, and that he to some extent revokes or palliates in *Purgatorio* II, cannot be simply the *Vita Nuova*; rather, we must remember that the *Vita Nuova* encompasses both the experiments of a poet overly subjected to his models and the moment in which he frees himself from them. "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona" marks an advance over "Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende" in the same way that submission to Lady Philosophy implies forsaking the physical eros of the tradition ("ch'al cor s'apprende") for the rationally propelled eros of the *Comedy* ("che ne la mente mi ragiona"). Moreover, the textual misuse that characterizes *Inferno* V is no longer present

²⁵ Hollander's position is well represented by his first sentence: "Casella's song is a Siren's song" (*Purgatorio* II, p. 348). In response, I would point out that the poet deliberately defuses the severity of Cato's charges in the opening of *Purgatorio* III, where he calls Vergil's lapse a "picciol fallo" ("little fault" [9]).

²⁶ Freccero, "Casella's Song," p. 74.

in *Purgatorio* II, where it is deflected not only by Cato but by the pilgrim himself; line 108, "che mi solea quetar tutte mie voglie," indicates—both in its use of the past tense and in its echo of another distancing verse, "Le dolci rime d'amor ch'i solia / cercar" (italics mine)—that he recognizes the limits of love poetry.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that a correction of "Amor che ne la mente" is implied by Cato's rebuke. On the literal level—Casella's level—the rebuke addresses the episode as a whole, and includes the vain attempt to re-create the ties of friendship in the same form in which they existed on earth (emblemized in the thrice-failed attempt to embrace), as well as the temporary succumbing to the blandishments of love poetry. Appearances by Cato frame the meeting with Casella, offering proleptic as well as retrospective corrections. Indeed, Casella's beautifully nostalgic projection of his love for Dante from the earthly past to the purgatorial present—"Così com' io t'amai / nel mortal corpo, così t'amo sciolta" ("As I loved you in the mortal body, so do I love you freed from it" [88-89])—is undermined by Cato even before it is spoken. In the preceding canto, Cato repudiates Vergil's all too human attempt to win favor by mentioning his wife, "Marzia tua, che 'n vista ancor ti priega, / o santo petto, che per tua la tegni" ("your Marcia, who in her look still prays you, o sainted breast, to hold her for your own" [I, 79-80]). As in his reply to Vergil Cato rejects all earthly ties to his wife, placing her firmly in the past definite ("Marzia piacque tanto a li occhi miei / mentre ch'i' fu' di là" "Marcia so pleased my eyes while I was over there" [85-86]), so later he reminds Dante and Casella that the earthly ties of friendship are less important than the process of purgation awaiting them.

Although Casella views the canzone he sings as a simple love song, we who have read the *Convivio* are obliged to take its allegorical significance into consideration as well. A textual signpost noticed by critics is the pilgrim's use of the verb *consolare* in his request to Casella: "di ciò ti piaccia consolare alquanto /

l'anima mia . . ." (109-110).²⁷ Echoing as it does Boethius' title, *consolare* is a verb that figures prominently in the *Convivio* chapter where Dante announces the true identity of the *donna gentile*. Given its connection to Boethius and Lady Philosophy, it may be profitable to briefly consider the history of this word in the *Vita Nuova* and *Convivio*.

Consolare first occurs in the prose of *Vita Nuova* XXXVIII (and in the accompanying sonnet "Gentil pensiero") where it refers negatively to the thought of the *donna gentile*: "Deo, che pensiero è questo, che in così vile modo vuole consolare me e non mi lascia quasi altro pensare?" ("God, what thought is this, which in so vile a way wants to console me and almost does not let me think of anything else?" [XXXVIII, 2]). If we were to take *consolare* as the sign of Boethius, its presence here would support the notion that the *donna gentile* is Philosophy as far back as the *Vita Nuova*. But the next appearance of *consolare* demonstrates that originally Dante did not always connect the word with Philosophy; he uses it in "Voi che 'ntendendo" to refer not to the thought of the *donna gentile* as one would expect, but to the consoling thought of Beatrice ("questo piatoso che m'ha consolata" of line 32 is the thought that used to go, as in "Oltre la spera," to view Beatrice in heaven). Thus, at a purely textual level *consolare* does not necessarily signify Philosophy and does not necessarily involve Boethius.²⁸ It is

²⁷ Both Freccero and Hollander make much of Boethius in their articles on Casella's song. Freccero draws attention to a Boethian meter describing the feeding of caged birds, who scorn the food given them in their desire to return home to the woods; this same Boethian passage is noted by Vincent Moleta, "Come l'ausello in selva a la verdura," *Studi danteschi*, 52 (1979-1980), 1-67, repr. in *Guinizzelli in Dante* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1980). In this book Moleta provides a reading of the *Comedy's* incipits in a Guinizzellian key, suggesting that Dante "chooses to recall in his last work precisely those canzoni in which the inspirational force of *Al cor gentil*, and above all his transformation of the last two stanzas of that canzone, are most in evidence" (p. 145).

²⁸ This fact could serve, I believe, as an argument against the original allegorical significance of "Voi che 'ntendendo." If the canzone had been written with the allegory of Lady Philosophy in mind, would Dante not have taken

only in the allegorical gloss to "Voi che 'ntendendo" that Dante for the first time deliberately links the notion of consolation to Philosophy. In *Convivio* II, xii, where *consolare* is repeated in various forms six times ("consolare," "sconsolato," "consolarsi," "consolato," "consolazione," "consolarme"), there is no trace of the negative valence the word bore in *Vita Nuova* XXXVIII. There, in the context of Beatrice's victory, the consoling thought of the *donna gentile* is "vile"; here, in the context of the *donna gentile's* victory, consolation is ennobled by being presented in Boethian terms.

By the time, then, that we reach "di ciò ti piaccia consolare alquanto / l'anima mia" in *Purgatorio* II, *consolare* has overtly Boethian associations. It also carries with it a history of signifying (with one exception) consolation from an incorrect source, whether the source be labeled the *donna gentile* or Lady Philosophy. As a canzone devoted to the wrong lady, "Amor che ne la mente" is corrected in the *Comedy*: first, in *Purgatorio* II, by Cato's rebuke; then, within the larger context of the autocitations, by being placed below "Donne ch'avete." The canzone from the *Vita Nuova* is located above the canzone from the *Convivio* in order to demonstrate that—chronology notwithstanding—the praise song for Beatrice must be ranked spiritually and poetically above the praise song for Lady Philosophy. In terms of his inner poetic itinerary as reconstructed in the *Comedy*, Dante views the earlier canzone as an advance over the later one.

This point is further conveyed through a consideration of the form and structure of "Amor che ne la mente." It has frequently been noted that "Amor che ne la mente" is closely modeled on

pains to attach the key word *consolare* to her in the text of the poem, rather than to Beatrice? The strenuous attachment of *consolare* to the *donna gentile* in the allegorical gloss of *Convivio* II, xii almost seems, from this point of view, like a cover-up. My tendency to believe that the canzoni were initially composed as love poems is strengthened by *Purgatorio* II: Casella's attitude toward "Amor che ne la mente" might be taken as a sign that it too was originally nonallegorical, especially considering that the verses confirming the poem's *dolcezza*—i.e. its status as a love poem—are delivered not by the pilgrim but by the poet.

"Donne ch'avete." It contains the same number of stanzas (five) and is organized on the same principles: in both, an introductory stanza is followed by a graduated series of stanzas dedicated to praising various aspects of the lady (general praise in the second stanza, praise of her soul in the third, and praise of her body in the fourth) followed by a *congedo*. Moreover, the rhyme scheme of the *fronte* of "Amor che ne la mente" repeats that of "Donne ch'avete." Such precise metrical and structural correspondences draw attention to a more basic resemblance; both belong to the *stilo de la loda* or praise-style, in which the poet eschews any self-involvement in order to elaborate an increasingly hyperbolic discourse regarding his lady. The marked similarities between the two canzoni have led critics to suggest that the later poem was conceived as a deliberate attempt to outdo the former.²⁹ If Dante once intended that his praise of the new lady should surpass his praise of Beatrice, in confirmation of his changed allegiance, then the hierarchy of the *Comedy's* autocitations serves as a reversal that reinvests "Donne ch'avete" with its original priority.

In *Purgatorio* II we witness a scene in which newly arrived souls are enchanted by a song to a new love, a song that is the textual emblem of their misdirected newcomers' enthusiasm. The *Convivio's* misdirected enthusiasm for Lady Philosophy is thus replayed on the beach of Purgatory; the singing of "Amor che ne la mente" in *Purgatorio* II signals the re-creation of a moment spiritually akin to the poem's first home, the prose treatise, where indeed Philosophy's sweetness is such as to banish all care from the mind: "cominciai tanto a sentire de la sua dolcezza, che lo suo amore cacciava e distruggeva ogni altro pensiero" ("and I began so to feel her sweetness, that her love drove away and destroyed all other thoughts" [II, xii, 7]). To my knowledge, no one has noted that the drama of *Purgatorio* II exactly reproduces the situation of the first stanza of "Amor

²⁹ This view is expressed by Vincenzo Pernicone in the article "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona," *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. I, pp. 217-219.

"Amor che ne la mente"

che ne la mente," in which the lover is overwhelmed by the sweetness of Love's song:

Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona
de la mia donna disiosamente,
move cose di lei meco sovente,
che lo 'ntelletto sovr'esse disvia.

Lo suo parlar sì dolcemente sona,
che l'anima ch'ascolta e che lo sente
dice: 'Oh me lassa, ch'io non son possente
di dir quel ch'odo de la donna mia!'

Love which in my mind reasons so desiringly about my lady often tells me things about her *which cause my intellect to go astray*. His speech sounds so sweetly that the soul which listens and hears says: "Alas that I am not able to utter what I hear about my lady!"

(1-8; italics mine)

Here too we are faced with a verbal sweetness—"Lo suo parlar sì dolcemente sona," echoed in the *Comedy* by "che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi suona"—whose effect is debilitating; as in the *Comedy* the rapt pilgrims are unable to proceed up the mountain, so in the poem the listening soul—"l'anima ch'ascolta e che lo sente"—loses its powers of expression. In both passages, beauty causes the intellect to go temporarily astray.

Line 4 of "Amor che ne la mente"—"che lo 'ntelletto sovr'esse disvia"—thus provides the paradigm that synthesizes all the facets of this discussion: the souls go off the path (temporarily) as they succumb to the sweetness of the song in *Purgatorio* II; Dante went off the path (temporarily) when he allowed himself to be overly consoled by the sweetness of Philosophy in the *Convivio*. Lady Philosophy was indeed a mistake. On the other hand, the location guarantees salvation; like the serpent which routinely invades the valley of the princes, the distractions of the *Purgatorio* have lost their bite. For all that they are new arrivals, easily led astray by their impulsive attraction to the new delights—erotic or philosophical—which cross their path,

the souls of *Purgatorio* II are incapable of erring profoundly. For them, as for their more advanced companions on the terrace of pride, the last verses of the *Pater noster* no longer apply. As in the case of the *donna gentile* episode of the *Vita Nuova*, the Casella episode functions as a lapse, a backward glance whose redemption is implicit in its occurrence.

"Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore"

The second autocitation takes us to one of the *Comedy's* most debated moments, the culminating phase of the encounter between the pilgrim and the poet Bonagiunta da Lucca. If we briefly rehearse the dialogue at this stage of *Purgatorio* XXIV, we note that it is tripartite: Bonagiunta asks if Dante is indeed the inventor of a new form of poetry, which begins with the poem "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore" (49-51); Dante replies by apparently minimizing his own role in the poetic process, saying that he composes by following Love's dictation (52-54); Bonagiunta then claims to have finally understood why the poetry practiced by himself, his peers, and his predecessors is inferior to the new poetry, which he dubs—in passing—the "sweet new style" (55-63).

Bonagiunta's remarks, which frame the pilgrim's reply, are grounded in historical specificity: his initial query concerns Dante's personal poetic history, invoked through the naming of a precise canzone; his final remarks concern the history of the Italian lyric, invoked through the names of its chief practitioners, "l'Notaro e Guittone e me" (56). The concreteness of Bonagiunta's statements contrasts with the indeterminate transcendence of the pilgrim's reply, in which poetic principles are located in an ahistorical vacuum. Not only are the famous *terzina's* only protagonists the poet and Love ("I mi son un che, quando / Amor mi spira, noto . . ."), but the absence of any external historical referent is emphasized by an insistent subjectivity, articulated in the stress on the first person ("I mi son un") at the outset.

Structurally, Dante's reply functions as a pivot between Bonagiunta's first question and his later exclamation. The "Amor mi spira" passage thus enables the poet of the *Comedy* to accomplish that shift in subject matter that has so puzzled critics: from the problematic of an individual poet to that of a tradition. Indeed, precisely the neutrality of the pilgrim's reply allows it to serve as a narrative medium conferring significance both on what precedes and what follows; because of its lack of specific content, the pilgrim's statement—"I am one who takes note when Love inspires me"—is able to provide a context first for the composition of "Donne ch'avete," and then for the emergence of the "sweet new style" as a poetic school. Both are defined in terms of a privileged relation to Amor.

By the same token, however, that the central *terzina* confers significance, it also generates ambiguity, by obscuring the terms of the very transition that it facilitates and by deliberately failing to clarify the application of the key phrase "dolce stil novo." Reacting against what they consider the reflex canonization of a school on the basis of a misreading of Bonagiunta's remarks, recent critics have insisted that the expression "dolce stil novo," as used in *Purgatorio* XXIV, is intended to apply only to Dante's own poetry. In other words, they refer Bonagiunta's latter comments back to his initial query. From this point of view (one which seeks to disband, at least within Dante's text, the group of poets known as *stilnovisti*), the "new style" begins with "Donne ch'avete," and it encompasses only Dante's subsequent poetry in the same mode.³⁰

³⁰ These verses have given rise to essentially two divergent critical camps: one traditionally sees in Bonagiunta's words an implied reference to a "school" of new poets, and the other maintains that the only *stilnovista* so designated by Bonagiunta is Dante himself. This last position is presented by De Robertis in "Definizione dello stil novo," *L'Approdo*, 3 (1954), 59-64. The matter is complicated by the recent emergence of a third camp which insists not only that there is no school of *stilnovisti* referred to within Dante's text, but further that there is no such school at all. For this point of view, see Guido Favati, *Inchiesta sul Dolce Stil Nuovo* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1975). The historiographical aspects of Bonagiunta's remarks will be discussed in the following chapter, where the critical response will be reviewed as well.