

As Francesca eloquently tells her story, Paolo weeps in silence. I say "her" story quite deliberately, for she is not only its protagonist but also its narrator.

We do not encounter many female characters in the *Comedy*, and this is particularly true of the first *cantica*, so it is significant that she is, in the poem, the very first soul who speaks, just as it is significant that the first theme to be explored is courtly love.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this article is to discuss Dante's reasons for choosing to explore the theme of courtly love from a female perspective, as this procedure is unusual in the literature of the times, as it is in Dante's case also. Beatrice, in fact, never speaks in any of Dante's earlier poems. The only women who are reported to speak in the *Vita Nuova* (XVIII) are the women who have "intelletto d'amore;" however, while in the prose comment they represent an attentive and critical female reading public, in the poem itself, where they are again speechless, they are called upon to serve as witnesses to Dante's spiritual and poetical awakening.

In Francesca's story the characters and the events are given as historically true, but at the same time they replicate those that populate the romantic literature familiar to Dante's readers; moreover, the language of Francesca's narrative echoes the language of courtly love poetry. The ethical implications of the ideal of courtly love are thus linked to the problem of the relationship between literature and life. It is through the exploration of this relationship that I hope to show the reasons for Dante's choice.

The search for the meaning of love, as old as love poetry itself, was not the idle pastime of poets but the focus of an important ideological debate in which moral and social values were questioned, along with artistic ones.<sup>2</sup>

In Dante's "libro della memoria" (*Vita Nuova*) we find that it is love that engenders writing, and consequently that the poet's woman, "la gloriosa donna de la mia mente," engenders not only a new kind of love but also a new kind of poetry; spiritual rebirth is thus one with poetical rebirth. The concepts of the nature and purpose of love and poetry develop along parallel lines throughout years of human experience and poetic experimentation; so, it is fitting that in the *Comedy* Dante should begin his voyage, in which the complexity of human reality is bound with its linguistic representation, with the exploration of the rhetoric of "courtly love;" it is fitting that he should revisit, in other words, his own poetical beginnings, and his own "dubbiosi disiri."

The image of the book is central to the entire poem, so much so that it has been said that the *Comedy* is "a book about books" and that the poem can be read as an allegory of its possible reading;<sup>3</sup> thus it is, too, in Francesca's narration. The importance of the texts read by Paolo and Francesca in the development and outcome of their love, establishes the relationship between literature and life as the theme of the episode. Francesca's speech, in calling "galeotto" the ancient text of *Lancelot du Lac*, and in paraphrasing Dante's poem *Amore e 'l cor gentil*, which in turn had paraphrased Guinizelli's *Al cor gentil*, shows that love poetry itself (including Dante's own) is open to scrutiny here.

If Francesca is to be taken as a historically real woman and reader, then who better than she, as protagonist of a love story in which life imitates art, can act as critic of a literature that preached, or seemed to preach, the indivisibility of love and the gentle heart, and thus the inevitability of love.

But if the lesson regarding the ethical responsibility of the authors is clear, the responsibility of the readers is equally clear; Francesca should have been just as critical of the things she read while she was alive. It can, in fact, be argued that there is nothing in Guinizelli's text, nor in Dante's interpretation of it, that would prompt such a deterministic reading, and that Francesca, doubtless like many others, had committed to memory only a few lines taken out of context and made them a credo. Moleta maintains that in *Inf.* V the

biographical collocation of Francesca's use of the canzone is presented as an antecedent to his own. Through *Inf.* V he invites us to see that he took up *Al cor gentil* partly so as to salvage the canzone from a deterministic reading which had been put on it in some provincial quarters by amateurs who could only read selected portions of it back into familiar texts like the *De amore*, and who, perhaps because they ignored the difficult fifth stanza (she conflates only lines 1 and 11), were blind and deaf to the implications of Guinizelli's exalted and 'innocent' lyricism.<sup>4</sup>

Although agreeing with this interpretation, I do not believe, as Moleta does,<sup>5</sup> along with much of the traditional criticism, that Guinizelli's "innocence" necessarily implies that Francesca is doubly guilty: of misreading love poetry while she was alive and now, in hell, when her credo has plainly been proved false, of wilful and unrepentant manipulation of the text. Nor do I think that a claim to the moral superiority of *stilnuovo* poetry is implied here.<sup>6</sup>

First of all, we should remind ourselves of the fact that Francesca is not in hell because she did not possess the analytical skills of an expert critic; she is there for adultery, a sin explicitly condemned by social rules and Christian ethics she could not have ignored. Secondly, if she were deliberately manipulating the text to prove the innocence of her belief, then she could not function at the same time as a critic of the literature from which she had extrapolated it; instead, the fact that she calls "galeotto" the text and author of *Lancelot*, demonstrates the directness and awareness of her criticism.

The ambiguity inherent in Francesca's character (which has made critics see her either as a victim and romantic heroine, or as a temptress and deceiver) lies in the nature of her awareness, torn as she is between the reality of sin and the reality of a love she still feels and cannot deny, offended by the suddenness and cruelty of her end, bewildered, *in fine*, by the coexistence, in her thoughts and actions, of nobility and sinfulness, of the beauty and falsity of the images of love. It is this aesthetic and emotional dilemma that must be fully recreated by Dante if future readers are to be better equipped than Francesca.

Finally, it should be noted that Francesca is not 'misquoting' a text, but reciting a maxim which has a complex literary origin. If Francesca gathers *fiori* without discriminating between the "old" and "new" style (after all, even an expert poet and critic such as Bonaggiunta [*Purg.* XXIV] confesses his difficulty in understanding the difference "da l'uno a l'altro stilo"), it may be that Dante is acknowledging that, despite the good intentions, the images and motifs which the *stilnuovo* poems contained did not appear sufficiently dissimilar from those found in other poetic "maniere." If this were not the case, Dante would not have felt the need to manifest his intentions, or indeed to "prove" the rectitude of his intentions, with the aid of a prose commentary to his poem.

In the *Comedy* there is no use of prosymetrum nor of allegorical abstractions and personifications; there are instead dialogues with real people, thus woman too enters the sphere of reality where language is the common means of communication and understanding: Beatrice, no longer internal image or silent muse, regains her human dimension even as "beatrice-beata;" the woman who would not, when she was alive, be deceived by the poet's rhetoric, now intervenes as 'maestra' with the power of her own "plain" language. Francesca is the other side of linguistic disenfranchisement, unable to transform the borrowed eloquence except by filtering it down to a maxim.

So, to return to the original issue, Dante's reasons for choosing to explore the theme of courtly love from a female perspective range from historical to personal, from social to literary.

As we know, vernacular poetry had its first audience in the court<sup>7</sup> (thus, of course, the term "courtly love"), and it is to the court that we must return to understand, firstly, the social consequences of love poetry, and, secondly, the reciprocal influence between this poetry and the real world, as society changed.

In the court then, the king and queen, or the "signore" and his lady, were not only political leaders but also the heads of a rather extended 'family' for whose education and conduct they were responsible. Aristocratic youths were sent to court to be educated, thus ensuring a good career for themselves. To succeed, it was of course essential to win the favour of their lord, and, in times of peace especially, this was achieved by paying homage to his lady. It was no less essential to marry well, and for this, too, the benevolence of the lord and lady was needed. This explains why so many love stories have protagonists such as Lancelot and Guinevere, a knight (sometimes the poet himself) and the lady, and why proving one's love became synonymous with proving one's valour.

I believe that the favour in which love poetry was held within the court was largely due to two factors: the aspirations and educative goals of these youths. The strict codes of behaviour prescribed by the poet for the lover could well have served to control the sexuality of the young knights, to protect the young women at court, to preserve a social order based on carefully planned marriages.<sup>8</sup>

Although it is, both in real and in poetic terms, a "game," the very fact that the lover pledges to serve his lady and is willing to wait forever (or so he says) for the final "dono," means that the pleasure love can give is no longer based solely on the final conquest, but also on the desire, on the expectation. This indubitably "male" erotic game (it is the man who makes the rules and writes the script) proves beneficial to women who are given more power in matters of love than they had previously enjoyed, thanks to the creation of the new image of woman as a superior creature to be served and obeyed, because it eventually educates the man to aspire to the woman's heart as well as to her sexual favours. The wider social implications of this amorous code are very important as it eventually permeates middle class culture, particularly in Italy. As the middle class lover assimilates the principle guiding his aristocratic counterpart, whereby courtly love was a measure of true nobility and refinement, we come to witness, in the new social context, the evolution of the concept of nobility and "cortesia," to the point where they become divorced from social status and turn into an exclusively spiritual value. Along the same lines the image and role of woman are transformed: her superiority is spiritual rather than social, she is more virtuous than the man. This progress brings about marked changes in the content and form of poetry. On the one hand, the concept of love and the image of woman come ever closer

to the religious sphere (we notice, in fact, many similarities in the language and imagery of love and religious poetry), so that love for a virtuous woman becomes a direct route to God and paradise. Despite these lofty ideals there is, on the other hand, an injection of realism into poetry. I am not referring only to the so-called "poesia realistica": even the most rarefied "poesia aulica" incorporates physical surroundings and customs peculiar to that social class. Most importantly, the different images of woman, from Queen Guinevere to Giovanna and Beatrice, down to the surprising image of Becchina, reflect, quite unmistakably, differences in time, place and social reality. In this sense, then, Paolo and Francesca are a "modern" couple replacing more famous lovers whose socio-temporal reality is by now remote. The impact that Paolo and Francesca's story had on Dante's immediate audience depended greatly on the fact that they were presented as real people, not as a literary memory.

Having said this, it is important to note that, despite all these changes, and even if the courting rituals may signify the beginning of a change in attitudes, the new image of woman (ever so removed from reality) does not translate into any real acquisition of power or improved social condition; nor does it give woman a voice either in reality or in fiction: the woman of French, Provençal and Italian poetry (from the Sicilians to the *stilnovisti*), remains by and large silent. The most notable occasions in which she speaks are in the *malmaritata* poems, in the *tenzoni* and in some *pasturella* poems; and it is in these that, for obvious reasons, societal values have greater prominence. There are of course other poets who use a female voice in their poems, but this rhetorical device does not produce any real change in content or images; for this reason the *pasturella* and *tenzone* forms are more significant since in them, consisting as they do of dialogues, the poets attempt to differentiate the female voice from the male.

The *pasturella* form (exemplified in the poems of the famous misogynist Marcabru)<sup>9</sup> features a socially inferior woman (a shepherdess) who is fair game for any male who happens to come along and who will only pretend to defend her virtue, often using a far more refined, "courteous" language than she could realistically be expected to possess. The *tenzone* form assumes a fictitious equality of voice; nevertheless, it is taken altogether for granted that the woman, following a ritual promise of discreetness by the man, will finally give in to his requests. The exceptions to this rule are Guittone d'Arezzo and Cecco Angiolieri, though in very different ways.

In Guittone's *Tenzone di Uomo e di Donna*,<sup>10</sup> a profound change occurs: the woman's rhetorical, logical and ethical attributes are decidedly superior to the man's, and the flimsiness and fraudulent nature of his arguments are openly exposed as he is forced by the unbending woman to

employ all the techniques of the *ars amandi*. He leaves her in the end saying that he is going to look for a woman more "courteous" than she is; but this is quite clearly no victory, as he, trapped in his own rhetoric, remains deaf to the logic and morality of her arguments. As Guittone becomes critical of the tradition he had inherited and embraced, he embarks on a dual campaign to warn other poets of their unrealistic and fraudulent words, and to warn women to beware male deception.<sup>11</sup> Guittone is, as far as I know, the only poet who states that woman is superior by "nature" and by "reason," and that she is more loved by God than man is. Dante would never claim such a thing: in the *De vulgari eloquentia* (I, iv, 1-3), for instance, he goes to the trouble of proving that it is unreasonable to believe that Eve was the first human being to speak; it had to have been Adam. Although in the *Vita Nuova* he, like Guittone, decides to address only women, in his case, only specific women (le "donne the hanno intelletto d'amore" (XVIII)), choosing them both as his public and his conscience, Beatrice never speaks; in fact, his new "matera" (*la lode*: disinterested praise) is born out of her silence, as she denies him even her greeting, and, in becoming the object of his praise, she is no longer addressed directly (Dante will speak of her and only to these women). In the *Convivio* we see a further development of this, in the artificial manner in which Dante opts for an allegorical explanation of his love poetry, at the expense of the literal one of the *Vita Nuova*: whereas in the latter Beatrice was both real woman and "miracle," and was "beatrice" because "beata" in paradise, in the former the real woman is supplanted by a personification (*la "donna gentile" = la filosofia*). Beatrice in fact becomes real and acquires a voice only in the Earthly Paradise (*Purg.* XXX).

The *poesia giocosa*, especially the many poems of Cecco Angiolieri, made up of extraordinarily lively dialogues between himself and Becchina, also have a very important role in Dante's poetic development. One of the greatest merits of the *poesia giocosa*, and, again, especially of Cecco's poems, is that of questioning the assumptions and the claims to higher truth made by the *poesia aulica*.<sup>12</sup> While it cannot be said that the content of this poetry is more "realistic," because the manner in which the content is presented is just as extreme as that of the *poesia aulica*, what this poetry does do is to open up explicitly the question of the relationship between literature and life, and to act as a constant reminder of the ludic nature of art, of the reality of the "game" (of which I spoke earlier) which many poets, and the *stilnovisti* most of all, had ended up taking too seriously and too literally. The *stilnovisti*, in fact, having taken to the farthest extremes both the notion of the interiority of love and the image of woman, had caused a greater rift between art and reality and had concealed more than other poets - this is particularly true of

Dante, and much less of Cavalcanti - the erotic origins of courtly love, with the result that their poetry was potentially more dangerous for readers such as those Francesca represents.

There is no doubt that these very different lessons imparted by Guittone and Cecco, had a profound effect on Dante's spiritual and poetical growth, on the manner in which he continues to rethink the meaning of love and the purpose of art. So, in the *Comedy*, as he confronts the complexity of human reality, he faces the problem of reading and of writing in relation to the ambitious ethical mission with which he entrusts poetry.

Love and woman had come to represent so many things, that Dante was driven to ask what relationship there was between love and society, love and the eternal, the image of woman and the real woman who never spoke with her own voice. The real woman had in the meantime been caught up, as Francesca shows, in the rhetorical constructs of male poets; the consequence of this was either deception, or, more often than not, self-deception. Paolo and Francesca are proof of such self-deception which still holds them, despite the knowledge that they are responsible for their sin.

Francesca represents the arguably new phenomenon of an avid female reading public which is also more vulnerable to the appeal that this poetic image of woman holds.<sup>13</sup> This is because, though speechless in real life, she can see herself as protagonist in the scenario of courting rituals, holding as she does the power to decide the lover's fate; this fictitious image is therefore all the more confusing for her as it is doubly removed from her real life experience where she has no decision-making power. It is now quite clear why it should be Francesca, and not Paolo, who narrates their story, voicing her experience as reader, as lover, and ultimately as woman.

By trying to live up to the ideals of courtly love, Francesca had endeavoured to escape the narrowness of a life circumscribed by the guarded domesticity of her father's and then of her husband's households, according to the *mores* of an epoch in which marriage, with its definite and explicit political and economic purposes, was an institution created to protect social order and to ensure, by strict vigilance, rightful heirs for the preservation of the male lineage of the family. No wonder, then, that guardians and advisers, usually members of the clergy, in compiling guides for the education of young women, had to pay particular attention to the reading material suited to that purpose.<sup>14</sup> As we know, Francesca's reading was not restricted to such edifying texts.

A brief comparison with Pia (*Purg.* V) may be useful at this point. The obvious similarity between her and Francesca lies in their common life experience as guarded daughters and wives; both women feel offended

by their defenselessness before the quasi anonymous dark figure of a husband who has fully sanctioned power of life and death over them.

Both Francesca and Pia begin by expressing courteous concern for the traveller ("O animal grazioso e benigno, // the visitando vai per l'aer perso // not the tignemmo it mondo di sanguigno; // se fosse amico it re dell'universo, // not pregheremo lui per tua pace, // poi the hai pietà del nostro mal perverso" [88-93], and "Deh, quando to sarai tornato al mondo, // e riposato della lunga via // seguitò it terzo spirito al secondo, // ricorditi di me the son la Pia" [130-133]); both then continue by specifying their geographical origins ("Siede la terra, dove nata fui, // su la marina dove it Po discende // per aver pace co' seguaci sui" [97-99], and "Siena mi fè; disfecemi Maremma;" [134]); and end with a reference to their violent death ("Caina attende chi vita ci spense 1107] and "salsi colui the 'nmanellata pria // disponando m'avea con la sua gemma" [135-136]).

Yet there is an essential difference between the speeches of the two women: unlike Pia's splendidly essential speech, which could, in this context, be read as a rejection of male rhetoric, Francesca's is striking for its elaborate and effective eloquence. It is precisely in this that we can pinpoint the problem. As the explanation of her drama is supported by indirect quotations,<sup>15</sup> she is, in fact, using someone else's language, a male rhetoric. She does not and cannot have her own language, but she recalls this rhetoric and makes us experience its charm.

The charm is, however, recreated indirectly: the lines we seem to recognize are in reality but echoes of love poems we, and Dante, have read. Francesca's growing love and illusion, and sudden end, are reflected in the crescendo ("Amor ... Amor ... Amor") abruptly truncated, as was her life, by 'morte'; the rhythmic qualities of these lines express her state of mind, the brevity with which her love story reached its peak and was destroyed, but the maxim she voices here is made up of words without images, so it is, as I said earlier, a male rhetoric in which images and similes have been filtered out; in other words, one devoid of its original charm and persuasion. In fact, Francesca is eliminating precisely all the things which had bound her to that credo; hence, though aware that the book was "galeotto," she is not aware of the means its author used to make it so. Her language does not prove to be a tool for understanding and, ultimately, remains ambiguous for the reader, divided between pity for her sad story and suspicion that she might be trying to deceive; more probably, it is her confusion as well as her inability either to appropriate male rhetoric or to create her own that is reflected in a language which can only generate contradictions. For instance, Francesca has learned courteous language and displays it in her greetings to the poet, but fails to perceive the logical contradiction in this useless proffer of courtesy: "Se fosse amico it re de l'universo || not pregheremmo lui de la tua pace."

15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30-31-32-33-34-35-36-37-38-39-40-41-42-43-44-45-46-47-48-49-50-51-52-53-54-55-56-57-58-59-60-61-62-63-64-65-66-67-68-69-70-71-72-73-74-75-76-77-78-79-80-81-82-83-84-85-86-87-88-89-90-91-92-93-94-95-96-97-98-99-100-101-102-103-104-105-106-107-108-109-110-111-112-113-114-115-116-117-118-119-120-121-122-123-124-125-126-127-128-129-130-131-132-133-134-135-136-137-138-139-140-141-142-143-144-145-146-147-148-149-150-151-152-153-154-155-156-157-158-159-160-161-162-163-164-165-166-167-168-169-170-171-172-173-174-175-176-177-178-179-180-181-182-183-184-185-186-187-188-189-190-191-192-193-194-195-196-197-198-199-200-201-202-203-204-205-206-207-208-209-210-211-212-213-214-215-216-217-218-219-220-221-222-223-224-225-226-227-228-229-230-231-232-233-234-235-236-237-238-239-240-241-242-243-244-245-246-247-248-249-250-251-252-253-254-255-256-257-258-259-260-261-262-263-264-265-266-267-268-269-270-271-272-273-274-275-276-277-278-279-280-281-282-283-284-285-286-287-288-289-290-291-292-293-294-295-296-297-298-299-300-301-302-303-304-305-306-307-308-309-310-311-312-313-314-315-316-317-318-319-320-321-322-323-324-325-326-327-328-329-330-331-332-333-334-335-336-337-338-339-340-341-342-343-344-345-346-347-348-349-350-351-352-353-354-355-356-357-358-359-360-361-362-363-364-365-366-367-368-369-370-371-372-373-374-375-376-377-378-379-380-381-382-383-384-385-386-387-388-389-390-391-392-393-394-395-396-397-398-399-400-401-402-403-404-405-406-407-408-409-410-411-412-413-414-415-416-417-418-419-420-421-422-423-424-425-426-427-428-429-430-431-432-433-434-435-436-437-438-439-440-441-442-443-444-445-446-447-448-449-450-451-452-453-454-455-456-457-458-459-460-461-462-463-464-465-466-467-468-469-470-471-472-473-474-475-476-477-478-479-480-481-482-483-484-485-486-487-488-489-490-491-492-493-494-495-496-497-498-499-500-501-502-503-504-505-506-507-508-509-510-511-512-513-514-515-516-517-518-519-520-521-522-523-524-525-526-527-528-529-530-531-532-533-534-535-536-537-538-539-540-541-542-543-544-545-546-547-548-549-550-551-552-553-554-555-556-557-558-559-560-561-562-563-564-565-566-567-568-569-570-571-572-573-574-575-576-577-578-579-580-581-582-583-584-585-586-587-588-589-590-591-592-593-594-595-596-597-598-599-600-601-602-603-604-605-606-607-608-609-610-611-612-613-614-615-616-617-618-619-620-621-622-623-624-625-626-627-628-629-630-631-632-633-634-635-636-637-638-639-640-641-642-643-644-645-646-647-648-649-650-651-652-653-654-655-656-657-658-659-660-661-662-663-664-665-666-667-668-669-670-671-672-673-674-675-676-677-678-679-680-681-682-683-684-685-686-687-688-689-690-691-692-693-694-695-696-697-698-699-700-701-702-703-704-705-706-707-708-709-710-711-712-713-714-715-716-717-718-719-720-721-722-723-724-725-726-727-728-729-730-731-732-733-734-735-736-737-738-739-740-741-742-743-744-745-746-747-748-749-750-751-752-753-754-755-756-757-758-759-760-761-762-763-764-765-766-767-768-769-770-771-772-773-774-775-776-777-778-779-780-781-782-783-784-785-786-787-788-789-790-791-792-793-794-795-796-797-798-799-800-801-802-803-804-805-806-807-808-809-810-811-812-813-814-815-816-817-818-819-820-821-822-823-824-825-826-827-828-829-830-831-832-833-834-835-836-837-838-839-840-841-842-843-844-845-846-847-848-849-850-851-852-853-854-855-856-857-858-859-860-861-862-863-864-865-866-867-868-869-870-871-872-873-874-875-876-877-878-879-880-881-882-883-884-885-886-887-888-889-890-891-892-893-894-895-896-897-898-899-900-901-902-903-904-905-906-907-908-909-910-911-912-913-914-915-916-917-918-919-920-921-922-923-924-925-926-927-928-929-930-931-932-933-934-935-936-937-938-939-940-941-942-943-944-945-946-947-948-949-950-951-952-953-954-955-956-957-958-959-960-961-962-963-964-965-966-967-968-969-970-971-972-973-974-975-976-977-978-979-980-981-982-983-984-985-986-987-988-989-990-991-992-993-994-995-996-997-998-999-1000

Finally, although she extends the responsibility for her sin to a literature that proved to be too divorced from life, her anger is directed towards the injustice of her life. By recalling the harsh social reality represented by the figure of her husband, and calling "galeotto" the book and he who wrote it, she is claiming to have been twice offended.

At this point Dante faints. He does so not only out of pity, but also out of the realization that he is twice the sinner in her presence: he has sinned as a man who had shared her fascination for the rhetoric of courtly love and had experienced the same "dubbiosi disiri"; and he has sinned as a poet who knows all too well the power of rhetoric, used for good purpose and for evil, and who now, as he is attempting the first Christian epic, is faced with the problem of the authorial control of a text's meaning.

"A te conven tenere altro viaggio", Virgilio had urged him (*Inf.* I, v. 91); in the *Comedy* Dante has abandoned the way chosen in the *Convivio*, that is to prove that his poetic subject matter was meant to be virtue as well as love, "sì d'amor come di virtù materiate" (I, i, 14), and has chosen instead a different path: "ma per trattar del ben ch'io vi trovai, // dirò de l'altre cose ch'io v'ho scorte" (I, vv. 8-9).

The poetry of praise alone was not sufficient to save humankind, to save a morally weak and inexperienced reader such as Francesca. It was necessary to venture into the complexities of human reality and experience, and the complexities of language.

The test of the truth or falsehood of rhetoric, however, could only be carried out through rhetoric itself. In Canto V Dante does precisely this, as Francesca shows the wounds caused by her fascination for the courtly love rhetoric in which she is still trapped.

Thus in the presence of this woman, Dante returns to the original question prompted by the women in the *Vita Nuova* (XVIII, 8): "perché altro parlare è stato lo mio?" The 'altro parlare' he now abandons is the poetics which made him shun dialogue, and it is through the restoration of dialogue that Dante restores, in the *Comedy*, the link between art and life.

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#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Dante and Virgil encounter other souls before these: the Trimmers (Canto III) and the the spirits in Limbo (Canto IV); however, the former do not speak, and the discussion with the latter is not

reported. It is therefore correct to say that this is the first time that a theme is explored through a character.

- <sup>2</sup> The very many poetical exchanges bear witness to this. From the Provençal debate on *trobar clus* (see L. Paterson, *Troubadours and Eloquence* [Oxford, 1975]), to the Sicilian debate on the nature of love (see the poems by Jacopo Mostacci, Pier della Vigna and Giacomo da Lentini, XIXa, XIXb, XIXc in *Giacomo da Lentini. Poesie*. Ed. R. Antonelli [Roma, 1979]), to the numerous others on the meaning of love and the function of poetry; and in particular, among these, the *stilnuovo* debate; see: G. Favati, *Inchiesta sul dolce stil nuovo* (Firenze, 1975); M. Marti, *Con Dante fra i poeti del suo tempo* (Lecce, 1971); Id, *Storia dello stilnuovo* (Lecce, 1972). For the texts see the following editions: F. Egidi, *Le rime di Guittone d'Arezzo* (Bari, 1940); M. Marti, *Poeti del Dolce stil nuovo* (Firenze, 1969); Id, *Poeti Giocosi del tempo di Dante* (Milano, 1956); A. Menichetti, *Chiaro Davanzati: Rime* (Bologna, 1965); F. Minetti, *Monte Andrea: Le rime* (Firenze, 1979); S. Orlando, *Onesto da Bologna: Le rime* (Firenze, 1974); V. Panvini, *Le rime della scuola siciliana* (Firenze, 1962).
- <sup>3</sup> G. Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in Dante's Comedy* (Princeton, 1979) 151, 233.
- <sup>4</sup> V. Moleta, *Guinizzelli in Dante* (Roma, 1980) 132-33.
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid*, 96, 134.
- <sup>6</sup> The moral, as well as artistic, superiority of the *stilnuovo* poets, has long been a critical commonplace based on the acceptance of Dante's interpretation and judgement of contemporary poetry as an objective parameter (see, in particular, M. Marti, *Con Dante*, cit., 90), and thus on the belief that Dante's concept of *amore-virtù* formulated in *Purgatorio* (XVII-XVIII) can be extended to his *stilnovisti* friends (see, in particular, S. Avalle, *Ai luoghi di delizia pieni* [Milano-Napoli, 1977]). But neither Cavalcanti's or Cino's concepts of love are identical to his, nor indeed is the latter's identical with the concept of love found in Dante's own early poems. The canzone *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore* (cited in *Purg.* XXIV) does not define the *stilnuovo* poetics but it exemplifies a turning point in Dante's poetical development within the already established *maniera*. On the various definitions of the *stilnuovo* see the bibliographical references in M. Marti, *Poeti del Dolce stil nuovo*, cit., 27-32; E. Pasquini & A. Quaglio, *Lo Stilnuovo e la poesia religiosa* (Bari, 1975), 141-42.
- <sup>7</sup> Cfr. G. Duby, "Il modello cortese", *Storia delle donne. Il Medioevo*. Ed. by C. Klapisch-Zuber (Bari, 1990), 310-29.
- <sup>8</sup> Cfr. G. Duby, *Medioevo maschio - Amore e matrimonio* (Bari, 1988).

- <sup>9</sup> A. R. Press, *Anthology of Troubadours Lyric Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1971); J. Anglade, *Les Troubadours* (Paris, 1929); E. Farai, *Les arts poétiques du XII et du XIII siècle* (Paris, 1962 [1924]); L. Paterson, *Troubadours and Eloquence*, cit.; P. Cherchi, *Andrea Cappellano, i Trovatori e altri temi romanzi* (Roma, 1979).
- <sup>10</sup> F. Egidi (ed.), *Le rime di Guittone d'Arezzo* (Bari, 1940); also G. Contini (ed.), *Poeti del Duecento* (Milano-Napoli, 1960).
- <sup>11</sup> See in particular the following: *Ahi lasso che li boni e li malvagi, Ahi Deo che dolorosa, Gentil mia donna, gioi sempre gioiosa, O cari frati miei, corn malamente, O tu, de nome amor, guerra de fatto*. (Egidi ed., XX, VII, XV).
- <sup>12</sup> M. Marti (ed.), *Poeti giocosi del tempo di Dante* (Milano, 1956). See in particular the following: *Dante Alighier, Cecco, 'I tu' serv'e amico, Dante Alighier, s'i so' buon begolaro, I'ho sì gran paura di fallare, Qualunque ben si fa, naturalmente*. (110, 111, 18, 26)
- <sup>13</sup> D. Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower. Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, 1983); P. Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984); C. Berman, *Beyond Their Sex. Learned Women of the European Past* (Morgantown, 1985); M. Thiebaut, *The Writings of Medieval Women* (New York, 1987); F. Bertini, *Medioevo al femminile* (Bari, 1989); E. Ennen, *Le donne nel Medioevo* (Bari, 1990).
- <sup>14</sup> A. Hentsch, *De la littérature didactique du Moyen Age s'adressant spécialement aux femmes* (Cahors, 1903); C. Casagrande, *Prediche alle donne del secolo XIII* (Milano, 1978); M. Pereira, *L'educazione femminile alla fine del Medioevo*, in E. Becchi, *Per una storia del costume educativo: Età classica e Medioevo* (Torino, 1983), 109-23.
- <sup>15</sup> As well as the explicit reference to *Lancelot du lac*, she paraphrases (lines 100-105) Guinizzelli's *Al cor gentil* and Dante's *Amore e 'l cor gentil* (and indirectly Cappellanus' *De amore*, on which so much of the vernacular love poetry was based), and (lines 121-123) of Virgil's *Aeneid* (II, 1-13; IV, 651-658).