

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 revaluation of the *rime*, the *Convivio* finds its pretext in an explicit revaluation of the *donna gentile* sequence of the *Vita Nuova*. In chapter XXXV of the *libello*, after the anniversary of Beatrice's death, Dante sees in a window a "gentile donna giovane e bella molto" who looks 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

comments that her appearance is reminiscent of Beatrice's, thus linking her to the *gentilissima*. Subsequently, the pendulum begins to swing back to his first love: in chapter XXXVII he rebukes his eyes for taking pleasure in the *donna gentile*; in chapter XXXVIII his heart, defending the newcomer, is in litigation with his soul, which represents Beatrice. Beatrice herself then appears to Dante in a "forte imaginazione" in chapter XXXIX, prompting him to regret his temporary inconstancy and to return his thoughts entirely to her. The *donna gentile* episode thus extends from chapter XXXV, when he first sees the new lady, to chapter XXXIX, where he reconverts to Beatrice.

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

In his commentary to the canzoni of the *Convivio*, Dante begins with the exposition of the literal meaning. Regarding "Voi che 'ntendendo," therefore, he begins with the identity of the new love, who is specifically introduced as the *donna gentile* of the *Vita Nuova*. She is presented, moreover, not in

a temporal vacuum but in strict chronological relation to Beatrice, whom she will supplant; we learn that Venus had completed two revolutions after the death of Beatrice when the *donna gentile* first appeared to him: ". . . quando quella gentile donna, cui feci menzione ne la fine de la Vita Nuova, parve primamente, accompagnata d'Amore, a li occhi miei e prese luogo alcuno ne la mia mente" ("when that gentle lady whom I mentioned at the end of the *Vita Nuova* first appeared to my eyes, accompanied by Love, and occupied a place in my mind" [II, ii, 1]). Continuing, Dante describes the psychomachia waged within him between the thoughts supporting the *donna gentile* and those supporting Beatrice. This image of mental combat, deriving from *Vita Nuova* XXXVIII where "la battaglia de' pensieri" was the subject of the sonnet "Gentil pensero," is dramatized and escalated in "Voi che 'ntendendo."

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

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

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

(5-8)

In "Voi che 'ntendendo" the Beatrician thought is described as undertaking just such a journey:

Suol esser vita de lo cor dolente
 un soave penser, che se ne già
 molte fiata a' piè del nostro Sire,
 ove una donna gloriär vedea,
 di cui parlava me sì dolcemente
 che l'anima dicea: 'Io men vo' gire.'

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

(14-19)

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

The transfer of allegiance from Beatrice to the *donna gentile* is complete in the *Convivio's* next canzone, "Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona," expounded in Book III. This is a song of praise dedicated to the triumphant new lady, not a debate like "Voi che 'ntendendo" but an unqualified celebration. It is interesting that Dante removes Beatrice from his treatise in the course of the prose commentary of Book II, before achieving the victorious stasis of "Amor che ne la mente." In chapter viii of Book II Dante suggests that he deliberately inserts his last mention of Beatrice into a digression on the immortality of the soul, because this lofty topic is an appropriate one with which

to commemorate her final appearance: "perchè, di quella [la immortalità de l'anima] ragionando, sarà bello terminare lo parlare di quella viva Beatrice beata" ("it will be beautiful to terminate our speaking of that living blessed Beatrice while discussing the immortality of the soul" [II, viii, 7]). Although tactfully accomplished, the implication nonetheless remains that there is no place for Beatrice in a text dedicated to another lady: ". . . quella viva Beatrice beata, de la quale più parlare in questo libro non intendo per proponimento" ("that living blessed Beatrice, of whom I do not propose to speak further in this book" [II, viii, 7]). Shortly after this dismissal Dante completes the literal exposition of "Voi che 'ntendendo" and begins, in chapter xii, to explain the poem's allegorical significance; it is here that we first learn that the *donna gentile* is to be identified with Lady Philosophy.

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

¹⁰ On the importance of the *De Amicitia* and its medieval epigones for Dante, see Domenico De Robertis, *Il libro della Vita Nuova*, 2d ed. rev. (Florence: Sansoni, 1970), pp. 21-24 and 93-115. De Robertis links Cicero's notion of disinterested friendship with the *Vita Nuova's* elaboration of a disinterested love. See also Alessandro Ronconi, "Cicerone," *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. I, pp. 991-997. Marziano Guglielminetti, in "Dante e il ricupero del 'parlare di

adoption of alternating prose and verse in the *Vita Nuova*, we should remember that the *Convivio* too is a modified form of *prosimetrum*. Most significantly, Boethius offers Dante, in the topos of the consoling lady, the way out of his impasse with the *donna gentile*.

The critical controversy surrounding the *donna gentile* may be reduced to essentially the following question: are we to believe Dante when he claims that she is Philosophy? Scholars are to be found at all points of the critical spectrum: the realists believe that the *donna gentile* is real (or conceived as real) in the *Vita Nuova* and that all the poems written about her, including "Voi che 'ntendendo" and "Amor che ne la mente," were originally composed with a real woman in mind; the allegorists believe that the *donna gentile* was always a symbol of philosophy, even in the *Vita Nuova*, and that all poems about her, including "Voi che 'ntendendo" and "Amor che ne la mente," were originally composed with allegorical intentions.¹¹ Perhaps the single most authoritative position on this issue has been Barbi's, endorsed by Pernicone in his commentary to the *Rime*

se medesimo," chap. 2 of *Memoria e scrittura: l'autobiografia da Dante a Cellini*, stresses the role of Boethius as Dante's confessional model in the *Convivio* over that of Augustine, esp. pp. 74-75 and 97-99. For Dante and Boethius, see Rocco Murari, *Dante e Boezio* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1905); Marie Thérèse D'Alverny, "Notes sur Dante et la Sagesse," *Revue des Études Italiennes*, 11 (1965), 5-24; Francesco Tateo, "Boezio," *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. I, pp. 654-658.

¹¹ Perhaps the most conspicuous among the allegorists is Bruno Nardi, who argues that the *donna gentile* was born allegorical; for an explicit formulation see "Le figurazioni allegoriche e l'allegoria della 'donna gentile,'" in *Nel mondo di Dante* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1944), pp. 23-40. Another strong advocate of this view is James E. Shaw, *The Lady "Philosophy" in the Convivio* (Cambridge: Dante Society, 1938). Among the realists are Fausto Montanari, *L'esperienza poetica di Dante*, 2d ed. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1968), esp. chap. III, "Tra la *Vita Nuova* e il *Convivio*"; also Amerindo Camilli, "Le prime due canzoni del *Convivio* di Dante," *Lettere italiane*, 4 (1952), 70-91. De Robertis offers a cogent dismantling of Nardi's position in "Il libro della *Vita Nuova* e il libro del *Convivio*," *Studi urbinati*, 25 (1951), 5-27. For a survey of the critical positions, see Giorgio Petrocchi, "Donna gentile," *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. II, pp. 574-577, repr. in *L'ultima dea* (Rome: Bonacci, 1977), pp. 97-104.

as well as by Foster and Boyde in theirs; Barbi argues for a middle course, claiming that the original *donna gentile* of the *Vita Nuova* was indeed conceived as flesh and blood, but that, by the time Dante came to write the later poems in the sequence devoted to her, he had already come under the sway of Lady Philosophy.¹² With regard to "Voi che 'ntendendo" and "Amor che ne la mente," therefore, he suggests that we accept the statements of the *Convivio*, reading them as allegorical lyrics composed for Philosophy.

Barbi's thesis is doubtless correct at least with regard to the *Vita Nuova*; an impartial reader of that text would be hard pressed to make a case for the *donna gentile* as Lady Philosophy.¹³ The *Vita Nuova* does not admit the type of personification allegory employed by Dante in the *Convivio*, where he refers

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

¹³ In order to support his thesis Nardi was forced to defend Pietrobono, who had postulated the existence of a first version of the *Vita Nuova* in which the *donna gentile* was victorious; accordingly, we possess the second version, to which the author returned after the experience of the *Convivio* with the intention of providing a new ending (Beatrice victorious) that would be consonant with the *Comedy*. See "Dalla prima alla seconda *Vita Nuova*," in *Nel mondo di Dante*, pp. 3-20; "Filosofia dell'amore nei rimatori italiani del Duecento e in Dante," in *Dante e la cultura medievale*, 2d ed. rev. (Bari: Laterza, 1949), esp. pp. 49-51; "Sviluppo dell'arte e del pensiero di Dante," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 14 (1952), 29-47; "Dante e Guido Cavalcanti," in *Saggi e note di critica dantesca* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1961), pp. 190-219. This theory of two redactions of the *Vita Nuova* (which unfortunately runs through all of Nardi's work on the subject) never gained general acceptance and was laid definitively to rest by Mario Marti, "Vita e morte della presunta doppia redazione della *Vita Nuova*," in *Studi in onore di Alfredo Schiaffini*, 2 vols. (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1965), vol. II, pp. 657-669 (= *Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale*, 7 [1965]).

to it as the allegorical mode used by the poets (II, i, 4); instead the *libello* adumbrates, perhaps unwittingly, the figural allegory of the *Comedy*, in which a literal reality is revealed to be miraculous.¹⁴ The historical level—i.e. Beatrice—exists in the *Vita Nuova*; the poet's task is to discover that she is a signifier, that she has come "from heaven to earth to show forth a miracle," that she is the number nine. Once he has discerned her significance, he must hold fast to his knowledge without the assistance of her presence, a presence from which he is weaned gradually through the revoking of her greeting. Like Christ, whose analogue she is, she makes the invisible visible; after her death the poet assumes this responsibility for himself. It is in this context, as a lapse into an opaque nonsignifying but visible and literal reality, that the *donna gentile* episode fits into the *Vita Nuova*. As an alternative to Beatrice, the *donna gentile* must possess an equally historical identity.

Dante's concern regarding the public repercussions of his inconstancy is already evident in the *Vita Nuova*, where he worries that the *donna gentile* episode may continue to reflect negatively on him even after his return to Beatrice, and says that the sonnet of chapter XXXIX is intended to lay the matter to rest once and for all.¹⁵ In the *Convivio* this concern for his

¹⁴ Singleton stresses the analogical rather than allegorical nature of the *Vita Nuova* in *An Essay on the Vita Nuova* (1949; repr. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1977), esp. pp. 22-24 and 110-114. In "Dante Theologus-Poeta," *Dante Studies*, 94 (1976), 91-136, repr. in *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1980), pp. 31-89, Robert Hollander argues that "Had Dante assigned a designation to the mode of signifying of the *Vita Nuova*, using the same two possibilities he set before us in the *Convivio*, he would not have hesitated to have told us that the *Vita Nuova* was written in the allegory of theologians" (p. 56). At this point I should like to alert the reader to my fundamental agreement with Singleton as regards Dante's use of the so-called allegory of theologians in the *Comedy*; for bibliography on this subject, see Hollander's *Allegory in Dante's Commedia* and "Dante Theologus-Poeta," and Jean Pépin, *Dante et la Tradition de l'Allégorie* (Montréal: Institut d'études médiévales, 1971).

¹⁵ "Onde io, volendo che cotale desiderio malvagio e vana tentazione paresse distrutto, sì che alcuno dubbio non potessero indurre le rimate parole ch'io avea dette innanzi, propuosi di fare uno sonetto ne lo quale io comprendesse

reputation and the impulse to present the *donna gentile* episode in a less derogatory light are recurrent: from the start of the treatise, Dante treats the *Vita Nuova* as a product of his youth whose evidence, it may be inferred, is suspect; moreover, his insistence that he does not wish to detract from the *Vita Nuova*, but only to promote the *Convivio*, does little to enhance the credibility of the earlier work. He openly states his fear that the content of the canzoni will brand him as one who passes lightly from one passion to the next: "Temo la infamia di tanta passione avere seguita, quanta concepe chi legge le sopra nominate canzoni in me avere segnoreggiata" ("I fear the infamy of having yielded to and having been conquered by such passion, as will be conceived by him who reads the above mentioned canzoni" [I, ii, 16]); he believes that the treatise will restore his integrity by revealing that the motive force behind the canzoni is "non passione ma virtù" ("not passion but virtue" [I, ii, 16]). It seems noteworthy that such sentiments are consistently followed, in the *Convivio*, by an appeal to allegory; to show that the canzoni deal not with passion but with virtue he must uncover their true—allegorical—significance: "Intendo anche mostrare la vera sentenza di quelle, che per alcuno vedere non si può s'io non la conto, perchè è nascosa sotto figura d'allegoria . . ." ("I intend also to show their true meaning, which no one will see if I do not explain it, since it is hidden under the figure of allegory" [I, ii, 17]).

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

la sentenza di questa ragione" ("Wherefore I, desiring that such a wicked desire and vain temptation would appear to be destroyed, so that no doubts could be adduced with respect to the rhymed words I had composed heretofore, proposed to write a sonnet which would include the essence of this discourse" [*Vita Nuova*, XXXIX, 6]).

sophical inclination, we may add an interest in the formal properties of allegory which overtakes Dante at this stage in his career; it is not fortuitous that *Convivio* II, i contains Dante's only discussion of the four modes of allegory outside of the Epistle to Cangrande, nor that he should use the treatise to formulate his distinction between the allegory of poets and the allegory of theologians. Dante is, moreover, consistent in his application of the allegory of poets throughout the *Convivio*, from his Fulgentian reading of the *Aeneid* to his interpretation of his own poems. Indeed, "Voi che 'ntendendo," whether or not originally written as allegory, stands as Dante's first non-imitative allegorical work.¹⁶ Finally, a third factor to be considered in the genesis of the *Convivio* is the urge, demonstrated by Dante throughout his career, to reconcile his narratives. These three factors—an interest in philosophy and in allegory combined with a pattern of self-correction—add up to the solution of the *Convivio*: the *donna gentile* as Lady Philosophy.

The *Convivio*'s position along the itinerary of Dante's development is an ambivalent one. In its essential historicity, its insistence on a sign-bearing reality, the *Vita Nuova* is the *Comedy*'s truer precursor. The promise of a new text for a new lady with which the *Vita Nuova* ends ("io spero di dicer di lei quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna" "I hope to say of her that which has never been said of another" [XLII, 2]) is a promise fulfilled

¹⁶ The qualification is intended to leave room for the *Fiore* as possibly Dante's first allegorical venture, in imitation of the *Roman de la Rose*. The attribution of the *Fiore* to Dante is now widely accepted in the wake of the internal evidence demonstrated by Gianfranco Contini; see his "La questione del *Fiore*," *Cultura e scuola* 4, nos. 13-14 (1965), 768-773, and his article in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. II, pp. 895-901. A recent book that takes Dante's authorship of the *Fiore* for granted is that of Luigi Vanossi, *Dante e il Roman de la Rose: Saggio sul Fiore* (Florence: Olschki, 1979). The *Fiore* is not discussed at greater length in this study because it lacks explicit literary references; although the text is a sustained tribute to the *Roman de la Rose*, and although it names philosophers (Socrates in XLIII, Sigier of Brabant in XCII, Ptolemy in CLXX), kings (Solomon in LXV and CIX, Justinian in CX), and literary lovers (Tristan and Isolde in CXLIV, Dido and Aeneas in CLXI, Jason and Medea in CXLI and CXC), it names no precursor poets.

only by the *Comedy*. On the other hand, although the *Convivio* cannot claim newness (both personification allegory and Lady Philosophy have long and venerable histories), the fact remains that the Beatrice of the *Comedy* is in many ways a synthesis of the *Vita Nuova*'s heroine with the *Convivio*'s. Thus, certain descriptions of Lady Philosophy, "la sposa de lo Imperadore del cielo" ("the bride of the Emperor of heaven" [III, xii, 14]), prepare us for the Beatrice of Paradise, "O amanza del primo amante, o diva" ("O beloved of the first lover, o divine one" [Par. IV, 118]). In fact, the *Comedy* as a whole cannot be imagined without the prior existence of the *Convivio*; not only does the treatise rehearse the poem's philosophical, linguistic, and political ideas, but it is also the first text to articulate fully the *Comedy*'s indispensable supporting metaphors of pilgrimage and voyage.¹⁷

Even in its dependence on the allegory of poets, the *Convivio* represents a detour that is simultaneously an essential forward step in Dante's poetic journey. From the love poems of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante passes to the allegorized love poems of *Convivio* II and III; here the allegory permits him to add a moral dimension he considers lacking in love poetry, to show that the canzoni treat "non passione ma virtù." This progression toward an overt moral content continues; the fourth and last book of the *Convivio* glosses a canzone, "Le dolci rime d'amor ch'i solia," which no longer requires an allegorical commentary because it is a straightforward moral discussion of the nature of true nobility. Because the canzone's ethical concerns are not hidden under a "beautiful" (i.e. amorous) exterior, allegory is not required to decipher its "vera sentenza." Book IV is an

¹⁷ One of the most striking features of the *Convivio* is its adumbration of the *Comedy*'s metaphors, in the "pane de li angeli" (I, i, 7), the "selva erronea di questa vita" (IV, xxiv, 12), and especially in the recurrent images of way-faring, by land and by sea, that run through the treatise. The sustained metaphorization of life as a pilgrimage in *Convivio* IV, xii, 14-19 renders explicit what in the *Vita Nuova* is implied by the pilgrims who pass through the city. On the *Convivio* as the most important source of the *Comedy*, see the article on the treatise by Maria Simonelli, *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, vol. II, pp. 193-204.

indication of the direction in which Dante was moving; "Le dolci rime" is but one of a number of moral poems that cap Dante's lyric career, poems like "Poscia ch'Amor" on the chivalric virtue *leggiadria* and "Doglia mi reca" on avarice. By mirroring the social and ethical concerns of the contemporaneous prose treatises, these late lyrics are an important part of Dante's preparation for the *Comedy*.

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

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

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

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

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

²⁰ Other verses seized on by the allegorists are "Ogni Intelletto di là su la mira" ("All the Intelligences from above gaze on her" [23]) and "costei pensò chi mosse l'universo" ("He who moved the universe thought of her" [72]). In his gloss to line 72 (*Convivio* III, xv, 16) Dante makes the connection to Sapientia, citing Proverbs viii, 27-30.

the poet asserts that the *ballata* (referred to as the "sorella" of the canzone) is mistaken in its harsh judgment:

Canzone, e' par che tu parli contrario
al dir d'una sorella che tu hai;
ché questa donna, che tanto umil fai,
ella la chiama fera e disdegnosa.

Canzone, it appears that you speak contrary to the words of one of your sisters, because this lady, whom you consider so humble, she calls harsh and disdainful.

(73-76)

This first cycle of contradiction and resolution is then followed by a second; in the sonnet "Parole mie" Dante again repudiates the new lady. The opening quatrain of this sonnet is interesting because it specifically names "Voi che 'ntendendo" as the starting point of this spasmodic textual love affair:

Parole mie che per lo mondo siete,
voi che nasceste poi ch'io cominciai
a dir per quella donna in cui errai:
'Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete',
andatevene a lei . . .

Words of mine who are throughout the world, you who were born when I began to write for that lady in whom I erred "Voi che 'ntendendo il terzo ciel movete," go to her . . .

(1-5)

This sonnet is in turn retracted in the following sonnet, "O dolci rime," where the poet denies "Parole mie" and recommitments himself to the service of his new love.

The two complete cycles of renunciation and recommitment described by these poems are ultimately resolved in the first stanza of the canzone "Le dolci rime," which effectively brings this series to a close. Here too the poet refers to the hardness of the lady, not as a motive for renouncing her but as an ex-

planation for his shift to explicit didacticism; her coldness has prompted him to temporarily put aside love poetry for the brisker pleasures of polemical verse. In the *Convivio* gloss, Dante explains this statement in terms of the allegory of Lady Philosophy, saying that he had not been able to penetrate certain metaphysical problems and had therefore turned to the more accessible ethical issue of *gentilezza*. The opening of "Le dolci rime" is thus the final scene in a drama that extends from the episode of the *Vita Nuova* to Book IV of the *Convivio*, from the pale and pitying countenance of the *libello* to the social concerns of the treatise. This series of poems, linked by a complex system of palinodic recalls and further related by the adoption of genetic terminology ("sorella" in "Amor che ne la mente" [74]; "vostre antiche sore" in "Parole mie" [11]; "nostro frate" in "O dolci rime" [4]), testifies to the textual importance of the *donna gentile* and to her resilience as an imaginative construct.

Due to the circumstantial nature of most of the evidence, the debate over the canzoni of the *Convivio* is not likely to be resolved. For our purposes, however, the issue of Dante's original intentions vis-à-vis the canzoni is not crucial. From the perspective of the *Comedy* and Dante's overall development, the significant fact is that he did, at a certain point in his career, choose to read (or write) selected love poems allegorically. In so doing, he effects a transition from one stage of his career to the next, moving from poems that function only as love poems to poems that function only as doctrine. The allegorized lyrics of the *Convivio* mark a precise moment in Dante's development in that they mediate between the exclusively erotic and the exclusively moral, thereby pointing to the eventual fusion of the affective with the intellective that will characterize the *Comedy*.

Dante's poetic career achieves such absolute retrospective coherence—a coherence whose emblem is the proleptic ending of the *Vita Nuova*—that we are perhaps tempted to endow his early poetic shifts with too much teleological significance. Nonetheless, if the *Comedy* returns to Beatrice and to the *Vita Nuova* for its point of departure, resuming in fact where the final sonnet

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.