

## Draft

### Beyond Beatrice: from love poetry to a poetry of Love

Brian Reynolds

In this essay I shall consider how Dante combines elements from the Marian tradition with the conventions of courtly love in drawing together literary, religious and philosophical strands and forging his own unique viewpoint on the feminine-love motif. I shall argue that the Marian element plays an important role in transforming the motive force of the lover-beloved dynamic from *amor* to *caritas*, creating a new vision of *poesis*, where the beauty of femininity is central to the salvific process and ultimately to union with God.

The feminine, whether as muse, mediatrix, temptress or ultimately as clarifier of the divine mysteries,<sup>1</sup> lies at the heart of almost everything that Dante wrote, while love is the driving force that impels him to ever greater poetic and spiritual heights. In the early poems of the *Vita Nuova*, we find a Beatrice who largely conforms to the conventions of the courtly love tradition, but who then transforms into a divine presence and the means to Dante's salvation.<sup>2</sup> In the *Convivio*, Dante deals at length with the theoretical nature of love and it is the intellectual attractions of Lady Philosophy that beguile,<sup>3</sup> while in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Dante reviews the whole courtly love tradition, in the context of justifying the use of the "illustrious vernacular" in poetry. Finally, in the *Divina Commedia*, love provides the momentum that draws poet and poem onwards and upwards through the earthly-divine figures of Beatrice and the Virgin Mary, who are the fulcrum on which the poem turns, to the source of all love, God.

Ultimately for Dante, feminine beauty, superficially physical but with its source in the spiritual, is a divinely inclined plane that leads beyond itself to the supreme beauty and light of God.<sup>4</sup> The feminine-love dynamic that constantly accompanies Dante on his lifelong literary and spiritual journey towards clarity is finally superseded in the last one hundred lines of the *Paradiso* when at last his will and desire are at one with God-Love who is the motive power of the universe:

“... ma giàolgeva il mio disio e 'l velle  
sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa

l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle”

(... but now my desire and will, like a wheel that spins with even motion, were revolved by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars. (Par. XXXIII: 143-45)

Inevitably, in concentrating on the Marian tradition and on courtly love, I can only deal peripherally with the many other manifestations of love and the feminine in Dante's works. Dante was the inheritor of a complex tradition on femininity, while he is among the supreme masters of love poetry, and in the finest scholastic mould, he draws on and combines elements from such varied sources as the Scriptures, mythology, classical philosophy and medieval theology<sup>5</sup>, while among his literary inspirations are the great Latin poets,<sup>6</sup> as well as the lyric poetry of the *langue d'oc* and the romances of the *langue d'oïl* and more immediate sources in the Sicilian and Siculo-Tuscan poets and his fellow rhymers in the *dolce stil novo*.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, one needs to take account of the context in which Dante was writing. Attitudes towards women at this time were complex. From around the turn of the first millennium there had been a rapid growth in popular Marian devotion and a corresponding interest in Mariology in the western Church, offering a new and positive feminine role-model. Very real power was wielded by such figures as Eleanor of Aquitaine and Blanche of Castile in the roughly century-and-a-half before Dante,<sup>8</sup> not to mention the importance of abbesses such as Hildegard von Bingen.<sup>9</sup> This was not reflected, other than perhaps for a brief period in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, in a more positive attitude towards women in general, either in Church circles or in the intellectual sphere of theo-philosophy. But while the Church's view of female sexuality was profoundly negative, attitudes among the literary elite were more ambiguous as is witnessed to by the widespread popularity of such an openly erotic poet as Ovid. It was in this ambiguous atmosphere that the troubadours and trouvères so skilfully sublimated *eros* in the *fin'amor* poetry and courtly romances of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries and that works such as Andreas Cappellanus' *De Amore* and the *Roman de la Rose* were written.

Moreover, in considering Dante's conception of the feminine and love, one must not ignore the whole field of medieval aesthetics in which beauty is identified as one of the attributes of God. Aquinas, for instance, assigns three properties to beauty: perfection, harmony and clarity, where clarity is the outward manifestation of an inner truth in its material embodiment.<sup>10</sup> Dante links this Thomistic notion of clarity with femininity and with vision of the divine. This is particularly so in the figures of Beatrice and Mary,

whose eyes are the means through which Dante ultimately gains access to the Beatific Vision.<sup>11</sup>

Keeping in mind the overall complexity of Dante's thought, let us turn now to a brief consideration of the Marian profile as it developed in both the Western and Eastern traditions from the time of the New Testament up to the High Middle Ages, to see how it fits into the totality of his poetic vision.

Mary does not feature particularly prominently in the Scriptures. She is mentioned 20 times in the New Testament, principally in Matthew and Luke, almost exclusively in relation to events in the life of Jesus. Similarly, her role was not emphasised in the early Church, other than in association with Christ. It was above all the Church itself, rather than Mary that was identified with the feminine mediating role. The Church was both Mother of Christians and Bride of Christ. She was given feminine attributes such as beauty and virginity as well as sentiments.<sup>12</sup> Likewise the mysterious figure of the woman clothed in the sun who appears in *Revelations 12* was unanimously identified as signifying the Church until at least the sixth century. As Leahy points out, "the concepts of 'virgin-mother-church' and 'virgin-mother-Mary' are so intertwined that, in a sense, they cannot be separated"<sup>13</sup>

In the second and third centuries, beginning with Justin Martyr, various commentators, most notably Irenaeus, drew out the parallel between Eve and Mary.<sup>14</sup> Just as the virgin Eve (it was believed that before the fall, Eve was still a virgin) had brought death to the world by listening to the voice of the serpent and disobeying God, the Virgin Mary had rescued the world from its bondage and opened the way to salvation by her "*fiat*". As Ferrante puts it: "We have, then two opposing traditions in scriptural exegesis – woman as the source and symbol of man's fall, and woman as the source and symbol of his salvation. In giving birth to Christ, the Virgin Mary is the immediate source of salvation, thereby exonerating Eve and all her daughters."<sup>15</sup>

In the fourth century, St Ephrem, along with other Syrian fathers, continued and developed the Eve-Mary theme. It is with Ephrem too that the long history of praise poems to Our Lady in the Eastern Church began. He praises the perfection and purity of Mary in effusive language reminiscent of medieval Marian devotion. Through her motherhood of Christ Mary's influence extends even to the realm of the dead, so that she was now seen as taking part in the redemptive work of her Son.

In the Latin Church, the figure of Mary was given less prominence in the early centuries. St Ambrose (c.340-397) and particularly St. Jerome (c.340-420), largely in the context of extolling an ascetic life of virginity, speak of Mary as the model of all the virtues. Ambrose also closely identifies Mary with the Church; as mother of Christ she is also mother of the Church. Generally, however Mary is subordinate to the Church. For Augustine “Mary is holy, Mary is blessed, but the Church is more excellent.”<sup>16</sup> Though she is the most exalted member of the Church and we should emulate her by giving birth to Christ spiritually, she is not yet seen as transcending the Church. It is also in these writers that we find some of the most negative associations of women with sex and seduction, again largely in the context of promoting virginity.

Alongside the development of official doctrine on Mary, popular devotion to the Mother of God was nourished by a considerable body of apocryphal writings, the most influential being the *Protovangelium of St. James* dating from the middle of the second century. It recounts a whole series of miraculous events in Mary’s life, for example that she lived in the temple at Jerusalem, nourished by angels from the age of six to twelve. Some elements of the *Protovangelium*, such as her perpetual virginity (virginity *in partu*), also became part of official Church teaching. The fifth century Greek story, *Theophilus*, in which a man sells his soul to the devil only to repent and call successfully on the Mother of God for help, was frequently quoted in the Middle Ages as proof that Mary had power over Hell. Graef notes that the “Greek text contained many epithets that became popular, among them redemption of captives, refuge of the afflicted, hope of Christians and, very important, mediatrix between God and man.”<sup>17</sup> However, while their popularity may in part be attributed to this source, their origins, as we shall see, most probably lay further back.

The period after Constantine’s conversion and the declaration of Christianity as the official religion of the Empire marked a transformation in many aspects of Christianity and the Church as it struggled to adapt to its new role. The Council of Ephesus (431 AD) when Mary was declared *Theotokos* (bearer of God) marked a new phase in the understanding that Mary was more than just a historic figure but continued to play a role in giving birth to Christ in the Church.

In Eastern Christianity, the declaration of the *Theotokos* also marked the moment when Mary triumphed over the goddesses that had been central to the civic and religious life of

Byzantium. In the process, not unnaturally, the figure of Mary assumed some of the characteristics of those goddesses. The image of Mary became more hieratic and regal, partly through the application of imperial panegyrics to her, as we shall see in a moment, and partly through her association with pagan goddesses. There is, of course, also scriptural justification for Mary's queenship in her Davidic ancestry (Luke 1:26-27), as well as in the argument that as mother of Christ the King, she is perforce a queen.

While recognising that Mariology took over some of the characteristics of pagan worship of goddesses such as Rhea and Tyche, Cybele and Isis, it is also important to remember that the debate on the Theotokos was an essentially Christological one.<sup>18</sup> The argument was over the dual nature of Christ as God and man. The declaration of Mary as the Bearer of God was made in order to assert that Christ was both fully human and fully divine, not in order to grant a new status to the Virgin *per se*. While popular devotion could and sometimes did attribute a degree of divinity to Mary, the doctrine of the Church on the matter remained orthodox.<sup>19</sup>

More importantly from our point of view, it was after Ephesus that the panegyric tradition associated with the worship of the goddesses and praise of the imperial family began to be applied to Mary. As Vasiliki Limberis puts it in her fascinating study, *Divine Heiress: the Virgin Mary and the Creation of Christian Constantinople*, "The clearest example of the merger of imperial cult and Christianity is the rise of the cult of the Theotokos under Pulcheria [sister of the Emperor Theodosius II]. It is specifically in the new hymns to the Virgin, written on the model of imperial panegyric, that we see the convergence."<sup>20</sup> Limberis goes on to provide a detailed analysis of the parallels between imperial panegyrics and Marian hymns, the most striking of which, she says, are those based on the orations of Proclus and the anonymous *Akathistos*.

In looking at these panegyrics, one is immediately struck by certain similarities they bear to high medieval hymns to Our Lady, to *fin'amor* lyric poetry and especially to Dante's treatment of Beatrice and the Virgin Mary. While I do not claim that there is a direct link between the two, there are certainly echoes to be found here, both in the laudatory attitude of the poet/hymnist towards his subject and to a certain extent in the imagery and vocabulary. For instance, in Julian's panegyric to the empress Eusebia, written around 353, he represents her as "averted of evil", "my saviour" and describes how she "defended me and warded off those false and monstrous suspicions".<sup>21</sup> Proclus, whose oration on Mary was the spark that led to the Nestorian crisis, is remarkable in that his poems

include both panegyrics to Pulcheria, the emperor's sister, and to the Theotokos, which closely parallel each other and illustrate how intimately the two forms were linked. In both he makes use of paradox, (just as Dante does in the prayer of St Bernard). In each case he extols their virtues and deeds. Mary is "the unstained treasure of Virginity while Pulcheria is "The virgin [who] dedicated herself to Christ" who "beautified the earth to be a visible heaven."<sup>22</sup>

The Akathistos hymn is the oldest continuously performed Marian hymn in the Orthodox liturgy. Although neither its writer nor its date of composition are known, its style and content would suggest that it is from around the time of the Council of Ephesus.<sup>23</sup> The poem is a celebration of the mysteries of the incarnation consisting of twenty-four stanzas, which by their initial letter form an acrostic of the Greek alphabet. They are alternately separated by long and short refrains. The long refrains, each thirteen lines, are salutations of praise to Mary. Limberis in her detailed analysis of the structure and content of the poem argues convincingly that it is essentially modelled on an imperial panegyric, pointing out that five of the six *topoi* one might expect in a poetical encomium are present. As well as being central to Byzantine Christianity's view on Mary, this poem had a profound impact on Western Mariology after it was translated into Latin in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> Below, I have selected some of the attributes assigned to Mary and divided them into categories. What is striking is how many of these qualities appear in the high medieval period in the West and how they also are present in Dante. It is also possible to discern a certain similarity with the hyperbole of the language of courtly romance, particularly regarding the virtues of the lady. However, as we shall see later, there is a profound difference between the ideology of the troubadours, in which love of the lady is an end in itself and the Mariology of the Byzantines and Dante, where Mary is seen as a channel between God and mankind.

### **Paragon of Virtues**

Hail, O Shining Emblem of Grace!

Hail, O Peak above the reach of human thought!

Hail, O Tenderness who exceeds all desire!

Hail, O you, through whom Joy will shine forth!

### **Channel of Divine Graces**

Hail, Celestial Ladder, by whom God came down!

Hail, O Dispenser of God's bounties!

Hail, O you who showed forth Christ the Lord, Lover of Mankind!

**Mediatrice to the Divine**

Hail, O Bridge leading earthly ones to heaven!

Hail, O you through whom Paradise was opened!

Hail, O Key to the Kingdom of Christ!!

Hail, O Gateway of Salvation!

Hail, O you who join the faithful with God!

**Guide**

Hail, O you who guide the faithful toward wisdom!

Hail, O Pillar of Fire who guided those in darkness!

**Refuge of Sinners**

Hail, O you who saved us from the mire of evil deeds!

Hail, Indulgence of many who have fallen!

Hail, O Ship for those who seek Salvation!

Hail, O Harbour for the Sailors of Life!

Hail, for you restored those born in shame!

**Inspiration to the Faithful**

Hail, O you who enlighten faithful minds!

Hail, O Steadfast Foundation of Faith!

**Source of Wisdom**

Hail, O Container of God's Wisdom!

Hail, O Reproof of foolish philosophers!

Hail, O Lamplight of Knowledge to many!

Hail, O you who surpass the wisdom of the wise!

**Light**

Hail, O Star who manifest the Sun!

Hail, O you through whom we were clothed with glory!

Hail, O Mother of the Star Without Setting!

Hail, O Light of those who search [for] the Trinity!

**Paradox**

Hail, O you who carry Him Who Carries All!

Hail, O Space of the Spaceless God!

Hail, O you who reconciled opposites!

Hail, O you who combined maidenhood and motherhood!

Hail, O Bride and Maiden ever-pure!

**Nature**

Hail, O Soil whose Fruit shall not perish!

Hail, O Earth who yielded abundant mercies!  
Hail, O you who flow with milk and honey!  
Hail, Fruitful Tree from whom believers feed!

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the iconoclastic persecutions led to an exodus of monks from the Byzantine Empire. Some settled in the Byzantine rite communities of Sicily while others joined Latin communities as far afield as Germany. Their presence undoubtedly had an influence in spreading Byzantine style Marian devotion, as did the translation of Marian homilies from the Greek that date from the tenth century. A more important means by which elements of Byzantine culture influenced the West was, of course, the Crusades, whose high point coincides precisely with the emergence of courtly love literature. Indeed a number of the troubadours took part in the crusades, including Arnaut Daniel whom Dante considered the greatest of the troubadours.

Early Medieval poetry and hymnody in the Latin Church was considerably more restrained. While images that had not been present in earlier centuries do occur, as for example in the 6<sup>th</sup> century hymns for Roman Matins and Lauds of the Blessed Virgin, written by Venantius Fortunatus, where Mary is described as a lady exalted above the stars, there is nothing approaching the lavish praise of the Akathistos. This anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem composed slightly before the time of Charlemagne, is typical of this more reserved style:

Hail, thou glory of this middle-world!  
The purest woman throughout all the earth.  
Of those that were from immemorial time  
How rightly art thou named by all endowed  
With gifts of speech! All mortals throughout earth  
Declare full blithe of heart that thou art bride  
Of Him that ruleth the empyreal sphere.<sup>25</sup>

In this poem the image of bride is applied to Mary rather than the Church. From the Merovingian and Carolingian era onwards, the image of the Church as Bride of Christ began to lose favour, largely owing to the deleterious state of the earthly Church, which could in no way be portrayed as pure or beautiful. As a counterbalance to this, greater attention was given to Mary, both in liturgical feasts in her honour, which multiplied, and in popular devotions. The celebration of the Assumption, Annunciation, Nativity and



Purification of Our Lady, all of Eastern origin may also be traced to this period.

As a result of this flowering of Marian devotion, from just before the turn of the first millennium, the bridal image became less central, as it became just one of the many images of Mary. The woman of the Apocalypse (Rv. 12) was now associated with Mary rather than the Church.<sup>26</sup> Mary's virtues were constantly extolled and her maternal role was also emphasised. Anselm of Canterbury's prayers dating from around 1070 in which he evokes a tender love for the Virgin, had a considerable impact in the centuries to come.<sup>27</sup> Removed from the context of the Byzantine court, Mary began to take on a less remote and regal personality. Her role as refuge of sinners and intercessor with a stern God was emphasized. A vast array of Marian devotional practices began to take shape and confraternities bearing her name mushroomed.

This softening of Mary's image is evidenced by the numerous prayers and hymns in her honour that became popular at this time, such as the "Hail Mary," the "Salve Regina" and the "Ave Maris Stella". In the Ave Maris Stella we find images that are evocative of the Byzantine tradition, such as "star of the sea", "happy gate to heaven" and "freer of captives". However, there is little sign of the ineffable almost goddess-like figure portrayed in the Akathistos. The same is true of the Salve Regina. While Mary is initially greeted in the typically eulogistic manner, "Hail Queen" this is immediately softened by the title "Mother of Mercy. Mary is asked to turn her eyes of mercy towards the tearful children of Eve and to return them from the exile of this life to the presence of her Son. She is clement, as a queen might be, but also loving and sweet in the manner of a mother. In the most familiar Marian prayer of all, the Hail Mary, which draws directly on the words addressed to her in the Gospels by the Angel Gabriel, the only title to appear is "Mother of God". Otherwise, she is addressed in a direct and familiar manner. Auerbach has pointed out, basing his argument on the work of Eduard Norden, that the use of the anaphoric "you", also characteristic of Dante's prayer to the Virgin, is typical of the Hebraic eulogistic tradition.<sup>28</sup>

The figure most associated with Marian devotion in the 12<sup>th</sup> century was St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153). He was also an important contributor to the arguments over the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption that occupied an important place in the theological debate on Mary at this time, but which lie beyond the scope of the present paper. Though only a small part of Bernard's writings is dedicated to Mary, most notably, *In Praise of the Virgin Mother*, *Aqueduct* and the *Sermon on the Twelve Stars*, they

enjoyed a widespread fame. Graef asserts that the *In Praise of the Virgin Mother*, in which Bernard urges the faithful to seek Mary's help in every affliction and to follow her example, was "perhaps *the* most influential contemporary contribution to popular devotion."<sup>31</sup> This prayer represents one of the pinnacles of the High Medieval belief in Mary as a merciful Mother who comes to the aid of her children whenever they are in distress. In the *Aqueduct*, there is an echo of the Byzantine attributes accorded to Mary; she is the channel through which divine graces come down to earth, thus source of divine grace, as well as means through which man could reach God.

The Marian bridal image is particularly prevalent in St. Bernard's commentaries on the Cantic of Canticles.<sup>32</sup> This, together with his strong emphasis on love in all its forms has led some commentators to claim a link between Bernard's mysticism and courtly love.<sup>33</sup> As we shall see later, while there is no direct evidence that Dante read any of Bernard's works (other than in the Letter to Can Grande, which cannot be attributed to Dante with certainty),<sup>34</sup> a key factor in his choice of Bernard as his final guide in the *Paradiso* is this strong association of the saint with Marian devotion.

In the thirteenth century, it was the Franciscans that contributed most to the image of Mary. St. Francis initiated the practice of portraying the nativity scene visually in the crib and St. Bonaventure was responsible for the introduction of the feast of the Visitation. As well as putting greater emphasis on the humanity of Mary, the Franciscans, along with the other new mendicant orders, the Dominicans, Carmelites and Servites, introduced a new element of emotionalism into Marian devotion.<sup>35</sup>

What then, are the principal characteristics we find associated with the figure of Mary by Dante's time? She is to be lauded as a paragon of virtue, perfect beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. She is to be revered as Queen of Heaven, Mother of God, Virgin and mystical Bride. She is the *magistra* by her example, the great teacher and role model in the acquisition of Christian virtues. She is the channel through whom graces flow from God. Conversely, she is the means through whom we can reach God. She is a caring mother, to be called upon in times of need. She identifies with human frailty and will plead our cause with God. Essentially then, there is a dichotomy between her exalted status as Theotokos, bearer or Mother of God, and her more approachable role as mother of humanity and refuge of sinners. It is for this reason that she is capable of being a Mediatrix between the human and the Divine.

As Dante's poetic and spiritual concept of Beatrice's role evolves from the early poetry of the *Vita Nuova* to the mature vision of the *Divina Commedia*, it is striking how she acquires more and more of the attributes that had come to be associated with the Virgin Mary. Nevertheless, Mariology is just one of the many elements that Dante drew upon in arriving at his concept of the feminine. The element of human emotion was central to Dante's relationship with Beatrice but is notable for its absence in the Marian tradition, unless it is in the form of devotional or filial love. Dante was first and foremost a poet and it is to poetry that we must turn to find the roots of Dante's notion of human love as the starting point from which the ascent towards the divine must begin.

The evolution in Dante's approach to the lover-beloved dynamic through the *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia* reflects both a maturing of his concept of the nature of love and the feminine and a kaleidoscope of contemporary and near contemporary literary influences from which he eventually broke free. A peculiarity of Italian vernacular literature is that it was so late in developing. Northern and Southern France, England and Germany all had a flourishing vernacular literature before anything of note was produced in Italy, yet by the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the Italians had surpassed them all.<sup>36</sup> It is hardly surprising then that Dante looked to the *fin'amor* poetry of the *langue d'oc*, and the romances of the *langue d'oïl*, when forging his own poetic vision in the *lingua del sì*. Indeed a considerable portion of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* is dedicated to the relative merits, when writing on love, of the three vernacular heirs to Latin.<sup>37</sup>

In its broadest sense, the term "amour courtois," coined by Gaston Paris in 1883 in the journal *Romania*, spans several centuries and embraces a broad range of styles, genres and ideas. It has as one of its defining characteristics an elevation of the lady in the context of a lover-beloved relationship where longing and passion are met with indifference and sublimated into a highly sophisticated language of idealised love.

*Fin'amor* poetry originated in the courts of Occitania, a large, diverse region in southern France, around 1100. Theories abound as to the factors that led to the emergence of the troubadour concept of love at this time and in this place. Some centre on the nature of the courts themselves, which varied widely in their composition but had in common a degree of freedom that had not hitherto been seen and a level of intimacy that allowed for greater contact between men and women.<sup>38</sup> Others posit that a decisive influence in the dissemination of courtly ideals was the powerful role of women such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, granddaughter of the troubadour Duke William IX, who inspired some of the

best poetry of Bernart de Ventadorn, and her daughter, Marie of Champagne, who encouraged the writing of the most famous romance of the 12th Century - Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot*.

From a literary perspective, influences that are put forward include Arabic love poetry, Celtic legends, classical Latin literature and Christianity. I do not wish to enter into a detailed analysis of the origins of courtly love (deferring to more authoritative scholars in the field), but some consideration of the dual role played by classical and Christian notions of love is essential to an understanding of how Dante was able to mine the deep and perhaps sometimes unconscious veins of *fin'amor*.

The three words that the Greeks used for love were *eros*, *philia* and *agape*, their Latin correspondents being *amor*, *amicitia* and *caritas*. *Eros* did not only mean sexual love, but included a desire for anything perceived of as beautiful. From a philosophic point of view, it was above all the Platonic and Neo-Platonic concepts of *eros* that pervaded medieval notions of love, although Aristotle's influence was also felt, especially through the Stoics.<sup>39</sup>

In the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, Plato, in his conception of *eros* and its relationship with the beautiful, arrives at a position that bears certain similarities to the *fin'amor* concept of love as elevating, although there are also some crucial differences especially on the ultimate object or goal of desire, as we shall see presently. For Plato the first rung on the ladder that leads to Ideal Beauty is the awakening of desire for physical beauty. He puts it this way in the *Symposium*: "This is the right way of approaching or being initiated into the mysteries of beauty in this world, and using them as steps to ascend continually with that absolute beauty as one's aim, from one instance of physical beauty to two and from two to all, then from physical beauty to moral beauty, and from moral beauty to the beauty of knowledge, until from knowledge of various kinds one arrives at the supreme knowledge whose sole object is that absolute beauty, and knows at last what absolute beauty is."<sup>40</sup>

He illustrates this more graphically in the *Phaedrus* with the image of a charioteer being pulled by two horses, one black, the other white. When *eros* takes hold of the person who sees the beauty of a human body, the elements of the soul are instantly pulled in competing directions. A form of madness grips them.<sup>41</sup> The white horse, representing reason, attempts to restrain the unbridled passion of the black horse, representing desire.

Both strive to reach the Ideal Form, but it is only through philosophy, which substitutes physical passion with desire for knowledge, that Beauty with a capital “B” can be attained. The courtly poets did not conceive of philosophy – love of knowledge - as a means of transcending physical desire, but they did see virtue – love of moral beauty - as sublimating passion.

A further similarity with *fin’amor* is Plato’s theory of mutuality. For Plato a person who is loved may in turn experience counter-love, thereby arousing erotic desire within him. In this case, both parties to the relationship should be active and desiring lovers, contrary to the asymmetrical relationships portrayed in the social norms of his time. However, counter-love should allow itself to be guided by reason and not seek to consummate the relationship sexually. Non-consummation is a key feature of courtly love, though this is often a result of the failure of the lover to win over his lady and cannot be put down simply to self-restraint.

Aristotle’s influence was largely indirect prior to the twelfth century, as most of his writings were unknown in Western Europe at this time, but works such as Cicero’s *De Amicitia*,<sup>42</sup> which drew heavily on the Aristotelian ideas of the Stoics, enjoyed a relatively wide circulation. Dante, in the *Convivio*, acknowledges Cicero’s *De Amicitia* as second only to Boethius’ *Consolations of Philosophy* in nourishing his love of philosophy.<sup>43</sup> In the Aristotelian tradition love is a natural inclination or appetite of all things for their object. *Eros* enters through the sensitive rather than the intelligent soul, so passionate love is therefore irrational, imperfect and destined to die. However, when dealing with another type of love, *philia*, Aristotle’s views are more positive. He approaches *philia* from the point of view of ethics. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he divides friendship into three species. Friendships based on utility (that is, based on what can be gained from the other) and friendships based on pleasure (based purely on enjoyment of the other) are incomplete. Friendships between good people, similar in virtue, are complete friendships, necessary for an ethical life. It is especially this emphasis on virtue and disinterested friendship that the Stoics picked up on and that was transmitted to the Middle Ages where it had a strong influence on the *fin’amor* notion of the lover-beloved relationship as ennobling. A second, well-known element in Aristotle’s philosophy that is relevant to us here is the doctrine of the golden mean whereby virtue is the middle road between excess and deficiency in a particular quality. Horace, though not a Stoic, reveals an Aristotelian bent when he talks of desire in terms of food. One must get up from the table neither bloated nor unsatiated. His is a gospel of moderation in which the will

controls the passions. In *fin'amor* the lover always has to keep his passions in check and it is precisely the acquisition of virtue that permits him to do so.

The Greek concept of *eros* combined with a strong cult of Venus played a major role in classical Latin philosophy and literature. The two major Roman philosophic schools, Stoicism and Epicureanism both considered desire as something inimical to human happiness. Epicureans, such as Lucretius, portrayed *eros* as a destructive force. In the fourth book of *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius deals with the passions. He says that passion for food can be satisfied but *eros* is an unquenchable thirst. Love, which has its divine origin in Venus, is an illusion that feeds us on false appearances. The illusion causes the lover to embark on a vain attempt to possess the beloved, whence comes the insatiable desire. The lover is unable to control his desire, which possesses him in an almost demonic fashion. No amount of wisdom can bring him to his senses. The happiness of the lover is always undermined by fear and anxiety. Seneca is typical of the Stoic approach in seeing desire as an incurable disease that needs to be constantly kept in check but can never be wholly cured. All these negative aspects of infatuation play an important role in the courtly portrayal of the effects of love on the poet-lover, the difference being that the troubadours are willing to put up with and even sometimes revel in the miseries of unrequited love because they see it as ennobling.

Ovid, the Latin poet of love *par excellence* is more positive in his portrayal of erotic love, though he does not ignore its perils. His *Amores* (Erotic Poems), *Ars amatoria* (Art of Love) and *Remedia amoris* (Cures for Love) are full of playful and explicit eroticism, and were among the most widely read classical texts in medieval Europe.<sup>44</sup> While on one level they can be read as manuals on the art of love and seduction, they are also about the literary art of love poetry and fiction. Ovid's influence is evident, for instance in Capellanus' ironic *The Art of Courtly Love* and in the *Romance of the Rose*, not to mention Dante.<sup>45</sup> As Sarah Kay states, "Ovidian motifs – love as a fever, a sweet pain or a welcome wound, the beloved as a medicine or an enemy to be overcome – are scattered throughout the lyric poetry of the troubadours. An even more important element of the Ovidian inheritance is the writerly self-awareness about love as an art of literary composition as much as emotion."<sup>46</sup>

Overt eroticism characterizes all of Ovid's writings. On the whole his view of *eros* and sexual gratification lacks the negative connotations of the likes of Lucretius. Though he does use images that draw on the notion of love as a malady, such as those mentioned by

Sarah Kay, he balances this by celebrating the delights of love and by a relatively light-hearted and often ironic tone. Given Ovid's strong influence on *fin'amor* poetry, this fits in with recent trends in scholarship on the troubadours, which argues that they were less serious in their intent than had previously been assumed and were essentially engaged in a sophisticated game.<sup>47</sup>

A further characteristic that Ovid shares with the troubadours is the idea that love effects a transformation. In *fin'amor*, the lover's desire to win over his lady brings about a moral transformation. In *Metamorphoses* the transformative power of *eros* is a central theme. The erotic gaze upon the eroticised body often acts as a catalyst for transformation. However, unlike courtly love, *who* is transformed depends entirely upon who possesses a greater agency. Thus, sometimes it is the subject of desire who affects the object's metamorphosis, while in other cases both subject and object of desire mutate. In courtly love, it is nearly always the poet-lover who is transformed, while the lady remains immutable.

In the *Amores*, Ovid describes his lovemaking with his mistress Corinna, a married woman. Similarly, it was usually one of the assumptions of courtly love that the lady was married. This meant that the affair was at least potentially adulterous, and had to be conducted in an atmosphere of secrecy and danger. However, Ovid's lovemaking is far from secretive and has little of the earnestness of the troubadours. In contrast to *fin'amor* moreover, in Ovid, it is very much the man who is the dominant force in the relationship. The woman is neither distant, nor haughty nor unattainable. She also tends to be the seducer's social equal or inferior. While societal factors are to some extent behind the reversal of these roles in *fin'amor*, the dominance of the lady, the suppression of sexual desire, along with the exaggerated and quasi-religious praise of beauty may also be attributed to the sole model of virtuous femininity available to the troubadours, the Virgin Mary.

It is curious, that relatively little attention has been given to the relationship between courtly love and medieval Mariology by literary critics, at least to the knowledge of this writer. Joan Ferrante does deal to some extent with the figure of Mary in her chapter on medieval biblical exegesis, though she tends to allow her distaste for the misogyny of the commentators to colour her treatment of the subject excessively. In any case, she does not make any direct link between Mary and courtly literature. Linda Paterson makes a passing reference to it in her essay on the development of the *canso*.<sup>48</sup> Pelikan, in *Mary*

*through the Centuries* deals with Mary and Dante, but not within the context of courtly love. On the whole, it is in the realm of historians and theologians that we find such material as does exist, though they tend to treat it as a peripheral subject.<sup>49</sup> Jean Guitton in *The Blessed Virgin* argues that the distancing of the woman, typical of courtly love, has its roots in the Byzantine court, where Mary was first likened to an empress.<sup>50</sup> Etienne Gilson, in his authoritative work on the mysticism of St. Bernard rigorously rejects<sup>51</sup> any parallel between *fin'amor* love, which goes unrequited and is directed towards a finite end, and mystical love, which, despite periods of dryness, involves an ecstatic union with an infinite God. Moreover mystical love is of its very nature mutual whereas this is not necessarily the case in courtly love. He does however acknowledge the strong influence of Christianity in general on the courtly tradition.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, he does not address Bernard's Mariology at all in this context. Graef approaches the subject in a general way. She states that, "it was inevitable that secular and religious trends should fuse, that divine and human love should blend and overlap. If the secular knight fought his battles in the service of a mostly inaccessible idealized lady, praised by minnesingers and troubadours, what more natural than that a monk should feel himself a spiritual knight, devoted also to a great lady, the Mother of God herself."<sup>53</sup>

Such a generalised statement glosses over the complex and contradictory relationship between the secular love of courtly literature and the Christian concept of *caritas*. While the language of Marian praise hymnody and the concept of the virtuous lady as an active transformative agent could be and were transferred to courtly literature, the underlying contradiction between the essentially self-serving and erotic nature of love in *fin'amor* and the transcendent love that Mary inspired could not be easily reconciled. The courtly lover is infatuated with his lady and longs for the moment when she will reciprocate his feelings. It is to this end that he attempts noble deeds and strives to attain greater virtue. For him virtue is not its own reward, it is a means of bringing his desired union with his lady closer. The lady is usually indifferent or sometimes even haughty in the face of these efforts, though she may occasionally respond positively. But, to love Mary is not to try to win her approval through virtuous behaviour, nor is it to seek some sort of mystical union with her. Rather it is to imitate her virtues and to call upon her aid in the face of one's own weakness, in order to come closer to God. Moreover, she is never unresponsive to such requests for help, so that through her (and not in her) *caritas* does find fulfilment in union with God.

In Christianity *agape* or *caritas*, not *eros*, is the ideal type of love. *Caritas* is the love of



God for man and of man for God and by extension mutual love among all humanity. It is an open-ended love that does not seek any reward. *Caritas* is the supreme virtue that encompasses all the others and allows us to overcome and transcend our fallen nature, uplifting us and restoring us to our proper state. For St. Augustine, whose philosophy dominated much of the Middle Ages, and who was the principal means whereby Platonism was absorbed into Christianity, the life of the Trinity is the life of absolute love and the ultimate source and destination of all love. He sees all disorder in human existence as stemming from a disorder in the creature's love for God. This is why all hearts are restless until they find their rest in God, similar to Plato's search for the Ideal Form. Since God is to be loved above all else, a rightly ordered life can be founded only upon love for God, who is the ultimate and absolute good that underlies the good of all creatures. An important consequence of Augustine's teaching is that to love anything, when that love is rightly ordered, is to love that thing or person in God. For Augustine, therefore, all truly human love is at the same time the love of God. Passion, on the other hand, is a disordered love, which does not put God in the first place and where the Latin poets saw cupidity as an illness or malaise, Augustine sees sin.

In *fin'amor* lyric poetry, Classical and Christian ideas on love, virtue and femininity come together to produce a new love poetry that is inherently contradictory because the troubadour ideal of love places at its core a love dynamic based on the belief that desire of itself can lead to the attainment of moral virtue.<sup>54</sup> The novelty of *fin'amor* lies in the concept that *eros* is admirable, that it is the very source and cause of virtue, that indeed one cannot be virtuous unless one is a lover. Infatuation is not to be eschewed; instead it is to be sought out. One should not seek to subdue desire to the greatest possible degree, nor should one wish to transcend it. Rather, to adapt the Platonic image, *amor* is a horse to be ridden. The troubadours delight in desire (*désir*), which brings with it exquisite pleasure *and* pain, and which they rank above the bliss (*jouissance*) of consummation. The pleasure consists in desiring union rather than the actual attainment of that union, which would negate the whole *raison d'être* of the poetry in the first place. The pain derives from the lover's failure to win over his lady, who often rejects his advances or simply ignores him. Of course, this is really an ironic subterfuge, because the quenching of desire would end the pleasure derived from the tension between longing and fulfilment. At the same time the negative side of love, concupiscence, is sublimated in a desire for spiritual union, expressed in a highly sophisticated language of idealised love that is reminiscent, at least in part, of Christian mysticism and Mariology. In this it distinguishes itself from *fals'amor* or *foll'amor*, (note the association with madness) which is base,

villainous and has sexual gratification as its sole aim.

Even in *fin'amor* however, love is not always unrequited, and the erotic element is not always quite repressed. Many poets dream of seeing their ladies naked in their bedrooms; Arnaut Daniel, for example describes his wish to undress his lady in the lamplight, while Guilhem de Peitieu is even more direct: “Enquer me lais Dieus viure tan/qu’aia mas mans soz son mantel!” (God let me live long enough to get my hands under her cloak!)<sup>55</sup> In the *fin'amor canso*, the language of *fals'amor*, which is harsh and crude, is expressed through the *lauzengiers* and *gilos*, or when the poet becomes frustrated with his lady's rejection. So, in reality the attitude towards *désir* and its object is highly ambiguous. This becomes even more evident if one looks at the *sirvantes*, often written by the same poets, in which the downside of the courtly relationship is revealed.

The ambiguity that lies at the heart of *fin'amor* reflects the complex nature of its origins and the conflicting demands of the society that produced it. In *fin'amor* the lover-poet is inspired to cultivate his moral qualities or virtues because of his passion for the lady and his desire to win her approval. Love inspires *cortesía*, or courtliness, the refined manners of nobility, and *mezura*, or moderation, the ability to reign in one's passion. Love causes the poet to refine his intellectual qualities such as discrimination, knowledge and good sense. It is precisely because the lover's desire remains unfulfilled that he continues his quest to be more virtuous. At the same time unbridled passion is lying just below the surface. Indeed, some troubadours argued that restraint was not possible in love, for example Bertrant de Ventadorn. This emphasis on virtue is not present in the love poetry of the Greeks and Romans and is just one of several manifestations of the fusion of classical and Christian values.

The troubadours deep concern with the effects of love is largely inherited from the classical tradition. These effects are generally confined to the emotional state of the lover. Love can produce wild mood swings in the lover-poet, ranging from fear despair and thoughts of death to elation and triumph. A further element in *fin'amor* that is of purely classical origin is the personification of Love as a god or a supernatural force that is utterly beyond the control of the protagonists. Sometimes Love is treated as independent of the lady, at other times as operating through her and can be so much identified with her that the two become virtually one.<sup>56</sup> It is here that the direct influence of the Roman cult of Venus and the classical concept of *eros* on *fin'amor* is clearest and where its ideal clashes most obviously with Christian values. And it is for this reason that a number of

troubadours abandoned their secular ways and embraced the religious life.<sup>57</sup> The inherent contradictions between Christian love and courtly *eros* are already evident in Bernart de Ventadorn's debate song with Piere and become more explicit by the 13<sup>th</sup> century for example in these lines from the poet-king, Thibaut de Champagne:

Or me gart Deus et 'd'amor et d'amer  
Fors de Celi, cui on doit aourer,  
Ou on ne peut failler a grant soudee

Now keep me, God from love and loving  
Save only There where man must needs adore  
And cannot want for great reward<sup>58</sup>

The figure of the lady in *fin' amor* lyric poetry, and this is also true of romance, is very different from the classical portrayal of women. She is always an idealized image, but she is not devoid of a physical reality. In this sense, she is not a pure personification of virtue and crucially can be made the subject of sensual as well as intellectual desire. As Ferrante puts it "the lyric lady is a kind of super-personification, the source and repository of all good qualities. She is an ideal being the poet adores, but she is also a real woman whom the poet wishes to possess."<sup>59</sup> In several ways the lady described by Ferrante resembles the medieval conception of the Virgin Mary. She inspires virtue. She bestows graces on her beloved. However, the desire for possession is of course clearly at odds with Mariology. It derives rather from the Graeco-Roman erotic element. Once again here we see the fusion of Christian and Classical.

The romance concept of love,<sup>61</sup> which I do not do not propose to deal with in any detail here, has much in common with that of the troubadours, in that it derives from the same Christian and classical sources, though the influence of Celtic and Germanic mythology and legends is stronger than in Occitan lyric poetry.<sup>62</sup> The underlying concept of desire for a beautiful and virtuous lady leading to the moral transformation of the lover remains the same, with the addition that he is inspired to noble deeds and chivalrous exploits in order to win her favour. Here too the source of virtue is not so much God as love for a noble woman. Unlike the love of the troubadours, however, illicit adulterous love plays a less important role. In the majority of the romances, the lady is free to give herself to the knight if she so chooses. Indeed, in the *romans d'antiquité* love sometimes leads to marriage as in the *Roman d'Eneas* or even to God as for example in the story of Floire's

conversion to Christianity when he weds Blancheflor. Moreover, in the *Roman d'Eneas* erotic passion is shown in a very negative light, when Dido's love for Eneas leads her to abandon her responsibility to her people.

Especially in the later chivalric romances, the conflict that is inherent in courtly love is externalised and generally has an effect on the life of the court, above and beyond any internal turmoil experienced by the knight. In the various versions of the Tristan and Iseult story the consequences of the love triangle between Iseult, her husband the king and Tristan go far beyond questions of personal morality and inner conflict, by threatening social breakdown. The conflict between knightly duty and love is particularly marked in the later romances, especially the Vulgate Cycle of Arthurian romance, while the incompatibility between courtly love and Christianity also becomes explicit. Lancelot's adulterous love for Guinevere prevents him from achieving the ultimate goal of finding the Grail and leads to the decline and eventual destruction of Camelot. Love may inspire the knight to great deeds but it is also ultimately highly destructive.

It was in the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>63</sup> that the *fin'amor* concept was transposed into Italian culture, so it is natural that the inherent conflict between love of God and love of the lady became a central theme of early Italian poetry and was crucial to Dante's poetic odyssey. Let us now turn to an examination of how *fin'amor* fared in the very different contexts of the Sicilian School of Frederick II (1220-50) and the urban centres of Northern Italy.

Frederick was the only foreign ruler to establish a court along Northern European lines on Italian soil, though it differed in several respects from its counterparts in Occitania, Northern France and Germany. Sicilian society was not feudal and Frederick was an absolutist ruler. This required him to establish a bureaucracy that was not typical of feudal courts in that it was composed almost entirely of professionals. It was from their ranks that the Sicilian poets emerged, rather than from the mix of noble dilettantes and professional troubadours that was characteristic of the Occitan courts.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Frederick's court had a distinctly cosmopolitan flavour. Frederick's catholic tastes meant that there was always a rich international mix at his court, drawn from different quarters of the Mediterranean as well as Northern Europe,<sup>65</sup> while Sicily itself was subject to a unique set of influences – Byzantine, Arabic, Norman and now German.<sup>66</sup>

In many respects the Frederician poets adhered closely to the conventions of Occitan *fin'amor* poetry and simply transplanted form and content to a Sicilian environment, as

for example in their “sicilianisation” of words that were central to the concept of *fin’amor* such as *gioia* (delight), *valore* (worth) and *pregio* (esteem). They lament their unrequited love, elaborately praise their lady, rile against the tyranny of the god of love and patiently await their illusive reward, just as their Occitan counterparts did. However, there are also a number of quite distinct elements in the poetry of the Sicilian school, which can be best described, in the words of Christopher Kleinhenz, as “imitative innovation”.<sup>67</sup>

Firstly, the production of the school was confined almost entirely to lyric love poetry, avoiding forms such as the troubadour *sirvantes*. Some have suggested that this eschewal of political subject matter was due to the politically oppressive environment under Frederick II.<sup>68</sup> However, as Poma and Riccardi<sup>69</sup> have pointed out, Pier della Vigna, one of the leading poets of the school, wrote a satire against the clergy as well as a eulogy addressed to Frederick in Latin. Indeed, contemporary Latin and Byzantine poetry in the Italian world was not lacking in political, moral and religious themes. Instead it would seem that the vernacular was deemed a suitable vehicle for love poetry but not for more “serious” subjects. This is borne out by Dante’s long justification for the use of the vernacular in matters of love in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, though he did not adhere to his own strictures in the *Commedia*.

It was not only in the almost exclusive concentration on matters of love that the Sicilians differed from their Occitan counterparts. The Frederician poets abandoned much of the feudal context that had no relevance to the reality of court life in Sicily. The court of Frederick II was an almost exclusively male preserve, so that the poets could not base their ladies on real women. For this reason they rarely used a *senhal*, or secret name, for their lady. Instead, she was entirely a figment of their imagination, her physical reality becoming less important than her conceptual role. The following poem by Giacomo da Lentini, the leading poet or *caposcuola* at the court of Frederick and the probable inventor of the sonnet<sup>70</sup> serves to illustrate some the characteristic features of the Sicilian school.

Io m'aggio posto in core a Dio servire,  
com'io potesse gire in paradiso,  
al santo loco ch'aggio audito dire,  
u' si mantien sollazzo, gioco e riso.  
Sanza mia donna non vi voria gire  
quella c'ha blonda testa e claro viso,

che senza lei non poteria gaudere,  
estando da la mia donna diviso.  
Ma no lo dico a tale intendimento,  
perch'io peccato ci volesse fare;  
se non veder lo suo bel portamento  
e lo bel viso e 'l morbido sguardare:  
che lo mi teria in gran consolamento,  
veggendo la mia donna in ghiora stare.

(I have proposed in my heart to serve God, that I might go to paradise, to the holy place of which I have heard said that there are maintained pleasure, play, and laughter. Without my lady I do not wish to go, the one who has a blond head and a clear face, since without her I could not take pleasure, being from my lady divided. But I do not say this with such an intention, that I would want to commit a sin; but rather because I would want to see her beautiful comportment and her beautiful face and her sweet glance: for it would keep me in great consolation, to see my lady be in glory. )<sup>71</sup>

The most immediately striking feature of this poem is that the lady is described as blond haired and fair skinned, a rare phenomenon indeed in Sicily! There is no attempt here even to pretend that she is other than an invention of the poet's mind. A second characteristic is that while the notion of service to the lady is carried over from *fin'amor*, the conflicted feelings of the poet no longer centred on the lover-beloved relationship. Here the conflict is between desire for a place in heaven, which is depicted in the manner of a court, and fear of separation from the beloved. This is resolved, in a rather apologetic manner, by conjoining the two desires in heaven. Here, we see the beginnings of what will become the distinctively Italian trait of courtly love, the notion of the *donna angelicata*, the lady who resembles an angel.<sup>72</sup> Prefigurations of the *donna angelicata* appear frequently in the poetry of da Lentini. For example, in *Diamante, né smiraldo, né zafino*, the lady is unique among women for her beauty and virtues and in *Lo viso – mi fa andare alegramente*, contemplation of the lady's face makes the poet feel as if he has gone to paradise. Byzantine Christianity, steeped in a tradition of Marian devotion as we saw earlier, had deep roots in Sicily. Here indeed was fertile ground for the transferral of Marian praise hymnody to secular poetry.

A further characteristic of the Sicilian poets was a theoretical preoccupation with the nature of love. Guido dello Colonne, for example, examines the subject in minute detail, while the best-known instance is in the exchange of poems or *tenzone* between Giacomo

da Lentini, Pier delle Vigne and Jacopo Mostacci. This highly technical debate on the tangibility of Love, drawing heavily on philosophy, would have been totally alien to the Occitan troubadours and reflects the professional background of the Sicilian poets and their scholastic training.

In many ways the Northern Italian poets who follow on from the Sicilian school and who drew their inspiration both from the Frederician poets and directly from the Occitan troubadours defy classification. To describe the so-called Siculo-Tuscans poets as a school would suggest a unity of purpose and a commonality in form or content that is far from the case.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless all of them were greatly influenced by the poetry of Guido Guittone, though sometimes it was as much in their rejection of his ideas as in imitation of them.

Starting out very much in the mould of the secular love poets, Guittone experienced a religious conversion, largely as a result of his devotion to the Virgin Mary, and turned his back on the notion of love as *eros*, which he found incompatible with Christianity. He is also notable for bringing a new element to Tuscan poetry through his treatment of moral and political themes in the manner of the Occitan *sirvantes*.

In his most well-known poem, *Ora parra s'eo savero cantare*, Guittone explicitly identifies *fin'amor* with carnal desire, which he rejects. He denies the necessity of being "pierced by Love" in order to write good poetry, as "in all parts where Love seizes madness is king, in place of wisdom." Instead "he who wants to sing well and be worthy should place Justice in his ship as pilot, and put honoured Wisdom at the helm, make God his star and place hope in true Praise." In one stroke he has swept aside everything that is at the heart of *fin'amor*. As Barolini puts it "once stripped of its sustaining ideology, courtly love is nothing but lust, carnal desire."<sup>74</sup> In its place he puts Wisdom and Justice. The wisdom he speaks of is not of the metaphysical variety; rather it consists in good living, in being "prepared at all times with all his power to advance his state to honour, not shunning toil."

Guittone, of course, is not new in identifying the conflict between courtly love and Christian values, which was already evident to the Occitan and Sicilian poets, as we have seen. What is novel in his outright rejection of *fin'amor* is that he does not abandon poetry or turn to purely religious themes, as some of his predecessors had done. His solution is to find a new source of poetic inspiration in an upright secular lifestyle rather

than in a religious life of contemplation, reflecting his urban, professional background. However, the result is a ponderous poetic style that Dante, along with the other poets associated with the *dolce stil novo*, disliked. (*Purg.* XXIV, 55-57 and XXVI 124-126) Nonetheless, Dante followed him in his ultimately rejecting courtly love in the *Commedia* and in treating moral and political themes.

Guido Guinizzelli, whom Dante calls his “*maximus Guido*”, (DVE I, xv, 6) is considered to be the progenitor of the *dolce stil novo*, though, as we shall see later, this is an assessment that needs some qualification. In his poetry we see in genesis a number of the features that were characteristic of Dante and his contemporaries a generation later. There is a decisive rejection of the court *topos* while the central figure, the angelic lady, takes on qualities that had hitherto been merely a gallant metaphor or courtly compliment. At the same time the concept of nobility is definitively divorced from birthright. These features are perhaps best illustrated in his most celebrated poem, *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore* (Love always repairs to the noble heart), where Guinizzelli sets forth his views on the nature of love, on what constitutes nobility and on the lover-beloved relationship.

He first of all asserts that love and the noble heart are distinct but one cannot exist without the other, just as light cannot exist without the sun, reminiscent of Christian doctrine on the Trinity, where the three persons are distinct but one. Using Aristotelian concepts, he then states that the nobility of the heart lies dormant until it is awakened by love of a lady. The next two stanzas deal with the relationship between love and nobility and clarify that nobility is not linked to birthright: Love can only dwell in a noble heart, not one of lesser virtue. Nobility of birth does not make a man noble. This decoupling of nobility from birthright and its transformation into an abstract concept, which was already evident in the Frederician poets, was all the more necessary in the context of the urban centres of Northern Italy, far removed from the feudal courts of Occitania.

Next comes his daring comparison between the lady and God. The Lady’s effect on the noble heart is comparable to God’s effect on the angels, who are moved to obey Him just as the noble heart must obey the lady. And it is worth quoting the final stanza in full:

Donna, Deo mi dirà, “Che presomisti?,”  
siando l'alma mia a Lui davanti,  
“Lo ciel passasti e ‘nfin a Me venisti,



e desti in vano amor Me per semblanti:  
 ch'a Me conven le laude  
 e a la reina del regname degno  
 per cui cessa onne fraude."  
 Dir Li porò, "Tenne d'angel sembianza  
 che fosse del Tuo regno;  
 non me fu fallo, s'in lei posi amanza."

(Lady, God will say to me: "How did you presume?" when my soul will be in front of Him. "You passed through the heavens and came all the way to Me, and you rendered Me through the likenesses of vain love; for to Me belong the praises and to the queen of the worthy kingdom, through whom all wickedness dies." I will be able to say to Him: "She had the semblance of an angel that was of Your kingdom; it was no fault in me, if I placed love in her.")

Here the poem harks back to Giacomo da Lentini in *Io m'aggio posto in core a Dio servire*, who expresses his fear of offending God when he does not wish to be in heaven without his lady. In a similar manner Guinizzelli draws back from his comparison of the lady to God, instead giving her the semblance of an angel, but he excuses himself for his earlier analogy by placing the blame on God for making the lady so angelic. Here again we find the same conflict between love of God and love of the lady. It is interesting that Guinizzelli also mentions the queen of heaven in this last stanza. Mary alone is worthy of being compared to God for through her "all wickedness dies." Barolini suggests that the equivalence between God and the lady in this poem is a first step in the solution to the polarity between the love of God and love of the lady, which finds its completion in Dante's *Commedia* where he "conflates the two poles of his desire, making the journey to Beatrice coincide with the journey to God, and collapsing much farther than theology would warrant the distinction between the lady – the luminous and numinous sign of God's presence on earth –and the ultimate being whose significance she figures forth."<sup>75</sup> Here she is following Singleton in his assertion that the Beatrice of the *Vita Nuova* and of the Terrestrial Paradise in *Purgatorio* XXXIII is to be identified with Christ. However, is it not equally legitimate to claim that the ultimate solution that Dante came to was not to identify Beatrice with Christ, but with she whose face most resembles her Son's?

In another of Guinizzelli's poems, *Io voglio del ver la mia donna laudare* (I want to praise my lady truly), the ennobling quality of the *donna angelicata* is even more explicitly portrayed. She "shines more brightly than the morning star" and "she humbles

the pride of anyone to whom she grants her greeting.” The morning star was an image usually associated with Mary, as was the virtue of humility. Guinizelli goes on to endow his lady with even greater powers: “no man can have evil thoughts as long as he sees her” and she even has the power to make “him of our faith if he does not believe it”, that is convert the non-believer to Christianity, all qualities that were frequently attributed to the Virgin Mary. As we shall see presently, these are very similar to the qualities that Dante attributes to Beatrice.

Let us turn now to *stilnovismo* proper and see how the conjoining of philosophical, theological and poetic elements in Guinizelli was more fully developed by the poets of the next generation. Apart from Dante himself, whose *Vita Nuova*, at least the earlier part of it, belongs to the new style, the poet who is at the same time both most and least representative of the *stilnovisti* is Guido Cavalcanti.<sup>76</sup> Cavalcanti is typical of the *stilnovisti*, in the manner in which he praises his lady, Giovanna. In *Fresca rosa novella* (Fresh new rose), for instance, she is an “angelicata criatura”, an angelic creature who is “Oltra natura umana”, beyond human nature. In common with the other *stilnovisti*, and to some extent the Sicilian poets, he uses the techniques of scholastic philosophy to arrive at a highly theoretical conception of the nature of love that is almost totally devoid of any carnal desire, most famously in “Donna mi prega.” But in this highly complex poem, as elsewhere, he diverges radically from the other *stilnovisti* and from the courtly love tradition in that his view of love is pre-eminently pessimistic, owing to his adherence to the Aristotelian/Averroistic notion that love enters through the sensitive rather than the rational soul. Love is therefore a sickness that creates imbalance between the senses and reason. While the negative effects of love had been present in the poetry of Occitania and in the Sicilian school, Cavalcanti brings them much further. Love is a drama of the passions, which brings fear and suffering to the soul. Infatuation is an unequal battle between the poet and a powerful force, too great for him to bear. “My soul is wretchedly discouraged and helpless from the assault it has had from the heart; so that if it feels Love even a little closer to it than usual it will die” are the opening lines of one of Cavalcanti’s poems. Love is such an uncontrollable and destructive force that it reduces the poet to a state of helplessness, deprives him of all sense of self-worth and brings death to his soul. Although Cavalcanti’s influence on Dante is evident in the poems of Chapters XIV-XVI of the *Vita Nuova*, provoked by Beatrice’s mockery of the poet’s stupefaction when in her presence, he soon rejects his pessimistic notion that love is supra-rational force.<sup>77</sup>

The embarrassment of riches that one has to choose from in discussing Dante’s

conception of love make it an almost limitless task, certainly well beyond the scope of a short presentation such as this. I shall therefore confine myself here to some brief observations on those parts of the *Commedia* that are most closely linked to the courtly love tradition and to Mary, and by way of an introduction, make some comments on the *Vita Nuova*.

In recent decades commentary on the *Vita Nuova* has generally focused on one of two interpretive approaches. The first, represented by Charles Singleton and those who have followed his method see the book as an allegory of the soul's journey to salvation, with a Christ-like Beatrice in the role of Saviour. The second is more literary, typified by Eduardo De Santis and Barbara Reynolds, emphasizing that this is "a treatise by a poet, written for poets on the art of poetry."<sup>78</sup> More recently there has happily been some reassessment of this tendency to divorce these two realities, as for example in Teodolinda Barolini's *Detheologizing Dante*.<sup>79</sup> In fact the two approaches are not mutually exclusive. In the *Vita Nuova* *poesis* and spiritual development parallel each other in a multi-layered journey of discovery that leads to a new understanding of the nature of love and the role of the beloved in achieving salvation. Experience and poetry are inseparable. Dante begins his journey as a *fin'amor* poet, passing through Guittonian, Guinizzellian and Cavalcantian stages until he finds that that limits of courtly love can no longer express his spiritual experience; *caritas* has superseded *amor*, just as Dante has outgrown courtly love poetry.

There are two key events in the *Vita Nuova* that mark Dante's decisive break with his essentially self-serving circular love for Beatrice. The first is *Donne che avete intelletto d'amore*, when he makes the momentous decision to change the focus of his poetry from a self-centred contemplation of how his love of Beatrice is affecting him to a selfless praise of his lady. The second is when Beatrice dies and he must choose whether to remain faithful to her beyond the grave or seek a new source of inspiration among the living or in the realms of the intellect, a choice that is not finally resolved until the *Divina Commedia*.

In the prose comment in the chapters leading up to *Donne che avete intelletto d'amore* we find these lines, which refer to the group of poems that dwell on his misery following Beatrice's mockery of him, much influenced by Cavalcanti:

"After I had written these three sonnets addressed to this lady, in which little

concerning my condition was left unsaid, believing I should be silent and say no more about this even at the cost of never again writing to her, since it seemed to me that I had talked about myself enough, I felt forced to find a new theme, one nobler than the last.” V.N. XVII, 1).

Here, he has identified one of the core characteristics of courtly love. Although ostensibly directed at praising the virtue of the beloved, it in fact focuses far more on the feelings of the poet. Ferrante<sup>80</sup> has suggested that this love is narcissistic, that the lady is in reality simply an externalisation of elements of the poet’s own persona and, to some extent this is true, in that all love that is based on self-gratification is self-reflexive. However this is not to deny the existence of the other as a tool in reflecting the love back on oneself. In courtly love the real identity of the lady is not so important, but it is essential that she be based on reality and external to the poet’s mind so that he can project his love outwards only for it to be mirrored back on himself; without this dynamic of projection and mirroring the whole edifice of courtly love collapses.

The reason for Dante’s change of course is made clear in the next Chapter when one of Beatrice’s companions, asks Dante why he loves his lady if he cannot bear her presence. He explains that he used to seek her greeting until she denied it to him, so that now he contents himself with praising her. The lady does not accept this attempt at self-deception and presses him further, asking him, if he is so intent on praising his lady, why does he write about his own condition. It is this question that jolts Dante out of the circular love pattern that had been the characteristic of courtly love from the time of the troubadours and sets him on the path towards a new kind of love, which is no longer concerned with himself.

“Therefore, I resolved that from then on I would always choose as the theme of my poetry whatever would be in praise of this most gracious one. Then, reflecting more on this, it seemed to me that I had undertaken a theme too lofty for myself, so that I did not dare to begin writing, and I remained for several days with the desire to write and the fear of beginning. (XVIII, 9)”

The solution that Dante arrives at is a *poetic* one, to speak of himself no longer and henceforth to sing only Beatrice praises, but it is more than this, otherwise why should he feel such fear? True he is breaking with an entire poetic tradition, but in so doing the whole quality of his love has also changed radically. He has begun the process of freeing

himself from the bonds of *eros*, a love that always seeks its guerdon, but the outcome is not yet certain. What is at stake here is the very salvation of his soul – *caritas* can make him worthy and transform his beloved into his means to salvation, the guarantee that he will not meet an evil end:

E quando trova alcun che degno sia  
di veder lei, quei prova sua vertute,  
ché li avvien, ciò che li dona, in salute,  
e sì l'umilia, ch'ogni offesa oblia.  
Ancor l'ha Dio per maggior grazia dato  
che non pò mal finir chi l'ha parlato.

And if she finds one worthy to behold her, that man will feel her power for salvation when she accords to him her salutation, which humbles him till he forgets all wrongs. God has graced her with an even greater gift: whoever speaks with her cannot come to an evil end. (VN. XIX, 10)

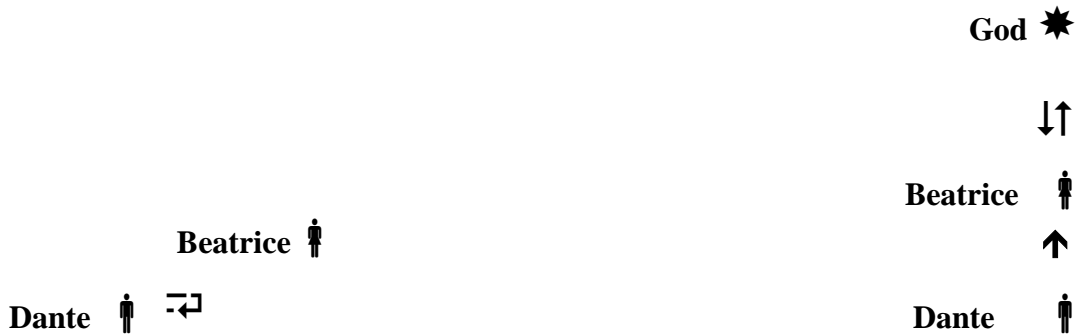
What Dante does in *Donne che avete intelletto d'amore* is to take away the mirror, thus beginning the transformation of the love dynamic from *amor* to *caritas* and breaking with a concept of love that stretched back to the troubadours. He effects this transformation by choosing to praise his lady without any expectation of reward.

The second leap that poetry and poet take in the *Vita Nuova* is when Beatrice dies. Da Lentini and Guinizzelli had both gone so far as imagining their lady to be in heaven or angelic, but no other poet in the courtly love tradition had written poetry for a woman who was no longer among the living. To do so would have been pointless for the tension between desire and consummation, which is at the heart of *fin'amor*, is automatically negated if that desire is beyond fulfilment. As Singleton so succinctly puts it in *An Essay on the Vita Nuova*, “The effects of love on the lover and the praise of the lady belong to the tradition. The death of Beatrice does not.”<sup>81</sup> While Beatrice is still a living, breathing woman, the transformation from *amor* to *caritas* can always be reversed. Now that she is removed forever from the realms of desire, praise of her, thoughts of her and love of her are heavenbound. However, the precise nature of their new relationship is not yet clear to Dante and will not be fully revealed to him until the *Commedia*.

In the course of her transformation from courtly to divine lady Beatrice has assumed many Marian qualities. She is a woman of flesh and blood who has taken on divine

qualities through her unique virtue. She is worthy of praise like no other woman. She is Dante's personal redemptrix, just as Mary is co-redemptrix with Christ of all humanity. But though Beatrice's transformation is complete, Dante himself has not yet reached a point where he can fully perceive her greatness or find the language to describe her transfiguration.

**Fig. A**



In the final sonnet of the *Vita Nuova* Dante's heart travels to heaven but his thought cannot follow. Then in the *mirabile visione* (miraculous vision), the final prose passage that concludes the *Vita Nuova*, he is caught up in a Pauline *raptus*<sup>82</sup> that he can find no words to describe:

“Appresso questo sonetto apparve a me una mirabile visione, ne la quale io vidi cose che mi fecero proporre di non dire più di questa benedetta infino a tanto che io potesse più degnamente trattare di lei.”

(“After I wrote this sonnet there came to me a miraculous vision in which I saw things that made me resolve to say no more about this blessed one until I would be capable of writing about her in a nobler way.” *V. N.* XLIII. 1)

We are reminded of the silence that preceded the writing of *Donne che avete intelletto d'amore*, but this one was to last a lot longer. While Dante himself claims that it was his writing of the *Convivio* and his turning to Lady Philosophy for consolation following Beatrice's death that turned him from the true path and lead to his long silence, there is ample evidence to suggest that he was also distracted by more tangible attractions than the pursuit of pure knowledge.<sup>83</sup> The *mirabile visione* is a fleeting prophetic sign of where *caritas* can lead him, but like St. Augustine who famously prayed to God to make him pure but not yet, Dante's love is not yet pure enough to sustain the vision nor is he

capable of finding a poetic voice to express his experience. He will have to face the reality of his own imperfection in the *Inferno* and purify himself through his ascent of Mount Purgatory before arriving at a level of spiritual and poetic maturity that is capable of describing the transformed Beatrice and his relationship with her. It is only in the *Divina Commedia*, in the long-awaited reunion with Beatrice at the summit of Mount Purgatory that poetry catches up with vision and the transformation from *amor* to *caritas* is assured.<sup>84</sup>

There are three stages in Dante's journey, both as protagonist and as poet, towards a full understanding of love, corresponding to the three *Cantiche* of the *Commedia*, but also closely linked to three phases in his literary and spiritual development as a whole, from the *Vita Nuova* through the *Convivio* to the *Commedia*. First he has to grapple with the disordered concept of *amor* in courtly literature, which fails to penetrate fully beyond a purely human, limited and limiting attraction to beauty. Next he needs to realise that while the use of reason and the study of philosophy can raise his conception of love to a higher intellectual plane and sublimate his carnal passion, it cannot bring him all the way and can even distract him from the true path. Finally, it is only through a thorough purging of his impure loves and a large dose of grace through the mediation of Beatrice and the Virgin Mary that he is able to understand that all love has its source in God and is destined to return to Him. Here, it is important to remember that the *Commedia*, just like the *Vita Nuova*, was written retrospectively.<sup>88</sup> He is putting into poetry a spiritual experience that he has already had, starting in the dark wood and ending in the divine *raptus* of the Beatific Vision. So it is with the wisdom of retrospect that he like us is able to distinguish the various steps he has taken along the way to a proper understanding of Love.

It is in *Canto V* of the *Inferno* where “i peccator carnali, che la ragion sommettono al talento”“ (the carnal sinners, who subject reason to desire”)<sup>89</sup> are condemned to be blown and buffeted by eternal winds, representative of their uncontrolled passion, and above all in the figure of Francesca da Rimini, the only Christian woman in the Hell,<sup>90</sup> that Dante most tellingly portrays the perils of courtly love. Here Dante is confronted with the misdirected *eros* of courtly literature, which came so close to seducing him. He is deeply moved by the plight of Francesca, because his own fate could so easily have been hers and because his own early poetry could still lead its readers astray just as the reading of the story of Lancelot and Guinevere did Paolo and Francesca. In *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (DVE I, 10), Dante describes the Arthur romances as “ambages pulcherrimae”

(most beautiful fantasies), but now he sees that courtly love literature can also have an impact in real life.

While the women that appear in this circle are renowned for their physical beauty, such as Helen of Troy, Paris, Cleopatra and presumably Francesca herself, it is a beauty that ensnares rather than uplifts. Moreover, most of the souls that are picked out from the flocking birds are public figures whose illicit loves had consequences that went beyond the private realm. Dido and Cleopatra were queens whose loves were closely linked to the history of Rome. Helen, Achilles and Paris were lovers whose lusts brought down a kingdom. With Tristan, we arrive at the period of courtly love, where the destructive passion of adulterous love brings turmoil to the court of King Arthur. Here too are many knights and ladies of the past, indicating the pitfalls inherent in chivalrous love. Dante's reaction to this long list of eminent lovers is one of pity and bewilderment. The use of *smarrito* (bewildered or lost) at line 72 is a deliberate echo of the *via smarrita* (lost way) of the opening lines of the *Commedia*. This is just one of many indications in this Canto of how closely Dante identifies with the perils of love gone astray.

As many scholars have noted, the style and choice of words in this Canto are reminiscent of *fin'amor* and the *dolce stil novo* as is the theme of love. In reality however, it is a love perverted. Francesca, when she speaks to Dante, uses the language of *fin'amor* but it is *she* instead of Dante who extols the power of love,<sup>91</sup> as would be proper in the courtly tradition. From the beginning, her entire speech is based on a false premise – “se fosse amico il re de l’universo” (if the king of the universe were friendly to us) (91). But God, the king of the universe - and the choice of title is evocative of courtly love – is not her friend, so everything that follows must be suspect. Francesca, in the elegant rhetorical language of a noble lady does everything to focus the blame elsewhere than on herself and to win Dante's pity. In doing so she “places herself within a literary tradition that rejects the notion of individual responsibility, and she places the blame for her damnation squarely upon the personified shoulders of “Amor”, the sweet and fatal tyrant”<sup>92</sup> Dante reacts to Francesca's words by bowing his head. When prodded by Virgil to reveal his thoughts, he answers “Oh lasso, quanti dolci pensier, quanto desio menò costoro al doloroso passo” (Alas! How many sweet thoughts, what great desire brought them to this woeful pass)(112-114), then turns to Francesca to ask her, amidst tears of grief and pity, to tell her story. We learn that while reading the Arthurian tale of Lancelot, Paolo and Francesca's eyes met frequently and they grew pale. When the longed for kiss between Lancelot and Guinevere finally happens, Paolo too kisses Francesca and their fate is



sealed. In contravention of the chivalric code, Lancelot and Guinevere have carried their love beyond the purely spiritual to the carnal. Similarly, Paolo and Francesca have broken the conventions of the *fin'amor*.

There has been much debate over the nature of Dante's pity for Francesca and of the meaning of his strong reactions to her story. Does his sympathy mean in some way that he agrees with what Francesca says or is it only an expression of *cortesia*, towards a lady who is speaking in the language of a *donna gentile* (noble lady)? The answer is surely that he treats her as a noble lady and identifies intensely with the sinner but does not condone the sin.

Hollander,<sup>93</sup> following Swinburn,<sup>94</sup> has pointed out the close associations in this *Canto* with St. Augustine. Dante hears Francesca's confession, which leaves him in tears, just as Augustine wept when reading the story of Dido. Augustine, in reading a passage from St. Paul is converted from a life of concupiscence to a life dedicated to Christian charity. Francesca, reading a book on carnal love, is overcome by lust. Francesca's last words, "*quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante*" (that day we read in it no further), closely resemble Augustine's "and I did not wish to read any further. As we noted earlier, Augustine taught that a rightly ordered life can be founded only upon love for God, while passion is a disordered love. Here we find another reason for the Augustinian resonances of this *Canto*.

Augustine can also help in giving us a clue to the meaning of Dante's behaviour in this *canto*. Strict moraliser, he may have been, but Augustine was also someone who was deeply aware of his own flawed nature and by extension the weakness of all humanity. Dante in coming face to face with a woman who represents everything that his early poetic career and experience valued, cannot but be moved to pity and fright at the thought of how easily he could have stayed wandering in his dark wood had it not been for the intervention of the Virgin Mary, who drew Beatrice's attention to his plight.

Francesca is the antithesis of womanhood as represented by Beatrice and Mary. Her eyes, instead of drawing the soul heavenwards, were the means through which carnal temptation entered the soul. The smile is not an expression of inner beauty but to use an old-fashioned Catholic term, an occasion of sin. Here we see very clearly how the tradition of the noble lady of chivalrous romance, *fin'amor* and the *dolce stil novo* can lead away, not towards God. It is this realisation that causes Dante to fall down in a faint

as the *Canto* ends.

Let us now turn to *Purgatorio* where love, which is distorted and debased in the *Inferno*, is now willingly purified in souls who long for a union with God that they know will eventually be fulfilled. Having successfully resisted the powerful but mistaken model of love presented in *Canto V* of the *Inferno*, Dante is now ready to begin his own journey of purification and education in the nature of true love

In *Cantos XVII- XVIII* of the *Purgatorio*, through Virgil's lengthy and highly technical exposition on the nature of love, the philosophical foundations of a new type of love are laid. Here Dante draws on his rich knowledge of scholasticism to summarise much of what he had already written in the fourth book of the *Convivio*.

We learn that the order and rightness of God's creation consist in conforming to the Divine Love. This conformity is already realised through natural love in the inanimate, vegetative and animal worlds. The stars move in order, plants grow towards the light and animals live in harmony with their habitat. As Beatrice says in the opening *Canto* of *Paradiso*:

Le cose tutte quante  
hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma  
che l'universo a Dio fa simigliante.  
Qui veggion l'alte creature l'orma  
de l'eterno valore, il qual è fine  
al quale è fatta la toccata norma.

("All things hold together in order, and it is this that makes the universe a likeness of God. It is here that the higher creatures see the trace of that eternal Goodness, which is the end for which that order was created") ( *Par. I.* 103-108)

We too possess natural love. We start out life with primary desire (*prima voglia*), which is inherently good and precedes the will. It is the divinely implanted nature of man to seek his end and achieve happiness in absolute Good. But man, along with the angels, also possesses a second type of mental or intelligent love. The faculties of intellect and free will are correctly aligned in the angels, who never deviate from the Divine plan, but man's love frequently takes the wrong path. He can misdirect his love choosing the wrong object, not love sufficiently or love excessively. When love is misdirected,

fainthearted or overzealous then, the created being, the *fattura*, works against the Maker (*fattore*). This juxtaposition of masculine and feminine nouns, which also occurs some lines earlier in the use of *creator*, (Creator) and *creatura*, (creature), is interesting. It is clearly meant to reflect the lover-beloved relationship and is also linked to the relationship between God and Mary, as we shall see later when we consider the prayer of St. Bernard.

For Dante as for Aristotle, all knowledge begins in sensation and so too every desire. The capacity to love must always be aroused by an external object. All love is an attraction to goodness in an object. Love passes through three phases: The first is the apprehension of something as desirable. Next comes the desire for the object, which Dante calls “*moto spirituale*” (spiritual movement). Finally comes the moment of possession and enjoyment and it is only in this final phase that love comes fully into play – until I am united with the desired object, I cannot truly know it and love it.

But, as we acquire the ability to choose, we may elect to be in conformity with our innate nature or not. If we allow our lower instincts to dominate over reason by not using our will correctly, then love becomes debased and irrational. This is how Dante puts it in *the Convivio*; “hence the nearer the thing desired gets to the desirer, the more desire grows, and the soul becoming more impassioned, ever more identifies itself with the sense appetite and ever more abandons reason.” (*Conv.*)

However, unlike in the *Convivio*, when he believed that the pursuit of knowledge and use of reason could bring him to an understanding of love and purge his passions, here he has Virgil remind him twice that reason can only carry him so far:

Ed elli a me: "Quanto ragion qui vede,  
dir ti poss' io; da indi in là t'aspetta  
pur a Beatrice, ch'è opra di fede.

(“And he to me: ‘As far as reason may see in this, I can tell you. To go farther you must look to Beatrice, for it depends on faith alone.’”) (*Purg.* XVIII. 46-48)

And a few lines later, in explaining the ability to restrain love that is not directed towards good, we are reminded again that it awaits Beatrice to explain the true nature of love in the light of Christian revelation:

La nobile virtù Beatrice intende  
per lo libero arbitrio, e però guarda  
che l'abbi a mente, s'a parlar ten prende.

(“ ‘That noble power is called free will by Beatrice, and so make sure that you remember this if she should ever speak of it to you.’”) (*Purg.* XVIII. 73-75)

We find the same attitude to philosophy in *Canto* II of the *Purgatorio*. Here Casella sings the second of Dante’s *canzoni* from the *Convivio*, which is primarily about rational or intellectual love, “*Amor che ne la mia mente mi ragiona.*” Dante, Virgil and the souls that are about to start their ascent of Mount Purgatory stop to listen, spellbound, but are rebuked by Cato for being distracted from their true task of purification.<sup>95</sup> This rebuke echoes Beatrice’s searing chastisement of Dante upon their meeting in the Garden of Eden, when she accuses him of being unfaithful to her. Part of his unfaithfulness consisted in his misplaced belief that philosophy could lead him to a full understanding of the nature of love, the other part being his failure to remain true to the new poetry and the new love revealed to him in the “*mirabile visione.*”

The failure of Dante’s poetic predecessors and contemporaries to grasp that the source of poetic inspiration lies neither in *eros* nor in a philosophical understanding of love, but in *caritas*, which dictates directly to the heart, is the subject of *Cantos* XIV and XXVI. Here, through his encounters with Bonagiunta, Guinizelli and Arnaut, Dante is able both to act as literary critic and provide his own viewpoint on the nature of love and love poetry.

In *Canto* XXIV through his dialogue with Bonagiunta da Lucca, a minor poet who composed mainly in imitation of the Provençal Dante deals with the question of the nature of the Love that has inspired his poetry, since he has abandoned the false direction of his youthful poems. It is presumably for two reasons that Dante chooses Bonagiunta to acknowledge the superiority of the *dolce stil novo*. Firstly he was involved in a polemic against the poetry of Guido Guinizzelli, the acknowledged father of the sweet new style and secondly because of his use of dialect instead of the high vernacular of the *stilnovisti*, for which Dante criticises him in the *de Vulgari*. (DVE I.xiii.1) When Bonagiunta asks him if he is the writer of *Donne che avete intelletto d’amore*, Dante replies:

“T’ mi son un che, quando  
Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo  
ch’e’ ditta dentro vo significando.”

("I am one who, when Love inspires me, take note and, as he dictates deep within me, so I set it forth.") (*Purg.* XXIV, 52-54)

We then understand that these lines don't just refer to Dante but to other *stilnovisti*:

"issa vegg' io...il nodo  
che 'l Notaro e Guittone e me ritenne  
di qua dal dolce stil novo ch'i' odo!  
Io veggio ben come le vostre penne  
di retro al dittator sen vanno strette,  
che de le nostre certo non avvenne"

("now I understand the knot that kept the Notary, Guittone, and me on this side of the sweet new style I hear. 'I clearly understand that your pens follow faithfully whatever Love may dictate, which, to be sure, was not the case with ours.") (55-60)

Who exactly the other *stilnovisti* were according to Dante and the exact meaning of the lines quoted above is a question that continues to cause heated debate among commentators who support and oppose a theological reading of the poem.<sup>96</sup> The arguments in favour of a theological reading seem conclusive to this writer. Dante clearly believed that his writing was inspired by the Love of God and not the god of love. This does not necessarily mean that he is putting himself on a par with the writers of the Scriptures, whose words were infallible, although the exponents of fourfold exegesis would assert that this is the point of view from which he wishes us to read the *Commedia*. It does mean that what he wrote was directly determined by the progress of his spiritual life, from the faltering steps of the *Vita Nuova* to the supreme confidence of the final part of the *Commedia*, when he reaches the heights of mystical contemplation. Bonagiunta, Guittone and da Lentini (the Notary) had not achieved a purity of spirit that would have allowed them to hear the voice of God, nor did Guinizzelli, whom we meet in *Canto* XXVI.

The two poets that make an appearance in *Canto* XXVI, Guido Guinizzelli and Arnaut Daniel are representative of the Italian and French courtly love traditions (Here Dante does not distinguish between *langue d'oc* and *langue d'oïl*). Dante is moved by his meeting with Guinizzelli, whom he calls "il padre mio e di altri miei miglior che mai rime d'amor usar dolci e leggiadre" ("father to me and to others, my betters, who ever used love's sweet and graceful rhymes.") (97-99). Once again in these lines, the question

arises as to who these betters were and whether Dante considers Guinizzelli, Cavalcanti and others to be in the ranks of the *stilnovisti*. As various commentators have pointed out, these lines refer more to the use of a particular style of poetry – sweet and graceful – than to the type of love that inspired it. In terms of style, Guinizzelli is the originator of a new poetics that includes Cavalcanti, Cino da Pistoia, Dante himself and possibly others. However, as we have already seen in Canto XXIV, Dante does not specify who belongs to the sweet *new* style. In what does this newness consist? The answer surely lies in Dante's own poetic and spiritual odyssey. Guinizzelli was the first to use a style that Dante fully identified with and was also the poet who, more than any other, set about redefining such crucial concepts as *gentilezza*, *cortesia*<sup>97</sup> and the lady as a *donna angelicata* through the use of scholastic philosophy in his poetry. However, he did not make the final crucial step of rooting his love and his poetry in the transcendent *caritas* that is God.

That Dante is referring to style rather than the inspirational source of poetry is further underlined in the closing lines of this *Canto* through the appearance of Arnaut Daniel, possibly the originator of the *sestina*, which Dante first successfully adopted to Italian. In *De Vulgari* (DVE II. ii.), he acknowledges his debt to Arnaut but clearly considers Giraut de Borneil the superior poet, yet here he has reversed this order. The possible reasons for this inversion have been discussed by various commentators, who have come up with a variety of solutions, none of which is pertinent to the present discussion.<sup>98</sup> What is clear is that it is a decision based on poetic value rather than on any radically different concept of love between the two. More importantly, from our point of view, it is clear that neither Guinizzelli nor Arnaut see their poetry as having any relevance here in *Purgatorio*. If anything, their misconceived ideas on love have led them astray and are part of the reason why they find themselves in their current state.<sup>99</sup> As Hollander says in commenting on the conclusion of this *Canto*: “Guido's last words (Purg XXVI 92-93), which seem to imply that, unlike Dante, he came to God *not* in his poetry but even in spite of it, and Arnaut's Provençal stanza, which also speaks to life rather than to art, are matched by Dante's own 'sweet new style' here, singing of salvation, the subject it took this poet some time to find again after his first attempt in the concluding chapter of his *Vita Nuova*. In this sense Guido's words about prayer as poem and Arnaut's poem, which is a request for prayer, posthumously join these two poets to Dante's new style, a poetry in tune with God.”<sup>100</sup>

Having dealt with love from a philosophical and literary perspective, in a largely

theoretical framework, in *Cantos* XVII- XVIII, XXIV and XXVI, Dante is faced with the a poetic and human challenge that is much closer to the bone in his long-awaited encounter with the transfigured Beatrice, whom he had last briefly glimpsed ten years before in the closing Chapter of the *Vita Nuova*, as she now she descends from heaven to meet him in the Terrestrial Paradise at the summit of Mount Purgatory.

In examining this climactic episode, I shall concentrate more on the interaction between Dante and Beatrice than on the elaborate and complex symbolism, deciphered and argued over by numerous commentators, which precedes her arrival. However, I should like to put forward a possible solution for one question that has caused considerable debate. The angels, in anticipating Beatrice's arrival sing "*Benedictus qui venit*" (*Purg.* XXX 19) using the masculine form. Is Dante implying here that Beatrice is analogous with Christ as various commentators assert, most famously Singleton?<sup>101</sup> For St. Paul and for St. Augustine, charity consists in seeing the other person in God, in seeing Christ in them, for each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. When we are fully in conformity with God's design for us, it is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Galatians 2:20) St, Paul also speaks of dying to sin, which he particularly links with Original Sin and Adam, in order to gain new life in Christ. The transfigured Beatrice is analogous with Christ in fact she now *is* Christ because she is in total conformity with Him. The only creature who supersedes her in this is Mary, who was always in syntony with God's will.

In *Canto* XXX at last, Beatrice, who until this moment has only once greeted Dante fleetingly in the entire corpus of his writings, speaks to and looks on her lover. When Dante realises that he is about to be reunited with Beatrice, filled with trepidation he turns to tell Virgil, like a frightened child, that the old flame is re-ignited. However, like many an anticipated reunion of old lovers, he gets a rude awakening! What should have been a moment of supreme joy turns to one of sorrow. Virgil is gone; Dante bursts into tears at this loss, but instead of getting sympathy and understanding from Beatrice, her first words to him are a sharp rebuke:

"Dante, perché Virgilio se ne vada,  
non pianger anco, non piangere ancora;  
ché pianger ti conven per altra spada."

("Dante, because Virgil has departed, do not weep, do not weep yet - there is another sword to make you weep.") (55-57)

And some lines later:

“Guardaci ben! Ben son, ben son Beatrice.

Come degnasti d'accedere al monte?

non sapei tu che qui è l'uom felice?”

(“Look over here! I am, I truly am Beatrice. How did you dare approach the mountain? Do you not know that here man lives in joy?” (73-75)

The meaning of the second sword<sup>102</sup> will not be revealed to Dante until *Canto XXXI* of *Paradiso*, but the reason for her swordlike anger here soon becomes clear - Dante has been unfaithful to her. In response to the angels, who ask her to be more gentle with the weeping Dante, she lists out the charges:

“questi fu tal ne la sua vita nova

virtüalmente, ch'ogne abito destro

fatto averebbe in lui mirabil prova.

Ma tanto più maligno e più silvestrosi

fa 'l terren col mal seme e non còlto,

quant' elli ha più di buon vigor terrestre.

Alcun tempo il sostenni col mio volto:

mostrando li occhi giovanetti a lui,

meco il menava in dritta parte vòlto.

Sì tosto come in su la soglia fuidi

mia seconda etade e mutai vita,

questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui

Quando di carne a spirto era salita,

e bellezza e virtù cresciuta m'era,

fu' io a lui men cara e men gradita;

e volse i passi suoi per via non vera,

imagini di ben seguendo false,

che nulla promession rendono intera.

(“this man in his new life potentially was such that each good disposition in him would have come to marvellous conclusion, but the richer and more vigorous the soil, when planted ill and left to go to seed, the wilder and more noxious it becomes. For a time I let my countenance sustain him. Guiding him with my youthful eyes, I drew him with me in



the right direction. Once I had reached the threshold of my second age, when I changed lives, he took himself from me and gave himself to others/another. When I had risen to spirit from my flesh, as beauty and virtue in me became more rich, to him I was less dear and less than pleasing. He set his steps upon an untrue way, pursuing those false images of good that bring no promise to fulfilment.”) (115-132)

There is some disagreement over the exact meaning of these lines, but what is abundantly clear is that they refer to Dante’s failure to stick to the true path of love indicated to him repeatedly by Beatrice. The “new life” may be taken as referring both to the *Vita Nuova* and to Dante’s youth. In an obvious reference to the parable of the sower (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8), Dante has wasted the abundant graces that he had been granted while Beatrice was still alive, allowing himself to be choked by the thorns of false love after her death, despite her repeated interventions from heaven. There has been considerable debate over who or what this false love was, partly because “altrui” in the sentence “questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui.” (he took himself from me and gave himself to others/another) (126), can have both singular and plural meanings. If it means more than one love, this eliminates the possibility that Dante is referring only to his excursus into philosophy, which is the gloss he gives to the “*donna gentile*” (*Vita Nuova* XXXV –XXXVIII) in the *Convivio*. The most likely meaning is that he betrayed Beatrice both in his excessive love of philosophy and in a return to the *fin’amor* model of love after her death.<sup>103</sup> This is borne out by a close reading of the next *Canto*.

In *Canto XXXI*, Beatrice addresses Dante directly once again. Having listed the charges, she now sets about wringing a confession from him. Throughout this first encounter between Dante and Beatrice the mundane and the sublime mix. The body language and behaviour of the two are typical of a lovers’ tiff. Dante is both thrilled and terrified at the prospect of being reunited with his beloved Beatrice after a ten-year separation. He knows he has been unfaithful but is longing for reconciliation. He is afraid to look at her. She is filled with the righteous anger of the slighted and pours forth her pent up scorn. She wants to force a confession out of him, to humiliate him, listing his numerous faults in front of others (the angels). He ashamedly admits his crimes, head bowed and in tears. She forces him to look up, but refuses to look at him herself, as if in a huff. It is a scene worthy of a Mills and Boon romance. At the same time the context and the words Dante and Beatrice exchange are loaded with multi-layered meanings drawn from courtly and classical literature and scholastic theo-philosophy.

The confusion and fear that Dante feels, (“confusione e paura insieme miste,” *Purg* XXXI, 13) in the face of Beatrice’s unrelenting accusations are reminiscent of the effects of *eros* on the *fin’amor* poets. His tears of remorse remind us of the tears he has shed for Virgil in the previous *Canto*, but also of *Canto V* of the *Inferno*. They also echo the tears of Boethius that were wiped away by Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation of Philosophy* (Cons.I.ii) and the tears Augustine shed for Dido when he was reading the Aeneid (*Confessions* I, 13):

Piangendo dissi: "Le presenti cose  
col falso lor piacer volser miei passi,  
tosto che 'l vostro viso si nascose."

(“In tears, I said: ‘Things set in front of me, with their false delights, turned back my steps the moment that your countenance was hidden.’”) (34-36)

Here there is no ambiguity – Dante has been turned aside by more than one false delight. The reference at lines 44-45 (“perché altra volta, udendo le serene, sie più forte,” “so that next time, when you hear the Sirens’ call, be stronger,”) to the dream of the Siren, which Dante had in *Purgatorio* XIX, suggests that at least one of these delights was of an erotic nature. The Siren initially appears as extraordinarily beautiful to him, and it is only through the intervention of Beatrice, who alerts Virgil to the peril that Dante is in, that the Siren’s true ugliness is revealed. In this episode, it is Divine Grace, in the shape of Beatrice, which informs Reason, represented by Virgil, of the danger presented by superficial beauty. It is also interesting to note that the Siren leads sailors astray, whereas both Beatrice, represented as an admiral in *Purgatorio* XXX, and Mary, the Star of the Sea, steer Dante safely to port.

In the concluding words of her indictment Beatrice sets out with unerring accuracy, lest Dante and the reader should still have failed to get the message, what the true direction of his love should have been and where it should have led him:

Mai non t’appresentò natura o arte  
piacer, quanto le belle membra in ch’io  
rinchiusa fui, e che so’ ‘n terra sparte;  
e se ‘l sommo piacer sì ti fallio  
per la mia morte, qual cosa mortale  
dovea poi trarre te nel suo disio?

Ben ti dovevi, per lo primo strale  
de le cose fallaci, levar suso  
di retro a me che non era più tale.  
Non ti dovea gravar le penne in giuso,  
ad aspettar più colpo, o pargoletta  
o altra novità con sì breve uso.

(“Never did art or nature set before you beauty as great as in the lovely members that enclosed me, now scattered and reduced to dust. And if the highest beauty failed you in my death, what mortal thing should then have drawn you to desire it? Indeed, at the very first arrow of deceitful things, you should have risen up and followed me who was no longer of them. You should not have allowed your wings to droop, leaving you to other darts from some young girl or other novelty of such brief use.”) (49-60)

His desire for her, which was aroused because of her unique beauty and had begun to lead him to its source in the “highest beauty” (“sommo piacer” i.e. God), should have transcended any physical reality upon her death. Instead, he has been lead astray by “mortal” and “deceitful” things. The mention of “pargoletta” (young girl) reminds us of the “*donna gentile*” of the *Vita Nuova*, but even more so of the *Rime Petrose*, where Dante directly links a young girl to sexual desire. The fleeting nature of the “altra novità,” possibly referring to the delights of Lady Philosophy, who displaced Beatrice in his affections in the *Convivio* (*Conv.*II.xii.5), contrasts with the new life he could have had if he had remained faithful to the “mirabile visione” of the *Vita Nuova*.

Dante remains bowed in remorse as Beatrice’s accusations rein down on him, but now she demands that he look at her and face the full force of her wrath. When he looks up, his vision is blurred and the still veiled Beatrice is staring intently at the Griffin, representative of Christ in his dual nature. Though he cannot see her clearly, he is so stricken by her beauty, which now far surpasses her earthly form –reflecting as it does the beauty of God, and so filled with remorse, that he falls in a faint. Here again, we are reminded of *Canto V*, when Dante faints after hearing the story of Paolo and Francesca.

When he awakes, he finds himself being conducted by Matelda<sup>104</sup> to receive a second baptism in the waters of the Lethe, the river of forgetfulness that will purify him of all his past faults and obliterate all memory of them. He is now ready to face the transfigured Beatrice and is at last free to direct his desire to higher things. The time has finally arrived when Dante can look Beatrice in the eyes. The four cardinal virtues (Justice,

Prudence, Temperance, and Fortitude), in the shape of nymphs prepare Dante for this moment, while the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope and Charity) urge Beatrice to turn towards him and reveal her full splendour:

“Volgi, Beatrice, volgi li occhi santi,”  
era la sua canzone, “al tuo fedele  
che, per vederti, ha mossi passi tanti!  
Per grazia fa noi grazia che disvele  
a lui la bocca tua, sì che discerna  
la seconda bellezza che tu cele.”

(“Turn, Beatrice, turn your holy eyes upon your faithful one, thus ran their song, “who, to see you, now has come so far. Of your grace do us a grace: unveil your mouth to him so that he may observe the second beauty that you still conceal.”) (133-138)

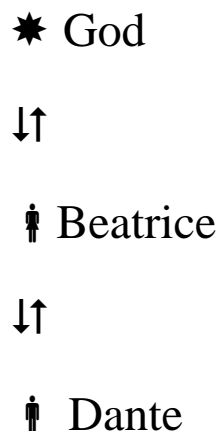
These line consciously echo a passage of the *Convivio*: “Here it is necessary to know that the eyes of wisdom are her demonstrations, by which truth is seen with the greatest certainty, and her smiles are her persuasions, in which the inner light of wisdom is revealed behind a kind of veil; and in each of them is felt the highest joy of blessedness, which is the greatest good of paradise. This joy cannot be found in anything here below except by looking into [her] eyes and upon her smile” (*Conv.*III.xv.2-3). For Dante, there is a continuous gradation of light, nobility or good in the intelligible and sensible orders. Thus the highest individuals in the human species are virtually angels. The perfect lady, then, receives the divine virtue as an angel does. This is manifested by her external comportment, her beauty and her speech, which are all manifestations of this inner light of the soul. The beauty of a lady is not to be found in her physical features or behaviour *per se* but in how these reflect her inner light. It is above all by way of the mouth and the eyes that the rational soul transmits this inner light into an outer light.

But in the *Convivio*, the eyes and mouth were those of Lady Philosophy, while now they are Beatrice’s, which reflect the light and beauty of God, far superior to the limited truth and wisdom of philosophy. As Hollander puts it: “In her eyes Dante has just now seen what he can currently understand of Christ’s two natures; in her smile he perceives that he is loved with the *eterno piacer* (eternal beauty [*Purg* XXIX 32]) that is reflected from her lips.”<sup>105</sup> It will be by means of looking at Beatrice’s eyes and smile, which reflect the immaterial light of God that Dante will be transported up through the spheres of

heaven, as his vision becomes clearer and his understanding of God-Love increases.

By locating his relationship with Beatrice in the realms of the next world, Dante has overcome the inherent contradiction of the courtly love tradition that all lover-beloved relationships must either be doomed to the permanent frustration of a never-to-be-achieved desire, or end in consummation, which removes the very mystique of the lady that was the attraction in the first place. Instead, hesitantly in the *Vita Nuova*, and definitively in the Terrestrial Paradise, charity, which embraces love but goes beyond it, becomes the defining motive force of poet, pilgrim and poem. Gone are the agonizing moments when he hopes in vain for Beatrice's greeting. From now until her departure to her allotted place in the mystical rose in *Canto XXXI* of the *Paradiso*, Dante is her "frate" (brother) (*Purg XXXIII* 23). She will remain his beloved "madonna" (lady) (*Purg XXXIII* 29), but a beloved who is no longer inaccessible or a source of inner turmoil, but of joy. ("Da tema e da vergogna voglio che tu omai ti disviluppe" "I want you to free yourself at once from the snares of fear and shame" (*Purg. XXXIII* 31-32). His love for her is now free of any carnal desire. In a certain sense, he has returned full circle to the final chapter of the *Vita Nuova*. Finally poetry has caught up with vision. However, there are two fundamental differences in the quality of the love between Beatrice and Dante in the *Vita Nuova* and now. Firstly, Dante has definitively broken with his past misdirected loves and purged himself of any impurity. Secondly, he can no longer doubt that Beatrice loves him, after all, why else would she have "visited the threshold of the dead"? ("Per questo visitai l'uscio d'i morti") (*Purg. XXX* 139) These two factors bring about a fundamental transformation in the nature of the love relationship – it has become mutual and selfless, in other words it is now charity.

**Fig. B**



However, Dante is now only at the beginning of his education in charity. He has learnt the negative lessons of where false love can bring him, purged himself and confessed his failings, but his understanding of charity is still very limited. For the moment, Beatrice's words go over his head "tanto sovra mia veduta vostra parola disiata vola" ("Your longed-for words soar up so far beyond my sight") (82-83). In words that recall Jesus' description of the Last Judgement (Matt. 25: 34-46), when the saved will be separated from the damned on the basis of their ability to recognise and love Christ in their fellows Dante says to Beatrice: "Non mi ricordach'i' straniasse me già mai da voi" ("As far as I remember I have not ever estranged myself from you") (91-92) He still cannot see Christ in her, only a reflection of Him and he is a long way from being capable of looking directly at God. Moreover, his love is still concentrated exclusively on Beatrice. He does not yet perceive clearly that Love is the motive force of the whole of creation. It will be the role of Beatrice from now on to guide him and educate him in the ways of charity until he reaches the point where he is ready to leave her behind in his quest for the Ultimate Love.

At line fifty-nine of *Canto XXXI*, Dante turns to ask Beatrice a question but finds her gone. The sudden disappearance of Beatrice and her replacement by Bernard<sup>106</sup> is as startling to the reader of the *Commedia* as is the final twist in a modern day thriller. Dante-protagonist is no less taken aback by this turn of events than we are. This momentous event is not presaged by portentous signs and has none of the elaborate ceremonial that marks Beatrice's solemn descent to meet Dante in the Earthy Paradise. Nor does her departure reduce Dante to a blubbing wreck, as we might expect, a striking contrast to his copious tears when Virgil left his side in *Purgatorio XXX*. One moment she is there and the next she is gone. In her place is an old man, whom we later learn is St. Bernard. Dante responds to Beatrice's departure by uttering a brief, heartfelt - but not heartbroken - paean and prayer to his lady, to which she responds with a look and a smile before turning her gaze back to God. Dante then turns his full attention to his new guide, without so much as a backward glance at the woman who had been at the centre of his life and his poetry for so long.

What is the meaning of this, on the face of it, extraordinary and inexplicable turn of events? We may find much of the explanation in looking at Dante's short farewell poem to his lady and at the quality of his visual perception of Beatrice, now that she has taken her allotted place in the Mystical Rose.

...vidi lei che si facea corona  
 riflettendo da sé li eterni rai  
 Da quella region che più sù tona  
 occhio mortale alcun tanto non dista,  
 qualunque in mare più giù s'abbandona,  
 quanto lì da Beatrice la mia vista  
 ma nulla mi facea, ché sù effige  
 non discendëa a me per mezzo mista.  
 "O donna in cui la mia speranza vige,  
 e che soffristi per la mia salute  
 in inferno lasciar le tue vestige,  
 di tante cose quant' i' ho vedute,  
 dal tuo podere e da la tua bontate  
 riconosco la grazia e la virtute.  
 Tu m'hai di servo tratto a libertate  
 per tutte quelle vie, per tutt' i modi  
 che di ciò fare avei la potestate.  
 La tua magnificenza in me custodi,  
 sì che l'anima mia, che fatt' hai sana,  
 piacente a te dal corpo si disnodi."  
 Così orai; e quella, sì lontana  
 come pareva, sorrise e riguardommi;  
 poi si tornò a l'eterna fontana.

("I lifted up my eyes and saw her where she made for herself a crown, reflecting from her the eternal beams. From the highest region where it thunders no mortal eye is so far, were it lost in the depth of the sea, as was my sight there from Beatrice; but to me it made no difference, for her image came down to me undimmed by aught between. 'O lady in whom my hope has its strength and who did bear for my salvation to leave your footprints in Hell, of all the things that I have seen I acknowledge the grace and the virtue to be from your power and from your goodness. It is you who have drawn me from bondage into liberty by all those ways, by every means for it that was in your power. Preserve in me your great bounty, so that my spirit, which you have made whole, may be loosed from the body well-pleasing to you.' I prayed thus; and she, so far off as she seemed, smiled and looked at me, then turned again to the eternal fount.)

Dante's final salute to his lady, though short and apparently simple, is replete with meaning and with links to other parts of the poem. In thanking her for saving him and delivering him from bondage to freedom, he uses the four words, grace, liberty, virtue and goodness, thereby combining *fin'amor* language with concepts drawn from philosophy and Christianity. We will see the same combination again in the last *Canto* of the *Commedia*, only this time it is Mary who is described in these terms, not Beatrice. This is not the only parallel the poem draws between Beatrice and Mary. The combination of praise and supplication is used again in Bernard's prayer to Our Lady, as is the anaphoric "you", thus linking Beatrice with Mary through the encomiastic tradition.<sup>107</sup>

The "you" with which Dante addresses Beatrice is the familiar "tu" form instead of the formal "voi", which he has used up to now, though she has used "tu" from the outset (*Purg XXXIII* 23 and 29). This reflects a profound qualitative change in their relationship. Dante no longer feels any need to maintain a distance in their relationship, because his love for her is now pure *caritas*. Paradoxically, now that she is infinitely distant from him, he is closer to her than he has ever been because, as well as being mutual and transcendent, the love between them is now open, embracing the whole of God's creation.

Clarity of vision in Dante is intimately linked with the concept of love of beauty, goodness, femininity and ultimately God.<sup>108</sup> Although Beatrice is now infinitely distant from him, he can see her form, reflecting the light of God, with perfect clarity because his love is for her is now perfectly pure. This contrasts with an earlier episode in *Canto XXV* of the *Paradiso*, when Dante also turns to look at Beatrice but cannot see her, even though she is at his side, because his eyes have been blinded by looking at the intense light of the Apostle John. According to an old legend, John had been assumed body and soul into heaven, like Mary. Dante is attempting to ascertain whether this is true, which is why he has been staring intently, but John tells him that his body is still on earth and that only "two lights", Christ and Mary have their bodily form in Heaven. Here Dante has still not moved beyond the need for physical reality. When he turns to Beatrice and cannot see her it is because the last vestiges of desire for her human form have not yet left him. By *Canto XXXI*, however, his capacity to love has grown, so that now he sees her perfectly, because he loves her "in the spirit."

The penultimate line of the poem refers to Beatrice's eyes and smile, which as we have already seen in *Canto XXI* of the *Purgatorio*, have a complex significance for Dante.



Throughout the *Paradiso* it has been through looking at the eyes and smile of the transfigured Beatrice that Dante has moved from one sphere to the next. In *Canto I*, starting at line forty-six, we find Beatrice turning her gaze towards the sun, in which she is followed by Dante, who has no difficulty looking straight at the material sun because he is now in Paradise. However, moments later a second sun appears, representing the immaterial light of God and Dante is forced to lower his eyes. Instead Dante looks into the eyes of Beatrice, who is continuing to stare at the immaterial sun, and through this reflected light he is transformed. (Par. XXIII: 46-72) Shortly afterwards, he realises that the quality of light has changed and is perplexed. Beatrice “smiles some brief words” (le sorrisse parolette brevi) (Par XXIII :95) to him, explaining that he has been transported from the earthly paradise to a higher level of heaven. This pattern repeats itself throughout the *Paradiso* each time they pass to a higher sphere. Beatrice gazes towards a higher point, Dante looks into her eyes and, as light increases they reach another sphere. Apart from providing simple human encouragement to Dante, Beatrice’s eyes also receive, internalise and reflect the immaterial light of God. In doing so, they act as the filter whereby Dante can proceed upwards in his spiritual journey. It is not until *Canto XXXIII*, but not before first beholding the face of Mary, that Dante can look unaided at the second immaterial sun that is the Trinity.

In the *Paradiso* it is Mary more than any other woman, including Beatrice, who personifies the feminine qualities that lead the soul to God. I have dealt at some length with Mary in the Christian tradition and also commented on the Marian influence on courtly literature, but have said little about her specifically in relation to the *Commedia*. I shall therefore conclude this paper with some remarks about Mary in the *Commedia* in general and look in more detail at the portrayal of her in the last three *Canti* of the *Paradiso*.

From the very outset of the *Commedia* Mary has always been present, but largely in the background, just as she was during Christ’s lifetime and in the early history of the Church. She can play no role in the *Inferno*, as the souls here are beyond aid, though we know that Dante invokes her name in his daily prayers, because she can and does come to the aid of living: “Il nome del bel fior, ch’io sempre invoco e mane e sera” (“The name of the fair flower that I always invoke morning and evening”) (*Paradiso* XXIII, 88). It is through her intervention, which is typical of the medieval notion that Mary could soften God’s harsh resolve, that Beatrice enlists Virgil’s aid in rescuing Dante from the dark wood. In this first image of Mary in the *Commedia*, she is also associated with the *fin’amor*

concept of *gentilezza* (nobility), a pattern that will continue throughout the poem:

“Donna è gentil nel ciel che si compiange  
di questo ‘mpedimento ov’ io ti mando,  
sì che duro giudicio là sù frange.”

(“There is a gracious lady in Heaven so moved by pity at his peril, she breaks stern judgment there above and lets me send you to him”) (*Inf.* II, 94-96)

In the *Inferno* Dante avoids mentioning Mary by name, but in the *Purgatorio*, “Maria” occurs nine times (*Purg.* III. 39; *Purg.* V. 101; *Purg.* VIII. 37; *Purg.* X. 50; *Purg.* XIII. 50; *Purg.* XVIII. 100; *Purg.* XX. 19; *Purg.* XXII. 142; *Purg.* XXXIII. 6). This number is of great significance for Dante because of its symbolic links with Beatrice, particularly in the *Vita Nuova* where she appears to Dante nine times on earth followed by the tenth “*mirabile visione*.” Here Dante is using the Pythagorean perfect ten (9 + 1) to represent the movement from goodness to perfection. Similarly, in the *Paradiso*, following the Ptolemaic system, nine heavenly spheres are surmounted by the perfection of the Empyrean. Nine, of course is also three by three, thus symbolic of the Trinity, which as we shall see shortly, is of paramount importance in linking Mary with a new type of *caritas*.<sup>110</sup>

In each of the seven circles of *Purgatorio* where a particular vice is purged, Dante takes an image from the life of Mary to illustrate the contrasting virtue. In the Circle of the Proud, for example, she is introduced as an example of humility, through her acceptance of the message of the angel Gabriel, with the words “*Ecce ancilla Dei*” (“Behold, the handmaid of God”) (*Purg.* X.34-44), while in the Circle of the Lustful, her words, “*Virum non cognosco*” (“I do not know man”) are proclaimed by the spirits as they pass through the purging flames (*Purg.* XXV. 127-128). The principal events in the life of Mary therefore are one of the keys to the structure of the second *Cantica*. These events function as a spiritual and moral exemplar to the penitent souls, and by extension also to the reader. Mary here is an active force in the salvific process, just as she was on earth in her own lifetime. Dante’s portrayal of the Virgin is not merely a hagiographical account designed to inculcate morality in the sinful. She is a living, active being who continues to intervene in history, an embodiment of the virtues, yes, but not an ineffable paragon beyond the reach of humanity.

This active role as intercessor or mediatrix is continued in the *Paradiso* but at a higher,

more mystical level. Mary is “la viva stella che là sù vince come qua giù vinse” (“the living star who surpasses there above as she surpassed here below”) (*Par.* XXII. 92-93). Here prayer and supplicants come to her rather than the other way round. Her titles become more noble. She is variously “*Nostra Donna*”(Our Lady), (*Par.* XXI. 123) “*donna del ciel*”(Lady of Heaven) and “*Regina celi*.” (Queen of Heaven) (*Par.* XXIII. 106; 128) In *Canto XXXII*, she is given the title “Agusta” (Empress) (119), normally reserved for a Roman empress. This is in the context of introducing St Peter, who as representative of the papacy is closely associated with the Roman imperial line. Mary therefore is also head of the Church. Through this hieratic title, Mary is also linked with the Greek panegyric tradition, which I examined in the early part of this paper. Yet in *Canto XXIII*, she is also portrayed as a “*mamma*” (*Par.* XXIII: 121-123) nourishing her children at her breast. This contrast between the ineffable, mystical Mary and the human, maternal Mary is even more explicit in the final canto of the *Paradiso*, as we shall see presently. It is clear then, that in portraying Mary as both Queen of Heaven and Mother of humanity, as a bridge therefore between the highest reaches of heaven and the lowliest of sinners, Dante is consistent with medieval Mariology.

However, in the first sight that Dante has of Mary in the Empyrean, following immediately on from Beatrice’s departure, we find an image of Mary that departs from orthodox Mariology:

“Vidi a lor giochi quivi e a lor canti  
ridere una bellezza, che letizia  
era ne li occhi a tutti li altri santi;”

(“I saw there, smiling at their sports and songs, a beauty which was joy in the eyes of all the other saints;”) (*Par.* XXXI. 133-35)

What is most striking about these lines is that through the description of her smile and her eyes, Dante associates Mary directly with Beatrice and also with the whole courtly love tradition, as well as linking her with the philosophical and theological meanings of the eyes and mouth, which I have already discussed.

In the opening lines of *Canto XXXII*, Dante returns to more conventional Mariology by linking Eve and Mary: “La piaga che Maria richiuse e unse, quella ch’è tanto bella da’ suoi piedi è colei che l’aperse e che la punse.” (“The wound that Mary closed and anointed, she at her feet who is so fair it was that opened it and pierced it.”) (*Par.* XXXII.

4-6) This link is further established at line 95, when Gabriel, later joined by the whole host, sings the *Ave Maria*, *Ave* being a reversal of the name of Eve, *Eva*.<sup>113</sup> In a direct line below Eve, in chronological order, are the Hebrew women, Rachel, Sarah, Rebecca, Judith and Ruth. It is interesting to note that Dante introduces us to the women in the Celestial Rose before he mentions the men. They are the ancestors of Mary, the human link between Eve and Mary. By choosing to introduce the women first, he is at the very least giving them the place of honour, but may also be suggesting that the feminine as a whole and not just Mary is more closely linked to God, through the maternal line beginning in Eve and reaching its apex in Mary.

Further on in this *Canto* Bernard invites Dante to “look now upon the face which most resembles Christ, for only its clarity can prepare you to see Christ.” (*Par.* XXXII: 85-87, my translation). Here Dante has synthesised in one short sentence a whole set of significances that are fundamental to his overall concept of the love-feminine-God relationship, with Mary as its supreme exemplar. Mary resembles Christ in two senses. She is the biological mother of Christ; therefore Jesus must have inherited her physical characteristics. But she is also Christ-like because it is in her face that the light of God shines most brightly, since it is she who loves God and is loved by God more than any other creature. She is fully in the image and likeness of God, unlike Eve, who in attempting to eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge so as to become Godlike, actually achieved the opposite.<sup>114</sup> The choice of the word “*chiarezza*” is not accidental. As we have already seen, clarity of vision is closely linked with several fundamental Dantean concepts. Clarity does not just suggest brightness, as many translators have rendered it in English. It also implies an ability to see with crystalline clearness, as Mary alone can see God. It is only through her that we can penetrate the mystery of the Trinity.

In the final *Canto* of the *Commedia*, it is on St. Bernard’s lips that Dante puts his exquisitely beautiful prayer to Our Lady and to him that he entrusts the task of presenting Dante’s petition to behold the Beatific Vision. Whether approached at a purely literary level or treated as the expression of a genuine mystical vision, the prayer surely ranks as one of the highest poetic expressions in either field.<sup>115</sup> It is both a laud and a love song, in which Dante combines elements from the centuries long tradition of Marian devotion with language that is clearly rooted in the *fin’amor* lyric style.

Vergine Madre, figlia del tuo figlio,  
umile e alta più che creatura,

termine fisso d'eterno consiglio,  
tu se' colei che l'umana natura  
nobilitasti sì, che 'l suo fattore  
non disdegnò di farsi sua fattura.  
Nel ventre tuo si raccese l'amore,  
per lo cui caldo ne l'eterna pace  
così è germinato questo fiore.  
Qui se' a noi meridiana face  
di caritate, e giuso, intra ' mortali,  
se' di speranza fontana vivace.  
Donna, se' tanto grande e tanto vali,  
che qual vuol grazia e a te non ricorre,  
sua disianza vuol volar sanz' ali.  
La tua benignità non pur soccorre  
a chi domanda, ma molte fiате  
liberamente al dimandar precorre.  
In te misericordia, in te pietate,  
in te magnificenza, in te s'aduna  
quantunque in creatura è di bontate.  
Or questi, che da l'infima lacuna  
de l'universo infin qui ha vedute  
le vite spiritali ad una ad una,  
supplica a te, per grazia, di virtute  
tanto, che possa con li occhi levarsi  
più alto verso l'ultima salute.  
E io, che mai per mio veder non arsi  
più ch' i' fo per lo suo, tutti miei prieghi  
ti porgo, e priego che non sieno scarsi,  
perché tu ogne nube li dislegghi  
di sua mortalità co' prieghi tuoi,  
sì che 'l sommo piacer li si dispieghi.  
Ancor ti priego, regina, che puoi  
ciò che tu vuoi, che conservi sani,  
dopo tanto veder, li affetti suoi.  
Vinca tua guardia i movimenti umani:  
vedi Beatrice con quanti beati

per li miei prieghi ti chiudon le mani!  
 Li occhi da Dio dilette e venerati,  
 fissi ne l'orator, ne dimostraro  
 quanto i devoti prieghi le son grati;  
 indi a l'eterno lume s'addrizzaro,  
 nel qual non si dee creder che s'invii  
 per creatura l'occhio tanto chiaro.

(“‘Virgin Mother, daughter of your Son, lowly and exalted more than any creature, fixed goal of the eternal counsel, you are she who did so ennoble human nature that its Maker did not disdain to be made its making. In your womb was rekindled the love by whose warmth this flower has bloomed thus in the eternal peace; here you are for us the noon-day torch of charity, and below among mortals you are a living spring of hope. You, lady, are so great and so prevailing that whoso would have grace and does not turn to you, his desire would fly without wings. Your loving-kindness not only succours him that asks, but many time sit freely anticipates the asking in you is mercy, in you pity, in you great bounty, in you is joined all goodness that is in any creature. This man, who from the nethermost pit of the universe to here has seen one by one the lives of the spirits, now begs of you by your grace for such power that with his eyes he may rise still higher towards the last salvation; and I, who never burned for my own vision more than I do for his, offer to you all my prayers, and pray that they come not short, that by your prayers you will disperse for him every cloud of his mortality so that the supreme joy may be disclosed to him. This too I pray of you, Queen, who can what you will, that you keep his affections pure after so great a vision. Let your guardianship control his human impulses. See Beatrice and so many of the blest who clasp their hands for my prayers.’ The eyes by God beloved and revered, fixed on the suppliant, made plain to us how dear to her are devout prayers; then they were directed to the Eternal Light, into which it is not to be believed that any creature should penetrate with so clear an eye.”)

In the series of paradoxes at the beginning of the prayer, which Auerbach calls a clear example of, “the fusion of Greek antithetic rhetoric with the paradoxes of the Christian faith,”<sup>125</sup> Dante uses language that is reminiscent of the Magnificat but also of the *Akathistos* to describe how Mary bridges the void between the human and divine. She is Mother and Virgin, but she is also daughter of God. She is both more exalted than any creature, yet more humble. In other words, she is one of us, or as Pelikan puts it she “stood in continuity with the human race, the same human race to which the poet and his

readers belong.”<sup>126</sup>

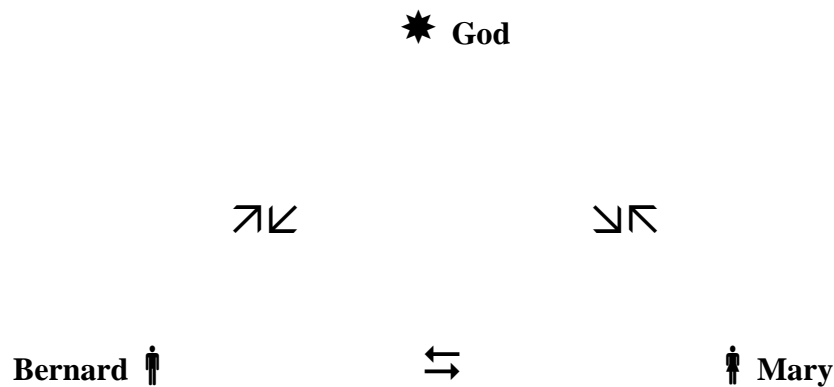
But the paradoxes also contain a further significance. The male-female, God-woman dynamic is strikingly underlined by calling Mary daughter of her Son and in the use of the masculine “*fattore*” for maker and the feminine “*fattura*” for creature. These words have already been used, as we have noted, by Virgil in his discourse on love (*Pug.* XVII. 102). The link between Mary and a female-male dynamic that is motivated by *caritas* is further reinforced by the unusual image that follows. It is in her womb that Love is rekindled, Love which in its turn germinates the mystical rose, and by implication everything below it in heaven and on earth, in a cascade of warmth and light. Therefore she is in a certain sense both created and creator.

Throughout the prayer/poem Dante mixes the language of Mariology with the lexicon of courtly love. Mary so “ennobled” (*nobilitasti*) human nature that God was able to take human form through her. Nobility, as we have seen, has been central to the whole *fin’amor* tradition, stretching back to the Occitan troubadours. She is a Lady (*donna*) of such great worth (*vali*) that whoever does not turn to her in seeking his desire (*disianza*) flies without wings. In her is united “all goodness that is in any creature.”(quantunque in creatura è di bontate). Worth, desire and goodness are words that are steeped in meaning, both in the courtly tradition and in scholastic philosophy. Aquinas says that all things desire a good that will satisfy their desire. Dante considers goodness, along with beauty, nobility and light to be the qualities of the ideal lady. It is because she is the perfect embodiment of all the virtues that Mary can “disperse for him every cloud of his mortality” (ogne nube li dislegghi di sua mortalità) (Par. XXXIII: 31-32), opening the way to “the supreme joy/beauty” (*sommo piacer*) of God. It is only through Mary’s grace (*grazia*) that Dante will gain the power (*virtute*) to behold the last salvation. (“l’ultima salute.”). These three words combine Christian and *fin’amor* meanings. “Grazia”, may be the graciousness of the courtly lady or divine aid in overcoming sin. “Virtute” implies Christian virtue as well as virtuous lady. “Salute” is a word with a triple meaning. In one sense it is the salute or greeting, which the *fin’amor* poets so longed to receive from their ladies. It can also be understood as the health or wholeness that the poets felt when they were certain of their ladies’ love. Finally it means salvation in the Christian sense. Alongside these words we find imagery that is unambiguously Christian. In heaven Mary is “the noonday torch of charity”, (10-11) while on earth she is a “living spring of hope.” The anaphoric “you” (in you is mercy, in you pity, in you great bounty, /In te misericordia, in te pietate, in te magnificenza,), already seen in the earlier poem to Beatrice, is typical of Hebraic and Christian praise prayers.<sup>127</sup>

As Bernard finishes his prayer, he draws Mary's attention to Beatrice whose hands are clasped in prayer with many other saints, uniting their supplications to his. This last reference to Beatrice is significant. It is a final reminder of the lady who has brought Dante so far on his journey to God and who now must be definitively left behind in order to see and sing the praises of the divine light of the Trinity. It also underlines how Dante's relationship to Beatrice is mirrored in Bernard's relationship to Mary, just as the combination of praise and prayer in the poem echoes Dante's final salute to Beatrice in *Paradiso XXXI*.

In his portrayal of St. Bernard and the Virgin Mary, which consciously parallels Dante's relationship with Beatrice, Dante shows us how the male-female, courtier-courted dynamic when transformed by the motive force of love, now conceived of as *caritas* instead of *amor*, becomes Trinitarian in nature. This is what lies at the heart of the feminine Marian role in achieving salvation and reaching our destination in God. The reflexive self-centred *eros* of *fin'amor* (Fig. A, above), which Dante had replaced with a linear and transcendent love in the *Vita Nuova* and with a mutual *caritas* in the *Purgatorio* (Fig. B above), now transforms into a tripolar relationship, in which *caritas* circulates from Creator to created, then from one person to the next and then back again to God in a continuous circular motion that is paradoxically closed yet open. This is the perichoresis (mutual indwelling through a movement of love) of the Trinity, where the paradox is that the more one becomes nothing out of love for the other (kenosis), the more one is totally fulfilled. This is the ultimate paradox of love – through extinguishing desire in desiring only what God wants, we actually fulfill reach the ultimate desire of all humans, which is to be happy.

**Fig. C**





At line 40 we read how Mary's eyes "beloved and venerated by God fixed upon him who prayed [Bernard]", ("Li occhi da Dio dilette e venerati, fissi ne l'orator" My translation) then "they were directed to the Eternal Light, into which it is not to be believed that any creature should penetrate with so clear an eye." (indi a l'eterno lume s'addrizzaro, nel qual non si dee creder che s'invii per creatura l'occhio tanto chiaro per creatura l'occhio tanto chiaro."). Just as Beatrice's eyes have been the means by which Dante has ascended through the circles of the *Paradiso* it is through the light of Mary's eyes that Dante will penetrate the Light of the Trinity. The fact that Dante describes the eyes of Mary as beloved and venerated by God is startling. It is almost as if Mary is the beloved Lady of God. In the eyes of Mary the love of God for her and her love for God are one and the same. This is why she alone is capable of making "the supreme sphere more divine by entering it". (Par. XXIII: 107-108) She is thus totally unique, in that she alone of human creatures actually participates in and to some degree contributes to the dynamic of *caritas* in the Trinity.

I should like to conclude this paper by quoting from the contemporary Marian mystic, Chiara Lubich, who expresses in words that I could never match, the relationship between Mary, *caritas* and the Trinity that lies at the end of Dante's poetic and spiritual journey from love poetry to a poetry of Love.

"Because there is in God a perfect perichoresis between the three divine Persons, and because, through Christ, in the Spirit, there is also a perichoresis between the Trinity and humanity, apex and synthesis of creation (You loved them even *as* you loved me [Jn 17:23], all creation, recapitulated in Christ, is also destined to be, as Mary already is, eternally set into the Trinity: that is to live and rejoice infinitely in the intimate life of God, in the ever new and unending dynamism of the Trinitarian relationships."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere I have argued that there is a close relationship between the feminine and clarity of vision. See for example, 但丁《神曲》中的女性啟蒙角色 Forthcoming Chung Wai Literary Monthly. For further treatment of this subject see, among others J.A Mazzeo "Light Metaphysics, Dante's 'Convivio' and the Letter to the Can Grande della Scala" *Traditio* Vol XIV Fordham UP (1958) 191-229; J. A. Mazzeo, *Medieval Cultural Tradition in Dante's Comedy* (Ithica, New York: Cornell UP, 1960) 56. G.B. Zoppi, *Il fenomeno e il concetto della luce studiati in Dante* (Rovereto, 1886); G. di Pino, *La figurazione della luce nella "Divina Commedia"* (Florence, 1952). For a fascinating study of medieval theories of light and the study of optics see S.A. Gilson, *Medieval Optics and Theories of Light in the Works of Dante* (Lampeter &

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Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> The literature on this subject is extensive. In the last half-century, it is the interpretation of Charles Singleton that has been to the forefront of the debate. In several of his works including Journey to Beatrice, An Essay on the Vita Nuova, and Dante's Commedia: *Commedia, Elements of Structure* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965 [1954]. he argues that Beatrice is analogous with Christ and is variously representative of Theology, Grace and Love as well as other qualities emanating from God.

<sup>3</sup> See *Convivio*, Tratt. Cap. II, XII, where Dante describes Philosophy as a woman, deriving his idea from Boethius' Consolations of Philosophy.

<sup>4</sup> As Jaroslav Pelikan puts it in Chapter 10 of Mary through the Centuries (London: Yale UP 1996) 150, while the Canto opens with a celebration of the Virgin Mary Dante "went on – through her and not around her, but nevertheless beyond her – to the celebration of the Eternal Light.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, Patrick Boyde, Perception and Passion in Dante's *Comedy*, which provides a detailed analysis of Aristotelian elements in Dante's portrayal of desire.

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion of the role of classical Latin poets, see among others, Kevin Brownlee, "Dante and the Classical Poets" in The Cambridge Companion to Dante, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 100-119; Rachel Jacoff, "Transgression and Transcendence: Figures of Female Desire in Dante's *Commedia*", in Marina Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee, and Stephen Nichols, eds., The New Medievalism Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1991), 197-99; Franco Ferrucci, Il poema del desiderio: poetica e passione in Dante, Milano: Leonardo Editore, 1990

<sup>7</sup> See note 90, (for the inclusion of Cavalcanti)

<sup>8</sup> In Woman as Image in Medieval Literature, Joan Ferrante points to the number of women, mainly in 12<sup>th</sup> century France, who wielded power, on the whole as regents, though occasionally as heirs. She also notes that by the time of Dante, such limited freedom as there had been for women, was on the decline.

<sup>9</sup> There is a large body of literature on this subject. A good overview is to be found in Mary T. Malone, Women and Christianity. 2 vols. Dublin: The Columbia Press, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> For a good summary of Medieval aesthetics see Hugh Bredin and Liberato Santoro-Brienza. Philosophies of Art and Beauty. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2000; Edgar De Bruyne. The Esthetics of the Middle Ages. New York: Ungar. For a more detailed treatment of Aquinas' aesthetics, see Umberto Eco. Il problema estetico in Tommaso d'Aquino Milan: Gruppo Editoriale Fabbri, 1970. Specifically on Dante, see John Took "L'eterno piacer": Aesthetic Ideas in Dante Oxford: Clarendon, 1984.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed consideration of this see Brian Reynolds "The Feminine as Clarifier in Dante's *Commedia*" *Literature and Religion*

<sup>12</sup> Brendan Leahy The Marian Profile in the Ecclesiology of Hans Urs von Balthasar (New York: New City Press 2000) 19.

<sup>13</sup> Leahy *op. cit.* 20

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- <sup>14</sup> Hilda Graef The Devotion to Our Lady New York: Hawthorn Books, 1963
- <sup>15</sup> Ferrante, *op cit.* Unaccountably, however, she proceeds to deal at some length with the negative images presented in medieval biblical exegesis without providing a counterbalancing analysis of the positive.
- <sup>16</sup> St. Augustine Sermo Denis 25
- <sup>17</sup> Graef *op. cit.* 30
- <sup>18</sup> On the subject of Christological background to the Theotokos and on the popular identification of her with pagan goddesses, see Stephen Benko The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian roots of Mariology New York: E.J. Brill, 1993.
- <sup>19</sup> Modern Catholic theology asserts that other religions and belief systems contain “seeds of the Word”, though the Church alone possesses the fullness of Divine revelation. By extension this can also be applied historically to the pre-Christian religions, so that, as Jung would put it, the figure of Mary is archetypically present in the goddesses of pre-Christian Rome. On the subject of feminine archetypes in the *Commedia*, see Rosetta Migliorini Fissi “Da Matelda a Beatrice a Maria” in Omaggio a Beatrice (1290-1990) ed. Rudy Abardo. Firenze: Casa Editrice le Lettere, 1997.
- <sup>20</sup> Vasiliki Limberis. Divine Heiress: the Virgin Mary and the Creation of Christian Constantinople. London and New York: Routledge, 1994. 63
- <sup>21</sup> Quoted in Limberis *op cit.* 72
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid* 86-87
- <sup>23</sup> Graef, *op cit* 31 attributes it to the Syrian poet Romanus (d. circa 560), but Limberis, quoting a number of scholars, states that is clearly anonymous and of an earlier date.
- <sup>24</sup> Graef *op. cit.*
- <sup>25</sup> Quoted in Catholic Encyclopaedia Online.
- <sup>26</sup> Leahy *op. cit.* p. 30.
- <sup>27</sup> Lawrence Cunningham. “Mary in Catholic Doctrine and Practice.” Theology Today 56(3) Oct 1999 307-318.
- <sup>28</sup> In his commentary on Dante’s prayer to the Virgin, he traces the evolution of Christian eulogy from its classical and Hebrew roots to the symbolic rhetoric typical of the twelfth century and also notes how the Franciscans were responsible for the introduction of a more emotive note in the thirteenth century. He suggests that Dante prayer differs from contemporary eulogies because of his ability to synthesize all of these elements in a far more disciplined way.
- <sup>29</sup> *Op cit.* 44
- <sup>30</sup> Leahy *op. cit.* . 29.
- <sup>31</sup> *Op cit.* 44
- <sup>32</sup> Leahy *op. cit.* . 29.
- <sup>33</sup> See endnotes 44 through 47 below.

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<sup>34</sup> Fancesco Mazzoni in “San Bernardo e la visione poetica della *Divina Commedia*,” argues that there is considerable intertextual evidence to suggest that Dante drew on the third book of the *Epistola aurea*, incorrectly believing it to have been written by St. Bernard and that therein lies the explanation for Bernard’s role in the concluding canti of the *Commedia*.

<sup>35</sup> Vossler suggests that the “sensualised devotion of the Franciscans” combined with “the glorified love service of the knight” in the *dolce stil novo*. p. 85

<sup>36</sup> Karl Vossler *Mediaeval culture: an Introduction to Dante and his Times*. (2 vols.) New York: Ungar, 1958.

<sup>37</sup> References to the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* will be parenthetical (DVE). All references refer to the Mondadori, 1990 edition translated by Claudio Marazzini and Concetto del Popolo. Translations into English are mine.

<sup>38</sup> Ruth Harvey “Courtly Culture in Medieval Occitania” *The Troubadours: an Introduction*. Eds. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 8-27

<sup>39</sup> Alan Soble. (Ed.) *Eros, Agape and Philia: Readings in the Philosophy of Love*. New York: Paragon House, 1989

<sup>40</sup> Plato *Symposium*

<sup>41</sup> It is interesting that elsewhere in the *Phaedrus*, Plato also insists on the necessity of madness in writing good poetry. “If anyone comes to the gates of poetry and expects to become an adequate poet by acquiring expert knowledge of the subject without the Muses’ madness, he will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds.”(*Phaedrus* 245a)

<sup>42</sup> Kenhelm Foster notes that there are certain parallels between Cicero’s concept of friendship and *fin’amor*. Just as in *fin’amor* friendship leads to moral perfection and to the acquisition of virtues. “Dante’s Idea of Love” *From Time to Eternity: Essays on Dante’s Divine Comedy*. Thomas G. Bergin ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967. 65-101.

<sup>43</sup> *Convivio* ????

<sup>44</sup> Rachel Jacoff, Jeffrey Schnapp & Robert Ball. *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante’s Commedia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Allen. *The Art of Love : Amatory Fiction from Ovid to the Romance of the Rose*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992..

<sup>46</sup> Sarah Kay, “Courts, clerks and courtly love” *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*. Ed. Roberta L. Krueger. Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2000

<sup>47</sup> See the introductory chapter to *The Troubadours: an Introduction*, which reviews the trends within troubadour scholarship from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

<sup>48</sup> Op. cit

<sup>49</sup> In *The Devotion to Our Lady* , Hilda Graef devotes a chapter to the subject entitled “The Exaltation of

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Mary and the Influence of Courtly Love”.

<sup>50</sup> Jean Guitton. The Blessed Virgin London: Burns Oates, 1952

<sup>51</sup> I concur with Mazzeo, *op cit.*, who argues that Gilson’s rejection of any link between the two is too absolute. Gilson approached the matter as a theologian, rather than a literary critic. While it is theologically sound to reject any link between courtly love and mystical love, this does not exclude the possibility that the language of mysticism was adapted to a more profane type of love.

<sup>52</sup> Etienne Gilson The Mystical Theology of St. Bernard trans A H C Downes. London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955. “Courtly love presents itself in no wise as a utilisation of mysticism, nor as a reaction directed against asceticism in the name of human love. Standing apart from both it much rather expresses the effort of a society, polished and refined by centuries of Christianity, to elaborate a code of human love which should be neither mystical nor specifically Christian, but more refined than the broad licence of Ovid, and one in which sentiment should take precedence over sensuality.” 195-196.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 45

<sup>54</sup> See Linda Paterson “Fin’amor and the development of the courtly canso” The troubadours: an Introduction 28-43

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Linda Paterson, “Fin’amor and the development of the courtly canso” *op cit.* Eds. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.36.

<sup>56</sup> Ferrante, *op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> See note on Folquet below.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Gilson, *op. cit* 181.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid* 67

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Gilson, *op. cit* 181.

<sup>61</sup> Here I am lumping together the *romans d’antiquité* and the later chivalric romances.

<sup>62</sup> Jeff Rider. “The Other Worlds of Romance,” The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance. Ed. Roberta L. Krueger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000

<sup>63</sup> Ferrante, *op cit.* suggests that the treatment of women in the courtly literature became more hostile in the 13<sup>th</sup> century because of a generalised breakdown in the the social harmony that characterised the previous century.

<sup>64</sup> Though the langue d’oïl writers of romances and chansons de geste were generally clerks with a scholastic education, like their Italian and Sicilian lyric counterparts. See ?? The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance.

<sup>65</sup> Wilkins, for instance, says that at least three of the Sicilian poets visited Frederick’s German court and that several minnesingers had travelled to Italy. Ernest H. Wilkins, A History of Italian Literature. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard Univesity Press, 1954. Vossler, *op. cit.* notes that not all the poets of the school were Sicilian and that there was extensive contact with Latin, Provençal, French, other Italian

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dialects.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas C. Van Cleve. The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen: "Immutator Mundi". Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.

<sup>67</sup> Christopher Kleinhenz. The Early Italian Sonnet: the First Century (1220-1321) Lecce: Milella, 19

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Karl Vossler. *op. cit.*

<sup>69</sup> Luigi Poma and Carla Riccardi eds. Letteratura italiana Il duecento; il trecento (5 vols.) Firenze: Le Monnier, 1997.

<sup>70</sup> See Kleinhenz, *op. cit.* for a thorough treatment of the origins of the sonnet.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Teodolinda Barolini "Dante and the Lyric Past. The Cambridge Companion to Dante

<sup>72</sup> Poma and Riccardi dismiss any possibility of outside influences on the Sicilian school suggesting that the court of Frederick II was hermetically sealed, immune to any local influences. While it is true that the regime "parachuted in," it seems rash to dismiss any indigenous influence. For example, the absolute power wielded by Frederick is more typical of an Eastern potentate as is the fact that the Empress lived apart from the Emperor and had her own court. Byzantine Christianity, steeped in a tradition of Marian devotion as we saw earlier, had deep roots in Sicily. Here indeed was fertile ground for the transferral of Marian praise hymnody to secular poetry. In the absence of powerful female figures in the Frederician court, and in the presence of a strong Marian cult in Sicily, it is plausible that attributes of the Virgin were applied to the courtly lady.

<sup>73</sup> Barolini, *op. cit.* describes Guittone as the "*caposcuola* of the Tuscan school." Teodolinda Barolini "Guittone's *Orra parrà*, Dante's *Doglia mi reca*, and the *Commedia*'s anatomy of desire" Seminario Internazionale Dantsco, Princeton, proceedings.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid*

<sup>75</sup> *ibid*

<sup>76</sup> Here I am applying the term *stilnovismo* to a particular style of poetry common to Guinizzelli, Cavalcanti, Cino da Pistoia, Dante and others, rather than in the narrower sense of poetry inspired directly by God, as Dante may have intended it to mean. See note 93? below.

<sup>77</sup> I have drawn the quotes here from Barolini "Dante and the Lyric Past."

<sup>78</sup> Barbara Reynolds "Introduction" Dante La Vita Nuova: Poems of Youth Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969.

<sup>79</sup> Barolini *Op. cit.*

<sup>80</sup> Ferrante *op cit*

<sup>81</sup> Essay on the Vita Nuova, p 101

<sup>82</sup> Robert Hollander Studies in Dante. Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1979.

<sup>83</sup> See discussion on Cantos XXX-XXXIII of *Purgatorio* on pages ? ?

<sup>84</sup> There is extensive commentary on the transformation of love to charity in the *Vita Nuova*, with its major

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exponent being Charles Singleton. A more recent take on this subject is Patrick Boyde, *op. cit.*

<sup>85</sup> See Mario Aversano, Il velo di Venere: allegoria e teologia dell'immaginario dantesco. Napoli: Federico & Ardia, 1984.

<sup>86</sup> See Francesco Nuzzaco, Le Figure Femminili della Divina Commedia Rome: Fratelli Palombi Editori (no date), for a systematic listing of the various female characters in the *Commedia*.

<sup>87</sup> I do not propose here to enter into the ongoing debate, particularly among North American Danteists, on whether Dante intends us read the *Commedia* as a poetic or theological allegory. My own feeling is that, whether or not one accepts Dante's authorship of the *Letter to the Can Grande*, the ultimate vision of the closing Cantos of *Paradiso* is consistent with the experience of a divine *raptus*. (On this subject, see among others, Charles Singleton, *ops cit.*, Robert Hollander, Dante's Epistle to Cangrande Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1993; Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. Eric Auerbach. *Neue Dantestudien*. Istanbul, 1944. Specifically regarding this episode see Steven Botterill. *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

<sup>88</sup> For a more extensive discussion on the importance of retrospective, particularly in the *Vita Nuova*, see Hollander Studies in Dante.

<sup>89</sup> According to, Francesco Mazzoni, "Il canto V dell'*Inferno*," Lectura Dantis Romana: Letture degli anni 1973-76 (Rome: Bonacci, 1977) pp. 97-143 the source for these lines is to be found in the chapter on chastity in the *Tresor* of Brunetto Latini (II.20).

<sup>90</sup> John S. Carroll Exiles of Eternity: An Exposition of Dante's Inferno 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911)

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Bergin, Lectura Dantis Inferno V, No 1. Fall 1987. Online, points out that Francesca is the only woman who talks in *Inferno* and one of a select few who speak in the *Commedia* as a whole, excepting Beatrice.

<sup>92</sup> Ray Fleming, "Francesca's Sweet New Subversive Style" Lectura Dantis. No. 3, Fall 1988. Online

<sup>93</sup> Robert Hollander Allegory in Dante's "Commedia" Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

<sup>94</sup> Swing, T. K., The Fragile Leaves of the Sibyl The Newman Press, 1962.

<sup>95</sup> Gardner, *op. cit.* looks at this *canzone* and a second one from the *Convivio*, "Voi che intendendo il terzo ciel morete," referred to in Canto VIII of *Paradiso*, in the context of Dante's mysticism.

<sup>96</sup> For the inclusion of Cavalcanti among the stilnovisti see Dante: da Firenze all'aldilà. Atti del terzo Seminario dantesco internazionale, ed. M. Picone, Florence: Cesati, 2001, especially Roberto Antonelli, "Cavalcanti e Dante: al di qua del Paradiso," pp. 289-302. Robert M. Durling, "'Mio figlio ov'è?' (*Inferno* X, 60)," pp. 303-29 Lino Leonardi, "Cavalcanti, Dante e il nuovo stile," pp. 331-54. For a cogent argument in favour of a theologised reading see Robert Hollander, "Dante's 'dolce stil novo' and the *Comedy*," in Atti del Secondo Seminario Internazionale Dantesco, ed. M. Picone Florence: Cesati, 1999, pp. 263-81.

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<sup>97</sup> For an in-depth analysis of Dante's treatment of these concepts see Boyde, *op. cit.*

<sup>98</sup> Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.; Michelangelo Picone, "Giraut de Bornelh nella prospettiva di Dante," *Vox romanica* 39 1980: 22-43; Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, "Dante come critico," *La parola del testo* 1 1997: 36-54.

<sup>99</sup> The only troubadour in *Paradiso* is Folquet (*Paradiso* IX 32-42 and 67sq) where he is described as "letizia and preclara cosa." He is thus here not just because of his poetry, which Dante regarded highly (DVE, II, x and xiii), but because he retired to a monastery where he dedicated his poetry to less worldly concerns.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Hollander, *Commentary on the Divina Commedia Canto XXVI*, The Princeton Dante Project. Online.

<sup>101</sup> Charles S Singleton, *Commedia, Elements of Structure*; Peter Armour, *Dante's Griffin and the History of the World: A Study of the Earthly Paradise ("Purgatorio" XXIX-XXXIII)* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

<sup>102</sup> Drawn from Luke 2:35, where Simeon prophesies that a sword will pierce Mary's heart

<sup>103</sup> For differing views on this see, among others: Joseph A. Mazzeo, *Medieval Cultural Tradition in Dante's "Comedy"* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960). Robert Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's "Commedia"* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969. Ruggero Stefanini, "Canto XXX," in *Dante's "Divine Comedy": Introductory Readings II: "Purgatorio"*, ed. Tibor Wlassics (Charlottesville: Lectura Dantis, University of Virginia, 1993), pp. 448-62. Ruggero Stefanini, "In nota a un commento," *Lectura Dantis (virginiana)* 13 (1991): 78-89.

<sup>104</sup> See Migliorini Fissi, *op cit*

<sup>105</sup> *Commentary on the Divina Commedia Canto XXXI*, The Princeton Dante Project. Online.

<sup>106</sup> Dating back to the *trecento*, there has been extensive commentary on the reasons on why Dante chooses Bernard as his final guide. Various commentators have noted Bernard's reputation as a contemplative, mystic and Marian devotee as good enough reason for Dante's choice. Stephen Botterill *op. cit.* who offers a balanced and comprehensive interpretation of the episode, adds to this Bernard's renown for eloquence, linking this with Dante's supreme effort in the *Paradiso* to describe the ineffable, while at the same time recognising the limits of language when confronted with the transcendent. It is interesting in this regard that Giuseppe Mazzotta points out the close relationship between rhetoric and Venus, the feminine zodiacal figure most closely associated with love, in the *Commedia* and the *Convivio*. "La luce di Venere e la poesia di Dante. *Studi Americani su Dante*. Eds. Gian Carlo Alessio and Robert Hollander. Milano: Franco Angeli Libri, 1989. 325-351. Botterill has also identified another reason for Dante's choice through his cogent analysis of the Bernardine mystical concepts of *excessus* and *deificatio*, which he argues correspond to Dante's *trasumanar* in *Paradiso* I (70) and the will achieving mystical union with God in the last lines of *Paradiso* XXXIII. Erich Auerbach, in "Dante's Prayer to the Virgin and Earlier Eulogies" *Romance*



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Philology, 3 (1949-50) 1-26, offers a detailed analysis of the prayer and traces its antecedents in Christian and classical literature. Some have erroneously asserted that Dante's prayer to the Virgin is derivative of Bernard's writings. For example, Edmund Gardener Dante and the Mystics (London: Dent & Sons, 1913), In Mary through the Ages, Jaroslav Pelikan incorrectly suggests that Dante "in great measure" drew the prayer from the writings of St. Bernard. Others have attributed him an allegorical significance, which does not seem sustainable, as mystical Theology as opposed to the more theoretical Theology of Beatrice. In my view there are a number of additional historical reasons for the choice of Bernard. One is Bernard's affiliation to the Knights Templar and his close association with the launching of the Second Crusade. He thus neatly fitted into the Dantean conception of noble love, which Bernard ultimately directed not towards an earthly woman but to the Virgin herself. Bernard was a key figure in both the ecclesiastical and temporal world during his lifetime, important for Dante whose ideal was a strong emperor in the temporal realm and Pope in the ecclesiastical. He was instrumental in the schismatic dispute between Pope Innocent II and the anti-pope Anacletus II, restoring the former to his throne. Eugene III, a successor to Innocent II, had been a monk in his abbey. He united King Louis le Jeune of France and the Holy Roman Emperor Conrad, in a crusade against the infidel. A final point is that Bernard was the great foe of Peter Abelard, whose heretical doctrine on the Trinity he refuted. Thus it is highly appropriate that he should be the one to prepare Dante for his vision of the Trinity (Gilson, *op. cit.* also notes the opposition between Abelard's conception of love as necessitating a renunciation of beatitude and Bernard's, which sees pure love as not going unrewarded.). A further element that links the two is that light figures very much in St Bernard. It was he who renamed the valley in which he established his monastery Clairvaux, clear valley. Light was also very much present in his writings. While it is impossible to say whether Dante was actually familiar with any of these texts, just as is the case in Bernard's writing on Mary, it is more than probable that he was aware in a general way of this aspect of the mystic.

<sup>107</sup> Aurbach, *op. cit*

<sup>108</sup> See notes 2, 5 and 9 above.

<sup>109</sup> Aurbach, *op. cit*

<sup>110</sup> 3. The Trinity, the three Theological virtues (Faith, Hope and Charity) 4. The four Cardinal virtues (Prudence, Fortitude, Justice and Temperance). 7. The seven virtues (Theological plus Cardinal) opposed by the seven vices (pride, envy, wrath, avarice, sloth, gluttony, and lust), The seven days of creation. 9. A multiple of three, thus representing the unity of the Trinity. Also, the nine spheres of the universe. The nine months of pregnancy. 10. Completion of the cycle. The perfect number, according to Pythagoras. See Wilhelm Pötters, "'Ella era uno nove': Rapporti geometrici fra la *Vita Nova* e la *Commedia*," Letteratura italiana antica 2 (2001): 27-60, for a recent treatment of the significance of the number nine in Dante.

<sup>111</sup> I do not propose here to enter into the ongoing debate, particularly among North American Danteists, on whether Dante intends us read the *Commedia* as a poetic or theological allegory. My own feeling is that,

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whether or not one accepts Dante's authorship of the *Letter to the Can Grande*, the ultimate vision of the closing Cantos of *Paradiso* is consistent with the experience of a divine *raptus*. (On this subject, see among others, Charles Singleton, *ops cit.*, Robert Hollander. *Dante's Epistle to Cangrande* Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1993; Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. Eric Auerbach. *Neue Dantestudien*. Istanbul, 1944. Specifically regarding this episode see Steven Botterill. *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

<sup>112</sup> See Mario Aversano, *Il velo di Venere: allegoria e teologia dell'immaginario dantesco*. Napoli: Federico & Ardia, 1984.

<sup>113</sup> See Pelikan *Mary through the Centuries* Chapters 3 and 10 for a fuller discussion of the relation of Eve and Mary

<sup>114</sup> See Thomas Aquinas Gen ad. Lit. xi 42)

<sup>115</sup> I do not propose here to enter into the ongoing debate, particularly among North American Danteists, on whether Dante intends us read the *Commedia* as a poetic or theological allegory. My own feeling is that, whether or not one accepts Dante's authorship of the *Letter to the Can Grande*, the ultimate vision of the closing Cantos of *Paradiso* is consistent with the experience of a divine *raptus*. (On this subject, see among others, Charles Singleton, *ops cit.*, Robert Hollander. *Dante's Epistle to Cangrande* Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1993; Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. Eric Auerbach. *Neue Dantestudien*. Istanbul, 1944. Specifically regarding this episode see Steven Botterill. *Dante and the Mystical Tradition: Bernard of Clairvaux in the Commedia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

<sup>116</sup> Stephen Botterill *op. cit.* offers a more comprehensive and balanced interpretation. Erich Auerbach, in "Dante's Prayer to the Virgin and Earlier Eulogies" *Romance Philology*, 3 (1949-50) 1-26, offers a detailed analysis of the prayer and traces its antecedents in Christian and classical literature. However, none fully explore the reasons for the choice of St. Bernard.

<sup>117</sup> Botterill *op cit.* 194-241

<sup>118</sup> It is interesting in this regard that Giuseppe Mazzotta points out the close relationship between rhetoric and Venus, the feminine zodiacal figure most closely associated with love, in the *Commedia* and the *Convivio*. "La luce di Venere e la poesia di Dante. *Studi Americani su Dante*. Eds. Gian Carlo Alessio and Robert Hollander. Milano: Franco Angeli Libri, 1989. 325-351.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid* 242-53

<sup>120</sup> See, for example, Edmund Gardener *Dante and the Mystics* (London: Dent & Sons, 1913), in which the author traces elements of the prayer to the Virgin to the writings of St. Bernard. In *Mary through the Ages*, Jaroslav Pelikan incorrectly suggests that Dante "in great measure" drew the prayer from the writings of St. Bernard.

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Gilson, op cit. also notes the opposition between Abelard's conception of love as necessitating a renunciation of beatitude and Bernard's, which sees pure love as not going unrewarded.

<sup>122</sup> See Pelikan Mary through the Centuries Chapters 3 and 10 for a fuller discussion of the relation of Eve and Mary

<sup>123</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas Summa theologiae I-II, q. 81, a. 5

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid* pp. 149-150

<sup>125</sup> Eric Auerbach, "Dante's Prayer to the Virgin," Romance Philology 111 (1949), p. 8.

<sup>126</sup> Pelikan Mary through the Ages 140.

<sup>127</sup> Auerbach "Dante's Prayer to the Virgin and Earlier Eulogies"

<sup>128</sup> Stephen Botterill in his exhaustive study Dante and the Mystical Tradition reviews the various critical interpretations of the prayer and very convincingly argues that any attempt to establish a direct link between Bernard's writings and Dante is largely futile and unprofitable.

<sup>129</sup> Pelikan Mary through the Ages 140.

<sup>130</sup> Chiara Lubich, quoted in The Abba School: an Introduction. New City Press

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