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## *Rassegna dantesca*

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EXILE AND RHETORICAL ORDER  
IN THE *VITA NOVA*

The *Vita nova* is an outsider text. It is unprecedented: as far as we know no writer before Dante had compiled and commented on his own previously published lyrics. And it is unparalleled: a host of possible models has been suggested for the *libello*'s hybrid structure – part narrative, part lyric, and part exegesis – but there is no one grouping to which it belongs exclusively<sup>1</sup>. The strangeness of the *Vita nova* has given rise to competing interpretations, with some critics treating it as largely secular and autobiographical, and others emphasizing its barely submerged theological content and use of Christian typology<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Models that have been suggested for «quella complessa opera che è la *Vita nuova*» (M. CORTI, *Percorsi dell'invenzione. Il linguaggio poetico e Dante*, Torino, Einaudi, 1993, p. 41) range from the *vidas* and *razos* of the Occitan tradition to Boethius' *Consolatio philosophiae*, as well as saints' lives and medieval commentaries on books of the Bible. A summary of the various models and of the *fortuna* of the *libello* more generally can be found in C. PAOLAZZI, *Novità e fortuna di un prosimetro*, in ID., *La «Vita nuova». Legenda sacra e historia poetica*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 1994, pp. 1-18. For the *Vita nova* in the context of the vernacular lyric tradition, see O. HOLMES, *Assembling the Lyric Self: Authorship from Troubadour Song to Italian Poetry Book*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000. For the *Vita nova* and Boethius's *prosimetrum*, see S. CARRAI, *Dante elegiaco. Una chiave di lettura per la «Vita nova»*, Firenze, Olschki, 2006. For the *Vita nova* and hagiography, see V. BRANCA, *Poetica del rinnovamento e tradizione agiografica nella «Vita nova»*, in «Lecture Classensi», 2 (1969), pp. 29-66. For the *Vita nova* and commentaries to the *Song of Songs*, see P. NASTI, *La memoria del «Canticum» e la «Vita Nuova»: una nota preliminare*, in «The Italianist», XVIII (1998), pp. 14-27; EAD., *La disciplina d'amore*, in EAD., *Favole d'amore e "saver profondo": la tradizione salomonica in Dante*, Ravenna, Longo, 2007, pp. 43-85. Quotations from the *Vita nova* will be given throughout according to the edition by Gorni (DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Vita Nova*, ed. by G. GORNI, Torino, Einaudi, 1996). When referring to points in the text, I shall give Gorni's divisions first, followed by Barbi's more familiar numeration. I also take up Gorni's recommendation that the work is properly entitled *Vita nova*. See G. GORNI, *Paragrafi e titolo della «Vita nova»*, in «Studi di filologia italiana», LII (1995), pp. 203-22; ID., *Ancora sui "paragrafi" della «Vita nova»*, in «Rivista di letteratura italiana», XIII (1995), pp. 537-62.

<sup>2</sup> The two exponents *par excellence* of these competing views are DE ROBERTIS and SINGLETON: see D. DE ROBERTIS, *Il libro della «Vita Nuova»*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1961; CH. SINGLETON, *An Essay on the «Vita Nuova»*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1986. For further details, bibliography, and an attempt to reconcile the two currents of opinion, see M. PICONE, *La «Vita Nuova» fra autobiografia e tipologia*, in *Dante e le forme dell'allegoresi*, ed. by M. Picone, Ravenna, Longo, 1987, pp. 59-69. PAOLAZZI, meanwhile, sees a tripartite division between what he calls the «autobiographical», the «poetico-literary» and the «hagiographico-biblical» readings (*Legenda sacra e*

This essay will bridge the divide between the opposing critical camps by reading the *Vita nova* as a narrative modelled on the Christian *topos* of exile, or *peregrinatio*<sup>3</sup>. Rather than resolving the tensions between secular and sacred, the motif of exile contributes to and justifies the *Vita nova*'s exceptionality and interpretative difficulty<sup>4</sup>. Dante's references to exile will be seen to help him to

*historia poetica* cit., pp. 13-18), although he also suggests that the three are «concordi nell'affermare che la *Vita nuova* racconta le varie fasi di una vicenda storico-biografica» (ivi, p. 17, emphasis original). For the *Vita nova* as autobiography, see M. GUGLIELMINETTI, *Memoria e scrittura. L'autobiografia da Dante a Cellini*, Torino, Einaudi, 1977, pp. 42-72.

<sup>3</sup>The idea that life on earth constitutes a pilgrimage through exile is deeply ingrained in Christian culture. The motif appears in many parts of the Old Testament, beginning with the primal couple's exile from the Garden of Eden (*Gen.* 3, 24) and recurring in such capital episodes as the Israelites' exile in Egypt and subsequent flight to the Promised Land (*Ex.*) and the Babylonian exile (*Dan.*; *2 Par.* 36, 6-21; *Ier.* 52). In the New Testament, Paul's epistles describe life on earth as a state of exile from Eden in which hope for redemption takes the form of a pilgrimage to God: «Dum sumus in corpore, peregrinamur a Domino» (*2 Cor.* 5, 6); «Non solum autem, sed et ordinatus est ab ecclesiis comes peregrinationis nostrae in hanc gratiam quae ministratur a nobis» (*2 Cor.* 8, 19); «Et confitentes quia peregrini et hospites sunt super terram» (*Hebr.* 11, 13). See also Peter's first epistle: «Carissimi, obsecro vos tamquam advenas et peregrinos abstinere vos a carnalibus desideriis, quae militant adversus animam» (*1 Petr.* 2, 11). Following these biblical models, AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO codified the idea of exile as a spiritual experience common to all Christians through his formulation of the *civitas Dei*, which, on this earth, exists within the *civitas terrena* but in a state of estrangement because of its desire to complete a pilgrimage to the true fatherland of Heaven. See, for example, *De Civitate Dei* xv, 1, where Augustine uses the Cain and Abel story (*Gen.* 4, 1-16), in order to underline the inevitable corruption of all human institutions after the Fall. GREGORY THE GREAT turned the vocabulary of pilgrimage into series of tropes that allowed the Christian affective experience of exile to find verbal expression: «At contra iusti [...] sic [...] temporali refouentur subsidio, sicut viator in stabulo utitur lecto. Pausat et recedere festinat; quiescit corpore, sed ad aliud tendit mente» (*Moralia in Iob* vii.xliv, 92). The later medieval inheritors of this *topos* included figures known to be central to the phenomenology of the *Vita nova*, such as HUGH OF ST VICTOR, who recommends exile to his students as a means to closer knowledge of God: «Delicatus ille est adhuc cui patria dulcis est, fortis autem iam cui omne solum patria est; perfectus vero cui mundus totus exsilium est» (*Didascalicon* iii, 19); FRANCIS OF ASSISI, who echoes Peter's epistle as he instructs his followers that «tanquam peregrini et advenae in hoc saeculo in paupertate et humilitate Domino famulantes vadant pro eleemosyna confidenter» (*Regula bullata* vi); and BONAVENTURE OF BAGNOREGIO, whose *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* describes the mystic's journey to enlightenment in terms of a pilgrimage. See BRANCA, *Poetica del rinnovamento* cit. for the importance of Victorine and Franciscan thought to the *Vita nova*'s poetics of novelty and SINGLETON, *Essay* cit., pp. 37-42 for these thinkers' importance to the *libello*'s defining metaphor of the book of memory. As critics have noted, the influence of the figure of *homo viator*, the individual in spiritual exile, goes far beyond religious writings and indeed permeates much of the secular literature of the late medieval period. See G. LADNER, «Homo Viator»: *Mediaeval Ideas on Alienation and Order*, in «*Speculum*» xlii (1967), pp. 233-59; F.C. GARDINER, *The Pilgrimage of Desire: A Study of Theme and Genre in Medieval Literature*, Leiden, Brill, 1971.

<sup>4</sup>In sum, in addition to Dante's references in his later works to his own experience of exile, there is a deeper relationship established throughout his career between exile as physical, psychological, and spiritual experience and the questions and problems encountered by the reader whilst reading Dante's texts. For Dante's own expressions of exile, see *Conv.* i.iii, 4-5; *Epist.* v, 1; vi, 1; vii, 1; *DVE* i.vi, 3; *Par.* xxv, 1-9. For the biographical details and historical context of Dante's exile, see G. PETROCCHI, *Vita di Dante*, Bari, Laterza, 1983, pp. 91-103. It has often been argued that Dante's texts are underwritten by the theme of exile: «in a gesture that makes reading the imaginary extension of exile [... Dante] implies that, as readers, we are dislocated in a space of radical ambi-

perform two literary operations: the first is an equation between the experience of reading his text and that of making a pilgrimage through exile; the second is the aligning with the exile of the figure of the author, that is to say the subjective position from which the *libello* is enunciated<sup>5</sup>.

There are six key terms that will appear throughout this essay – *traveller, journey, hardship, desire, pilgrim, and exile* – the last two of which are engaged in a dialectic that will be central to our discussions<sup>6</sup>. We will find that the theme of the journey is associated in the *libello* with the narrative distance travelled by the reader and the author through the rhetorical continuum of the text. The breaks in this continuum caused by the intervention of non-narrative writing associate the two principal modes of the text – lyric and narrative – with either side of the dialectic of exile/pilgrimage. Where the incomplete, “lyric” mode is uppermost, we find an expression of the lostness of the exile: the hardship and desire for finitude of a traveller on an unfinished and perhaps unfinishable journey. Where the work appears to be more of a completed “narrative”, we sense the pilgrim’s feeling of progress towards a desired location<sup>7</sup>. A reading of the Dantean author figure as a traveller or wayfarer, who aspires to be a pilgrim but finds himself currently in exile, will prove to be an especially useful conceptual aid, since it can help to reconcile the alienation inherent to the poet’s relentlessly self-reflexive praxis with his contemporaneous emphasis on intersubjective communication.

There is thus a fluctuating interplay and sometimes a tension between plural senses of exile in the text, which mirror and, arguably, authorize the interplay and tension between the *Vita nova*’s sense of narrative progress and its facility for lyric expression. This tension will serve to underline the fact that the *Vita*

guity, where the metaphors we encounter can be taken to be glittering signs of God’s presence or fictions emptied of any reality» (G. MAZZOTTA, *Dante: Poet of the Desert*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 11). However, this presence of exile is usually viewed as causally linked to Dante’s biographical experiences, whereas my essay argues that exile is already important in Dante’s work before 1302.

<sup>5</sup> Fittingly, given the text’s unprecedented structure, several critics have observed that the anonymous narrator of the *Vita nova* is also a stranger in his unnamed city: «[In VN 29 (XL)] Dante [is] already defining his role as poet in close relation to a pilgrim or exilic experience that paradoxically increases his importance to his own society by somehow separating him from it» (C. KEEN, *The Language of Exile in Dante*, in «Reading Medieval Studies», xxviii (2001), pp. 79-102, at p. 83). See also B. WIRKUS, *Vestiges and Communities: Franciscan Traces in Dante’s «New Life»*, in *Dante and the Franciscans*, ed. by S. Casciani, Leiden, Brill, 2006, pp. 307-43, at pp. 333-42. The most complete exploration of this authorial estrangement was carried out by Picone, who shows that the appearance of the pilgrimage theme in the final chapters of the *Vita nova* (29-31 [XL-XLII]) ties the author function in the *Vita nova* firmly to the various valencies of the *peregrinatio* tradition; cfr. M. PICONE, “*Peregrinus amoris*”: *la metafora finale*, in Id., «*Vita nuova*» e tradizione romanza, Padova, Liviana, 1979, pp. 129-93.

<sup>6</sup> My list is indebted to Gardiner’s «key words» of medieval literary exile: «*pilgrim, exile, journey, heavenly fatherland, desire, and hardship*» (GARDINER, *Pilgrimage of Desire* cit., p. 12).

<sup>7</sup> For the “lyric” and “narrative” aspects of Dante’s writing see T. BAROLINI, *Dante’s Heaven of the Sun as a Meditation on Narrative*, in EAD., *The Undivine «Comedy»: Detheologizing Dante*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992, 194-217. For the *Vita nova* and narrative, see S. CRISTALDI, *La «Vita Nuova» e la restituzione del narrare*, Messina, Rubbettino, 1994.

*nova* remains an amorous literary text despite its use of Christian *topoi*: although the poet deploys and evokes Christian sources as a central aspect of his literary practice, he does so for technical, not theological, reasons. Moreover, the exile described here will not be a physical, psychological or even a spiritual experience so much as a means of explaining the work's thematic and structural difficulty in terms of pre-existing medieval discourses. That these discourses are sometimes at odds with one another only serves to add to the *Vita nova*'s characteristic, and manifestly willed, ambiguity<sup>8</sup>.

The first appearance of one of the «traditional lexical units» of the exile motif<sup>9</sup>, journeying, comes not far into the *libello*, when Beatrice is depicted as a walking whilst greeting the narrator her greeting:

*e passando per una via*, [Beatrice] volse gli occhi verso quella parte ov'io era molto pauroso, e per la sua ineffabile cortesia, la quale è oggi meritata nel grande secolo, mi salutòe virtuosamente tanto, che mi parve allora vedere tutti li termini della beatitudine<sup>10</sup>. (VN I, 12 [III, 1], emphasis added)

This first deployment of one of the *Vita nova*'s central *topoi* serves to foreshadow all the other major figures of the work and unite the lady with them: the poet's other ladies, the personification of Love, the pilgrims through Florence encountered in Chapter 29 (XL), the *Vita nova*'s lyric poems, and the poet himself are all depicted as walkers<sup>11</sup>. In a potentially scandalous reminder of Christ, Beat-

<sup>8</sup> SINGLETON likens the *libello*'s ambiguous treatment of Beatrice to «those utterances in the Gospels which foretell the death and resurrection of the Son of Man and yet conceal this from his disciples» (*Essay* cit., p. 23), but another possible comparison is surely to the passages mentioned by AUGUSTINE where the biblical *auctores* express themselves with justifiable and yet unilluminable obscurity: «quae ad exercendas et elimandas quodammodo mentes legentium et ad rumpenda fastidia atque acuenda studia discere volentium, celandos quoque [...] utili ac salubri obscuritate dixerunt» (*De doctrina Christiana* IV.viii, 22). The Bishop of Hippo, moreover, instructs the would-be preacher not to imitate these passages – a piece of advice Dante perhaps sees as less applicable to poets.

<sup>9</sup> GARDINER, *Pilgrimage of Desire* cit., p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> As Picone has noted, Dante's use of the verb «passare» here is far from casual: it evokes the *transitus* of the Jews across the Red Sea celebrated at Passover (*Pascha*), which is in turn integrated into the *passio* commemorated during Christian festival of Easter; cfr. PICONE, *Beatrice Personaggio: Dalla «Vita nova» alla «Commedia»*, in «L'Alighieri», 30 (2007), pp. 5-23, at p. 17. Compare BONAVENTURE: «Ad quod propitiatorium qui aspiciet plena conversione vultus, aspiciendo eum in cruce suspensum per fidem, spem et caritatem, devotionem, admirationem, exultationem, appretiationem, laudem et iubilationem; *pascha, hoc est transitum*, cum eo facit, ut per virgam crucis transeat mare rubrum, ab Aegypto intrans desertum, ubi gustet manna absconditum» (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum* VII, 2, emphasis added). For these terms in Christian Latin, see CH. MOHRMANN, *Pascha, passio, Transitus*, in EAD., *Études sur le Latin des Chrétiens*, t. I, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1961, pp. 206-22.

<sup>11</sup> Soon after the meeting with Beatrice *in via*, the second lyric of the *Vita nova*, *O voi che per la via d'Amor passate* (2, 14-17 [VII, 3-6]), is directed towards some ladies walking along a road, immediately consolidating the link between ladies and journeying. Love is encountered as a pilgrim in the road (4, 3 [IX, 3]) and his «moto locale» is said to be one of the primary «human» qualities in Dante's discussion of *prosopopeia* (16, 2 [XXV, 2]). The pilgrims «pass[ano] per una via» (29, 1 [XL, 1]), in a formulation strikingly similar to that used to describe Beatrice at 1, 12 (III, 1). The

rice's status as an exemplary figure to other more uncertain wayfarers in the *libello* is the result of a successful "journey" through the "pilgrimage" of life which will end with her accession to the City of God in Heaven («la quale è oggi meritata nel grande secolo», *ibidem*)<sup>12</sup>.

Alongside this hint of Christology, the narrator aligns the Beatrice of the greeting with the lyric ladies of the vernacular love tradition, describing her in explicitly courtly terms («per la sua ineffabile cortesia», *ibidem*)<sup>13</sup>. Dante's construction of Beatrice's allure as lying in her conquering of spiritual exile sets his lady apart from all other lyric lovers, before and since, and yet she remains the object of a love poet's desire.

The proleptic mention of the end point of Beatrice's pilgrimage, eternal bliss, at the time of lady's first adult appearance in the *libello* means that the entire narrative is effectively contained in microcosm in this passage: Beatrice appears to the narrator; he is beatified by her; she dies; he continues to be beatified by her in death. If the value of the *Vita nova* were purely theological, one could even say that this passage obviates the need for the rest of the work<sup>14</sup>, but that would be to ignore the emphasis that the *libello* places on its *affabulazione* – its juxtaposition of material to construct a textual whole<sup>15</sup>. The fact that we know

lyric *Ballata*, *i' vo' che tu ritrovi Amore* (5, 17-22 [XII, 10-15]) is sent to «walk with Love in front of my lady», thus uniting lady, Love, and poem under the rubric of «walkers». Finally, the narrator himself is a walker at one of the turning points of the *Vita nova*'s narrative: the moment of inspiration for *Donne ch'avete* (10, 12 [XIX, 1]).

<sup>12</sup> Later in the *Vita nova* it will be shown that Beatrice's pilgrimage is definitively completed when she is said to be «facta delli cittadini di vita eterna» (23, 1 [XXIV, 1]). Beatrice's non-exiled condition is emphasized by the terminology Dante uses: «cittadini» is a calque of the Latin *civis* ('citizen'), which was commonly set in opposition to the term *peregrinus* ('foreigner', or 'exile') in classical legal documents. Augustine challenged this binary with his formulation of the *civitas Dei peregrina* (the 'City of God in exile'), allowing for the co-existence of spiritual exile and terrestrial citizenship of an earthly city. However, Beatrice's *post mortem* citizenship of the *civitas Dei* is certain and no longer compromised by the tinge of exile suffered *in vita* by the poet. See M.A. CLAUSSEN, "Peregrinatio" and "peregrini" in Augustine's «City of God», in «Traditio», XLVI (1991), pp. 33-75, at pp. 35-36, 49-53; M. BRITO-MARTINS, *The Concept of "peregrinatio" in St Augustine and its Influences*, in *Exile in the Middle Ages*. Selected Proceedings from the International Medieval Congress, ed by L. Napran and E. van Houts, Turnhout, Brepols, 2004, pp. 83-94, at pp. 86-87.

<sup>13</sup> Colombo has rightly emphasized the «micro-rivoluzione lessicale» represented by this juxtaposition of a mystical term «ineffabile», in all probability appearing here for the first time *in volgare*, with the amorous locution «cortesia»; cfr. M. COLOMBO, *Dai mistici a Dante: il linguaggio dell'ineffabilità*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1987, p. 32. As the critic goes on to point out, this ineffability *topos*, «porterà Dante ad assegnare una funzione strutturale e non meramente retorico-esornativa alle dichiarazioni di ineffabilità del libello» (ivi, p. 34).

<sup>14</sup> «Beatrice is thus dead before she has even begun to live. In narrative terms, one could say that the book has ended before it has even begun» (T. BAROLINI, "Cominciandomi dal principio *in fino a la fine*": Forging Anti-Narrative in the «Vita Nuova», in *La gloriosa donna della mente: A Commentary on the «Vita Nuova»*, ed. by V. Moleta, Firenze, Olschki, 1994, pp. 119-40, at p. 128). But such a reading would ignore the central influence on the *Vita nova* of hagiographical sources in which the death of the blessed figure represents a *dies natalis* whose contemplation by the reader can be a means to taste the afterlife. See BRANCA, *Poetica del rinnovamento* cit., pp. 53-59.

<sup>15</sup> The narrator stresses the importance of the *libello*'s *affabulazione* from very early on when

of Beatrice's special status and of her eventual position in eternal bliss from the beginning of the work and yet the *libello* itself continues to unfold lends the figures of the author and the text a form of privilege, since it suggests these initial statements of virtue are not sufficient in themselves but require enrichment from our progress through the rhetorical continuum of the book.

On the other hand, the *libello* displays a fondness for division that counterbalances this privileging of continuity and unity. The act of textual division had a metaphysical importance in medieval literary theory that derived from an analogy to Adam's exile from Eden<sup>16</sup>. The *Vita nova's* most daring literary operations – the transformation of lyric materials into a narrative and the application of exegetical methods of *divisio textus* in a vernacular work – are thus connected to a Pauline conception of terrestrial life as exile. The inclusion of non-narrative writing moreover places the emphasis on technical literary issues by calling into question whether narrative alone is sufficient to convey the story of Beatrice's completed pilgrimage.

The first mention in the *Vita nova* of physical absence from the unnamed city is the departure of the narrator's first *donna schermo* to a «paese molto lontano» (2, 12 [VII, 1]). The lady's act of distancing herself is the first in a series of three absences that begin Chapters 2, 3, and 4 respectively (III, 14; VIII, 1; IX, 1): the first *donna schermo's* exit from the narrator's city; the death of Beatrice's friend (with the first *donna schermo's* departure also evoked here); and the protagonist's own journey outside his city. The narrator protests that he is truly unaffected by the first *donna schermo's* departure, and is merely feigning his dismay to conceal

he repeatedly identifies material that will not be part of the *Vita nova's* narrative: his infancy (1, 11 [II, 10]); the poems for the screen lady that do not relate to Beatrice (2, 9 [V, 4]); the *sirventese* for the sixty most beautiful women of Florence, which is mentioned only because Beatrice is placed ninth (2, 11 [VI, 2]). It is possible to discern motivations behind these choices – the *sirventese*, for example, is a vernacular style usually voiced by a foot soldier, and so out of keeping with the *Vita nova's* more rarefied atmosphere – but the more important point to recognize is the emphasis these avowed omissions place upon the author's discretion in composing the work. The fullest exploration of the *Vita nova* as poetic project is DE ROBERTIS, *Il libro* cit., which underlines «il carattere appunto del "libro"» (ivi, p. 11). But De Robertis's hostility to any reading of the *libello* in terms of mystical or theological texts (cfr., for example, ivi, pp. 19-20, 23) leads to an overemphasis on the unity of *libello's* hybrid structure, excluding the rich analogy between the *Vita nova* as glossed book and the theologian's writing as commentary on the divine books of the Bible and creation (see NASTI, *La memoria del Canticum* cit.). For an alternative view, somewhat exaggerated in the opposite direction, see CRISTALDI, *Poesia e "ordinatio"*, in Id., *Restituzione del narrare* cit., pp. 5-54. Cristaldi would read Dante's authorial interventions as stressing the impossibility of completing the *Vita nova's* self-anthologizing project, but this underestimates the importance of what the author did complete.

<sup>16</sup> See T. STILLINGER, *The Song of Troilus: Lyric Authority in the Medieval Book*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992, p. 76; R. MARTINEZ, *Mourning Beatrice: The Rhetoric of Threnody in the «Vita nuova»*, in «Modern Language Notes», CXIII (1998), pp. 1-29, at p. 15. For CRISTALDI, the divisions have a very different significance: as a central aspect of the *Vita nova's* status as rhetorical «trattato», «ostentano il tragitto da un "proemio" ad una *conclusio*», (Id., *La restituzione del narrare* cit., p. 51). However, I would argue that the critic's focus on rhetoric as an end in itself tends to minimize the affective experience of the journey from ignorance to enlightenment implied by the *Vita nova's* deployment of *peregrinatio*.



his love for Beatrice<sup>17</sup>. Nonetheless, the fact of distance from which he hangs his sonnet's lament works to externalize and make concrete the poetics of longing that will characterize much of the *Vita nova* hereafter, both before and after Beatrice's death. This identification of external distance with internal hardship and loss is a significant example of the *libello's* «transposition of space into human values», which presages similar operations to come<sup>18</sup>.

These chapters adopt a voice reminiscent of the troubadour Jaufré Rudel, who bases poems such as *Lanquan li jorn son lonc e may* around laments for his faraway love:

Ja mais d'amor no m jauziray  
si no m jau d'est'amor de lonh,  
que gensor ni melhor no n sai  
ves nulha part, ni pres ni lonh;  
tant es sos pretz verais e fis  
que lay el reng dels Sarrazis  
fos hieu per lieys chaitius clamatz!<sup>19</sup>.

Rudel's use of the exile *topos* echoes Gregory the Great's description of Christians as *viatores* ('travellers'), who find temporary rest and solace on this earth, as they would at an inn (*stabulum*), but whose ultimate desire is to pass on to their final destination: the heavenly fatherland<sup>20</sup>. The exile motif was so important to Jaufré's writings as to become the defining feature of his biography: *vidas* of Jaufré recount that the poet fell in love with the Countess of Tripoli purely on the strength of tales told by «pilgrims who came from Antioch» and that the poet then «took the cross and set out to sea» in order to see his lady for the first time<sup>21</sup>.

The *vidas'* evocations of pilgrimage are significant, since they demonstrate that contemporary readers linked *amor de lonh*, a love poet's theme, with the

<sup>17</sup> «E pensando che se della sua partita io non parlassi alquanto dolorosamente, le persone sarebbero accorte più tosto del mio nascondere, propuosi di farne alcuna lamentanza» (2, 13 [VII, 2]). For the screen ladies in the context of the artifices of courtly love, see DE ROBERTIS, *Il libro* cit., pp. 44-70.

<sup>18</sup> M. SHAPIRO, *Spatial Relationships in Dante's «Vita Nuova»*, in «Romance Notes», XVI (1975), pp. 708-11, at p. 709. See also PAOLAZZI, *Legenda sacra e historia poetica* cit., pp. 51-54.

<sup>19</sup> *Les Chansons de Jaufré Rudel*, ed. and Fr. trans. by A. JEANROY, Paris, Champion, 1965, p. 14 («Never shall I enjoy love / if I do not enjoy this love from afar, / for fairer nor better do I know / anywhere near or far. / Her worth is so true and fine / that there in the kingdom of the Saracens / would I be called, for her sake, captive»: translation quoted, with minor adaptation, from *The Songs of Jaufré Rudel*, ed. and Eng. trans. by R. T. PICKENS, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978, p. 165).

<sup>20</sup> Note the reference to the Saracen kingdom, the destination for pilgrims to Jerusalem; elsewhere in the same poem Rudel also laments that he did not go «like a pilgrim» to find his lady. «Ai! car me fos lai pelegris» (*Jaufré Rudel*, ed. by JEANROY cit., p. 13) («Ah! would that I were a pilgrim there» [*Jaufré Rudel*, ed. by PICKENS cit., p. 167]). For Gregory the Great, see note 3.

<sup>21</sup> «Pelerins qe [vengron] d'Antiocha»; «el se croset e mes se en mar» (*Jaufré Rudel*, ed. by PICKENS cit., p. 58).

key terms of Christian *peregrinatio* discussed in this essay<sup>22</sup>. It is unsurprising, therefore, to find that Dante makes the same connection in *Vita nova* 2 (III, 14-VII), especially in the sonnet *O voi che per la via d'Amor passate* (VN 2, 14-17 [VII, 3-6]), which juxtaposes echoes of Rudel, Guittone, Rustico Filippi, and Guido Cavalcanti to an allusion to the *Lamentations* of Jeremiah<sup>23</sup>. The narrator himself goes on to highlight the biblical reference, which clearly evokes the lexis of exile with its mentions of a road, a journey, and suffering, by quoting the Vulgate directly: «O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus» (*Lam.* 1, 12; VN 2, 18 [VII, 7]).

The evocation of the *via* of the pilgrims of love creates a mirror image of the poem's treatment of the *donna schermo*'s absence: where the lady's distance spiritualized the spatial, the poet's borrowed apostrophe to the amorous wayfarers spatializes the spiritual. The imprecation to the travellers to delay their journey and listen to the sonnet substitutes the spiritualized road down which Jeremiah's interlocutors were proceeding in the biblical text for the textual thoroughfare of the sonnet in the *Vita nova*, implying a spiritual equivalence between the two pathways. And yet, when one considers the sonnet's situation in the *Vita nova*'s macrotext, a second analogy is apparent between the temporal progress integral to the narrative constructed by the *Vita nova*'s prose and the delayed journey of the wayfarers, since both are interrupted for the benefit of the sonnet. The spiritual value of the sonnet's position within the *Vita nova* is thus ambiguous: it could be a *via* in and of itself, or a hiatus on the narrative road to knowledge of Beatrice's salvific love. However, the literary value of the *libello*'s incorporation of the sonnet is clear: by highlighting the presence of the Bible and the Fathers in its tissue of sources from the vernacular past, the combination of *O voi che per la via d'Amor passate* and its surrounding expository prose seeks to enhance the authority of the tradition to which the *Vita nova* belongs. Moreover, the Christian discourse that it evokes, that of exile, is one capable of theologizing the doubt and ambiguity that this hybridity fosters since it explicitly privileges the believer's subjective feeling of alienation in the face of God's magnitude<sup>24</sup>.

It is not long before the narrator himself takes a journey outside the unnamed

<sup>22</sup> The question of whether Jaufré's poems should rightly receive a mystical or Christian reading lies beyond the scope of this paper. See L. LAZZERINI, *La trasmutazione insensibile. Intertestualità e metamorfismi nella lirica trobadorica dalle origini alla codificazione cortese*, in «Medioevo romanzo», XVIII (1993), pp. 153-206, 315-69, at pp. 315-28; M. LAZAR, "Fin' amor", in *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, ed. by F. R. P. Akehurst and J. M. Davis, Berkeley-Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1995, pp. 61-100 at pp. 72-76; L. PATERSON, "Fin' amor" and the development of the courtly "canso", in *The Troubadours: An Introduction*, ed. by S. Gaunt and S. Kay, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 28-46, at pp. 36-37.

<sup>23</sup> For the intertexts of this *sonetto rinterzato*, a form that places the poem in Dante's early Guittonian phase, see DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Vita Nuova*, ed. by D. DE ROBERTIS, in Id., *Opere Minori*, t. I/1, Milano-Napoli, Ricciardi, 1984, pp. 3-247, at 51-54; HOLMES, *Assembling* cit., p. 129; DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Rime giovanili e della «Vita Nuova»*, ed. by T. BAROLINI, with notes by M. Gragnolati, Milano, Rizzoli, 2009, pp. 102-06.

<sup>24</sup> «Et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis» (AUGUSTINE, *Confessiones* VII, 10).

city in the wake of the first *donna schermo* (Chapter 4 [IX]). Critics have noted that, in its evocation of a wayfaring encounter, this chapter alludes to the Occitan *pastorela* style: an erotic form traditionally centring on a meeting between a highborn knight and a lowly shepherdess<sup>25</sup>. But the *Vita nova* does not replicate the *pastorela* scenario exactly: rather than encountering a young shepherdess, the poet meets a personification: Love<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, as Picone has noted<sup>27</sup>, the theme of *peregrinatio* is present, since, unlike the shepherdess, who would assumedly be native to the countryside<sup>28</sup>, Love is described as a fellow traveller: «Lo dolcissimo signore [...] apparve come peregrino leggiatamente vestito e di vili drappi» (4, 3 [IX, 3]). It emerges that Amor's abject status is reflexive of the poet's own condition, leading to an eventual union between the interlocutors («mi parve che Amore mi desse di sé» 4, 7 [IX, 7])<sup>29</sup>, and allowing the authorial figure, previously known principally for his erotic poetry, to don the additional mantle of exemplary pilgrim<sup>30</sup>. This identification with pilgrim Love introduces an allusion to another roadside encounter, very different from that of the *pastorela* scenario: St Francis's meeting with the leper, in which a mounted Francis on a journey outside of Assisi also encounters a poor traveller on foot who suddenly disappears in the wake of the protagonist's experience of conversion<sup>31</sup>. If the evocation of *Lamentations* in *Vita nova* 2 (III, 14-VII, 7) was the point at which the poet first laid claim to the authority of Christian writings for the amorous material of the *Vita nova*, the meeting with Love in *Vita nova* 4 (IX) functions as the point in the work where the poet himself is identified with thirteenth-century Italy's foremost exemplar of a humble but authoritative pilgrim.

Soon after, once the narrator has returned to the city and begun to court the

<sup>25</sup> «The *incipit* of the poem in this section, *Cavalcando l'altrieri per un cammino* [*sic*], echoes the conventional opening of an Occitan *pastorela*» (HOLMES, *Assembling* cit., p. 131). The *divisione* also divides the ballad into the three traditional narrative segments of the *pastorela* – encounter, colloquy, and epilogue – (PICONE, *Tradizione romanza* cit., p. 94, and *ivi*, pp. 73-98). Of course, the lyric's *incipit* and the introduction of the god of love both point to a specifically Florentine interpretation of the *pastorela*: Cavalcanti's *In un boschetto trova' pastorella*.

<sup>26</sup> PICONE, *Tradizione romanza* cit., p. 97.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> For the *contrada*, the hinterland surrounding the medieval Italian city, in relation to Dante and the theme of exile, see C. HONNESS, *Insiders and Outsiders in the «Commedia»*, in EAD., *From Florence to the Heavenly City: The Poetry of Citizenship in Dante*, London, Legenda, 2006, pp. 14-36.

<sup>29</sup> M. PICONE, *Dante e la poesia dell'esilio*, in *Le rime di Dante*. Atti della giornata di studi, ed. by P. Grossi, Paris, Istituto italiano di cultura, 2008, pp. 53-73, at p. 56.

<sup>30</sup> PICONE, *Tradizione romanza* cit., p. 98.

<sup>31</sup> «Nam inter omnia infelicia monstra mundi Franciscus naturaliter leprosus abhorrens, leprosum die quadam obvium habuit, cum iuxta Assisium equitaret. Qui licet sibi taedium non parvum ingereret et horrorem, ne tamen velut mandati transgressor datae fidei frangeret sacramentum, ad deosculandum eum, equo lapsus, accurrit. Cui cum manum quasi aliquid accepturus leprosus protenderet, pecuniam cum osculo reportavit. Et statim equum ascendens et huc illuc se convertens, cum campus pateret undique liber nullis obiectis obstaculis, leprosum illum minime vidit. Admiratione inde repletus et gaudio post dies paucos opus simile facere curat» (THOMAS OF CELANO, *Vita secunda S. Francisci* I.V, 9-13). See also BONAVENTURE, *Legenda maior* I.V, 1-5.

second *donna schermo*, follows the denial of Beatrice's greeting. Again the protagonist encounters his love *in via*, in an echo of *Vita nova* 1, 12 (III, 1):

quella gentilissima, la quale fu distruggitrice di tutti li viti e regina delle vertudi, passando per alcuna parte, mi negò lo suo dolcissimo salutare, nello quale stava tutta la mia beatitudine. (5, 2 [X, 2], emphasis added)

The effect of this denial is to send the narrator into a fit of self-imposed estrangement and suffering:

poi che la mia beatitudine mi fu negata, mi giunse tanto dolore che, partito me dalle genti, in solinga parte andai a bagnare la terra d'amarissime lagrime<sup>32</sup>. (5, 8 [XII, 1])

However, intervening between these two events, which in referential terms ought to be consecutive, is a passage in which the narrator digresses in order to explain the benefits of the now unavailable greeting (5, 3-7 [X, 3-XI, 4]):

E uscendo alquanto del proposito presente, voglio dare a intendere quello che lo suo salutare in me virtuosamente operava. (5, 3 [X, 3], emphasis added)

Ora tornando al proposito dico che poi che la mia beatitudine mi fu negata. (5, 8 [XII, 1], emphasis added)

The use of the language of departing and returning casts the *libello's* narrative as a journey<sup>33</sup>. Moreover, the estranged narrative section established by the digression contains the *libello's* fullest consideration of the sanctifying effects of Beatrice's greeting, a matter of fundamental importance to the *Vita nova's* plot. As with the account of Beatrice's first greeting, which presaged the lady's death even as it established her effects *in vita*, here the benefits of Beatrice's greeting are contextualized within the loss of those benefits<sup>34</sup>.

The digression and its adjacent episodes demonstrate how Dante alternately identifies the two main participants in exilic motifs in the *libello* – the author and the text – with either side of the dual nature of the Christian concept of *pere-*

<sup>32</sup> Paolazzi notes that this episode of estrangement marks a Pauline moment of conversion away from the narrator's prior state *ut parvulus* (1 Cor. 13, 11); cfr. «m'adormentai come uno pargoletto battuto» (5, 9 [XII, 2], emphasis added). See PAOLAZZI, *Legenda sacra e historia poetica* cit., pp. 76-78.

<sup>33</sup> BAROLINI, "Cominciandomi" cit., p. 137.

<sup>34</sup> D'Andrea has pointed out that the digressions of the *Vita nova*, a category in which he includes the section discussed here, bear a striking resemblance to the *quaestiones* found after the *divisio et expositio textus* in thirteenth-century Scholastic commentaries on Aristotle and on theological works such the *Sententiae* of Peter Lombard. Given the *Vita nova's* frequent recourse to ambiguity, D'Andrea's is an intriguing observation, since in the *quaestio* first counter-argument then argument are presented, ensuring that the eventual thesis must always co-exist with its antithesis, just as Beatrice's greeting here co-exists with its absence. See A. D'ANDREA, *La struttura della «Vita Nuova»*. *Le divisioni delle rime*, in ID., *Il nome della storia. Studi. Ricerche di storia e letteratura*, Napoli, Liguori, 1983, pp. 25-58 at pp. 39-41.

*grinatio*, which implies both progress towards a spiritual goal and yet estrangement from that goal in the here-and-now. The interposing of the consideration of Beatrice's beneficent effects into the story of the poet's loss of those effects creates a sort of conceptual Möbius strip: the protagonist appears to be estranged from his love and yet a digression is introduced which reminds us of her potential to redeem him; that redemption, however, appears in an estranged position, away from the main path of the narrative, symbolizing the possibility that the protagonist may never regain that level of beatitude. If the authorial figure is a pilgrim, an outsider on the road to bliss, then the text is in exile, unable to present both desire and fulfilment simultaneously when it must be written sequentially. Meanwhile if the authorial figure is an exile, currently unable to attain beatitude, the text is a pilgrim, deliberately reforming the referential sequence of events into a more spiritually accurate *iter* through the protagonist's troubles<sup>35</sup>.

At various points in the *libello* one or other of these two readings is more prevalent. Subsequently in Chapter 5 (X-XII), for example, the narrator further endangers the integrity of his own authorial choices by raising the question of whether the *ballata* he wrote in response to Beatrice's disdain is overly self-referential, only to delay answering the charge until a later, unspecified, point in the *libello* – a move which leaves the doubt he has raised hanging over the work<sup>36</sup>. In Chapter 6 (XIII), meanwhile, contradictory thoughts assail the protagonist and he describes himself in exilic terms as «quasi come colui che non sa per qual via pigli lo suo camino» (6, 6 [XIII, 6]), a phrase which glosses the sonnet's «così mi trovo in amorosa erranza» (6, 9 [XIII, 9]). In each case the theological integrity of the work then rests upon the other member of the pair: if the text's *affabulazione* is suspect, its continuation can nonetheless be justified

<sup>35</sup> The rhetorical act of digression is one that cannot but foreground the person of the author at the expense of the continuity of his text, which is disrupted by being “diverted” from its former rhetorical path to service the author's desire. As critics have noted, digression will later become the hallmark of the *Convivio* and the latter stages of the *Commedia* (see, for example, R. HOLLANDER, *Dante: A Life in Works*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 2001, p. 75). It appears that digression is a method Dante consistently employs to assert his authorial voice by specifically rhetorical, rather than grammatical or referential, means. Digression is moreover a fundamental feature of Franciscan hagiography, where scribes and authors often apologize for the necessity of disrupting the chronological order of the saint's life in their struggle to communicate the salvific import of his or her life. For example, after the abbreviated account of Francis's miracles interpolated into his *Vita*, THOMAS OF CELANO proclaims «Verum quia non miracula, quae sanctitatem non faciunt sed ostendunt, sed potius excellentiam vitae ac sincerissimam conversationis ipsius formam decrevimus explanare, hiis prae nimietate omissis, aeternae salutis opera retexemus» (THOMAS OF CELANO, *Vita Prima S. Francisci* LXXVI, 70). On the *Vita nova*'s stylistic proximity to hagiographical texts, see BRANCA, *Poetica del rinnovamento* cit., pp. 61-62.

<sup>36</sup> «Potrebbe già l'uomo opporre contra me e dicere che non sapesse a cui fosse lo mio parlare in seconda persona, però che la ballata non è altro che queste parole che io parlo. E però io dico che questo dubbio io lo 'ntendo solvere e dichiarare in questo libello ancora in parte più dubbiosa; e allora intenda qui chi qui dubita o chi qui volesse opporre in questo modo» (5, 24 [XII, 17]). It is usually assumed that the reference here is to *Vita nova* 16 (XXV) and the digression on the personification of Love (see, for example, DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Vita nova*, ed. by L. C. ROSSI, Milano, Mondadori, 1999, pp. 55-56).

by reference to its assertions of its author's spiritual journey; if the author's journey is in doubt, the fact of the text's continuing *affabulazione* serves to suggest that the exile is only temporary. The invocation of the religious resonance of the exile *topos* acts to cloak the audacious experiments of the *Vita nova* in a sense of Christian humility by ensuring that the reciprocal authorizing strategies of author figure and text carry with them a nuance of human frailty and fallibility that tempers the otherwise impersonal nature of medieval *auctoritas*<sup>37</sup>.

The most self-consciously experimental sequence in the first part of the work is of course *Vita nova* 10 (XVII-XIX), a chapter which stands out for its inclusion of the first of the *Vita nova*'s three full-length *canzoni*, *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore*<sup>38</sup>. The inspiration for this lyric occurs whilst the narrator is walking along a stream – «passando per uno camino lungo lo quale sen gia uno rivo chiaro molto» (10, 12 [XIX, 1]) – the second and final instance of his bodily leaving his home city and the last time he appears in physical motion in the *libello*<sup>39</sup>. The riverside *passeggiata* is deliberately reminiscent of the protagonist's previous extra-urban excursion, which also took place alongside a «fiume bello e corrente e chiarissimo, lo quale sen gia lungo questo camino là ov'io era» (4, 4 [IX, 4]), a reference which suggests that this chapter will lay claim to a further increase in authority with respect to discovery of the poet's exemplary status made in *Vita nova* 4 (IX)<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> See Ascoli, who points out that Dante's consistent use of the grammatical first person produces «a structural tension [that] appears at once grammatically and dramatically in the obstinate presence of the speaking "I", the pronominal projection of the author-function, which both claims and inherently contradicts the definitionally impersonal stature of *auctor*» (A. R. ASCOLI, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 58). Ascoli argues moreover that «Dante grounds his impersonal, immutable authority in the personal experience of exile and change, for which such authority is also potentially the remedy» (ivi, p. 127). I am in full agreement with Ascoli's thesis, which I seek to develop in two ways. First, I aim to define Dante's relationship with exile in a more general sense, viewing it as a theoretical as well as an experiential phenomenon – hence my focus on the *Vita nova*, whereas Ascoli's latter comment applies to the post-exilic *Convivio*. Second, I wish to explore further how Dante applies the exiled authority he obliquely claims not only to his image of himself as author but also to his texts; Ascoli hints at this process in such comments as «Dante's simultaneous occupation of the roles of commenting *lector* and commented-upon *auctor* hastens along the authorizing process by modeling it for future readers» (ivi, pp. 42-43) and «the flawed, individualized character of the vernacular is analogous to the flawed individualized character of Dante» (ivi, p. 93), but his focus remains upon Dante's personal authority.

<sup>38</sup> SINGLETON has famously argued that each of these longer poems represents a staging point in the *Vita nova*'s narrative (*Essay* cit., pp. 78-80). See also CARRAI, *Dante elegiaco* cit., pp. 89-90. But Gorni has proposed an equally suggestive bipartite scansion of the text, in which the interpolation of the *incipit* of Lamentations (19, 1 [XXVIII, 1]) would function as a second «rubrica» under which the section of the *libello in morte Beatricis* is inscribed: cfr. G. GORNI, *Lettera nome numero. L'ordine delle cose in Dante*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1990, p. 99. Such an analysis would still place a *canzone* as the border between sections, but it would be the monostrophic *Si lungiamente m'è tenuto Amore* and the performance of its "interruption" by the quotation from Jeremiah, examined below.

<sup>39</sup> SHAPIRO, *Spatial relationships* cit., p. 710.

<sup>40</sup> As both ROSSI and DE ROBERTIS note (*Vita nova*, ed. by DE ROBERTIS cit., p. 63; *Vita nova*, ed. by ROSSI cit., p. 40), there is moreover an implicit comparison between the rivers in the *libello* and the «fluvium aquae vitae, splendidum tanquam crystallum, procedentem de sede Dei et Agni» of

The narrator has already signalled a departure at the beginning of the chapter where he asserts that, having given an account of his own condition, he needed to take up a new theme (10,1 [XVII, 1]), which turns out to be direct praise of Beatrice (10, 11 [XVIII, 9]). The idea that the *libello's* poems should praise Beatrice is not new: it is cited as the primary criterion for discarding the rhymes which praise only the first *donna schermo* and not Beatrice (2, 9 [v, 4]). Given that goal, *Vita nova* 10 (XVII-XIX) is able to achieve significant authority within the context of the work because its referential material functions as a homecoming to the *libello's* self-declared true theme<sup>41</sup>. The sense of arrival is further enhanced by the fact that exilic motifs disappear from the *libello* for a short while afterwards. In the meanwhile, the poet celebrates the apparent success of his «stilo della loda» in two Guinizzellian sonnets, *Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa* and *Negli occhi porta la mia donna Amore*, which roundly reject the Rudelician poetics of absence, so constant in the work's earlier lyrics.

It must surely be in doubt from the outset that *Donne ch'avete* can truly function as a homecoming from exile, since the reader already knows Beatrice is to die and can deduce from the fact that the episode occurs only one third of the way through the *libello* that there must be some significant further issues to follow. Moreover, as Stillinger has pointed out, the extensive *divisione* that follows the *canzone* may be seen to bring the supposed spiritual advances made over the first ten chapters (I-XIX) into significant doubt. The narrator divides his poem into a series of hierarchized binaries, of which the second term is further subdivided. The result of this concentration on the lower term is that the *divisione* connects the benefits of Beatrice's greeting to a carnal body part, the mouth, whereas the line being glossed mentions only her face<sup>42</sup>. The sense of a homecoming is thus not only short-lived, but misleading, since the Guinizzellian motifs of the subsequent two sonnets are somewhat tarnished if an erotic implication may lurk under every mention of the lady's visage and greeting<sup>43</sup>.

the vision of St John (*Apoc.* 22, 1). The *topos* of walking beside a river will be revisited in the Earthly Paradise episode of the *Purgatorio*, again with a sense that Dante is amalgamating authoritative biblical allusions with the *colori* of the lyric tradition: «Allor [Matelda] si mosse contra 'l fiume, andando / su per la riva; e io pari di lei, / picciol passo con picciol seguitando» (*Purg.* xxix, 7-9).

<sup>41</sup> This homecoming occurs both on a literal level («Ritornato alla sopradecta cittade, [...] cominciai una canzone», 10, 14 [XIX, 3]) and on a poetic one («[Canzone] se non vòli andar sì come vana, / non restare ove sia gente villana: / ingegnati, se puoi, d'esser palese / solo con donne o con omo cortese, / che ti merranno là per via tostana. / Tu troverai Amor con esso lei», 10, 25 [XIX, 14]). *Donne ch'avete* moreover has the distinction of being the only full-length praise *canzone* included in the *Vita nova*. The others, *Donna pietosa e di novella etate* (14, 17-28 [XXIII, 17-28]) and *Gli occhi dolenti per pietà del core* (20, 8-17 [XXXI, 8-17]), both lament the lady's loss – potential in the former case, actual in the latter.

<sup>42</sup> «Il saluto di questa donna, lo quale era delle operationi della sua bocca, fue fine delli miei desiderii mentre che io lo potei ricevere» (10, 31 [XIX, 20], emphasis added); cfr. «Voi le vedete Amor pinto nel viso, / là ove non pote alcun mirarla fiso» (10, 23 [XIX, 12]), and see STILLINGER, *Song of Troilus* cit., pp. 97-99. See CARRAI, *Dante elegiaco* cit., pp. 91-92 and above, note 38, for the importance of the *canzoni*.

<sup>43</sup> But note also BRANCA's observation of the many hagiographical echoes in the *Vita nova's* praise poems, many of them in turn calqued from the imagery associated with the «reine» and

After only two sonnets in the new praise style, Beatrice's father dies and the pilgrimage theme returns to describe the event: «di questa vita uscendo, alla gloria eternale sen gio veracemente» (13, 1 [XXII, 1]). The subsequent two sonnets draw inspiration from peregrinary ladies reminiscent of Beatrice in her role as *viatrix*<sup>44</sup>. Then, when the narrator falls ill and sees his second *ymaginatione*<sup>45</sup>, it becomes clear that his participation in the exile motif has been entirely internalized, perfecting the equation of external distance with internal estrangement made in Chapters 2 and 4 (III, 14-VII, 7 and IX). Rather than journeying bodily, the narrator describes his mind as «erring» in both the verse and the prose<sup>46</sup>, with the result that he is quite absent from his surroundings as he confronts the reality of the permanent loss of his lady's greeting, whether because of her mortality or his own<sup>47</sup>. We find that the poetic citadel *Donne ch'avete* claims to represent is breached almost as soon as we enter it.

The *Vita nova*'s narrative now becomes more intricate, consisting in a series of interlocking prolepses, each dependent on one side of the exile/pilgrimage binary. On the one hand, the narrator's initial inspiration by Beatrice, his *ymagi-*

«principi» of courtly love, suggesting that even apparently erotic praise may connote due celebration of a *speculum Christi*. See ID., *Poetica del rinnovamento* cit., pp. 48-49; p. 56.

<sup>44</sup> «Ditelmi, donne, che me 'l dice il core, / perch'io vi veggio andar sanz'acto vile» (13, 9 [XXII, 9]); «Lascia piangere a noi e triste andare» (13, 14 [XXII, 14]). Others have likened these *donne* to female members of the *corrotto*, the traditional Florentine funeral cortège, who would be allowed to display their grief publicly, unlike the male poet, because of their sanctioned emotional closeness to the dead lady (see *Rime giovanili*, ed. by BAROLINI cit., pp. 343-46). This is undoubtedly a valuable observation where the poems are seen as works in their own, right but in the context of the *Vita nova*'s macrotext it is important to keep in mind the recurrence of the walking motif. Given the resemblance to *Vita nova*, 1, 12 (III, 1), it is clear that these ladies serve as analogues both to Beatrice and to the poet's desired condition; their appearance thus implies a return to the narrative situation of the *saluto* (see above, note 11).

<sup>45</sup> The first *ymaginatione* was the vision of Love in *Vita nova* 4 (IX). For the difference between the terms *visione* ('a dream') and *ymaginatione* ('a waking vision'), see I. BALDELLI, *Visione, immaginazione e fantasia nella «Vita Nuova»*, in *I sogni nel Medioevo*, ed. by T. Gregory, Roma, Ate-neo, 1985, pp. 1-10.

<sup>46</sup> «Così cominciando ad *errare la mia fantasia*, venni a quello che io non sapea ove io mi fossi» (14, 5 [XXIII, 5], emphasis added); «e fuoron sì smagati / li spirti miei, che ciascun giva *errando*» (14, 22 [XXIII, 22], emphasis added). The Latin cognate of *errare*, *erro*, appears throughout the Vulgate to suggest aimlessness and loss – sometimes physical, sometimes conceptual. For example, it is used when a peasant finds Joseph in a field searching for his brothers, «invenitque eum vir *errantem* in agro, et interrogavit quid quaereret» (*Gen.* 37, 15, emphasis added). However, in the Psalms the verb is consistently associated with the heart: «Quadragesima annis displicuit mihi generatio illa et dixi populus *errans* corde est» (*Ps.* 94, 10, emphasis added). See also the iconic image of the believer as lost sheep: (*Ps.* 118, 176; *Mt.* 18, 12). As Paolazzi points out, this participation by the protagonist in the biblical motif of exile serves to universalize the significance of his story: «il poeta sembra ritirarsi in una distanza contemplativa che non ha più bisogno né del saluto né di incontri individuali con visione diretta [...] perché egli ormai non canta più una vicenda privata ma un evento universale, la “beatrice” e la “salute” “venuta / da cielo in terra a miracol mostrare”» (PAOLAZZI, *Legenda sacra e historia poetica* cit., pp. 102-03, emphasis original).

<sup>47</sup> «L'anima mia fu sì smarrita, / che sospirando dicea nel pensiero: / – Ben converrà che la mia donna mora» (14, 21 [XXIII, 21]); «visi di donne m'apparver crucciati, / che mi dicean pur: “Morra'ti, morra'ti!”» (14, 22 [XXIII, 22]).



*natione* of love as a pilgrim and his realization of how to praise her directly in Chapter 10 (XVII-XIX) provide a blueprint for the sort of episodes that may act as points of arrival, albeit as temporary *stabula* rather than permanent *civitates*. Then again, the departure of the first *donna schermo*, the death of Beatrice's friend, the denial of Beatrice's greeting, and now the death of Beatrice's father cause the narrator to explore his subjective experience of loss even before the final and inevitable separation from Beatrice takes place.

Uniting all these contrasting homecomings and partings is the constant truth of the *libello's* rhetorical and narrative continuity, signalled by the recurrence of such temporal formulae as «apresso», which appears 29 times in the work, as well as by the consistent use of the first person. From Chapter 15 (XXIV) onwards, previous demonstrations of narrative finitude are reflected and refracted, with both author and text confronting significant challenges but also asserting their authority via association with canonical figures and works. The process grows gradually more complex, suggesting the ultimate impossibility of achieving a definitive solution to the issue of exile through rhetoric.

One such sequence begins with a new assertion of Beatrice's Christology at Chapter 15 (XXIV) and lasts until the lady's death at the end of Chapter 18 (XXVII). The narrator has a further *ymaginatione* in which he sees Love leading behind him two ladies: Cavalcanti's Giovanna and Beatrice. The linking of Giovanna to John the Baptist and, by extension, of Beatrice to Christ, aligns the confession of a poetic filiation from Cavalcanti's work to the poet's own typologically with this biblical story of prophetic succession<sup>48</sup>. As with the earlier reference to *Lamentations*, the quotation chosen, *Io. 1, 23*, emphasizes the prophet's role as a voice speaking from exile («vox clamantis in deserto»), as well as the motif of pilgrimage towards Heaven («parate viam Domini»). This extraordinarily daring assertion of Beatrice's Christological significance – which cannot help but suggest a parallel between the *Vita nova's* text and that of the Gospels – is followed by two further praise sonnets in Chapter 17 (XXVI). The lyrics are inspired by the narrator's observation of bystanders' joy at the view of Beatrice *in via*, a tableau which generalizes the effect of his individual meeting with Beatrice *viatrix* in Chapter 1 (I, I-III, 13)<sup>49</sup>. However, before the new praise section, the narrative sequence of the *Vita nova* is interrupted by a technical digression (VN 16 [XXV]) similar to that of Chapter 5 (X-XI)<sup>50</sup>, in which the narrator seeks to quell a potential objection to his use of the trope of *prosopopoeia*.

<sup>48</sup> «Quello Giovanni lo quale precedette la verace luce dicendo: "Ego vox clamantis in deserto: parate viam Domini"» (15, 4 [XXIV, 4]). For a recent view on Cavalcanti and Dante in the *Vita nova*, see M. GRAGNOLATI, *Trasformazioni e assenze: la "performance" della «Vita nova» e le figure di Dante e Cavalcanti*, in «L'Alighieri», 35 (2010), pp. 5-23.

<sup>49</sup> «Questa gentilissima donna, di cui ragionato è nelle precedenti parole, venne in tanta gratia delle genti, che quando passava per via, le persone correvano per vedere lei, onde mirabile letitia me ne giugnea nel cuore» (17, 1 [XXVI, 1]). For the hagiographical echoes of this passage, see BRANCA, *Poetica del rinnovamento* cit., p. 52.

<sup>50</sup> See PAOLAZZI's observation that this chapter of the *libello*, like the earlier digression, is «articolato come una vera e propria risposta a una "questio" scolastica» (ID., *Legenda sacra e historia poetica* cit., p. 55). And see above, note 34, for the ramifications of such a conclusion.

This digression is justly well known amongst *Dantisti*, since it contains Dante's earliest extended comment of the nature of poetry, as well as an instructive first list of classical *auctores*<sup>51</sup>. It is easy to lose sight, therefore, of the issue that the chapter ostensibly sets out to confront: whether the poet is right to personify Love. The narrator points out that he has given Love three instructive attributes: movement, implying bodily form; laughter; and speech – these last two both implying that Love is human<sup>52</sup>. Although the further implications of these attributes are not discussed, it is suggestive that the narrator admits that his depiction of Love shows the personification as a wayfarer («venire dica moto locale», 16, 2 [xxv, 2]) and as a user of signs, such as laughter and speech, two key attributes of *homo viator*<sup>53</sup>. As occurred in *Vita nova* 4 (IX), the abstraction that is at the heart of the *libello* serves as an exemplar of personhood whose status is then applied to the author himself.

The chapter rests its case for the legitimacy of *prosopopoeia* on the validity of the human subject's intellect in reaching an artistic judgement. Although the narrator does make recourse to the argument from authority in his citation of various classical works to illustrate previous licit uses of *prosopopoeia* (16, 9 [xxv, 9]), it is nonetheless an assertion of the importance of human reason which constitutes the intellectual underpinning to the two most important views propounded: the equality of value between vernacular and Latin literature (16, 4 [xxv, 4]); and the need for poetry to be explicable to its reader (16, 10 [xxv, 10]). In both cases, the narrator depicts the process of literary interpretation as a negotiation between human agents using their capacity for reason rather than as a hierarchical relationship between a human reader and an impersonal quality of *auctoritas*. The Christian view of all human subjects as exiled through sin but nonetheless capable of making a spiritual pilgrimage to God is thus essential to the author/reader relationship as sketched out in *Vita nova* 16 (xxv), since it allows the *auctor* to become a human figure, in this case a vernacular poet, whilst retaining ethical and spiritual legitimacy<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> «Il maggior teorico in cose d'amore, Ovidio, e prima di lui tre autori di poemi tradizionalmente catalogati fra le *historie*, ossia Virgilio [...], Lucano e Omero» (PAOLAZZI, *Legenda sacra e historia poetica* cit., p. 57). For an analysis of the chapter and a comprehensive bibliography of writings which treat it, see ASCOLI, *Making of a Modern Author* cit., pp. 193-201.

<sup>52</sup> «E che io dica di lui come se fosse corpo, ancora come se fosse uomo, appare per tre cose ch'io dico di lui. Dico che lo vidi venire: onde, con ciò sia cosa che venire dica moto locale, e localmente mobile per sé, secondo lo Phylosofo, sia solamente corpo, appare che io ponga Amore essere corpo. Dico anche di lui che ridea, e anche che parlava; le quali cose paiono essere proprie dell'uomo, e spetialmente essere risibile; e però appare ch'io ponga lui essere uomo» (16, 2 [xxv, 2]).

<sup>53</sup> The assertion of signification as a defining human feature can also be connected to the theme of exile. In Augustinian semiotics, all human signs connote our exile from the Kingdom of Heaven because of their incomplete signification and their need to be arranged temporally through syntax in order to have meaning. See M.W. FERGUSON, *St Augustine's Region of Unlikeness: The Crossing of Exile and Language*, in «Georgia Review», XXIX (1975), pp. 842-64, at p. 847; E. LOMBARDI, *Augustine: The Syntax of the Word*, in EAD., *The Syntax of Desire: Language and Love in Augustine, the Modistae and Dante*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2007, pp. 22-76.

<sup>54</sup> This privileging of the value of the human subject's intellect over the argument from authority fits with Minnis's observation of the increased prestige of the poetic and literary author in

Vital though *Vita nova* 16 (XXV) is to the poetics of the work, we should not forget that, in narrative terms, it is an overt digression from the *libello*'s story<sup>55</sup>. As occurred with the digression of *Vita nova* 5 (X-XII), which sealed off the account of Beatrice's greeting, the chapter's exogenous status in the rhetorical continuum of the *libello* prevents its metatextual subject matter from being an end in itself. The theoretical justification of the *Vita nova*'s methods is clearly important to a project which engages so self-consciously with models of reading both sacred and secular, and yet that justification is suspended tantalizingly out of reach. *Vita nova* 16 (XXV)'s status as a digression symbolizes the fact that the theoretical basis on which the work constructs its narrative progress as a literary pilgrimage remains forever estranged from the *libello* itself.

The defining example of the problematic ambiguity inherent in the *Vita nova*'s rhetorical strategies is the account of Beatrice's death, which constitutes an audacious technical poetic demonstration of the lady's significance whose own meaning remains unelucidated. The narrator begins Chapter 18 (XXVII) by saying that now he has shown that Beatrice's effect to be general, he wishes to return to her specific effect on him<sup>56</sup>. He then focuses on the quantity of verse needed to achieve this: a long *canzone* rather than a short sonnet<sup>57</sup>. But this declaration turns out to be a rhetorical device intended to foreground the work's literary structure. The poem lasts only fourteen lines, the same length as a sonnet, before the intervention of a second quotation from *Lamentations*, this time the *incipit*: «Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo! facta est quasi vidua domina gentium» (*Lam.* 1, 1). The narrator then announces that the death of Beatrice occurred while he was writing the poem, hence the interruption<sup>58</sup>. However, he re-

the wake of the increased individualism of late medieval thought, especially amongst theologians and exegetes. See A. MINNIS, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, London, Scolar Press, 1984.

<sup>55</sup> Unlike most other episodes in the *Vita nova*, the chapter does not begin with a temporal adverb suggesting narrative forward motion, but rather with a static adverb of place, suggesting a delay in the *Vita nova*'s pilgrimage: «Potrebbe *qui* dubitare» (16, 1 [XXV, 1], emphasis added). For the structural importance of temporal markers in the *Vita nova*, see Cervigni and Vasta's rejection of Barbi's divisions in the introduction to their version of the text (DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Vita Nuova*, ed. and Eng. trans. by D. CERVIGNI and E. VASTA, Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 1995, pp. 19-44). See also CRISTALDI, *Restituzione del narrare* cit., pp. 147-52, where the author's arrangement of his material in a chronological sequence is seen as «provisional», since the sense of a progression from one episode to the next is prone to interruptions by «exceptional» events such as the death of Beatrice's father in Chapter 13 (XXII).

<sup>56</sup> «E veggendo nel mio pensiero che io non avea detto di quello che al presente tempo adoperava in me, pareami defectivamente avere parlato. E però propuosi di dire parole nelle quali io dicessi come mi pareva essere disposto alla sua operatione, e come operava in me la sua virtute» (18, 1-2 [XXVII, 1-2]).

<sup>57</sup> «E non credendo potere ciò narrare in brevitate di sonetto, cominciai allora una canzone» (18, 2 [XXVII, 2]). The poem's *incipit* reinforces this impression of a necessary *amplificatio*. Note also Holmes's observation that, in the manuscript tradition, «this poem is laid out [...] like a *canzone*-stanza, not like a sonnet» (HOLMES, *Assembling* cit., p. 215).

<sup>58</sup> The critical consensus is that *Si lungiamente* was written as a single-stanza *canzone* and this «interruption» would thus be part of the *Vita nova*'s editorial fiction. See *Rime giovanili*, ed. by BAROLINI cit., pp. 416-20.

fuses to address the death directly in the prose and delves instead into the numerological significance of the date on which Beatrice departed this world (19, 2-7 [XXVIII, 2-XXIX, 4])<sup>59</sup>.

The quotation from *Lamentations*, which was familiar to medieval readers as the opening of the first lesson in the Eastertide office of *Tenebrae*, stresses the believer's distance from God and foreshadows Augustine's *civitas terrena* in its image of the widowed city<sup>60</sup>. This sense of spiritual exile is, as Martinez has pointed out, replicated rhetorically via a disruption to all three categories of writing in the *Vita nova*: the narrative prose, which refuses to discuss Beatrice's death; the verse, which is interrupted; and the exegetical *divisioni*, which are left out entirely and thereafter shifted in position<sup>61</sup>.

In the absence of any direct consideration of the lady's death, surely the capital event of the *libello*'s plot, these structural upheavals bear the onus of communicating the significance of Beatrice's absence. The announcement that the intended effect of moving the *divisioni* is to mirror the widowed nature of the city after Beatrice's death makes the rhetoric of the *libello* a performative representation of spiritual exile connected to the Jerusalem of *Lamentations* by the cognate pair «vidua/vedova»<sup>62</sup>. This is the first in a series of experimental moves that last until the *donna pietosa* episode in Chapter 24 (xxxv): next the narrator simulates another man's voice (21-22 [xxxii-xxxiii]); then he supplies two beginnings to a sonnet (23, 7-8 [xxxiv, 7-8]) – alternately undermining the integrity of the two constituent figures of the lyric poem, the authorial voice and the poetic form.

This strategy of controlled rhetorical disruption serves more than adequately to represent the psychic and spiritual hardship of separation from the narrator's object of desire, but it also undermines the integrity of the fundamentally rhetorical process of «asemplare» (1, 1 [1, 1]) with which the narrator set out to clarify Beatrice's virtue. As occurred with the casting of doubt upon the validity of the self-reflexive practice of addressing the poet's own *ballata* (5, 24 [xii, 17]), the problematizing of the *libello*'s rhetorical strategies places the emphasis of its spiritual journey on the continuity of the author's progress towards understanding in spite of the setback represented by Beatrice's death. This path appears to be intact, as the poet continues to praise Beatrice's memory in the lyrics of Chapters

<sup>59</sup> Singleton considers that this numerological discussion does constitute writing about Beatrice's death «in a way» (SINGLETON, *Essay* cit., p. 12), since it shows «that Beatrice was a miracle» (ivi, p. 13). In effect, he too casts the prose as performing rather than demonstrating the meaning of Beatrice's death. Moreover, such a reading surely makes the episode a willed obscurity of the type discussed above at note 8.

<sup>60</sup> The traditional order of *Tenebrae* draws its three lessons from *Lamentations*, Augustine's Psalm commentaries, and Paul's epistles, making a palpable association between this quotation and two of the principal exponents of *peregrinatio*. See D. STEVENS, *Tenebrae*, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. by Catholic University of America, t. XIII, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1967, pp. 1007-09.

<sup>61</sup> MARTINEZ, *Mourning Beatrice* cit., 17.

<sup>62</sup> «Acciò che questa canzone paia *rimanere più vedova* dopo lo suo fine, la dividerò prima ch'io la scriva; e cotale modo terrò da qui innanzi» (20, 2 [xxxii, 2], emphasis added). For the *Vita nova* as performance, see GRAGNOLATI, *Trasformazione e assenze* cit.

22 and 23 (XXXIII and XXXIV), albeit in technically unorthodox ways. Although the tenor of the verse becomes more Cavalcantian, with pessimistic calls to death to end the poetic “I”’s amorous suffering<sup>63</sup>, there are also suggestions in the verse and prose of these chapters that the speech act of poetry may bring some solace to the loss the narrator feels<sup>64</sup>.

However, these chapters of rhetorical fracture give way to the cryptic *donna pietosa* episode, in which the narrator abandons the love of Beatrice for another woman, a digression from the *libello*’s declared path towards understanding of Dante’s beloved unmatched even by the *donna schermo* episodes. The poems of this section return to formal normality, although the *divisioni* are still preposed and in two cases forswear any need for division (Chapters 24, 25 [XXXV, XXXVI]). Instead it is the poet who finds himself riven and he repeatedly expresses his internal struggles: between eyes and heart (26 [XXXVII]); between reason and appetite (27 [XXXVIII]). The shape of the latter part of the *libello* thus follows a pattern familiar from earlier in the work, whereby text and author alternate in playing the part of exile and pilgrim.

The *libello*’s final *ymaginatione* provides the egress from this hall of mirrors. This time the narrator sees Beatrice herself, arrayed in the red garment in which she appeared in the first *visione* of the work (28, 1 [XXXIX, 1]). The *ymaginatione* provides the impetus for the narrator to unite both himself and his poem, in the sonnet *Lasso, per forza di molti sospiri*, which again remains undivided. This unity of authorial self and of text leads into three chapters (29-31 [XL-XLII]), which constitute an epilogue written under the sign of pilgrimage<sup>65</sup>: a paradoxically mobile point of arrival for the final stage of the *Vita nova*’s narrative. This closing section of the *Vita nova* develops the poetics of distance beloved of Dante’s Romance predecessors such as Cavalcanti and Jaufré Rudel into an expression of ineffability that symbolizes man’s incomplete and uncompletable effort to bridge the gap between subject and deity by human means<sup>66</sup>.

Following the precedent of *Vita nova* 2, the pilgrimage theme appears bodily at first, in Chapter 29 (XL), where the narrator sees a group of pilgrims passing through his city at Eastertide:

In quel tempo che molta gente va per vedere quella ymagine benedecta la quale Gesocristo lasciò a nnoi per exemplo della Sua bellissima figura, la quale vede la mia donna gloriosamente, che alquanti peregrini passavano per una via, la quale è quasi mezzo della cittade ove nacque e vivette e morio la gentilissima donna, e andavano,

<sup>63</sup> «Ond’io chiamo la Morte, / come soave e dolce mio riposo; / e dico ‘Vieni a me!’ con tanto amore / che sono astioso – di chiunque more» (22, 6 [XXXIII, 6]).

<sup>64</sup> «Chiamo Beatrice e dico: ‘Or se’ tu morta?’ / E mentre ch’io la chiamo, mi conforta» (20, 14 [XXXI, 14]). See also Chapter 23 (XXXIV), where Dante chooses to explain his distraction on the anniversary of Beatrice’s death via the two-headed sonnet *Era venuta nella mente mia*. For the death of the saint as a *transitus felix* in Franciscan hagiography, see BRANCA, *Poetica del rinnovamento* cit., pp. 53-54.

<sup>65</sup> PICONE, “*Peregrinus Amoris*” cit., p. 182.

<sup>66</sup> PICONE, “*Peregrinus Amoris*” cit., p. 192.

secondo che mi parve, molto pensosi. (29, 1 [XL, 1])

The walkers function as a hypostatization of the biblical motif of exile so prevalent in the *Vita nova*. Like Beatrice, they are described as «pass[are] per una via», highlighting the unity of purpose between their journey to see the Veronica and Beatrice's pilgrimage on the Earth to Heaven. The mention of Easter, the pilgrims' mournful aspect, and the bereft air which the narrator ascribes to the «città dolente» after Beatrice's death (29, 9 [XL, 9]) all evoke the hardship and loss typical of the *Vita nova*'s plangent evocations of *Lamentations* and troubadour *amor de lonh*<sup>67</sup>. Moreover, the pilgrims' desire is for something beyond the sight of the Veronica, in a clear analogy to the poet's desire for his absent lady<sup>68</sup>.

As the narrator announces the sonnet's *incipit* he embarks on yet another digression, this time on the meanings of the word «peregrini»:

Dissi «peregrini» secondo la larga significazione del vocabolo, ché peregrini si possono intendere in due modi, in uno largo e in uno stretto: in largo, in quanto è peregrino chiunque è fuori della sua patria; in modo stretto non s'intende peregrino se non chi va verso la Casa di Sa' Iacopo o riede. (29, 6 [XL, 6])

The digression makes clear that these pilgrims could more precisely be called «romei», since their destination is Rome, not Santiago de Compostela (29, 7 [XL, 7]). Their inclusion under the more general rubric «peregrini» is indubitably significant, since it makes the pilgrims such simply by means of their absence from home. The link from these walkers in exile to the narrator's own internal estrangement from his lady will be confirmed in the succeeding chapter where the phrase «spirito peregrino» is glossed: «E chiamolo allora "spirito peregrino", acciò che spiritualmente va lassù e, sì come peregrino lo quale è fuori della sua patria, vi stae» (30, 5 [XLI, 5])<sup>69</sup>.

The inclusion of the concept of pilgrimage in another aside classes it along with the now extensive list of important subjects – Beatrice's greeting, the theory of poetry, the meaning of the number nine, even the *donna pietosa* – whose discussion in a digression figures them as the narrative equivalent of *stabula* – stag-

<sup>67</sup> See MARTINEZ, *Mourning Beatrice* cit., pp. 10-13 for a fuller elucidation of how this chapter and its lyric draw together the scattered references to *Lamentations* throughout the *Vita nova*. Carrai argues that Dante returns to the threnodic motif here «per marcare la circolarità del tema del pianto e dell'invito a partecipare al dolore del poeta» (CARRAI, *Dante elegiaco* cit., p. 27). But this reading overlooks the motif of progression that the pilgrims introduce into the chapter and its sonnet, suggesting that the retrospective glance of elegy cannot be seen as the chapter's (or indeed the *libello*'s) prime characteristic, as Carrai would have us believe. A closer analogue might be Bonaventure's exhortation to love death: «Quam mortem qui diligit videre potest Deum, quia indubitanter verum est: Non videbit me homo et vivet. Moriamur igitur et ingrediamur in caliginem, imponamus silentium sollicitudinibus, concupiscentiis et phantasmatis; transeamus cum Christo crucifixo ex hoc mundo ad Patrem» (BONAVENTURE, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* VII, 6).

<sup>68</sup> «Deh, peregrini, che pensosi andate / forse di cosa che non v'è presente» (29, 9 [XL, 9]).

<sup>69</sup> For the pilgrims' exemplary status, see PICONE, «*Peregrinus Amoris*» cit., p. 186.

ing points but not end points – in the *Vita nova*'s rhetorical journey. Pilgrimage thus suffers the same fate as these other matters of being simultaneously thematically highlighted and rhetorically marginalized, with the important proviso that it was the equation between narrative and pilgrimage that underpinned the nuance of inadequacy attaching to material included in digressions in the first place. In the paradoxical marginalization of the pilgrimage motif via its exclusion from the *Vita nova*'s narrative of pilgrimage, we can begin to see how this consciously problematic strategy of communicating ineffability is constructed.

The impossible communicative responsibility belongs to the *libello*'s final two chapters, which flank the sonnet *Oltre la spera che più larga gira*. These chapters engage with the lyric device of the *congedo*, or dismissal, in order to situate first the work and then the poet as *viatores* through hardship towards transcendence<sup>70</sup>.

The penultimate chapter functions as a microcosmic recapitulation of the work's own structure. It shows the narrator's past self writing a new poem at the request of a pair of noble ladies and collecting previous poems (*Deh, peregrini* and *Venite a 'ntender*) to accompany it – making him both an *auctor* and a *compilator*, where before the two functions have been divided, with the past self writing the poems and the present self collecting them<sup>71</sup>. Now we see a working demonstration of the *Vita nova*'s new model of the vernacular author as poet and self-commentator. The positioning of the episode at the end of the work makes the narrator's missive reminiscent of the many Occitan and Italian lyrics that end with the poet alienating himself from his own poem and sending it out to its performer or reader<sup>72</sup>.

However, unlike its lyric predecessors, the *libello* does not end on that note, but rather goes on to consider the poet figure as he remains after having delivered

<sup>70</sup> «Di colpo si chiarisce l'intima necessità di quegli istituti poetici, come la *tornada* o il *congedo*, che sembrano destinati unicamente a notificare e, quasi, a enunciare la fine del poema, come se questo ne avesse bisogno, come se la fine implicasse per la poesia una catastrofe e una perdita d'identità tanto irreperabili da esigere il dispiegamento di mezzi metrici e semantici affatto particolari» (G. AGAMBEN, *La fine del poema*, in Id., *Categorie italiane*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1996, pp. 113-19, at p. 116).

<sup>71</sup> For the four figures of the medieval *scriptorium* – *scriptor*, *compiler*, *commentator*, and *auctor* – see PICONE, «*Vita Nuova* fra autobiografia cit., p. 66; M. PICONE, *Leggere la «Commedia» di Dante*, in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. «Inferno»*, ed. by G. Güntert and M. Picone, Firenze, Cesati, 2000, 13-25, at pp. 15-16.

<sup>72</sup> I am indebted to Dr Robert S.C. Gordon of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge for comments made to me during the *viva voce* examination of my PhD thesis on December 18, 2008, which gave me the initial impetus to make the comparisons between the *congedo* and the discourse of exile that inform this section of my essay. For the *congedo* and issues of exile in the Italian and Occitan lyric, see C. KEEN, «*Va, mia canzone*»: *Transmission and the «Congedo» in Medieval Exile Lyrics*, in «*Italian Studies*», LXIV (2009), pp. 183-97. Note, however, that Keen gives an account of the political and rhetorical significance of exile in almost exclusively secular terms, without highlighting the important contributions of the theological, exegetical and hagiographical context. Instead, the critic somewhat anachronistically suggests that incorporating a religious reading of exile would cause «the specifics of [...] politics to be subordinated within a universalizing Christian perspective» (ivi, p. 192).

his *congedo*, bereft of both poem and interlocutor. It has been shown that the very final chapter of the *Vita nova* (31 [XLII]) takes a distinctly different narratological approach from the rest of the work, since it is forward looking and casts the present narrator as a writer of future poems as well as a commentator who looks back on previous poetic achievements<sup>73</sup>. Chapter 31 (XLII) begins with the cryptic phrase, «apresso questo sonetto» (31, 1 [XLII, 1]), before alluding to the *visione* of Beatrice in glory. The prose leaves some considerable doubt over the order of events, since the narrator also claims to have sent the three collected sonnets to his readers after writing *Oltre la spera* and it is not clear whether this occurs before or after the *visione*<sup>74</sup>. The effect is to undo the narrative structure of the whole *libello*, collapsing its previously rigorous adherence to a temporal separation between the two incarnations of the author.

The trajectory of the work towards the expression of beatitude now tails away and we are left instead to concentrate on the figure of the poet. Our final and definitive vision of the author finds him suspended between pilgrimage and exile. He is at this point unable to recount and divide his unsayable vision of Beatrice in glory, since, despite his certainty of her salvation, the suitable rhetorical continuum in which to «tractare di lei» (31, 1 [XLII, 1]) remains as far off as it has been during the *Vita nova*'s previous journeys towards the *stabula* of *Donne ch'avete* and *Si lungiamente*. The *città dolente* of the calques of *Lamentations* will thus remain the poet's home for the foreseeable future<sup>75</sup>. Yet the exile motif's theological origins are respected to the last, and so the possibility of transcen-

<sup>73</sup>«This chapter [31 (XLII)] stands out simply by virtue of its unusual mixture of time and narrative tense. Aside from this basic peculiarity, however, Chapter XLII [31] is unique in that it does away with the temporal separation of the *Vita Nuova*'s narrative and poetic voices» (T. LEVERS, *The Image of Authorship in the Final Chapter of the «Vita Nuova»*, in «Italian Studies», LVII (2002), pp. 5-19 at p. 15).

<sup>74</sup>This difficulty stems, as Levers notes, from the fact that the phrase «apresso questo sonetto» is difficult to interpret in strict chronological terms, since a sonnet is not an “event” in the same way as a screen lady leaving the narrator's city (LEVERS, *Image of Authorship* cit., p. 16; see also PAOLAZZI, *Legenda sacra e historia poetica* cit., p. 52). Cristaldi has attempted to establish a definition of “event” free of its modern connotations of «impersonalità e pertanto l'assenza di intenzione» (CRISTALDI, *Restituzione del narrare* cit., p. 158 and cfr. ivi, pp. 158-64). The critic argues that the *Vita nova* «manovra sulla restante animazione dei moti interni, ed in occasione del progetto scrittoria la svincola dalla stessa fisiologia delle *passiones* per insinuare [...] il senso dell'incentivo trascendente» (ivi, p. 162). *Oltre la spera* could therefore be seen as a textual index of an internal *motus*; nevertheless the problem of chronology remains with regard to when the sonnet was composed and, moreover, the prose clearly foregrounds this issue.

<sup>75</sup>Carrai suggests that this final chapter's heavenward gaze represents an overturning of Orpheus's fateful glance backwards and down towards Hades, evoked at *Consolatio philosophiae* III, metrum 12, which would therefore redeem «il dolore stesso che ha sostenuto il racconto elegiaco» (CARRAI, *Dante elegiaco* cit., p. 75). As I argued above (note 67), I am sceptical that Carrai's emphasis on the elegiac and the mournful can give an accurate account of a work whose title and emphasis on narrative succession both suggest a persistence nuance of progress; nonetheless it is noteworthy how my reading converges with his on the importance of maintaining the integrity of the *Vita nova*'s more dolorous sections even in the light of the final apotheosis. Such an emphasis is necessary if we are to avoid following Singleton – and with him the various critics who have hypothesized a second redaction of the *libello* – in suggesting that «we are not told that more will not



dence is still asserted: we are left in no doubt that Beatrice is in glory. Moreover, despite the narrator's inability to arrive at an expression of this transcendence during the *Vita nova*, the eventual solution will not necessitate the leaving behind of Dante's writings about his lady; rather it will require further such endeavours, effectively theologizing the act and the inevitable failure of the poet's work, including Chapter 31 (XLII) itself, by making it a necessary component of spiritual progress.

Giorgio Agamben has described the "failure" of poetry that the end of the work represents in terms of a tension between sound and sense which resolves temporarily with each renewal of the poem's patterned structure, only to be left suspended as the final line gives way to silence<sup>76</sup>. The final chapters of the *Vita nova* use this inevitable suspension inherent to the patterned finitude of the literary text as a means to perform for the reader their evocation of a poet's unfinished pilgrimage through the *civitas terrena*. The effect is to inscribe together the imperfect figures of the vernacular author and his unfinishable work in the authoritative book of salvation history.

This essay has shown how the *libello* lends authority to its experimentation by making use of a palette of images – the traveller, the road, the city, and the subjective experiences of hardship and loss – associated with an influential and utterly orthodox concept in Christian thought: terrestrial life as spiritual exile. The innate duality of the pilgrim/exile motif means that Dante the exile is able to broach new ground without repudiating the continuity between Dante the pilgrim and his predecessors, be they vernacular poets or Christian writers. The motif of exile is applied not only to the author figure of the work, but, vitally, to the text itself as well, allowing the concept's complementary nuances of progress and crisis to alternate between the two constant figures of any literary work. These starkly unreconciled binaries lend *Vita nova* its cryptic air; yet they are also at the centre of its extraordinary fascination. The authoritative duality of pilgrimage and exile lends ideological legitimacy to the *Vita nova*'s ambiguity.

be written down under the rubric headed *Incipit Vita Nova*» (SINGLETON, *Essay on the «Vita Nuova»* cit., p. 103; for the hypothetical second redaction, see M. MARTI, *Vita e morte della presunta doppia redazione della «Vita Nuova»*, in *\*Studi in onore di Italo Siciliano*, Roma, Ateneo, 1965, pp. 657-69).

<sup>76</sup> «Il poema cade segnando ancora una volta l'opposizione del semiotico e del semantico, così che il suono sembra consegnato per sempre al suono e il senso rimesso al senso. La doppia intensità che anima la lingua non si placa in una comprensione ultima ma sprofonda, per così dire, nel silenzio in una caduta senza fine. In questo modo il poema svela lo scopo della sua orgogliosa strategia: che la lingua riesca alla fine a comunicare stessa, senza restare non detta in ciò che dice» (AGAMBEN, *La fine del poema* cit., p. 119).