

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, “‘I Notaro e Guittone e me” (56). The concreteness of Bonagiunta’s statements contrasts with the indeterminate transcendentalism 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.

Whereas the historiographical potential of Bonagiunta's concluding statements has sparked controversy, critics have not been similarly divided in their reaction to his earlier remark on "Donne ch'avete." Perhaps one reason for the general consensus regarding the status of "Donne ch'avete" is the unusual consistency in Dante's own attitudes toward this canzone as displayed throughout his career, from the *Vita Nuova* to the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* to the *Comedy*. As the first of the *Vita Nuova's* three canzoni, it marks a decisive moment in the *libello*: in narrative terms it signals the protagonist's total emancipation from the Provençal guerdon, and in poetic terms it signals his liberation from the so-called tragic, or Cavalcantian, mode. In the *Vita Nuova*, where aesthetic praxis is viewed as a function of ethical commitment, developments in form are strictly coordinated with developments in content; a stylistic triumph can only exist within the context of a conceptual breakthrough. Nowhere is this procedure more observable than in the chapters describing the genesis of "Donne ch'avete."

The account begins with an impasse in the poet's love for Beatrice. In *Vita Nuova* XIV Dante attends a wedding where he sees the *gentilissima*; his resulting collapse is ridiculed by the ladies present. In the aftermath of this event, Dante writes three sonnets: the first is a direct appeal to Beatrice for pity ("Con l'altre donne mia vista gabbate" [chap. XIV]); the second details his physical disintegration upon seeing her ("Ciò che m'incontra, ne la mente more" [chap. XV]); the third further chronicles the state to which he has been reduced by the erotic conflict, "questa battaglia d'Amore," waged within him ("Spesse fiate vegnonmi a la mente" [chap. XVI]). All share an insistence on the self (the three incipits all contain the first-person pronoun), a tendency to self-pity ("e venmene pietà" from "Spesse fiate"), and a preoccupation with death.³¹ Moreover, they presume the lover's right to air grievances and ask for redress; the

³¹ Dante's "e venmene pietà" echoes Cavalcanti's incipit, "A me stesso di me pietate vene." The relation of these sonnets to the Cavalcantian mode will be discussed further in Chapter II.

first two sonnets are directly addressed by the lover to the lady, who is implicitly viewed as responsible for his suffering.

The last of these sonnets is followed by a strikingly brief chapter consisting of only two sentences, in which the poet quietly announces a major transition; whereas the preceding poems deal obsessively with his own condition, he shall now undertake to write in a new mode, selflessly:

Poi che dissi questi tre sonetti, ne li quali parlai a questa donna però che fuoro narratori di tutto quasi lo mio stato, credendomi tacere e non dire più però che mi pareva di me assai avere manifestato, avvegna che sempre poi tacesse di dire a lei, a me convenne ripigliare materia nuova e più nobile che la passata.

After I had composed these three sonnets, in which I had spoken to this lady since they were the narrators of nearly all of my condition, deciding that I should be silent and not say more because it seemed that I had revealed enough about myself, although the result would be that from then on I should cease to write to her, it became necessary for me to take up a new and more noble subject matter than the past one.

(XVII, 1)

We notice that the "materia nuova e più nobile che la passata" is predicated on a double-edged verbal renunciation: he may no longer speak about himself ("credendomi tacere e non dire più"), and he may no longer speak to her ("avvegna che sempre poi tacesse di dire a lei"). The result of blocking both traditional outlets and traditional responses will be a new poetry.

The archaic dialogue imposed by the poet on the lady is thus replaced by a monologue whose morphology is based on a poetics of sublimation, a poetics illuminated for the poet by the Florentine Muse of chapter XVIII. Here the topos of the *gabbo* is replayed, but with positive results; both lover and poet are provoked into defining new goals. Rather than locating his supreme desire ("fine di tutti li miei desiderii" [XVIII, 4]) in an

event outside of his control (Beatrice's greeting) whose presence is transformational but whose denial induces narrative lapses into self-pity and poetic lapses into regressive modes, the lover learns to use the lady to generate a happiness ("beatitudine") that cannot fail him ("che non mi puote venire meno" [XVIII, 4]) because it is under his own governance. Such total autonomy from referentiality—true beatitude—translates, in poetic terms, into the praise-style; by placing his poetic happiness "in quelle parole che lodano la donna mia" ("in those words that praise my lady" [XVIII, 6]), the poet foregoes the traditionally dualistic mechanics of love poetry and discovers a new mode.

The privileged status of the first poem written in the new style is immediately apparent. Only on this occasion does Dante chronicle the birth of a poem, a birth that is described as a quasi-miraculous event, a creation *ex nihilo*: "la mia lingua parlò quasi come per sé stessa mossa, e disse: *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore*" ("my tongue spoke as though moved by itself, and said: 'Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore'" [XIX, 2]). The inspirational emphasis of this statement from *Vita Nuova* XIX foreshadows the poetic credo of *Purgatorio* XXIV; both texts present "Donne ch'avete" as deriving from a divinely inspired exclusionary relation existing between the poet and a higher authority. The *De Vulgari Eloquentia* also sanctions, albeit in less mystical terms, the special status of "Donne ch'avete": in a text where Dante uses many of his later poems to serve as exempla of excellence in various stylistic and metrical categories, he nonetheless chooses the youthful "Donne ch'avete" as the incipit to follow the formal definition of the canzone, thus establishing this early lyric as emblematic of the entire genre.³²

³² The canzone is defined and "Donne ch'avete" cited for the first time in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* II, viii, 8. Dante also cites the following later canzoni in the treatise: "Doglia mi reca ne lo core ardire" (II, ii, 8); "Amor, che movi tua virtù da cielo" (II, v, 4 and II, xi, 7); "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona" (II, vi, 6); "Al poco giorno e al gran cerchio d'ombra" (II, x, 2 and II, xiii, 2); "Traggemi de la mente amor la stiva" (lost) (II, xi, 5); "Donna pietosa e di novella etate" (II, xi, 8); "Poscia ch'Amor del tutto m'ha lasciato" (II, xii, 8); "Amor, tu vedi ben che questa donna" (II, xiii, 13). "Donne ch'avete" is cited a second time in II, xii, 3.

The testimony of the *Vita Nuova* and the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* clarifies the appearance of "Donne ch'avete" in *Purgatorio* XXIV, where Bonagiunta invokes the canzone as a badge of poetic identity:

Ma dî s'î veggio qui colui che fore
trasse le nove rime, cominciando
'*Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore.*'

But tell me if I see here him who brought forth the new poems, beginning "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore"?

(*Purg.* XXIV, 49-51)

In fact, Bonagiunta both revives and integrates each of the canzone's previous textual roles: in that "Donne ch'avete" is an inaugural text ("le nove rime") he recapitulates the *Vita Nuova*; in that the canzone sets a standard by which to measure other poetry ("l Notaro e Guittone e me") he recapitulates the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. But Dante does not limit himself to recapitulation; in cantos XXIII and XXIV of the *Purgatorio* he constructs a sustained tribute to "Donne ch'avete" that effectively designates this canzone his supreme lyric achievement.

The episode surrounding the citation of "Donne ch'avete" is complicated by the fact that it involves a double set of characters, issues, and retrospective allusions, for the statements of *Purgatorio* XXIV acquire their full significance only when viewed on the backdrop of *Purgatorio* XXIII. The first sign directing us to a contextual reading of canto XXIV is the apparent absence of the requisite autobiographical marker, an absence rectified by the figure of Forese Donati, the friend Dante meets in canto XXIII. As we shall see, the encounter with Forese provides the necessary prelude to the conversation with Bonagiunta. Structural considerations further support reading canto XXIV in tandem with canto XXIII; we do well to bear in mind that the entire Bonagiunta episode takes place literally within the meeting with Forese.³³

³³ The thematic and structural coherence of these two cantos is noted by Umberto Bosco, who makes a point of treating them as a unit in the commentary

Purgatorio XXIII begins with a description of the pilgrim peering through the green boughs of the tree he and his guides have discovered on the terrace of gluttony, "like one who wastes his life chasing little birds": "come far suole / chi dietro a li uccellin sua vita perde" (2-3). The emphasis on loss in "sua vita perde" sets the canto's tone; as well as initiating the episode, the verb *perdere* will also bring it to a close, in Forese's final words in canto XXIV:

Tu ti rimani omai; ché 'l tempo è caro
in questo regno, sì ch'io perdo troppo
venendo teco sì a paro a paro.

Now you remain behind, for time is dear in this realm, so that I lose too much by coming thus with you at equal pace.

(*Purg.* XXIV, 91-93; italics mine)

The encounter with Forese is precisely about loss, a loss which is recuperated through that redemption of history which is the chief matter of the *Purgatorio*. It is no accident that this of all episodes is used to articulate the fundamental relation of the *Purgatorio* to time. Forese's remark on the importance of time in Purgatory, "ché 'l tempo è caro / in questo regno," echoes the crucial definition of the previous canto, where the pilgrim comments that he had expected to find his friend down below, in Ante-Purgatory, where time is restored for time: "Io ti credea trovar là giù di sotto, / dove tempo per tempo si ristora" (XXIII, 83-84). Although the pilgrim's maxim refers directly to the Ante-Purgatory, with its formulaic insistence on literal time, it in fact glosses the whole of the second realm.

Time is the essential commodity of the *Purgatorio*, the only real eye for an eye that God exacts. The *Purgatorio* exists in

of his edition with Giovanni Reggio, *La Divina Commedia*, 3 vols. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1979), *Purgatorio*, pp. 386-394. This same dialectical emphasis pervades the readings of Alberto Del Monte, "Forese," *Cultura e scuola* 4, nos. 13-14 (1965), 572-589; and Vittorio Russo, "Pg. XXIII: Forese, o la maschera del discorso," *MLN*, 94 (1979), 113-136.

time because the earth exists in time; time spent sinning in one hemisphere is paid back in the other.³⁴ Because earth is where "vassene 'l tempo e l'uom non se n'avvede" ("time passes and man does not notice" [*Purg.* IV, 9]), Purgatory is where "tempo per tempo si ristora." Climbing Purgatory allows the reel of history to be played backward; the historical fall of the race through time, symbolized by the Arno in Guido del Duca's discourse as it was in Hell by the Old Man of Crete, is reversed.³⁵ The journey up the mountain is the journey back through time to the place of beginnings, which is in turn the new ending; it is a journey whose goal is the undoing of time through time. The fall that occurred in history can only be redeemed in history; time is restored so that with it we may restore ourselves. This reversal of the fall, most explicitly reenacted in the ritual drama of *Purgatorio* VIII, finds its personal and autobiographical expression in the meeting with Forese Donati.

If Purgatory is the place where we are given the chance, desired in vain on earth, to undo what we have done, the Forese episode is chosen by the poet as the vehicle for articulating these basic principles of the canticle because it is emblematic, more than any other episode, of a fall in Dante's own spiritual biography. The episode's thematics of loss rehearse at a personal level what will later be fully orchestrated in the Earthly Paradise, where Matelda reminds Dante of Proserpina in her moment of loss ("Proserpina nel tempo che perdette / la madre lei, ed ella primavera" "Proserpina in the time when her mother lost her,

³⁴ This underlying notion of debt translates into the economic images that run through the *Purgatorio* to culminate in the startling metaphor of canto XXVIII, 91-96, whereby Eden was God's downpayment on Paradise, but man defaulted while paying back the loan. The economic motifs of the *Comedy* are treated by Joan M. Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, chap. 6, "Exchange and Communication, Commerce and Language" (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1984). On time in the *Comedy*, see Franco Masciandaro, *La problematica del tempo nella Commedia* (Ravenna: Longo, 1976).

³⁵ The Arno's role in personifying the fall of history is succinctly expressed by Guido del Duca's phrase with its emphatic progressive construction: "Vassi caggendo" ("It goes on falling") in *Purg.* XIV, 49. Giuseppe Mazzotta discusses the Old Man of Crete in Dante, *Poet of the Desert*, chap. 1.

and she lost spring" [*Purg.* XXVIII, 50-51]), and where Eve, signifying loss, is continually insinuated into the discourse. Indeed, the opening simile of *Purgatorio* XXIII may be seen as an anticipation of Beatrice's Edenic rebuke; the vain pursuit of little birds finds its metaphorical equivalent in another distracting diminutive, the *pargoletta* of canto XXXI:

Non ti dovea gravar le penne in giuso,
ad aspettar più colpo, o pargoletta
o altra novità con sì breve uso.

No young girl or other novelty of such brief use should have weighed your wings downward to await further blows.

(*Purg.* XXXI, 58-60)

The fall that Forese Donati marks in Dante's life is redeemed in cantos XXIII and XXIV of the *Purgatorio*, both biographically and poetically. The moment of failure is placed before the moment of triumph, the encounter with Forese before the dialogue with Bonagiunta. Thus, Dante's so-called *traviamento morale*, as remembered in canto XXIII, is ultimately seen from the perspective of an enduring conquest, as formulated in canto XXIV. The poetic correlative of Dante's spiritual fall is the *tenzone* of scurrilous sonnets exchanged by him and Forese; the *tenzone* stands in contrast to the *stil novo*, celebrated here as the pinnacle of Dante's lyric form in the canzone "Donne ch'avete."³⁶ There is no further autocitation in the *Purgatorio*

³⁶ Bosco, Del Monte, and Russo all point to the contrast between the *tenzone* and the *stil novo*, referred to by Bosco respectively as the "poison" and the "antidote" (*Purgatorio*, p. 391). Before proceeding, some mention should be made of the doubts that exist regarding the attribution of the *tenzone* to Dante. Domenico Guerri's suggestion that the sonnets are in fact an obscene literary correspondence of the early *Quattrocento* (*La corrente popolare nel Rinascimento* [Florence: Sansoni, 1931], pp. 104-148) went counter to the expressed opinion of Michele Barbi ("La tenzone di Dante con Forese," orig. 1924, repr. in *Problemi di critica dantesca, Seconda serie* [Florence: Sansoni, 1941], pp. 87-188, and in *Rime della Vita Nuova e della giovinezza*, ed. M. Barbi and F. Maggini [Florence: Le Monnier, 1956], pp. 275-373), by whom it was refuted

because "Donne ch'avete" is the end-term in the search for the purgatorial mode of pure love poetry; like the Earthly Paradise, the beginning is revealed to be the end.

As a poetic experience, the *tenzone* is present only obliquely, in Dante's encounter with his former verbal antagonist. The lexical gains of the uncompromisingly realistic *tenzone* are registered less in the second canticle than in the first, where we find, for instance, the exchange between Sinon and Maestro Adamo.³⁷ Far from containing a particularly realistic lexicon,

("Ancora della tenzone di Dante con Forese," orig. 1932, repr. in *Problemi di critica dantesca, Seconda serie*, pp. 189-214). Guerri's thesis was revived forty years later by Antonio Lanza in an Appendix to his *Polemiche e berte letterarie nella Firenze del primo Quattrocento* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1971) entitled "Una volgare lite nella Firenze del primo Quattrocento: la cosiddetta tenzone di Dante con Forese Donati—nuovi contributi alla tesi di Domenico Guerri," only to be refuted again by Mario Marti, "Rime realistiche (la tenzone e le petrose dantesche)," *Nuove letture dantesche* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1976), vol. VIII, pp. 209-230, who insists on the evidence of the early commentators (some verses of the *tenzone* are cited by the Anonimo Fiorentino) and of the manuscripts (which are assigned with greater probability to the end of the fourteenth than to the beginning of the fifteenth century). Were Dante's authorship of the *tenzone* to be revoked and my analysis of canto XXIII to lose its textual factor, the biographical/poetic triumph of canto XXIV would still be dialectically preceded by a biographical—if not poetic—fall. On the other hand, precisely the striking parallelism between the two cantos that the existence of the *tenzone* adds to the episode in the *Comedy* seems to constitute further support of its authenticity.

³⁷ Although Russo points to the presence of "rime realistiche" in *Purgatorio* XXIII ("Forese o la maschera del discorso," p. 126), they seem not extensive enough to constitute a textual echo of the *tenzone* in the canto. Reverse echoes pervade the canto according to Francesco D'Ovidio, who argues that the repetition of Forese's name here makes amends for the use of the nickname "Bicci" in the sonnets, and likewise that the tender insistence on Forese's face (*Purg.* XXIII, 48 and 55) is connected to the "faccia fessa" of the sonnet "Bicci novel, figliuol di non so cui." D'Ovidio's chief claim is that the rhyming of "Cristo" only with itself in the *Comedy* is intended to correct its rhyme with "tristo" and "male acquisto" in the same sonnet; all these points are to be found in "Cristo in rima," *Studii sulla Divina Commedia* (Milan-Palermo: Sandron, 1901), pp. 215-224. More recently, Piero Cudini has returned to the question of the *tenzone* in the *Comedy*, both with respect to its impact on the language of Sinon and Maestro Adamo in *Inferno* XXX, and with respect to the encounter

Purgatorio XXIII is saturated with lyric elements like the antithesis. As the lyric figure par excellence, Dante uses antithesis in canto XXIII to chart the lyric's transcendence of itself. From a traditionally private and rhetorical figure, it stretches to accommodate the deepest moral significance; in narrative terms, we move from the Petrarchism *avant la lettre* that describes the gluttonous souls in the first part of the canto ("piangere e cantar" [10]; "diletto e doglia" [12]; "piangendo canta" [64]) to the passion of Christ, expressed through an antithesis whose rigor is foreign to the lyric experience:

E non pur una volta, questo spazzo
 girando, si rinfresca nostra pena:
io dico pena, e dovia dir sollazzo,
 ch  quella voglia a li alberi ci mena
 che men  Cristo lieto a dire 'Eli,'
 quando ne liber  con la sua vena.

And not just one time as we circle this space is our pain refreshed—I say pain, and I ought to say pleasure, for that desire leads us to the trees which led Christ happy to say "Eli" when He freed us with His blood.

(*Purg.* XXIII, 70-75; italics mine)

That most banal of amatory expedients—pain that is pleasure—thus renders the sublime.³⁸ The rhetorical achievement of line 72 is concretized in two further antithetical expressions, again radically new: "buon dolor" in "l'ora / del buon dolor ch'a Dio ne rimarita" ("the hour of the sweet grief that reweaves us to God" [80-81]), and "dolce assenzo" in "a ber lo dolce assenzo d'i martiri" ("to drink the sweet wormwood of the torments"

with Forese (in key moments of the latter he finds the use of rhyme schemes from the sonnets); see "La tenzone tra Dante e Forese e la *Commedia* (*Inf.* XXX; *Purg.* XXIII-XXIV)," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 159 (1982), 1-25.

³⁸ A propos of antithesis in canto XXIII and of line 72 in particular, Sapegno cites the anonymous verse "E sto in sollazzo e vivo in gran pena" ("I exist in joy and in great pain"), where "sollazzo" and "pena" are present in their most hackneyed form (*Purgatorio*, pp. 256-257).

[86]). Thus, in the *Purgatorio* "sweet wormwood" describes not the contradictory love of the poet for his lady (as in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, where his lady's eyes can make honey bitter, or sweeten wormwood: "e l' mel amaro, et addolcir l' assenzio" [CCXV, 14]), but the soul's paradoxical attachment to the martyrdom of purgation.

Through such textual strategies the poet sets the stage for the elaboration of a new poetic category in *Purgatorio* XXIV, that of the transcendent lyric. Indeed, as though to underscore the importance of canto XXIII for our reading of canto XXIV, Dante introduces the souls of the terrace of gluttony, at the beginning of XXIII, in a *terzina* that proleptically glosses the role of the canzone "Donne ch'avete":

Ed ecco piangere e cantar s'udie
 'Labia m a, Domine' per modo
 tal, che diletto e doglia parturie.

And suddenly in tears and song was heard "Labia mea, Domine" in such a way that it gave birth to delight and sorrow.

(*Purg.* XXIII, 10-12)

Embedded within lyric antitheses is a verse with enormous resonance for Dante's conception of the lyric, from the Vulgate's Fiftieth Psalm: "Domine, labia mea aperies; et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam" ("Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will announce Your praise"). Thus, the gluttons pray to the Lord to open their once closed mouths so that they may sing forth His praises, a fact that illuminates the positioning of Bonagiunta and his poetic discourse on this terrace. As a poet, Bonagiunta also failed to "open his mouth" in praise; he is emblematic of an archaic poetics that stopped short of discovering the praise-style, the "materna nuova e pi  nobile che la passata" of *Vita Nuova* XVII.³⁹

³⁹ In "Dante's Sweet New Style and the *Vita Nuova*," *Italica*, 42 (1965), 98-107, John Scott links these verses of Psalm 50 to the spontaneous speech that generated "Donne ch'avete," so emphasized in the *libello*. For the importance

The gluttons of canto XXIII have turned their mouths from the basest of concerns—"eating," or unrelieved self-involvement—to praising God, in the same way that the discovery of the *stil novo* turns the Italian lyric from the conventional poetics of the "I" to the deflection of the "I" in the poetry of praise. Thus, the gluttons chanting their Psalm are described as souls who are loosening the knot of their obligation, "forse di lor dover solvendo il nodo" (XXIII, 15), in a phrasing that anticipates the loosening of Bonagiunta's "knot" (his uncertainty regarding the reasons for his poetic failure) by the pilgrim. The artifact that symbolizes the conversion that the gluttons have only now achieved—away from the self toward a disinterested focusing on the Other—is "Donne ch'avete," which attains its prominence within the *Comedy* precisely because it marks the moment in which Dante first opens his mouth in a song of praise.

Within the new order imposed by the *Comedy's* confessional self-reading, in which literal chronology becomes irrelevant, Forese signifies the fall preceding the conversion to Beatrice. Moreover, the pilgrim will specify, in the detailed account of his journey that he offers at the end of canto XXIII, that he proceeded directly from the experience shared with his friend to the meeting with Vergil; thus, we can state that Forese signifies, within the *Comedy's* ideal scheme, no less than the final fall before the final conversion. That this fall is connected to the displacement of Beatrice is suggested by the fact that Dante's friendship with Forese seems to correspond to the period of depression following Beatrice's death, a period documented by the *Convivio* (and perhaps by Cavalcanti's sonnet rebuking Dante

of this Psalm, see Robert Hollander, "Dante's Use of the Fiftieth Psalm," *Dante Studies*, 91 (1973), 145-150, repr. *Studies in Dante*, pp. 107-113. Richard Abrams connects Bonagiunta's gluttony to his inability to achieve the praise-style in "Inspiration and Gluttony: The Moral Context of Dante's Poetics of the 'Sweet New Style,'" *MLN*, 91 (1976), 30-59, as does Mark Musa, "The 'Sweet New Style' That I Hear," in *Advent at the Gates: Dante's Comedy* (Bloomington and London: Indiana U. Press, 1974), pp. 111-128.

for his *vile vita*), in which Beatrice was replaced by other interests to a degree later judged intolerable.⁴⁰

In the absence of precise indices regarding the years after 1290, the decadence of the *tenzone* (dated by internal evidence to 1293-1296) was originally viewed as symptomatic of a literally dissolute period in Dante's life. The illegitimate biographical status once assumed by these texts has been defused by studies insisting that the low style of the *tenzone* is just as conventional as the high style of the courtly lyric. As a result, Dante's straying after the death of Beatrice is now generally interpreted in a more metaphorical light, as a phase of moral and political secularism, involving a philosophical and/or religious deviation from orthodoxy.⁴¹ To the extent that any strictly

⁴⁰ Cavalcanti's famous and enigmatic sonnet, "I vegno 'l giorno a te 'nfinite volte," has spawned a variety of interpretations. In answer to D'Ovidio's claim that the sonnet was intended to reprove Dante for his low associations, and in particular for his friendship with Forese ("L'intemerata di Guido," 1896; repr. "La riminata di Guido," in *Studi sulla Divina Commedia*, pp. 202-214), Barbi asserted that the sonnet enjoins Dante against excessive depression, not decadence ("Una opera sintetica su Dante," 1904; repr. *Problemi di critica dantesca, Prima serie* [Florence: Sansoni, 1934], pp. 40-41). In support of Barbi's thesis is Dante's own use of the expression employed by Cavalcanti in line 9, "la vil tua vita," in the *donna gentile* sequence of the *Vita Nuova*, where "la mia vile vita" refers to the life of tears and suffering he had been leading since Beatrice's death (XXXV, 3). Another current of criticism sees an underlying political motivation; Marti suggests that the resentment of the aristocratic and therefore politically excluded Cavalcanti may have been provoked by Dante's growing political involvement ("Sulla genesi del realismo dantesco," in *Realismo dantesco e altri studi* [Milan: Ricciardi, 1961], pp. 1-32). A convincing reading of the sonnet in a poetic key is that of Marco Santagata, "Lettura cavalcantiana," *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 148 (1971), 295-308, according to whom Guido accuses Dante of leaving the restricted sphere of stilnovist poetics, as in fact he did. The recent contribution of Letterio Cassata, "La paternale di Guido," *Studi danteschi*, 53 (1981), 167-185, is notable mainly for its helpful review of the sonnet's complex hermeneutic history. In conclusion, I would note that there could well be some merit to all the chief interpretations of "I vegno 'l giorno a te," since all facets of the problematic—depression, Forese, politics, poetic divergence—come together in the critical years following the death of the *gentilissima*.

⁴¹ In "Sulla genesi del realismo dantesco," Marti insists on the stylistically conventional aspect of the *tenzone*, which he says should be viewed in the

personal or erotic failure is involved, it is viewed as part of a larger problematic; the *pargoletta* cited by Beatrice is not only a rival lady (as witnessed by her place in the *Rime*), but is also the central symbolic node of a cluster of transgressions. Among these transgressions are the poems to the *donna gentile*, composed at this time, most likely in 1293-1294. The episode of his life to which Dante later attached the rubric "Forese Donati" is, therefore, a synthesis of the deviations catalogued by Beatrice: the moral ("o pargoletta / o altra novità" [*Purg.* XXXI, 59-60]), and the philosophical ("quella scuola / c'hai seguitata" [*Purg.* XXXIII, 85-86]).⁴²

Beatrice forecasts her more specific rebukes with a single compact charge, that of turning away from her to someone else: "questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui" ("he took himself from

context of anti-courtly poetry in general. In the matter of Dante's potentially more serious deviations, Nardi maintains that although Dante never strayed as far from orthodoxy as his friend Cavalcanti, he was not immune from Averroistic influences ("Dante e Guido Cavalcanti," p. 213); his "Dal Convivio alla Commedia" (in *Dal Convivio alla Commedia: sei saggi danteschi* [Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1960], pp. 37-150) delineates Averroistic tendencies in the *Convivio* and even finds residual Averroism in the *Paradiso*. Another critic who stresses the philosophical component of Dante's error is Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, who suggests that the temptations cited by Beatrice, the "serene" of *Purgatorio* XXXI, 45 as well as the "pargoletta" of line 59, should be read in the context of Cicero's passage on Ulysses and the Sirens in the *De Finibus* as representing "simultaneously the sins of the flesh and a misuse of knowledge" ("The 'Sirens' of *Purgatorio* XXXI, 45," in *Medieval Cultural Tradition in Dante's Comedy* [Ithaca: Cornell U. Press, 1960], pp. 205-212). In his commentary to the *Comedy* (which devotes particular attention to the autobiographical aspects of the poem), Bosco stresses the philosophical/religious nature of the *traviamento* (see, for instance, *Purgatorio*, p. 391).

⁴² Beatrice refers not only to "that school which you followed" but also to "its doctrine"; as Edward Moore points out, the expression "sua dottrina" (*Purg.* XXXIII, 86) implies a philosophical school of thought (see "The Reproaches of Beatrice," in *Studies in Dante, Third Series: Miscellaneous Essays* [1903; repr. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968], p. 234). Etienne Gilson makes the same point, saying that "Since it is here a question of a *school* and a *doctrine*, Beatrice cannot have been speaking of moral transgressions in this passage" (*Dante and Philosophy*, trans. David Moore [1939; repr. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968], p. 97). Moore argues against an overly literal interpretation of Dante's fall, concluding that "Religion, as I believe, lost its practical hold on him after the death of Beatrice" (p. 249).

me and gave himself to another" [*Purg.* XXX, 126]). Indeed, the hallmark of Beatrice's personal discourse throughout the Earthly Paradise is negative conversion. She concentrates insistently on the illicit presence of the other; "altrui" is echoed by "altra novità," and finally by "altrove" in the verse "colpa ne la tua voglia altrove attenta" ("the fault of your will elsewhere intent" [*Purg.* XXXIII, 99]). To the thematics of negative conversion is opposed the positive conversion of canto XXIII, where the pilgrim registers the forward turn of *Inferno* I:

Di quella vita mi volse costui
che mi va innanzi, l'altri' ier, quando tonda
vi si mostrò la suora di colui

From that life he who goes before me turned me the other
day, when the sister of him [the sun] showed herself round
to you

(*Purg.* XXIII, 118-120)

The full moon over the *selva oscura* marks the poet's tryst with the conversion that will take him, as he explains to his friend, ultimately to Beatrice, "là dove fia Beatrice" (*Purg.* XXIII, 128).

When Dante says to Forese "Di quella vita mi volse costui," he defines the new moment with Vergil ("mi volse") in terms of the old moment with Forese ("quella vita"), the conversion in terms of the preceding fall. The words "quella vita" refer literally to the past life shared by the two friends, a past whose memories are still burdensome (the flip side of Casella's song, which is still sweet):

Se tu riduci a mente
qual fosti meco, e qual io teco fui,
ancor fia grave il memorar presente.
Di quella vita mi volse costui . . .

If you call to mind what you were with me and I with
you, the present memory will still be grievous. From that
life he turned me . . .

(*Purg.* XXIII, 115-118)

The life-experience shared by Dante and Forese thus assumes a metaphoric value in the *Comedy* that bears little relation to anything we know about the two men. Forese stands in Dante's personal lexicon for his own compromised historical identity, the past—"qual fosti meco, e qual io teco fui"—brought painfully into the present—"il memorar presente." Their life together represents everything the saved soul regrets before being granted forgetfulness: the sum total of personal falls, little deaths, other paths. For Dante, this is everything he left behind when he turned to Beatrice.

In directly linking his friendship with Forese to the encounter with Vergil, in casting the Florentine *traviamento* as the immediate predecessor to the dark wood, Dante far outstrips the literal content of the *tenzone*, which (with its gluttonies, petty thieveries, and untended wives) tells of a more social than spiritual collapse. Nor is he concerned with strict chronology; Forese, who died in 1296, had been dead for four years when the pilgrim wanders into the first canto of the *Inferno*. Such underminings of the factual record, combined with the evasion of textual echoes from the *tenzone*, underscore the metaphorical significance of the Forese episode in the *Comedy*.

The paradigmatic value assigned to the episode necessarily extends to the poetic sphere as well. The conversion from "that life" with Forese to "new life" with Beatrice is also the conversion from the fallen style of the *tenzone* to the new style of "Donne ch'avete." In this ideal chronology, the *tenzone* occupies a position antecedent even to Bonagiunta's old style; it is as complacently rooted in fallen reality as the *stil novo* is free of it. As Dante's personal fall—"quella vita"—is redeemed by the restorative time of Purgatory, so the poetic fall—the *tenzone*—is redeemed by the converted style of the *stil novo*. This poetic conversion takes place in a context of lyric antitheses so overriding that they embrace even the episode's personnel; in the violent contrast between Forese's chaste wife Nella and the "sfacciate donne fiorentine" ("brazen women of Florence" [XXIII, 101]) one could see a continuation of the canto's antithetical mode, carried from the lexical to the figural level. In fact, the

terrace of gluttony is played out on a backdrop of contrasting women, good and bad, courtly and anti-courtly: not only Nella and her Florentine opposites, but Beatrice, Piccarda, Gentucca, Mary (from the exempla at the end of canto XXII), and (mentioned in XXIV, 116) Eve.

An episode that deals with lyric themes is thus sustained by the genre's narrative prerequisites, by women. It is not coincidental that in the course of this episode Dante should ask his friend about the location of his sister, or that Bonagiunta should prophesy the aid of a young woman from Lucca; both Piccarda and Gentucca are historical correlatives of the terrace's true heroines, the "ladies who have understanding of love." Most important is the fact that only here does the pilgrim take the opportunity to name Beatrice as the term of his voyage, thus relinquishing his usual practice of indicating her through a periphrasis. He names her because Forese—unlike the majority of the souls he has encountered—knows her, a simple fact with less simple implications. Precisely Forese's historical identity, his connection to a literal past, makes him valuable to a poet whose metaphors require grounding in reality. The fall must have a name, Forese, as salvation has a name, Beatrice, and as conversion occurs under the aegis of Vergil, specifically five days ago, when the moon was full. The irreducible historicity of this poem—the radical newness of its style—retrospectively guarantees all those other poems, and the newness of their style: "le nove rime, cominciando / 'Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore.'"

"Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete"

The last of the *Comedy's* autocitations, "Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete," belongs to *Paradiso* VIII. In the heaven of Venus Dante meets Charles Martel, who declares his whereabouts by citing his friend's canzone, appropriately addressed to the angelic intelligences of this third heaven: