

I

Autocitation and Autobiography

Prelude: the *Inferno*

In a text that functions largely through a dialectical process of revision and appropriation, the moments in which the poet looks to his own poetic past, through autocitation, acquire a peculiar significance; indeed, in a study of the *Comedy's* poets, one must begin by examining Dante's retrospective treatment of his poetic self. Nowhere can this palindomic self-analysis that permeates the *Comedy* be more tellingly isolated than in the episodes in which Dante quotes from his earlier literary achievements. In this chapter I propose to approach these episodes as a unified and continuous autobiographical meditation purposely inscribed by the poet into the text of his poem.¹

¹ Scholars dealing with autobiography or autoexegesis in Dante have adopted a variety of approaches. The critic who has most illuminated the dialectical intersecting of the *Comedy* with its poetic past is Gianfranco Contini, who comments that "la *Commedia* è, dopo tutto, anche la storia, stavo per dire l'autobiografia, di un poeta" ("Dante come personaggio-poeta della *Commedia*," *L'Approdo letterario*, 4 [1958], 19-46, repr. in *Un'idea di Dante* [Turin: Einaudi, 1976], pp. 33-62; the quotation is from *Un'idea di Dante*, p. 40). Giovanni Fallani, *Dante autobiografico* (Naples: Società editrice napoletana, 1975), reconstructs Dante's biography on the basis of his texts. Marziano Guglielminetti, *Memoria e scrittura: l'autobiografia da Dante a Cellini* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), places the *Vita Nuova* and *Convivio* in a historical framework (see in this context the questions raised by Paul Zumthor, "Autobiography in the Middle Ages?" *Genre*, 6 [1973], 29-48). William C. Spengemann discusses the *Vita Nuova*

There are three autocitations in the *Comedy*: two in the *Purgatorio* and one in the *Paradiso*. All are incipits of canzoni, all from love poems. The fact that none occurs in the *Inferno* is relevant to this discussion, representing as it does a deliberate omission. Autocitations appear in the *Comedy* as integral parts of larger deliberations on textuality; the very nature of Dante's infernal commentary on this issue precludes the possibility of quotation, since the mimesis of the first canticle is dedicated to reproducing instances of textual distortion. Textually, the governing principle of the *Inferno* is misuse, which is objectified into a series of misquotations operating at all levels of textual activity, from the religious hymn, in the case of "*Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni*" (*Inf.* XXXIV, 1), to the secular lyric.

The most explicit evocation of love poetry in the *Inferno* occurs in canto V, where the dense fabric of literary reminiscences, ranging from Vergil and Augustine to Boethius and the vernacular traditions, is intended to sustain an investigation into the status of authoritative texts.² The material for Dante's in-

from an autobiographical perspective in *The Forms of Autobiography* (New Haven and London: Yale U. Press, 1980), as does Jerome Mazzaro, *The Figure of Dante: An Essay on the Vita Nuova* (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1981). The *Convivio* and Epistle to Cangrande della Scala are situated within the tradition of medieval exegesis by L. Jenaro MacLennan, "Autocomentario en Dante y comentarismo latino," *Vox Romanica*, 19 (1960), 82-123, and Gian Roberto Sarolli, "Autoesegesi dantesca e tradizione esegetica medievale," *Convivium*, 34 (1966), 77-112, repr. in *Prolegomena alla Divina Commedia* (Florence: Olschki, 1971), pp. 1-39. John Freccero has written on the role of the Augustinian model in shaping the *Comedy* as a confessional narrative; see especially "Dante's Novel of the Self," *Christian Century*, 82 (1965), 1216-1218, "Dante's Prologue Scene," *Dante Studies*, 84 (1966), 1-25, and "Dante's Medusa: Allegory and Autobiography," in *By Things Seen: Reference and Recognition in Medieval Thought*, ed. David L. Jeffrey (Ottawa: U. of Ottawa Press, 1979), pp. 33-46. A recent proposal for reading the *Comedy* in an autoexegetical key is provided by Amilcare A. Iannucci, "Autoesegesi dantesca: la tecnica dell' 'episodio parallelo' nella *Commedia*," *Lettere italiane*, 33 (1981), 305-328.

² The following studies focus on textuality in *Inferno* V: Paget Toynbee, "Dante and the Lancelot Romance," in *Dante Studies and Researches* (London: Methuen, 1902), pp. 1-37; Gioacchino Paparelli, "*Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse*" (Naples: Conte, 1954), repr. as "Ethos e pathos nell'episodio di Fran-

quiry is provided by Francesca, whose monologue can be conveniently divided into two parts: the first (88-107) contains her celebrated anaphoric invocation of Love; the second (121-138) responds to the pilgrim's question regarding the specifics of her fall. In this latter, more representational phase of her discourse Francesca relies on the authority of the *Lancelot du Lac*; in the first preparatory phase she draws on the tenets of the established amatory code, explaining that love flourishes in the noble heart and that reciprocity in love is obligatory. Here commentators uniformly point not only to the presence of Andreas Capellanus, but also to that of the Italian, specifically stilnovist, lyric.³

cesca da Rimini," in *Ideologia e poesia di Dante* (Florence: Olschki, 1975), pp. 171-200; Renato Poggioli, "Tragedy or Romance? A Reading of the Paolo and Francesca Episode in Dante's *Inferno*," *PMLA*, 72 (1957), 313-358, repr. in *Dante: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Freccero (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 61-77; Gianfranco Contini, "Dante come personaggio-poeta della *Commedia*," esp. pp. 42-48; Roger Dragonetti, "L'Épisode de Francesca dans le Cadre de la Convention courtoise," *Romanica Gandensia*, 9 (1961), 93-116; Daniele Mattalia, "Moralità e dottrina nel canto V dell'*Inferno*," *Filologia e letteratura*, 8 (1962), 41-70; Antonino Pagliaro, "Il canto di Francesca," in *Ulisse: ricerche semantiche sulla Divina Commedia*, 2 vols. (Messina-Florence: D'Anna, 1967), vol. I, pp. 115-159; Lanfranco Caretti, "Il canto V dell'*Inferno*," *Nuove letture dantesche* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1968), vol. I, pp. 105-131; Anna Hatcher and Mark Musa, "The Kiss: *Inferno* V and the Old French Prose *Lancelot*," *Comparative Literature*, 20 (1968), 97-109; Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's Commedia* (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1969), esp. pp. 106-114; Nicolas J. Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: U. of California Press, 1969), pp. 140-157; D'Arco Silvio Avalle, ". . . de fole amor," in *Modelli semiologici della Divina Commedia* (Milan: Bompiani, 1975), pp. 97-121; John A. Scott, "Dante's Francesca and the Poet's Attitude towards Courtly Literature," *Reading Medieval Studies*, 5 (1979), 4-20; Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert* (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1979), esp. pp. 160-170; Stephen Popolizio, "Literary Reminiscences and the Act of Reading in *Inferno* V," *Dante Studies*, 98 (1980), 19-33; Susan Noakes, "The Double Misreading of Paolo and Francesca," *Philological Quarterly*, 62 (1983), 221-239; Karla Taylor, "A Text and Its Afterlife: Dante and Chaucer," *Comparative Literature*, 35 (1983), 1-20. See also Baldo Curato, *Il canto di Francesca e i suoi interpreti* (Cremona: Editrice Padus, 1963).

³ Contini points out that Francesca's verse, "Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona," draws on two of Andreas' Rules of Love: Rule IX, "Amare nemo potest nisi qui amoris suasionem compellitur" ("No one can love unless he is

The first of Francesca's precepts regarding the god of Love, "Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende" ("Love, which is quickly kindled in the noble heart" [100]), is far from original; Contini points out that it is in fact a conflation of two verses from Guinizzelli's programmatic canzone "Al cor gentil," considered a manifesto for the poets of the *dolce stil novo*.⁴ Onto the canzone's incipit, "Al cor gentil reppara sempre amore" ("Love always returns to dwell in the noble heart"), which formulates a necessary and causal relationship between love and inborn—rather than conferred—nobility, is grafted the first verse of the second stanza, "Foco d'amore in gentil cor s'apprende" ("The fire of love is kindled in the noble heart"), which introduces the element of love as a kindling fire. But for the addition of the adverb "ratto," an intensifier characteristic of Francesca's speech patterns, the result is pure—albeit misquoted—Guinizzelli.

The density of line 100 is further augmented by the fact that it also echoes the first verse of a sonnet from the *Vita Nuova* in which Dante is openly imitating his precursor Guinizzelli. The young poet formulates the relation between love and the gentle heart in terms of identity (they are "one thing"), and ascribes his beliefs to his Bolognese predecessor, the *saggio* of the sonnet's second verse: "Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa, / sì come il saggio in suo dittare pone" ("Love and the noble heart are one thing, as the wise man claims in his verse"

compelled by the persuasion of love"); Rule XXVI, "Amor nil posset amore denegare" ("Love can deny nothing to love") ("Dante come personaggio-poeta della *Commedia*," p. 46). The theme of love and the noble heart in its various transmutations from Andreas to Guittone, Guinizzelli, and Dante is discussed by D'Arco Silvio Avalle, "Due tesi sui limiti di amore," in *Ai luoghi di delizia pieni: saggio sulla lirica italiana del XIII secolo* (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1977), pp. 17-55. On Dante's relation to Andreas, see also Maria Simonelli, "Il tema della nobiltà in Andrea Cappellano e in Dante," *Dante Studies*, 84 (1966), 51-68, and Antonio Viscardi, "Andrea Cappellano," *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 6 vols. (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970-1978), vol. 1, pp. 261-263.

⁴ "Dante come personaggio-poeta della *Commedia*," p. 43. For the poetry of Guinizzelli and his peers, the edition used throughout, unless otherwise noted, is Contini, *Poeti del Duecento*, 2 vols. (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1960).

[*Vita Nuova*, XX]]. The love poetry of Dante's early years, as inherited from poets like Guinizzelli, would therefore seem to be implicated in the condemnation of literature that critics have discerned as a primary theme of *Inferno* V. But although Dante is undoubtedly alerting readers of the *Comedy* to the perils inherent in the lyric tradition, *Inferno* V cannot be seen as positing a final damnation of the genre; its practitioners—including Guinizzelli and the poet of the *Vita Nuova*—are firmly lodged in the *Purgatorio*, where they figure in the review of contemporary poetry that runs through the second canticle.

Moreover, Dante is careful to draw immediate attention to the positive as well as negative dimensions of the lyric. To this end he devises the stilnovistic discourse between Vergil and Beatrice in *Inferno* II, a canto imbued with the kind of morally unambiguous lyric atmosphere that characterizes the final cantos of the *Purgatorio*. Indeed, canto II anticipates not only the *Purgatorio*'s later positive treatment of the lyric, but also—by contrast—the negative treatment of *Inferno* V. There are a number of intriguing correspondences between the two cantos, correspondences intended, I believe, to proleptically defuse and unmask the values underlying Francesca's discourse. Both cantos are, for instance, unusually verbal. Canto II consists almost entirely of referred speech, from the pilgrim's to that of the heavenly intercessors. Beatrice's speech is mediated through Vergil, who repeats it to Dante, using his "parola ornata" (67) and "parlare onesto" (113).⁵ Like Francesca (whose word is as ornate but less honest), Vergil draws on both the lyric and romance registers in his account, thus anticipating her discourse and establishing the stylistic complementarity of the cantos.

⁵ The high incidence of language relating to speech supports the notion that *Inferno* II is a markedly verbal canto; besides the various forms of *dire* employed to relate what one person said to another, we note the frequent iteration of "parlare" and "parola": "S'ì ho ben la parola tua intesa" (43), "Or movi, e con la tua parola ornata" (67), "amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare" (72), "com'io, dopo cotai parole fatte" (111), "fidandomi del tuo parlare onesto" (113), "e 'l mio parlar tanto ben ti promette" (126), "a le vere parole che ti porse" (135), "sì al venir con le parole tue" (137). The court of heaven seems to rely heavily on words. For more on this issue, see Chapter III, note 100.

Vergil's use of the lyric register is especially apparent in his initial description of Beatrice's arrival, a passage whose stilnovist flavor has been remarked:

Io era tra color che son sospesi,
 e donna mi chiamò beata e bella,
 tal che di comandare io la richiesi.
 Lucevan li occhi suoi più che la stella;
 e cominciommi a dir soave e piana,
 con angelica voce, in sua favella

I was among those who are suspended, and a lady called me, so blessed and so beautiful that I requested her to command me. Her eyes shone more than the stars, and she smoothly and softly began to speak, with angelic voice, in her tongue

(*Inf.* II, 52-57)

The paired adjectives "beata e bella" and "soave e piana" remind us of the synonymic reduplication typical of the early lyric.⁶ Her angelic voice and the likening of her eyes to stars are reminiscent of stilnovist developments in the lyric; we think for instance, of Guinizelli's comparison of his lady to the *stella diana* or morning star.⁷ The tone of the passage matches the description of Beatrice; it is "smooth and soft," like the praise

⁶ For examples of synonymic reduplication in the early Dante and the relation of this stylistic feature to the Italian poetic tradition, see Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde, *Dante's Lyric Poetry*, vol. II: *Commentary*, p. 35. Regarding the stilnovist resonance of Canto II, Sapegno comments that "L'atmosfera in cui si colloca questa prima presentazione di Beatrice è tipicamente stilnovistica, anche nei particolari, e prima di tutto in questo gesto di 'omaggio' di Virgilio" (Natalino Sapegno, comm., *La Divina Commedia*, 2d ed., 3 vols. [Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1968], vol. I: *Inferno*, p. 22).

⁷ See the sonnet "Vedut' ho la lucente stella diana," where the poet not only compares his lady to the morning star, but also refers in line 6 to her "occhi lucenti," thus anticipating both terms of Dante's "Lucevan li occhi suoi più che la stella." Other comparisons to the *stella diana* appear in line 3 of Guinizelli's "Io voglio del ver la mia donna laudare" ("più che la stella diana splende e pare"), and in the second line of Cavalcanti's "In un boschetto trova' pastorella" ("più che la stella—bella").

sonnets of Dante's high *stil novo* phase, in which he aimed precisely at creating a *stilus planus*.

The presence of the romance register is less explicit in canto II than in canto V, if only because canto II does not contain a protagonist-text like the *Lancelot du Lac*. Instead, the canto's words and actions are superimposed onto a backdrop of romance conventions: Vergil is the chivalrous knight, begging Beatrice to command him; she is the anxious romance heroine, concerned for her lost friend. Indeed, the context of romance relations, with their prerequisite courtly network, helps to explain Beatrice's promise to praise Vergil to her lord, a remark that has puzzled critics because it seems so gratuitous: is Beatrice suggesting that she can alter Vergil's fate?⁸ Her words, "Quando sarò dinanzi al signor mio, / di te mi loderò sovente a lui" ("When I am before my lord, I will praise you frequently to him" [73-74]), suggest a secular context, in which *il signor mio* takes on the connotations of a secular lord. Like the repeated commands and "recommendations" that run through the canto, they belong to the courtly register to which we are introduced in line 17, where the description of God as *cortese* implicitly likens Him to a beneficent king. This adjective, etymologically connected to "court," will reoccur twice: in Beatrice's opening words to Vergil ("O anima cortese mantoana" [58]), and again in the pilgrim's words of gratitude to his guide ("e te cortese

⁸ The sixteenth-century commentator Lodovico Castelvetro sums up the perplexity of the critics in his question "Questo che monta a Virgilio che è dannato?" ("How does this help Vergil, who is damned?"). The quotation is from Guido Biagi, ed., *La Divina Commedia nella figurazione artistica e nel secolare commento*, 3 vols. (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1924-1929), vol. I, p. 68. The commentators closest to Dante tend to do away with the problem by reading the passage allegorically; for instance, Benvenuto comments: "Hoc autem significat quod theologia saepe utitur servicio rationis naturalis" ("this moreover signifies that theology often makes use of the services of natural reason"). See Benvenuti de Rambaldi de Imola, *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam*, ed. J. P. Lacaita, 5 vols. (Florence: Barbèra, 1887), vol. I, p. 93. With the exception of Benvenuto, who will be cited according to Lacaita, all quotations from the early commentators will be taken from Biagi's edition.

ch'ubidisti tosto" [134]). *Inferno* II is the only canto in the poem where *cortese* appears more than once, as part of a calculated stress on courtliness; in the *Convivio* Dante explicitly links the word *cortesìa* to the notion of the court, saying "si tolse quello vocabulo da le corti, e fu tanto a dire cortesìa quanto uso di corte" ("that word was taken from the courts, for to say courtesy was as much as to say the practice of the court" [II, x, 8]). The canto's insistence on courtliness reaches its metaphorical peak when Vergil, toward the end, refers to the domain of the assisting luminaries as the "court of heaven": "tre donne benedette . . . ne la corte del cielo" (124-125).

Dante, then, goes to great lengths to create the ambience of a court in *Inferno* II. Whereas the canto's lyric echoes may be accounted for by the poet's desire to introduce Beatrice to the *Comedy* in a stylistic environment consonant with the last text in which she figures prominently, the *Vita Nuova*, the creation of the "court of heaven" is less easily explained. I would suggest that it belongs to an associative network designed with an express purpose: Dante intends us to recall this evocation of a courtly scenario when, a few cantos later, we encounter a similar figurative construct. Francesca too invokes an imagined court in which God is king, also in order to offer her protection to the pilgrim: "se fosse amico il re de l'universo, / noi pregheremmo lui de la tua pace" ("if the king of the universe were a friend, we would pray to him for your peace" [Inf. V, 91-92]). This remark is curiously analogous to Beatrice's offer to Vergil, with the difference that Francesca—an exile from the court of heaven—uses a conditional mode that contrasts sharply with Beatrice's self-assured use of the future tense: "di te mi loderò sovente a lui" (Inf. II, 74).

Similarly, much of the diction of *Inferno* V can be seen as an inverse reflection of that of *Inferno* II. *Talento* in *Inferno* II refers to Beatrice's desire to save the pilgrim (81); in *Inferno* V it occurs in the definition of the carnal sinners, "che la ragion sommettono al talento" ("who submit reason to desire" [39]). *Disio* and its derivatives in *Inferno* II refer to Beatrice's desire to return to heaven (71), or to the pilgrim's desire to move

forward on his journey (136), whereas in *Inferno* V they occur four times and always in the context of physical passion (82, 113, 120, 133). "Eyes" in the second canto are either Beatrice's shining eyes or Beatrice's tearful eyes (55, 116); in the fifth canto they are the medium through which passion is first expressed (130). A lady in *Inferno* II is a "donna di virtù" (76; cf. also 94, 124); in *Inferno* V she is immediately coupled and—more dangerously—romanticized (in the most literal sense of the word: she becomes a heroine of romance): "le donne antiche e ' cavalieri" (71). *Amor*, so over-invoked in canto V (in various forms, we find 13 occurrences), is used in canto II with a deliberately chaste infrequency (only twice). And finally, the first words spoken by Beatrice and Francesca offer an interesting contrast. Francesca's "O animal grazioso e benigno" (Inf. V, 88) syntactically parallels Beatrice's "O anima cortese mantoana" (Inf. II, 58); both statements are direct addresses consisting of a vocative preceded by "O," followed by a noun and two adjectives. The similarity underlines the shift from *anima* in one case to *animal* in the other. In a context where the poet has already indicated the difference that changing one letter can make, in reference to Semiramis' legalization of lust ("che libito fé licito in sua legge" "she made lust licit in her law" [Inf. V, 56]), the contrast is suggestive of the larger difference between these two ladies and their two "courts."

Dante's analogous treatment of cantos II and V, his drawing in both cantos on the same genres in order to create a similar textual environment, points to an implied comparison; the two "courts" of these cantos illustrate in fact the two possible outcomes for courtly literature. Dante's statement regards especially the lyric, the courtly genre in which he conducted his own early poetic experiments and whose development he traces throughout the *Comedy*. In *Inferno* V the lyric is criticized for its tendency to conceptual banality; its philosophical underpinnings are susceptible to being reduced to the level of Andreas Capellanus' maxims. The same lack of sufficient critical self-awareness that afflicts the genre also afflicts the youthful Dante, whose willingness to defer to a *saggio* finds its precise echo in

Francesca's deference to authorities (and, even verbally, in her naming of "l tuo dottore" in line 123). If misquotation in a broad sense is the issue of this episode, there is nonetheless also a strong implication that these particular texts are unusually capable of misrepresenting themselves, of creating traps for the inattentive reader, and of generating the occasions for their own misquotation and misuse.

Inferno V represents one possible outcome for the love lyric; *Inferno* II points ahead to the other. The general rebirth of the *Purgatorio* does not leave poetry unaffected: "Ma qui la morta poesi resurga" ("But here let dead poetry rise up again" [*Purg.* I, 7]), from the poet's invocation to the Muses at the beginning of the canticle, is emblematic of the renewal that the *Purgatorio* works at all levels of textuality. The redemption of the love lyric, in particular, is signified in the second canto by the verbatim citation of a verse of love poetry, no longer misquoted but faithfully transcribed. The lyric surfaces on the shores of the mountain in much the same condition as the pilgrim, functioning in fact like all other newcomers to this realm: in need of purgation, refinement, but definitely saved.

The love lyric is a major theme of *Purgatorio* II as it is of *Inferno* V; indeed, one could say that *Purgatorio* II stands as a corrective to *Inferno* V, and that Casella is in this sense a new version of Francesca. "Amorous song," as the lyric is dubbed in *Purgatorio* II, is a key component of both episodes; its reception is in both cases a paradigm for the relation to textuality obtaining in each canticle. Whereas in the *Inferno* tension is generated from the interplay between the "subjective" sinners who view themselves as victims and the "objective" structure (mirrored by the "objective" text) that views them as recipients of justice, in the *Purgatorio* tension results from the dialectic between the souls' conflicting desires, rendered in the purgatorial topos of voyagers who are not sure whether they are more drawn to what lies ahead or to what they leave behind. The dialectic of the *Purgatorio* derives its power from the fact that the sentiments that must be put aside are not, from an earthly perspective, wrong per se; rather, we are dealing here with the

highest of earthly loves: love of friends, love of family, love of one's native city and country, love of poetry and poetic masters.

Art, as mankind's supreme collective accomplishment, pervades the *Purgatorio*. Like the women who are insistently invoked throughout this canticle, art is the emblem of the *Purgatorio's* fundamental problematic: the transcending of an object of desire that is intrinsically worthy but earthbound and subject to time. All aspects of artistic endeavor are represented and find expression in the *Purgatorio*: music, the pictorial and plastic arts, poetry. Of these, however, poetry is the most thoroughly explored; this one canticle contains the episodes of Casella, Sordello, Statius, Forese Donati, Bonagiunta da Lucca, Guido Guinizzelli, and Arnaut Daniel, to mention only those episodes that may be categorized by name. Poetry has a central role in the *Purgatorio* because this is the canticle where even poets must rearrange their priorities; by the same token, this is the only one of the three realms where poetry can truly come into its own as a theme. In the *Inferno* it is only valuable in so far as it is exploitable; in the *Paradiso* it is out of place, surpassed.

In the first two cantos of the *Purgatorio* Dante rehearses the canticle's theme of detachment with respect to a woman (Cato's wife, Marcia), a friend (Casella), and the *amoroso canto* that Casella sings. All three inspire a love that is in need of being redirected upward, away from the earthly catalyst. Of particular interest is Casella, the first of many "old friends" in this canticle, and his song, "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona," which, as the *Comedy's* first autocitation, also establishes Dante as the first lyric poet of the *Purgatorio*. If we look at the three episodes that contain autocitations in the *Comedy*, we notice that they are all linked to encounters with friends: in *Purgatorio* II Casella sings "Amor che ne la mente"; in *Purgatorio* XXIV the recital of "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore," although executed by Bonagiunta, is part of the larger episode of Forese Donati; in *Paradiso* VIII "Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete" is quoted by Charles Martel. Autocitations, or poetic reminiscences, are thus linked to personal encounters, or biographic reminiscences,

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.⁹ 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.

Textual History

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 devel-

⁹ 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 Boyde 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 predetermined 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 reevaluation of the *rime*, the *Convivio* finds its pretext in an explicit reevaluation 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 pityingly 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