Dante and Cavalcanti (On Making Distinctions in Matters of Love):
Inferno v in Its Lyric Context

TEODOLINDA BAROLINI

The lyric context of Inferno v is a great deal richer and more complex than the routine citations of Guido Guinizelli’s Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore vis-à-vis Francesca’s Amor ch’al cor gentil ratto s’apprende would suggest.1 While we have integrated Francesca’s self-congratulatory exploitation of Guinizellian principles on love and inborn nobility into our reading of Inferno v, her blatant citational tactics seem to have obscured the importance of the lyric tradition for other parts of the canto. I will attempt in this essay to cast a wider net with respect to Inferno v and the Italian lyric tradition, and to explore how Dante fashions the canto as a meditation on that tradition and that discourse—quintessentially a discourse of desire.

The choice of a lyric context for the treatment of lust is in itself unusual and should not be taken for granted; it is important to note that a treatment of lust need have little or nothing to do with a discourse of desire. The souls of Canto v are explicitly defined as peccator camali, and yet Dante’s treatment of them differs enormously from the treatment of carnal sinners in vision literature or in moral didactic poetry like that of Bonvesin da la Riva. The visions give us a richer sense of the cultural options available to Dante as he designed his underworld and thus provide a context which, though typically ignored by the Commedia’s commentators, both ancient and modern, is extremely useful for putting what Dante does in perspective.2

The visions tend to treat the sins of incontinence with particular asper-
ity and cruelty; Dante instead treats them with comparative mildness. Most significant is the “obsession with sexual sin, such as adultery, fornication, promiscuity and sodomy” that runs through vision literature and that is essentially absent from the Commedia. Dante, after all, places Cunizza da Romano, a scandalous adulteress, in Paradise, along with Rahab, a prostitute; he puts Thaïs, another prostitute, among the flatterers with an emphasis that is more rhetorical than sexual, and even treats sodomy as equivalent to heterosexual indulgence in Purgatory. One could argue in fact that the most perversely “sexual” passage in the Commedia is the grotesque copulation of man and snake in Inferno xxv, a canto that treats not lust but the sin of fraudulent thievery. By the same token, the most sexual word of Inferno v may well be “coda,” referring to the tail used by the infernal judge, Minos, to indicate the circle to which the damned soul is to be sent: “cignesi con la coda tante volte / quantunque gradi vuol che giù sia messa” (Inf. v,11–12). The phallic connotations of coda, already present in Horace and Cicero and familiar to us from the Decameron, were evident to the illustrators of the Commedia, who frequently show Minos’s tail appearing phallically from between his legs.

However, even given the very definite phallic implications of Minos’s tail, Dante’s treatment of lust is remarkable not for how sexualized but for how desexualized it is. Again, the visions demonstrate to what degree Dante, by contrast, could be said to desexualize lust, even—despite the presence among the lustful of the Commedia’s second most famous female—to degender it.5 Compare, for instance, Tundale’s Vision, written in 1149 by an Irish monk, where the punishment of the fornicators is revoltingly gendered. Not only does the punishment take the gendered form of an obscene pregnancy, but the men who suffer this affliction incur what is clearly perceived as the further degradation of being effectively made into women:

All of the men and the women who descended into the swamp were actually made pregnant by the beast. In this condition they waited harshly for the time agreed on for their departure. The offspring they conceived stung them in their entrails like vipers, and so their corpses were miserably churned in the fetid waves of the frozen sea by icy death. And when it was time, so that they were ready, they filled the depths crying with howls; and so they gave birth to serpents.

I say not only women, but also men, gave birth to them, not through the part that nature constructed suitable for such a function, but through their arms, just as through their breasts, and they went bursting out through all their members. (Gardiner ed., 169–170)
Likewise, the deflected and literary nature of Canto v, so frequently noted, comes into a more telling relief when we consider the adulterers in Thurkill’s Vision (dated 1206, of English provenance), who must fornicate publicly in an infernal amphitheater, and then tear each other to pieces:

An adulterer was now brought into the sight of the furious demons together with an adulteress, united together in foul contact. In the presence of all they repeated their disgraceful love-making and immodest gestures to their own confusion and amid the cursing of the demons. Then, as if smitten with frenzy, they began to tear one another, changing the outward love that they seemed to entertain toward one another before into cruelty and hatred. Their limbs were torn to pieces by the furious crowd all around them, and they suffered the same punishments as those who had preceded them. All the fornicators who were also present were tormented in the same way, and the intensity of their sufferings was so great that the pen of this writer is not adequate to portray them. (Gardiner ed., 230–231)

It goes without saying that Francesca and Paolo do not fornicate in public; or, rather, although it has always gone without saying, saying it forces us to envision the possibility of a very different text. In Dante’s text, in the text he chose to create, the lustful do not perform a degraded act of love for the pilgrim and his guide. At the same time, the presence of Vergil’s Minos in Canto v alerts us to the Aeneid as a frame of reference and prompts us to note that Dante is harsher to Francesca than Vergil is to Dido. We have moved from a context that Dante did not choose to evoke (the visions) to one that he did (the Aeneid): Dido, who killed herself when abandoned by Aeneas, is a touchstone of Canto v, figuring the love-death nexus that is at the canto’s core. Dante’s description of the Phrygian queen as “the one who killed herself for love” (“colei che s’ancise amorosa, 61) recalls the “Fields of Mourning” of Vergil’s underworld, where Dido dwells among those “whom bitter love consumed with brutal waste.” The proximity between Minos and the unhappy lovers in the Aeneid (the “Lugentes Campi” are separated from Minos by only six verses) sheds light on the controversial decision to place Minos at the threshold of the second rather than the first circle of hell? as Vergil’s Minos paves the way for Dido, so, I suggest, Dante’s Minos paves the way for Francesca, who is marked as Didoesque, coming to the pilgrim from Dido’s cohort—“la schiera ov’è Dido” (85).

This suggestive symmetry brings us back to the key difference instituted by Dante between his Minos and Vergil’s; it brings us back to that
coda. The tail is a Dantesque addition to the figure of the infernal judge as presented in *Aeneid* vi, a feature that Dante uses to connote something about his hell that is lacking in Vergil's somber, even tragic, but much more static and monochrome vision. Minos's tail is an early signpost in a web of signifiers extending all the way to Lucifer's thickly-piled hide, a web that serves to conjure a hell that is densely corporeal, viscously physical, verbally foul—in short, much more degraded and degrading than anything Vergil has to offer. In *Inferno* v Dante follows Vergil—creating an analogy between Francesca and Dido that includes their structural contiguity to Minos—as part of the complex interplay whereby he both appropriates from his precursor (even the pairing of Francesca with Paolo has its forerunner in *Aeneid* vi's pairing of Dido with Sycaeus, to whom Dido turns after she spurns Aeneas) and deviates from him, in this case by imposing much sterner conditions on his lovers than does Vergil. Dante uses Vergil to deviate from Vergil, in that it is precisely Minos, as refashioned by Dante, who marks the degree of difference between Vergil's "Lugentes Campi" and the second circle of hell. If we compare Dante's handling of the lustful to the *Aeneid* on the one hand and to the visions on the other, we see that he steers a middle course: much harsher than Vergil, he uses his Minos's phallic tail proleptically to carnalize the figure of Francesca and to offset her romanticizing; at the same time he is infinitely less brutal than the vision writers, compared to whom he offers a romanticized portrait of lust.

While the visions emphasize sex itself as degraded and sinful, and subject carnal sinners to degrading and sexualized punishments, the contra-passo fashioned by Dante in *Inferno* v—where the lustful are tossed by the hell-storm as in life they were buffeted by their passions—emphasizes the psychology of desire. The story that Francesca relates mirrors the contra-passo, for it too is exquisitely psychological: she offers no extenuating circumstances to justify her behavior, not the deceitful father or proxy marriage later added to her story by Boccaccio, just the overwhelming force of overriding passion. Desire compels her, and she sins. That is the essence of her story, and it is one that foregrounds the key philosophical issues at stake here for Dante, issues of compulsion and the will, already condensed in his definition of carnal sinners as "those who subordinate reason to desire": "i peccator carnali, / che la ragion sommettono al talento" (*Inf.* v, 38–39). Reason struggles with desire, and in Francesca's case desire triumphs. Her discourse of justification engages a deeper logic than
Boccaccio’s circumstantial inventions: her point, reflected in her very syntax, is that desire cannot be withstood. Dante is passionately invested in the belief that desire can be withstood, that reason can and must triumph, and it is this profoundly psychological and ethical drama, with deep roots in the courtly tradition, that is ultimately played out in his treatment of lust.

Moreover, the contrapasso that Dante fashions for lust may well have benefited also from Aristotle’s discussion of compulsion and the will in *The Nichomachean Ethics*. In a passage that has not, to my knowledge, been brought to bear on *Inferno* v, Aristotle illustrates compulsion by offering precisely the example of a person being carried by a wind: “Those things, then, are thought involuntary, which take place by force or owing to ignorance; and that is compulsory of which the moving principle is outside, being a principle in which nothing is contributed by the person who acts—or, rather, is acted upon, e.g. if he were to be carried somewhere by a wind, or by men who had him in their power” (*Nich. Ethics* 3.1; italics mine). Francesca, who speaks of her past actions as involuntary, of her self as having been acted upon rather than acting, and who is now carried by a wind, is the perfect embodiment of Aristotle’s example; we could say that she is Aristotle’s example of compulsion transplanted to the Christian afterlife. What for Aristotle serves as an example of compulsion—the example of a person being carried by a literal wind—becomes in Dante’s afterworld a contrapasso, that is a metaphor—in this case a windy tempestuous passion—that has been fashioned into a literal feature of Dante’s infernal landscape. Aristotle’s literally compulsive wind has become the *bufera infernal*: it has become the tempest that represents the passions that Francesca calls compulsive but that Dante believes can and must be withstood by reason.

We have extended the frame of reference for this contrapasso to take in visionary and classical contexts, in the latter case even intertexts, both definite (*Aeneid*) and possible (*Nichomachean Ethics*). A further context is offered by the fourteenth-century commentator Guido da Pisa, whose gloss of the contrapasso—“the lustful arc moved in this world by every wind of temptation, so that their souls are always in continual motion and continual tempest”—moves him to cite Isaiah: “Cor impii quasi mare fervens quod quiescere non potest” ("The heart of the wicked man is like a troubled sea that cannot rest" [Isaiah 57:20]). Beyond the suggestive comparison of the human heart to a turbulent sea, which resonates in
Canto v’s description of the circle of lust as a place “che muggchia come fa mar per tempesta, / se da contrari venti è combattuto” (28–30), we note the verb *quiescere*, whose Italian synonyms are found throughout *Inferno* v, and indeed throughout the *Commedia*. The constellation *quiescere* / *restare* / *posare* inevitably invokes yet another philosophical context for the canto, for this is the language of the Augustinian analysis of desire, based on a counterpoint between human motion and divine repose, the human *cor inquietum* with its restless and unfulfilled longings versus the eternally fulfilled *quies* of God.¹⁴ The language and psychology of Augustine’s analysis of human desire saturate not only the *Commedia*, but also the linguistic and metaphoric systems of the lyric tradition to which Dante’s poem is heir, and to which we shall now turn. With its emphasis on the psychology of desire, the lyric tradition offers a key and underutilized context for understanding *Inferno* v.

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Giacomo da Lentini’s canzone *Madonna, dir vo voglio* develops in simile the analogy between the lover’s condition and that of a ship “in mare tempestoso” (50); noteworthy with respect to *Inferno* v, where the souls have no hope of *posare* (“nulla speranza li conforta mai, / non che di posa, ma di minor pena” [44–45]), is the dialectic between the restless motion of the *tempesta* on the one hand and, on the other, the lover’s attempt to reach a different state, that of *posare*: “posar crio” (64).¹⁵ Likewise, Guido delle Colonne, in the canzone *Ancor che l’aigua*, speaks of his desire as a force that puts him in a tempest: “e lo disio c’ho lo cor m’abranca, / crescemi voluntate, / mettemi ’n tempestate” (43–45). Even more interesting in this regard is another canzone of Guido delle Colonne, *Amor, che lungiamente m’hai menato*, which is in effect a lyric version of *Inferno* v without the eschatological context. The Augustinian dialectic between *menare* and *posare* (terms that will govern *Inferno* v as well)¹⁶ shapes the canzone from the outset, where the compulsive force of love is compared not to the rolling force of a gale on the sea but to the severe control of a rider on his mount; the lover begs love to loosen the reins by which he is so tightly bound: “Amor, che lungiamente m’hai menato / a freno stretto senza riposanza, / alarga le toi retene in pietanza” (1–3). The wind and sea imagery comes to the fore in the canzone’s conclusion, where, as the wind beats the waves into a frenzy, so love agitates the lover, giving him
no peace: “c’Amor mi sbatte e smena, che no abento, / sì come vento smena nave in onda” (63–64). Love moves the lover as the wind moves a ship; this analogy brings us quite close to the contrapasso of the *bufera infernal*. It is worth noting, moreover, that Dante himself posited the analogy between wind and desire, albeit in benign form, in the early sonnet *Guido, i’ vorrei*, where he wishes to be placed with his friends “in un vasel, ch’ad ogni vento / per mare andasse al voler vostro e mio” (3–4).17

The theoretical scaffolding behind this imagery, which is spelled out crisply by Dante in verse 39 of Canto v, where he defines the carnal sinners as those who subordinate reason to desire (“che la ragion sommertono al talento”), is also present in these early lyrics. While Giacomo offers the language of passive surrender to love that Francesca will later use (e.g., “como l’amor m’ha priso”; “di tal guisa Amor m’ha vinto” [*Madonna, dir vo voglio*, 2, 72]), Guido delle Colonne, who like Giacomo presents love as a force that seizes and overcomes the lover (e.g., “sì m’ave preso e tolto” [*Ancor che l’aigua*, 33]; “Amor che vince tutto” [*Amor, che lungiamente*, 24]), more explicitly theorizes the role of reason—“senno”—as the counter-weight to passion:

Forza di senno è quella che soverchia
ardir di core, asconde ed incoverchia.
Ben è gran senno, chi lo pote fare,
saver celare—ed essere signore
de lo suo core quand’este 'n errore.

(*Amor, che lungiamente m’hai menato*, 48–52)

Elaborating the troubadour topos of *fol’amor*, Guido delle Colonne writes that love causes even the wisest to stray, that he who loves most has least judgment or sense of measure and is most “folle”: “Amor fa disviare li più saggi: / e chi più ama men’ ha in sé misura, / più folle è quello che più s’innamora” (*Amor, che lungiamente*, 53–55). Here the Judge of Messina anticipates Guittone d’Arezzo, the Italian poet who went furthest in questioning the courtly view that holds desire desirable at all costs. Guittone explicitly repudiates the courtly ethos in his canzone *Ora parrà s’eo saverà cantare*, where he declares that he flees and diswants love—“Amor fug[g]h’ e disvoglio” (3)—for where love grips there reigns madness, “follore,” instead of wisdom: “ché ’n tutte parte ove distringe Amore / regge follore—in loco di savere” (10–11).

The commentary tradition is not entirely silent on the subject of ver-
nacular subtexts for this section of Canto v; a small but intriguing set of references has grown up around “che la ragion sommettono al talento.” Di Siena’s 1867 commentary is the first to mention the similarity between verse 39 and a line from a sonnet of Folgore da San Gimignano,18 which I will cite in full:

Quando la voglia segnoreggia tanto
che la ragion non à poter in loco
spesse fiate ride l’uom di pianto
e de grave doglienza mostra gioco;
e ben seria de bon savere affranto
chi fredda neve giudicasse foco;
simil son quelli che gioi’ mostra e canto
de quell’onde doler devria un poco;
Ma ben se pò coralmente dolere
chi sommette ragion a voluntade
e segue senza freno sò volere;
che nou è già si ricca podestade
com sè medesmo a dritto mantenere,
e seguir pregio, függer vanitate.19

Folgore’s “chi sommette ragion a voluntade” and Dante’s “che la ragion sommettono al talento” are strikingly parallel in their use of the construction sommettere a, with reason as the direct object of the verb and desire as the object of the preposition a. This is a construction that commentators have turned up in other texts as well. In 1905 Torraca, claiming that “il concetto era antico, la frase dell’uso,” cites Cicero, De Officiis, and Tavola Ritonda 75: “perch’io non voglio sottomettere la ragione alla volontà.”20 Contini draws attention to a verse of Meo Abbracciacavacca: “e qual sommette a voglia operazione.”21 The Bosco-Reggio edition of the Commedia cites Mazzoni’s reference to a passage in Brunetto Latini’s Tresor.22

These citations do indeed illuminate the topical currency of Dante’s “che la ragion sommettono al talento,” while not however venturing beyond fairly trite and hackneyed statements of the moral conflict between reason and desire. I propose a different intertext, a verse whose syntax is different but whose meaning is substantively identical, and whose author—Guido Cavalcanti—enormously enriches and complicates our understanding of Dante’s deployment of “che la ragion sommettono al talento” in the context of Inferno v. I refer to “ché la ’ntenzione per ragione vale,” verse 33 of Donna me prega. Using intenzione to signify
desire (or the object of desire or, but in this context it amounts to the same thing, the representation of the object of desire). Cavalcanti states that, for a lover, desire takes the place of reason. Although keyed to different registers—one Aristotelian and scholastic, the other more traditionally erotic and courtly, with “talempo” replacing “’ntenzione” (it is interesting to note that “talempo” is the last word of Donna me prega)—these two verses make essentially the same point. In fact, “ché la ’ntenzione per ragione vale” is a philosophically more sophisticated way of saying “che la ragion sommettono al talempo.”

In Donna me prega, Cavalcanti takes that rhetorical staple of the lyric tradition, the copula Amore-morte, and endows it with hard philosophical value, arguing in lethally sharp technical language that love is a sub-rational force that kills. Having assigned love to that faculty of the soul that is “not rational, but which feels” (“non razionale,—ma che sente,” 31), in other words to the seat of the passions, the sensitive as compared to the rational soul, he claims that love removes human judgment from health, from the sphere of rationality, that it substitutes appetite for reason, and induces lack of discernment: “for di salute—giudicar mantene, / ché la ’ntenzione—per ragione—vale: / discerne male— in cui è vizio amico” (Donna me prega, 32–34). Cavalcanti spectacularly concludes this line of argument by stating that if reason—the faculty that helps us pursue the path contrary to love—is impeded, then from love death will often follow: “Di sua potenza segue spesso morte, / se forte—la vertù fosse impedita / la quale aita—la contraria via” (35–37). For Cavalcanti, in other words, love leads us not down the path of life, but down the path of death.

Now, viewed teleologically, Dante’s work and thought are governed by one principle: that love is a life-force, and that the life-force is love. Love can save, love can beatify, love can give life—these principles are the bedrock of the Commedia. If I state the obvious, I do so in order to make a point about Inferno v: simply put, it is that Inferno v derives its extraordinary importance within the economy of Dante’s oeuvre from its pervasive mirroring of the poet’s primal foundational belief. Inferno v constitutes Dante’s most synthetic and compelling meditation on love as a death force, on love as a power that does not defy death but courts it, on love as a dark compulsion that—far from leading us toward salvation—keeps us, as Cavalcanti puts it, “for di salute.” We could say, indeed, that Inferno v is the venue in which Dante conducts an in malo exploration of
the Commedia’s basic premises: the possibility of transcendence through love and the salvific mission of the word. And, if Inferno v’s profile is heightened by its association with a love that leads us down “la contraria via” from the one on which Beatrice leads Dante, so is Cavalcanti’s, for Cavalcanti is the theorctician of that love.

Looking at these issues from the perspective of Cavalcanti’s role vis-à-vis the Commedia, two points emerge: 1) our persistent sense of a pervasive Cavalcantian presence in the Commedia that goes far beyond explicit citations of or referrals to Guido is accurate; and 2) this is so because Guido is in fact encoded into the problematic that is Inferno v, and that problematic is in fact coterminous with the poem.26 I articulated in nuce the view that animates these pages in Dante’s Poets: “Whatever our position on the question of Cavalcanti’s alleged Averroism, so hotly debated by Nardi and Favati, there can be no doubt that the love Guido professes in Donna me prega is diametrically opposed to the love Dante professes in the Commedia. Cavalcanti aligns love and death, Dante love and life; the ending of Donna me prega reads like the antithesis of the Paradiso, or rather the Paradiso reads like a sustained contradiction of Donna me prega” (144–145).

From this perspective, Guido is akin to Ulysses—another seeker of “canoscenza” (a quintessentially Cavalcantian word) who, proud of his “altezza d’ingegno,” disdains all help or assistance—in that he is a figure whose literal presence in the poem is only the starting point for the density of significance that ultimately accrues to him. I would argue, indeed, that Dante’s Ulyssean mythography is a composite that draws on Guido’s haughty intellectualism; even more to the point is that the Commedia’s handling of Guido resonates to its overarching Ulyssean thematics.27 The “Da me stesso non vegno” thematic of Inferno x, a canto whose echoing of Donna me prega is well recognized, projects onto Guido an arrogant self-sufficiency that is emphatically and precisely coded as Ulyssean. Dante achieves this view of Guido by pushing Guido’s own arguments one step further, turning Guido’s despair—his belief that love can never afford “canoscenza” because of the very nature of what love is—into disdain. Thus, Guido is viewed as “disdaining” the object of Dante’s quest, namely Beatrice: “Da me stesso non vegno: / colui ch’attende là per qui mi mena / forse cui Guido vostro ebe a disdegno” (Inf. x, 61–63).28

In this way a shared lyric past is invoked in Inferno x (and cemented by way of the evocation of Donna me prega in the nome / come / lume rhyme words of the passage immediately following the naming of Guido in verse
63), a past in which—from Dante’s perspective—one poet gave new meaning to the salvific and life-giving force of love already conjured by Guinizzelli, while the other insisted on the tragic conjunction of love and death. Although a Cavalcantian role in Inferno v—a text whose subject is none other than “colei che s’ancise amorosa,” i.e., the conjunction of love and death—is not dependent on specific citations, I believe that Donna me prega may be discerned as a precise intertextual presence. The canzone tells us that love is formed from darkness (“si formato,—come / diaffan da lume,—d’una scuritate” [16–17]), and that, seated in darkness, it excludes the light (“assiso—’n mezzo scuro, luce rade” [68]); the dwelling of the lustful is twice defined in terms of the total exclusion of light, as “parte ove non è che luca” (Inf. iv, 151), and “loco d’oge luce muto” (Inf. V, 28). The agitated purposeless motion of Inferno v evokes Cavalcanti’s description of love as a condition whose essence is excess, absence of repose, and the inability to endure for long in any single state:

L’essere è quando—lo voler è tanto  
ch’oltra misura—di natura—torna,  
poi non s’adorna—di riposo mai.  
Move, cangiando—color, riso in pianto,  
e la figura—con paura—storna;  
poco soggiorna . . .

(Donna me prega, 43–48)\(^29\)

The stanza continues by situating love in “gente di valor”—“ancor di lui vedrai / che ’n gente di valor lo più si trova” (48–49)—a group in which Francesca would undoubtedly claim membership.

Let us return now to the connection between verse 33 of Donna me prega, which states that under love’s sway desire takes the place of reason, and verse 39 of Inferno v, which states that carnal sinners subordinate reason to desire. The likeness of “ché la ’ntenzione—per ragione—vale” and “che la ragion sommettono al talento” is evident: although, as I noted previously, the verses belong to different stylistic registers, they offer the same information about the damaging effects of passion on the alignment of human faculties. Both hold that passion takes our faculties out of alignment, permitting desire to govern reason rather than the other way around. More significant, however, is the difference between the verses, which stems from their contexts and which can be summed up as follows:
what Guido says about love, Dante says about lust. What Dante considers, in fact, to be the very definition of lust rather than love—carnal sinners are defined precisely as those who subject reason to desire—Cavalcanti considers to be the very nature of love—all love. So, while we are accustomed to thinking of Inferno v as a text that forces us to deconstruct Francesca’s use of the word “amore,” a text that, by romanticizing in hell, obliges the reader to deromanticize and to learn that what is called love may not always be love, even when enveloped in citations from Guido Guinizzelli and Andreas Capellanus, we can now see that it is also a text that protects and defends love—what Dante would classify as real love—from a blanket indictment like that of Cavalcanti. By working to make distinctions between different kinds of human impulses popularly grouped together under the general rubric “love,” Inferno v resists the totalizing effect of Cavalcanti’s philosophy. Dante’s echoes of Donna me prega in Inferno v do not confirm the canzone’s views, therefore, but resist them.

But Dante had not always resisted Cavalcanti’s views on love, and so this intertextual moment also affords us a window onto the struggle waged between Dante and Guido, an ideological struggle over Dante’s thinking about desire in human life, its transcendental dimension or lack thereof—a struggle, that is, over Dante’s very soul. There was a time when Dante employed for himself the language that in the Commedia is employed by or about Francesca. Perusing his lyrics in chronological order, we have no trouble finding language retroactively reminiscent of Inferno v:

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\begin{align*}
&\text{lo disio che li mena (De gli occhi de la mia donna, 13)} \\
&\text{si ch’io caddi in terra (E’ m’incresce di me, 64)} \\
&\text{Lo doloroso amor che mi conduce} \\
&\text{a fin di morte per piacer di quella . . .} \\
&\text{Per quella moro c’ha nome Beatrice . . .} \\
&\text{E allor non trarrà si poco vento} \\
&\text{che non mi meni, si ch’io cadrò freddo;} \\
&\text{e per tal verrò morto . . .} \\
&\text{Pensando a quel che d’Amore ho provato,} \\
&\text{l’anima mia non chiede altro diletto,} \\
&\text{né il penar non cura il quale attende:} \\
&\text{ché, poi che ’l corpo sarà consumato,} \\
&\text{se n’anderà l’amor che m’ha si stretto} \\
&\text{con lei a Quel ch’ogni ragione intende;} \\
&\text{e se del suo peccar pace no i rende,}
\end{align*}
\]

42
partirassi col tormentar ch’è degna;
si che non ne paventa,
e starà tanto attenta
d’imaginar colei per cui s’è mossa,
che nulla pena avrà ched ella senta;
si che, se ’n questo mondo io l’ho perduto,
Amor ne l’altro men darà trebuto.
(Lo doloroso amor, 1–2, 14, 21–23, 29–42)
onde ha vita un disio che mi conduce . . .
una giovane entrata, che m’ha preso,
e hagli un foco acceso . . .
non soffrir che costei
per giovanezza mi conduca a morte
(Amor, che movi tua vertù da cielo, 20, 25–26, 56–57)

Ben è verace amor quel che m’ha preso
e ben mi stringe forte
(Io sento si d’Amor la gran possanza, 33–34)

e Amor . . . non m’abbandona . . .
ché li dolzi pensier’ non mi son tolti
la morte de’ passare ogni altro dolce30
(Io son venuto al punto de la rota, 23, 25, 37, 65)

si ch’ella non mi meni col suo freddo
(Amor, tu vedi ben che questa donna, 23)

E’ m’ha percosso in terra, e stammi sopra
con quella spada ond’elli ancise Dido
(Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro, 35–36)

Corre l’avarro, ma più fugge pace . . .
Colpa è de la ragion che nol gastiga.
Se vol dire ‘I’ son presa,’
ah com poca difesa
mostra segnorc a cui servo sormonta! . . .
Vedete come conchiudendo vado:
che non dee creder quella
cui par bene esser bella,
esser amata da questi cotali;
che se beltà tra i mali
volemo annumerar, creder si pòne,
chiamando amore appetito di fera!
Oh cotal donna pera
che sua biltà dischiera
da natural bontà per tal cagione,
e crede amor fuor d'urto di ragione!
(Doglia mi reca ne lo core ardire, 69, 95–98, 137–147)

Io sono stato con Amore insieme
da la circulazion del sol mia nona,
e so com'egli affrena e come sprona,
e come sotto lui si ride e geme.
Chi ragione o virtù contra gli sprieme,
fa come que' che 'n la tempesta sona
(Lo sono stato, 1–6)

Chi s’innamora si come voi fate,
or qua or là, e sè lega e dissolve,
mostra ch’Amor leggermente il saetti.
Però, se leggier cor così vi volve,
priego che con vertù il corregiate,
sì che s’accordì i fatti a’ dolci detti.
(Lo mi credea del tutto esser partito, 9–14)

Quale argomento di ragion raffrena,
ove tanta tempesta in me si gira?
(Amor, da che convien pur ch’io mi doglia, 26–27)

This compilation gives us much to consider with respect to the lyric context of Inferno v, ranging from suggestive phrasings to substantive intertexts. Let us begin with the early canzone Lo doloroso amor.

The Cavalcantian alchemy of Lo doloroso amor—perhaps one should say the hyper-Cavalcantian alchemy, in that Guido himself never addresses a congedo to “Morte,” as Dante does uniquely in this canzone—is such that Beatrice becomes literally an anti-Beatrice:31

Lo doloroso amor che mi conduce
a fin di morte per piacer di quella
che lo mio cor solea tener gioioso,
m’ha tolto e toglie ciascun di la luce
che avèan li occhi miei di tale stella,
che non credea di lei mai star doglioso:
e ‘l colpo suo c’ho portato nascoso,
omai si scopre per soverchia pena,
la qual nasce del foco
che m’ha tratto di gioco,
sì ch’altro mai che male io non aspetto;
e ’l viver mio (omai esser de’ poco)
fin a la morte mia sospira e dice:
‘Per quella moro c’ha nome Beatrice.’
(Lo doloroso amor, 1–14)

There is no text that more dramatically serves notice of the long path
Dante had to travel to become the poet whose beloved is an absolute
principle of life than this canzone’s initial stanza, which begins by invok-
ing love as a force that leads to death—“Lo doloroso amor che mi
conduce / a fin di morte”—and concludes by affirming Beatrice’s role,
by name (this is the only poem not later included in the Vita Nuova in
which her name appears), as carrier of death: “Per quella moro c’ha nome
Beatrice.” Fausto Montanari links the lover in Lo doloroso amor to Fran-
cesca in Inferno v, suggesting that the canzone’s lover comes to life again
in her, specifically in the last stanza’s declaration that hell holds no fear for
him, since with his lady’s image before him he will feel no pain:

ché, poi che ’l corpo sarà consumato,
se n’anderà l’amor che m’ha si stretto
con lei a Quel ch’ogni ragione intende;
e se del suo peccar pace no i rende,
partirassi col tormentar ch’è degna;
sì che non ne paventa,
e starà tanto attenta
d’imaginar colei per cui s’è mossa,
che nulla pena avrà ched ella senta . . .
(Lo doloroso amor, 32–40)

Seeing in these verses a challenge that anticipates Francesca’s later claim
to a love that challenges death itself, Montanari writes “Nelle parole di
Francesca rivive il disperato estremismo della canzone giovanile di
Dante.”

“Disperato estremismo” is, of course, an understatement when it
comes to the rime petrose, poems that offer a template for the dance of
desire—of motion versus stasis, life versus death—in the unmoving stone
that must be moved, in the pietra as the icon of inert unmoving “death”
that is unresponsive to the lover’s turgid pressing all too living need. That
urgent ever unmet desire is expressed in Canto v as a tempest, a whirl-
wind, in imagery that creates a bridge back to the second stanza of the
canzone Io son venuto, where too, as Durling and Martinez comment, we
find “wind and storm as erotic passion” (224). *Inferno* v, which seems deliberately to recall the incipit of *Io son venuto* in verse 26’s “or son venuto,” is thus linking itself to a poem that enacts love as death, eros as thanatos. For, if the canzone’s strophes ring out changes on the topos “it is winter, i.e. death, and yet I love, i.e. live,” their rhetoric accomplishes an inversion, whereby the natural death of winter lives and “true” death, so to speak, is associated with the lover. All the pulsating vibrant verbs of life belong to the “dead” natural world of the first part of each strophe; when we shift to engage the “I” in the conclusion of each strophe, the living language gives way to the passive static verbs that qualify the lover, whose life/love is more dead than the death of winter. Stanza 2, for example, begins emphatically with “Levasi,” a strong verb that describes the soaring wind as it rises up: “Levasi de la rena d’Etiopia / lo vento peregrin che l’aere turba.” The “I” is the mere object in a clause of which triumphant Love, “Amor,” whose nets are carried aloft by the conquering wind, is subject: “e Amor, che sue ragne / ritira in alto pel vento che poggia, / non m’abbandona” (*Io son venuto*, 23–25; italics mine).

Francesca, too, uses constructions in which Love is subject and she is the passive object. She too says that “Amor . . . non m’abbandona” (*Inf.* v.103, 105). Francesca’s “non m’abbandona” is an explicit echo of the lover’s “non m’abbandona” from the canzone *Io son venuto*, thus confirming *Inferno* v’s link to the *petrose* and the canto’s status as Dante’s consummate statement on the choice—what he would consider the Cavalcantian choice—of a love whose never loosening grip is the grip of death. The description of the lustful souls as starlings who fly “nel freddo tempo” (41) evokes another *petrosa*. *Amor, tu vedi ben*, two of whose rhyme words are *freddo* and *tempo*. The presence of Dido in Canto v constitutes yet another link to the *petrose*, since Dido is named in *Così nel mio parlar*, in the only reference to Vergil’s doomed queen in Dante’s lyrics. Love beats the lover to the ground, and then stands over him “with that sword with which he killed Dido”—“con quella spada ond’elli ancise Dido” (36); as in Canto v, Dido is the human matrix on which love and death meet. And it is noteworthy that the identical word “ancise” appears in both references to Dido, as if Canto v’s more succinct “che s’ancise amorosa,” which suppresses all other agents, whether they be Love or Aeneas’s sword, and leaves Dido alone with her fate, bears the verbal traces of the earlier lyric rendering. The common ground between *Inferno* v and the *petrose* is a love that is not life—not warmth, not motion, not
growth. Like the petrose, Inferno v meditates on a love that—belied by the apparent turbulence of the bufera infernal—is ultimately motionless, cold, inert, and deadly. For all the restless tumult of the bufera, Canto v ends with the stillness of death: “e caddi come corpo morto cade.”

While the petrose ritually enact the love-death, the late sonnet Io sono stato argues that there is no withstanding it. Neither reason nor virtue can prevail over love, the poem explains; free will is powerless to overcome it. Written to Cino da Pistoia most likely between 1303 and 1306, Io sono stato accompanies Epistola 3, in which Dante addresses his friend’s query as to “whether the soul can move from one passion to another” (“utrum de passione in passionem possit anima transformari”) and replies in the affirmative with language that is strikingly reminiscent of Donna me prega: “since the concupiscent faculty, which is the seat of love, belongs to the sensitive soul, it is manifest that after the corruption of one passion for which it is translated into act, it is reserved for another” (“Cum igitur potentia concupiscibilis, que sedes amoris est, sit potentia sensitiva, manifestum est quod post corruptionem unius passionis qua in actum reductur, in alium reservatur” [6]).\(^3\) Dante will reverse himself later in another sonnet to his friend, Io mi credea del tutto esser partito, in which he reproves Cino for his changeability and urges him to correct it,\(^4\) but in Io sono stato and its companion letter volatility in love is a given, since we are under love’s dominion rather than our own. Moreover, the sonnet makes clear that such love applies even to Beatrice; indeed, its opening verses declare that Dante first experienced love in his ninth year, thus “implicitly admitting,” as Foster and Boyde comment, “to a carnal love for Beatrice.”\(^5\) Using the same metaphor of love as rider (implicitly lover as mount) that we saw in Guido delle Colonne’s “Amor, che lungiamente m’hai menato / a freno stretto senza riposanza,” Dante describes love reining him in and spurring him on, dominating reason and free will:

\[
\text{Io sono stato con Amore insieme} \\
\text{da la circulazion del sol mia nona,} \\
\text{e so com’egli affrena e come sprona,} \\
\text{e come sotto lui si ride e geme.}
\]

“Sotto lui si ride e geme” not only recalls Donna me prega, where love changes “riso in pianto,” but places the lover squarely “beneath” love, “sotto,” so that he is literally sommesso, to use the verb that in Inferno v characterizes the lustful, “che la ragion sommettono al talento.” In the
comparison that follows, the attempt to withstand passion with reason or virtue is as futile as the attempt to make oneself heard during a tempest: “Chi ragione o virtù contra gli sprieve, / fa come que’ che ’n la tempesta sona” (5–6). It is impossible not to think of Francesca, who speaks to the pilgrim during a brief respite in the buffeting violence of the infernal wind: “noi udiremo e parleremo a voi, / mentre che ’l vento, come fa, ci tace” (Inf. v. 95–96). The lovers of Inferno v are reminiscent of the lover of Io sono stato, with the crucial difference that they are condemned for having allowed their reason to be vanquished, while he is not. Far from being condemned, his behavior is justified, for within love’s domain free will (“liber arbitrio”) has no power; in fact, it is not free (“franco’”), and our deliberative faculty (“consiglio”) fights in vain to resist love’s dominion: “Però nel cerchio de la sua palestra / liber arbitrio già mai non fu franco, / sì che consiglio invan vi si balestra” (9–11).

The impotence of reason when faced with an ineluctable passion is reaffirmed, and again laced with tempest imagery, in Dante’s last great Cavalcantian testament to a deadly eros, the so-called canzone montanina. Here, in Amor, da che convien pur ch’io mi doglia, the lover asks how reason can restrain where such a tempest whirls within: “Quale argomento di ragion raffrena, / ove tanto tempesta in me si gira?” (26–27). This canzone accompanied Epistola 4, to Marchese Moroello Malaspina, apparently written circa 1307–1308, in which Dante describes how “Amor terribilis et imperiosus me tenuit”(3)—“terrible and imperious love holds me.” He is constrained against his will: “in order that my soul not rebel against him again, love bound my free will, so that it is necessary for me to turn not whither I, but whither he, wants. So love reigns in me, with no virtue opposing him” (“ne contra se amplius anima rebellaret, liberum meum ligavit arbitrium, ut non quo ego, sed quo ille vult, me verti oppos- teat. Regnat itaque Amor in me, nulla refragante virtute” 4–5). The terrible and imperious love sung by these poems resurfaces in the story of Paolo and Francesca, whose unopposable passion leads not only to death—as in the lyric—but also to damnation. Never are these views disavowed more explicitly than in Purgatorio xviii, where the strong statement of free will’s dominating role in all moral transactions suggests a desire to discredit Io sono stato. A textual link is the sonnet’s “consiglio” and the canto’s “virtù che consiglia” (Purg. xviii, 62), noted by Foster and Boyde.36 Moreover, while the sonnet’s protagonist is a steed ridden by love—but not by “giusto amor”—in Purgatorio xviii the purging souls
are ridden—cavalcati—by their good will and just love: “cui buon volere e giusto amor cavalca” (96).37

But we do not have to await the Commedia to find a condemnation of the views espoused by Io sono stato. Roughly contemporaneous with Io sono stato and Amor, da che convien is the canzone Doglia mi reca ne lo core ardire, whose indictment of passion ungenterned by virtue and reason inhabits a moral framework that is highly suggestive vis-à-vis the Commedia. (The chronology of these poems, wherein the ideologically “regressive” Amor, da che convien is accorded the latest date, suggests the fierceness of Dante’s internal struggle; these are not matters that he resolved once and for all without ever looking back, but an arena to which he was called again and again.) The argumentation that in the Commedia will be marshaled to refute Io sono stato is already advanced in Doglia mi reca; although the context is avarice, not lust, the argument works in the same way, as I have demonstrated previously, for both are sins of excess desire.38 In fact, the point of the canzone is to show the commonality of all sins of desire, and the necessity of constraining all desire by reason; to this end, Dante systematically links carnal desire to desire for wealth, thus exploding the courtly ethos that would privilege love over baser desires and illuminating their common ground in concupiscence.

Like the lover of Donna me prega and the lustful souls of Inferno vi, the avaricious miser of Doglia mi reca is characterized by continuous futile motion, absence of repose, lack of peace: “Corre l’avaro, ma più fugge pacc” (69). (Donna me prega contributes to Dante’s agenda of contamination between lust and avarice on more than one count, if we consider that Cavalcani defines love’s essence as excess, “oltra misura,” using a term—misura—that Dante, following both Aristotle and Guittone, uses in Doglia mi reca and Inferno vii to denote correct or incorrect deployment of desire vis-à-vis material goods.) Continuing to anticipate Inferno vi, Doglia mi reca tells us, in its critique of the miser’s unruly passion, that the fault lies in the insufficient exercise of reason: “Colpa è de la ragion che nol gastiga” (95). The canzone continues: if reason were to offer as justification for her poor performance the excuse that she is overcome, possessed by desire—“Se vol dire ‘I’ son presa’ ” (96)—she merely demonstrates the weakness of her resistance, since the master should not be overcome by the servant: “ah com poca difesa / mostra segnore a cui servo sormonta!” (97–98).

The image of a seigre (reason) who has been sormontato by his servo
(desire) is a reversal of the image implicit in “che la ragion sommettono al talento”; while Inferno v offers the image of reason “under” desire, and the canzone offers the image of desire “over” reason, the point regarding the misalignment of our faculties is the same. Moreover, the language used in Doglia mi reca for being possessed by desire—“I’ son presa”—is the language of the lyric tradition: we remember, for instance, Giacomo’s “como l’amor m’ha priso,” Guido delle Colonne’s “si m’ave preso e tolto,” and Dante’s “Ben è verace amor quel che m’ha preso / e ben mi stringe forte” from the canzone Io sento si d’Amor la gran possanza (33–34). It is Francesca’s language: “Amor, ch’al cor gentil ratto s’apprende, / prese costui” (100–101), “Amor, ch’a nullo amato amar perdon, / mi prese” (103–104). Indeed, it is the quintessential language of desire, used in the great explication of love of Purgatorio xviii, where the discourse of desire—the lyric discourse of desire—receives its positive gloss: “così l’animo preso entra in disire / ch’è moto spiritale, e mai non posa / fin che la cosa amata il fa gioire” (31–33). Here possession (“preso”), motion (“moto”), lack of rest (“mai non posa” recalls “La bufera infernale, che mai non resta”) culminate not in death but in fulfillment and joy, not in “e caddi come corpo morto cade” but in “fin che la cosa amata il fa gioire.”

I have argued elsewhere that Doglia mi reca is not merely “Dante’s canzone on avarice,” as it has been labeled by the commentary tradition, but rather an expansive meditation on desire that in key respects lays the groundwork for the Commedia; I will now elaborate some specific points of contact between Doglia mi reca and Inferno v. It is useful in this context to view Doglia mi reca against the backdrop of a Guittonian canzone that greatly influenced it, Ora parrà s’eo saverò cantare; both are moral canzoni that are explosively anti-courtly and that deal with the interaction between reason and desire, with the result that the differences between them are highly instructive.40

Guittone begins by repudiating love. He pits love against reason: “ché ’n tutte parte ovc distringe Amore / regge follore—in loco di savere” (10–11). He redefines love as “carnal voglia” (21). He recommends that we follow not love, but “honored Wisdom”—“orrato Saver”—and God:

Ma chi cantare vole e valer bene
in suo legno a nochier Diritto pone

50
Dante and Cavalcanti (On Making Distinctions in Matters of Love), Teodolinda Babolini

e orratò Saver mette al timone,
Dio fa sua stella...

(Ora parrà, 16–19)

Noting that neither honor nor good can be attained by pursuing “carnal voglia,” Guittone recommends a life of abstinence from vice and willingness to toil; only so can one advance one’s “stato ad onore” (26). A bourgeois ethic of God-centered savere thus replaces the folklore of the courtly paradigm. In Doglia mi reca, on the other hand, Dante does not so much replace the courtly paradigm as correct it, insisting that we distinguish one impulse called love from another. While in Ora parrà Guittone sustains the total incompatibility of love and reason, in Doglia mi reca Dante argues that where there is not reason, there cannot be real love, that what is called “love” in such a case is not love, but bestial appetite. While Guittone rejects the very idea of human love existing on a higher plane, saying in effect that what people call “amor” is always “carnal voglia,” Dante makes it clear that love that accords with reason and virtue does exist, and that it is up to us to distinguish such love from carnal voglia.

Dante arrives at his anatomy of love by a negative path, an anti-courtly diatribe that refuses to exculpate women from their share of blame in matters of love. He begins Doglia mi reca by insisting that it is a woman’s duty to deny her love to a man who cannot match in virtue what she offers in beauty, and castigates women for the “vil vostro disire” (6) that could prompt them to love unworthy men:

ché la beltà ch’Amore in voi consente,
a vertù solamente
formata fu dal suo decreto antico,
contra ’l qual voi fallate.

(Doglia mi reca, 7–10)

In the seventh and final stanza Dante once more addresses the ladies, saying that he has accomplished his mission, in that he has unveiled for them the baseness of their male admirers: “Disvelato v’ho, donne, in alcun membro / la viltà de la gente che vi mira” (127–128). Given that a woman’s potential lover is vicious, “a union of vice” (“In ciascun è di ciascun vizio assembro” [132]), the love that results can only be turbid and confused (“per che amistà nel mondo si confonde” [133]), since the good of the woman requires a corresponding good from the man to draw forth
love: "ché l'amorose fronde / di radice di ben altro ben tira" (134–135). Love, properly understood, is inseparable from virtue; where there is no corresponding good, there is no love. A woman could only consider herself loved by men like these if she redefined love, giving the name of love to what is mere bestial appetite: "chiamando amore appetito di fera" (143). Such a woman should perish, since she disjoins her beauty from natural goodness and believes love to be "outside of reason’s garden":

Oh cotal donna pera
che sua bìlìa dischiera
da natural bontà per tal cagione,
e crede amor fuor d’orto di ragione.

(Doglia mi reca, 144–147)

This final stanza of Doglia mi reca is crucial for our topic, for it adumbrates one of the fundamental issues of Inferno v, namely whether the use of the name "love" is sufficient guarantee that we are in fact talking of love. Dante is concerned with human desire, but also how we use language when we deal with desire. Francesca talks repeatedly of "love," but the narrator instructs us otherwise, using different words ("carnal," "desire"), when he tells us that we will be encountering "peccator carnali, / che la ragion sommettono al talento." Similarly, Doglia mi reca raises the possibility that someone who desires—a woman who desires, no less!—could define love in a self-serving way, could justify her actions by calling her appetite by the name of love. As with Francesca, although she may use the word amore, she misapplies the signifier, for the impulse that grips her is in fact an "appetito di fera." Her mistake comes from the fact that she believes that love is disjoined from reason; literally, she "believes love to be outside reason’s garden": "e crede amor fuor d’orto di ragione" (147).

These are very important verses, critical for understanding Dante’s mature view of human love. They do not tell us, as Gagliardi holds, that "Oltre ad ‘amore appetito di fera’ non c’è altro" (86). Rather, as in the Commedia, Dante offers us a choice: appetite divorced from reason, mistakenly called love, versus appetite in accord with reason, correctly called love. The fact that there is a choice is underscored by the verb credere: the lady "crede amor fuor d’orto di ragione"; she believes love to be disjoined from reason. From Dante’s perspective, she is wrong. The very idea of an appetite, mistakenly called love, that is instead "bestial" and "outside of
reason’s garden,” allows us to postulate its converse: it allows us to conjure that which may correctly be called love, an appetite that is human rather than feral and that resides within reason’s garden. In other words, what Dante does in *Doglia mi reca* is what he does in *Inferno* v and *Purgatorio* xviii: insist on the crucial role of reason as the arbiter of human desire, whether in malo or in bono. Dante does not say, in *Doglia mi reca*, that “Il desiderio di per sé è vile”;41 his point is, as it is in the *Commedia*, that desire becomes evil when it triumphs over reason. These verses supply the crucial discriminant between types of love, or more properly between lust and love, namely reason, the faculty that renders us human rather than bestial. The anatomy of love that results, with its two opposing categories—amore appetito di fera versus amore d’orto di ragione—will find confirmation in the *Commedia*, where love is not rejected or replaced, but reconceptualized.

One could say, then, that Dante rejects both Guittone’s and Cavalcanti’s formulations, since in very different ways both view love negatively. Guittone moralistically condemns “amore” as “carnal voglia,” holding that when love is present, reason is absent (“ché ’n tutte parte ove distinghe Amore / regge follore—in loco di savere”). His is a bourgeois Italian variation of the old troubadour model of recantation and retirement to a monastery: he rejects love and love poetry but he does not reject secular life. Cavalcanti concludes—despairingly but not moralistically—that love belongs to the seat of the passions, is divorced from the intellect, and can never lead to *canoscenza*. His is a newer position, philosophical but not didactic, which offers a rationalistic pessimism with regard to love in human life. Both poets divorce love from reason. In this essential respect, both stand in sharp opposition to Dante, who considers the presence of reason to be the indispensable guarantee of that which is truly love, and not lust. Poetic affect further complicates the picture, for Dante is passionate about the role of reason, in a precise inversion of Cavalcanti, who is cool about passion. In *Doglia mi reca*, an irascibly passionate poem, Dante sketches the outlines of the situation we find in *Inferno* v: a courtly lady who keeps using the word “amore” to refer to what can only have been an “appetito di fera,” given that it existed “fuor d’orto di ragione.” It is the responsibility of the lady in *Doglia mi reca* to distinguish between lovers, and to make sure that she is not “amata da questi cotali” (140), desired by the men of vice whom the *canzone* has savaged. If she does give her love to such a man, disjoining her beauty
from virtue, she deserves to perish. "Oh cotal donna pera" says the canzone—and Francesca does indeed perish, killed with her lover on earth and damned for all eternity after her death.

Death brings us back to Cavalcanti and to the last of Francesca's three great Amor verses, the only one not to possess a Guinizzellian pedigree: "Amor condusse noi ad una morte" (106). It is here that Francesca inscribes the true rubric of Canto v, whose topic is not just sinful love but the love that leads to death. This is the love of which one could say—with Cavalcanti (in what may constitute yet another intertext between Donna me prega and Inferno v)—"Di sua potenza segue spesso morte" (35). Cavalcanti seals Francesca's canto, his language bringing its dispassionate and quiet power to the end of Inferno v. The last verses of Inferno v are a tissue of Cavalcantisms: "Mentre che l'uno spirto questo disse, / l'altro piangèa; / si che di pietade / io venni men così com' io morisse" (139-141). Although we are in the Commedia and therefore talking of two discrete historical souls, we could as well be in that dim Cavalcantian penumbra of fractured interior space where "uno spirto questo disse," "l'altro piangèa," and the "I" to which both spirits belong swoons as to death from the pity and anguish of his self's utter dispossession. Nor is a Cavalcantian frame of reference out of place with respect to the actual souls described in these verses: Paolo seems very like the quintessential Cavalcantian lover's persona, so alienated from himself that he has lost his voice. While the canto's final verse echoes some of Dante's early lyrics—"si ch'io caddi in terra" from E' m'inresce di me and "si ch'io cadrò freddo / e per tal verrò morto" from Lo doloroso amor—and substitutes for the Cavalcantian delicacy of the preceding verses a more Dantesque vigor, it too contributes a Cavalcantian stamp: how can we resist hearing "Cavalcanti" in the repeated "ca" sounds of "caddi come corpo morto cade"?

Finally, though, in the same way that Dante uses Vergil to deviate from Vergil through his deployment of Minos, so he uses Cavalcanti to go beyond Cavalcanti. I mean "go beyond" most literally, in the sense of Dante's going beyond Inferno v, and removing himself from the Cavalcantian space of love and death. Inferno vi begins with the pilgrim's recovery from the swoon caused by the pity and sorrow he experienced at Francesca's story; upon regaining consciousness, he becomes aware of new sights all around him:

novi tormenti e novi tormentati
mi veggio intorno, come ch'io mi mova
e ch'io mi volga, e come che io guati.
I have singled out these verses before, as paradigms of the *Commedia*'s poetics of the new, noting that: “For [the pilgrim] alone, in hell, there are ‘novi tormenti e novi tormentati’ (Inf. vi, 4), ‘nove travaglie e pene’ (Inf. vii, 20), ‘nova pieta, / novo tormento e novi frustatori’ (Inf. xviii, 22–23). For the sinners, instead—as for the angels, but for opposite reasons, and with opposite results—there is no difference, nothing is ever new: ‘regola e qualità mai non l’è nova’ (Inf. vi, 9).”

What is interesting, in our present context, about these classic verses of comedic upward mobility is that they are derived from Guido Cavalcanti, the poet of zero mobility: Contini points out the echo of Cavalcanti’s “una paura di novi tormenti,” from the sonnet *Perché non fuoro a me gli occhi dispensi.* So Dante has reworked Guido’s fear—his friend’s paralyzing “paura di novi tormenti”—into his own relentless forward motion; after all, the “novi tormenti” of Canto vi have a positive connotation for the protagonist, not being his. Rather, he revels in the resurgent strength of that unbridled present tense: “mi veggio intorno, come ch’io mi mova / e ch’io mi volga, e come che io guati. / Io sono al terzo cerchio. . . .” He is not stuck with Francesca, stuck with the “novi tormenti,” in the space of Canto v, the space of love and death, anymore than he will be stuck with anyone else he meets along the way. And, perhaps, there is a final Cavalcantian echo, not picked up by Contini: the verse that describes the deathly stasis of hell, “regola e qualità mai non l’è nova,” seems to me imprinted on a periphrasis for love in *Donna me prega,* where love is “La nova—qualità” (49). If so, then—in a transformation that accurately sums up Dante’s thoughts on what Guido had to say in his great canzone—Cavalcanti’s love has become Dante’s hell.

*Columbia University*

*New York, New York*

**NOTES**

1. Francesca’s precept is a conflation of two verses from *Al cor gentil:* onto the incipit, which formulates a causal relationship between love and inborn nobility, is grafted the first verse of the
second stanza, "Foco d'amore in gentil cor s'aprende," which introduces the element of love as a kindling fire. See Teodolinda Barolini, Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the 'Comedy' (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 4–7 (also available as Il miglior fabbro: Dante e i poeti della 'Commedia' [Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1993]).

2. The one exception of which I am aware is Grandgent, who comments as follows: "In some previous tales of Hell a wind torments evildoers, notably in the Vito Alberici, xiv, where souls are driven by the fiery breath of a dog and a lion. Dante divests the torment of all grotesqueness, and, indeed, treats the sinners of this class with special consideration. This may be due in part to sympathy, and partly, no doubt, to a sense that their fault is the result of a mistaken following of love, the noblest of human emotions." See La Divina Commedia, comm. C. H. Grandgent, rev. Charles S. Singleton (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), xx.

3. The quotation is from Eileen Gardner's introduction to her edition, Visions of Heaven and Hell before Dante (New York: Italica Press, 1989), xvii. Citations from the visions will be from this edition.

4. Under causa, the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae (Lipsia: Tschuber, 1906–1912), vol. 3, offers an entry "latiore sensu hominum" and gives references to Cicero's Epistles and Horace's Satires (627). Illustrations of Minos in Inferno v may be found in Illuminated Manuscripts of the 'Divine Comedy' by Peter Brieger, Millard Meiss, and Charles Singleton (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 2:79–90. Minos's tail appears plurally from between his legs in plate a on page 82 (London B.M. Additional 19587), plate b on page 87 (Madrid B.N. 10057), plate a on page 88 (Paris B.N. it. 74), plate a on page 89 (Paris B.N. it. 2017), and plate a on page 90 (Paris B.N. it. 78). My thanks to Karl Fugelslo for his expert guidance in deciphering these illustrations.

5. While this essay reads Canto v in a nongendered way (as is indeed not only canonical but hermeneutically fundamental), I believe that a gendered reading can supplement our understanding of what is at stake for Dante in this canto. I attempt such a reading in "Dante and Francesca da Rimini: Realpolitik, Romance, Gender," Speculum, lxxv (2000), 1–28. When I say, then, that Dante's treatment of lust is desexualized and even, by contrast with the visions, degendered, I do not mean to suggest that his choice of a female protagonist is casual or unimportant.


7. Castelvetro notes that the judge should be situated in the area preceding Limbo, so that no soul remains outside the purview of justice; "dovendosi ragionevolmente far il giudicio in luogo separato, e non solamente in luogo separato, ma per aventura nell'anzilimbo, acciò che niuna anima restasse, che non avesse il suo luogo assegnato e certo per dirittura di giudicio." See Sposizione di Lodovico Castelvetro a XXIX Canti dell'Inferno dantesco (Modena: Società tipografica, 1886) 73.

8. This symmetry lies not, to the best of my knowledge, been picked up by the commentators. Padoan comments on the "Lugentes Campi" as a gloss for "molto pianto" in verse 27: "Sono i virgiliani 'Campi lugentis' (Aen. vi 441), in cui l'esegesi medievale dell'Enide riconosceva gli 'errori luxuryis,' collocandovi appunto, con Didone, le anime dei lussuriosi." See La Divina Commedia: Inferno i–viii, ed. Giorgio Padoan (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1967).


10. In Boccaccio's tale Francesca is effectively innocent of any misdeed, since her father deceives her into wedlock with the ugly Gianciotto through the use of the handsome Paolo as a proxy for his brother. Picked up by subsequent commentators, Boccaccio's melodramatic tale has achieved canonical status and has utterly contaminated the reception of Francesca's story. See my "Dante and Francesca da Rimini" for further discussion of and bibliography regarding Boccaccio's Francesca.

11. See the gloss on sommettere offered in the Enciclopedia Dantesca, 6 vols. (Roma: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970–1978): "Più che nel senso oggi vulgato di 'sottomettere,' 'soggiogare,' il verbo era usato nell'italiano dell'epoca di Dante come contrario di 'suvrapporre,' 'preferire' (in senso traslato); dunque 'mettere in secondo piano,' 'subordinare,' 'considerare di minore importanza' rispetto a qualcosa, cioè con insita l'idea di paragone; è questo il caso di If v 39" (5:314).

Dante and Cavalcanti (On Making Distinctions in Matters of Love), Teodolinda Barolini

1980). Aristotle’s examples of compulsion—"if he were to be carried somewhere by a wind, or by men who had him in their power”—resonate not only for Inferno v but also for Piccarda in Paradiso iii. Her story, according to which "men had her in their power," precipitates a lengthy meditation on the will and compulsion.


14. Of course, Augustine’s terminology is replete with that of previous thinkers. Speaking of the term *pace* and its significance in Dante’s canzone *Dolgia mi reca ne lo core ardire*, Antonio Gagliardi derives it from Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics*: "Pace is termine strategico and porta con sé un sistema concettuale. Soltanto con la pace, con la fine del desiderio, c’è felicità. Non può esserci sommo bene e felicità nel desiderio senza fine e senza pace. Il testo aristotelico per la definizione del sommo bene (*Etica Nicomachea . . . *) è presente nel suo termine più significativo"; see Guido Cavalcanti e Dante: una cita d’amore (Catanzaro: Pullano, 1997), 80.


16. *Menare* defines the effects of the *bufera* on the souls of Canto v: not only "mena li spiriti con la sua rapina" (32), but "di qua, di là, di giù, di sù li mena" (43). Later in the canto the allegory that applies *menare* to a physical *bufera* rather than to a metaphysical force is breached, and *menare* applies—as in Guido delle Colonne—explicitly to *amor* and *disio*: "per quello amor che i mena" (78), "quanto disio / mench c’èntorn al doloroso passo" (113–114). The noun *posa* appears in verse 45, "non che di posa, ma di minor pena," while *pace* is used by Francesca twice, in verses 92 and 99.

17. Dante’s lyrics are cited from the edition Dante’s Lyric Poetry, ed. Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). However, while Foster and Boyde follow Barbi and Maggini in taking "ad ogni ventero" to mean "whatever wind may blow" (see Michele Barbi and Francesco Maggini, eds., *Rime della Vita Nuova* e della giovinezza [Firenze: Le Monnier, 1956], 193), I prefer Contini’s "vastel che viaggià con ogni ventero" (see Gianfranco Contini, ed. *Rime*, 2nd. ed. [Torino: Einaudi, 1970], 35). As the sonnet goes on to say, tempests and foul weather will provide no impediment; the winds will be consonant with their desires, which are temperate, amicable, benign. Guglielmo Gorni notes the presence in *Inferno* v of these verses from *Guido, i vorrei* in "Francesca, o la cognizione del dolore: riscritture nel quinto dell’Inferno," *Anticodromo*, vol. 1 (Roma: Viella, 1997).


19. I Sonetti, ed. Ferdinando Neri (Torino: UTET, 1925); italics mine. In the introduction Neri refers to the same study by Monti that had caught Di Siena’s eye: “Quanto ai riscontri tra Folgore e Dante, ascritti dal Monti, essi si limitano pur sempre al verso ‘chi la ragion sommette a volontade’ (*Inf.* v, 39 ‘che la ragion . . .’), d’un sonetto che può essere, o no, di Folgore” (15, note 1).

20. Torraca is quoted according to the Dartmouth Dante Project, *La Tavola Rionda* from the edition of Di Filippo-Luigi Poldori (Bologna: Gaetano Romagnoli, 1864), 276.


23. Domenico De Robertis glosses la 'ntenzione as follows: "il desiderio ('intendanza' vale, nel linguaggio della poesia amorosa, sia 'amore,' sia per metonomia, l'oggetto amato): cfr. Conv., iv xv 8–9, dove a 'desiderio naturale' corrisponde e equivale 'intenzione naturale'; o anche l' 'intenzion formae,' ossia la rappresentazione sensibile dell'oggetto amato (l' 'intenzio individui' di Averroë nel suo commento al De anima, ii, t.c., 65), l'immagine che l'amante se ne fa. Ma il verso è evidentemente 'ispirato' dalla clausola di Giovenale, Sat., vi 223, 'sit pro ratione voluntas' (Contini, Lett. d. Or.), del resto probabilmente presente anche a Guittone del seu. Franchezza, segnoia . . . 9, 'una fisica è que la cui voglia è ragione' " (102). See De Robertis's edition of Guido Cavalcanti, Rime, con le rime di Iacopo Cavalcanti (Torino: Einaudi, 1986); all citations are from this text. Mario Marti, in Poeti del Dolce stil nuovo (Firenze: Il Monnier, 1969), glosses: "'ntenzione' è qui l'atto e la condizione dell'intendere; dunque, 'appetito'" (187). Ferdinando Pappalardo paraphrases thus: 'L'amore dunque, in quanto appunto, procede dalla virtù sensitiva dell'anima, o meglio dalla conoscenza sensibile: e la sua essenza è tale da offuscare il retto giudizio della ragione, distrugliendola dal suo fine naturale e benefico (for di salute—giudicar mantene), perché all'esercizio di questa facoltà si sostituisce l'impulso cieco del desiderio sensibile (ché la 'ntenzione—per ragione vale). . . intenzione sta infatti qui a significare la rappresentazione che si ricava dalla conoscenza delle qualità sensibili, e che costituisce l'oggetto del'appetito sensitivo'; see "Per una rilettura della canzone d'amore del Cavalcanti," Studi e problemi di critica testuale xii (1976), 47–76, quotation page 64.

24. It is worth noting that the congedo of Donna me prega juxtaposes ragione and talento, referring to the canzone's argument ('ragione') and its lack of desire ("talento") to consort with "personne" who do not possess "intendimento." Although ragione and talento do not here possess the moral significance that they have in "che la ragion sommettono al talento," it is intriguing to see them together:

Tu puoi sicuramente gilt, canzone,
là 've ti piate, ch'io t'ho si adornata
ch'assai laudata—sarra tua ragione
da le persone—ch'hanno intendimento:
di star con l'altre tu non hai talento.

They appear together in the canzone's first stanza as well:

Ed a presente—conoscente—chero,
perch'io no spero—ch'om di basso core
a tal ragione porti canoscenza:
ché senza—natural dimostramento
non ho talento—di voler provare . . .
(Donna me prego, 5–9; italics mine here and above)

25. Interestingly, Corrado Bologna notes the recurrence of words from these verses of Donna me prega in Inferno i, including "morte," "forte," "impedita," and "contraria vi": "i rimanti-chiave danteschi con cui s'inizia il poema sono già determinati, si vorrebbe dire ideologicamente e contrario, dalla Reimbildung di Cavalcanti"; see Il ritorno di Beatrice: simmetrie dantesche fra 'Vita Nova', 'Petrose' e 'Commedia' (Roma: Salerno, 1998), 32.

26. My formulation could be taken as an elaboration of the memorable conclusion of Gianfranco Contini's classic essay, "Cavalcanti in Dante," where he writes "Cavalcanti aveva salato il sangue a Dante"; see Un'idea di Dante (Torno: Einaudi, 1970), 143–157. Contini offers one Cavalcantian intertext for Inferno v: "Se Meré fosse amica a'miei disiri ispira a Francesca 'Se fosse amico il re de l'universo' " (155). On the intertextual presence of Cavalcanti in the Commedia, see Dante's Poets, especially 123–153, and now the lexically rich but hermeneutically scarce contribution of Nievo Del Sal, "Cavalcanti in Dante 'comico'", Rivista di letteratura italiana, ix (1991), 9–52. Much attention has been devoted recently to the Cavalcanti-Dante node, mostly to the relationship between the Vita Nuova and Donna me prego; see the Bibliographical Note in conclusion to this essay.

28. This is my understanding of these verses, for which I have argued in *Dante’s Poets*, page 146, note 66: “My interpretation of line 63 is, of course, apparent from my translation, in which I have rendered “cui” not as “quem” (i.e. Vergil), but as “ad eum quem.” or, if we follow Dante in historicizing the Signifier as a woman, “ad eam quam” (the argument as to whether Beatrice or God is intended is a spurious one, since they amount to the same thing; however, in that Dante and Guido share a past as love poets, and Beatrice is that localized version of the divine that Dante chose and Guido refused to discover within love poetry, the work seems the more appropriate choice.”

29. In her gloss of these verses Maria Corti discusses the contaminatio between philosophical and lyric discourses in *Donna me prega*. “Nell’Anonimo Giele si legge che l’anima sensitiva, in preda all’appetitus e al desiderium movet corpus . . . nec est illo motu mota per se, sed per accidens,’ cioè se è ‘alterata a sensibilibus extra.’ Si noti la coincidenza con ‘Movere, cangiando— color, riso in pianto’ del v. 46, dove il cambiamento di colore o il passaggio dal riso al pianto sono postille poetiche e della tradizione lirica al movet corpus del filosofo (con questo non si vuol ignorare l’esistenza del verbo ‘muovere’ nella lingua della poesia, là dove si descrivono gli effetti di amore, ma solo fare presente il caricarsi di significato dei termini dovuto all’incontro della tradizione con il nuovo pensiero filosofico).” See *La felicità mentale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1983), 30.

30. Robert M. Durting and Ronald D. Martinez argue convincingly for the reference to orgasm in this verse (see *Time and the Crystal. Studies in Dante’s ‘Rime Petrose*’ Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 102). I see no reason, however, to restrict morte to only one meaning here.

31. The uniqueness of this congedo, the only one in which Dante addresses “Morte,” seems to have escaped the commentator, although Foster and Boyde do note that “The apostrophe to death is a nice variation on the traditional congedo, in which the poet addresses his song” (2:76). Foster and Boyde argue against a Cavalcantian presence in this conzone: “despite the insistence on love as *male, dolore, morte*, and in spite of the account of the departure of the soul from the body (as again in *E’ m’incresce*), the poem is not specifically Cavalcantian: there are no spirits, no mind, no personified sighs, no dramatization of the psyche, no dialogue, no scientific subtlety, and above all there is no dolcezza in the style” (2:72–73). I disagree with this assessment: while the style of *Lo doloroso amor* is not Cavalcantian, the ideology most certainly is.

32. See “Dalla canzone ‘Lo doloroso amor’ a Francesca da Rimini,” in *L’esperienza poetica di Dante*, 2nd ed. (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1968), 207–226; quotation 214. Foster and Boyde also note the parallel: “It is worth remarking that the situation imagined here is, in one significant respect, very similar to that of Paolo and Francesca: as the poet’s soul will be in hell for ever accompanied by the love he has felt on earth, so the souls of the two damned lovers are for ever accompanied by their love (Inf. v, 103–5)—with the difference of course that the latter are each really, not merely in imagination, present to one another (ibid. 135); and also that they are nevertheless suffering (ibid. 44–45); whereas for the young Dante—not, as yet, much concerned with theological consistency—the state of damnation could be imagined as painless” (2:75).


34. The relevant verses are interesting also for language that Dante will draw on in *Inferno* v:

Chi s’innamora si come voi fare,
*or qua or là, e s*è *lega e dissolve,*
mostra chi’Amori leggernente il seianti.
Però, se legger cor cosi vi volve,
priego che con vertil il coreggiate,
si che s’accordi i fatti a’ dolci detti.
(*Io mi credea del tutto esser partito, 9–14; italics mine*)

“Or qua or là” will be echoed in “di qua, di là, di giù, di sù li mena,” while the characterization of
the lover as "light" surfaces in the description of Paolo and Francesca, who "paion si al vento esser leggieri" (Inf. v. 75).

35. Dante's Lyric Poetry, 2:323. They comment further: "This is the more remarkable in that Dante is now about forty years old and has behind him not only the Vita Nuova with its story of an entirely sublimated 'heavenly' love, but also the series of canzoni that more or less directly celebrated a love that had its seat in the mind or intellect" (323).

36. Foster and Boyle comment that the "consiglio" of the sonnet is "the act of 'la virtù che consiglia' " in Purgatorio xxi, 62. I agree with their statement that a comparison of lo sono stato with

Purgatorio xviii "strongly suggests that the carefully reasoned affirmation of free will in the latter text was made with the [sonnet's] denial of free will (where erotic stimuli at least are concerned) in mind" (2:324).

37. It is perhaps worth noting that the verb cavalcare, whose past participle cavalcato is but one consonant short of the name Cavalcanti, appears in the Commedia only here and in Purgatorio xxiv, the canto in which Dante coins the name of and defines for posterity the ultimately anti-Cavalcantian dolce stil novo. The verb appears in the simile used to describe Forese's departure: "Qual esce alcuna volta di guallopo / lo cavalier di schiera che cavalchi .. ." (94–95).

38. This discussion draws on my 1997 reading of Doglia mi reca as a meditation on desire that deliberately, following Guittone's lead, confounds lust (carnal desire) with avarice (material desire); see "Guittone's Ora parà, Dante's Doglia mi reca, and the Commedia's Anatomy of Desire," Seminario Danteesco Internazionale: International Dante Seminar 1, ed. Zygmunt Baraski (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1997), 3–23. Also in 1997 appeared Antonio Gagliardi's book, Guido Cavalcanti e Dante: una questione d'amore, noteworthy for the importance it gives to Doglia mi reca and for the similarity of our perspectives (but not of our subsequent readings): Gagliardi believes that "Doglia mi reca si può ritenere la risposta di Dante alla canzone di Guido" (72), and holds—correctly—that in Doglia mi reca "Dante costituisce un'ermeneutica parallela tra l'amore e l'avarizia" (78). However, in accord with his view of Dante as a dualist, a "negatore dell'amore" (32), Gagliardi profoundly misreads the canzone as denying all value to human love, establishing "un'ermeneutica negativa di qualsiasi desiderio funzionale all'eros" (73). I will return to this point further on.

39. In his reading of Canto v Francesco Torraca offers the following opportune citation from Re Enzo: "Così mi stringe amore / ed hammi così priso, / in tal guisa conquiso, / ch'èna altra parte non ha pensamento"; see "Il canto v dell'Inferno," 1902, rpt. Studi danteschi (Napoli: Francesco Perrella, 1912), 424.

40. For a fuller treatment of the impact of Guittone's canzone on Doglia mi reca, see my "Guittone's Ora parà, Dante's Doglia mi reca, and the Commedia's Anatomy of Desire," where I argue that Dante learns from Guittone the key move of conflating lust with avarice.

41. Gagliardi, 74. Precisely because there is much that is admirable in Gagliardi's book, including his bringing Doglia mi reca into play in a discussion of this sort, it is important to point out that he misconstrues Dante's text, even with respect to its literal meaning.

42. The Undivine 'Comedy', 23–24.

43. Contini writes that "'paura di novi tormenti' si riflette nei 'Novi tormenti e novi tormentati' del canto di Cerbero (con cui, nella prima bolgia, "novo tormento e novi frustatori"); see Un'idea di Dante, 155.

Bibliographical Note: Vita Nuova and Donna me prega

Much of the material that has accumulated recently on Dante and Cavalcanti has been devoted to the relationship between the Vita Nuova and Donna me prega, with a view to suggesting that Cavalcanti intended his canzone as a "reply" to the libello. This thesis was put forward in 1993 by
Giuliano Tanturli, “Guido Cavalcanti contro Dante,” in Le tradizioni del testo: Studi di letteratura italiana offerti a Domenico De Robertis, ed. Franco Gavazzeni and Guglielmo Gorni (Milano–Napoli: Ricciardi, 1993), pp. 3–13. Tanturli builds his argument on a weak foundation, namely the assumption that Dante in the Vita Nuova speaks of Guido with an “aria di perfetta intesa” (8), that as a result Dante could harbor no polemical intent vis-à-vis his friend, and that—given the formal echoes between the two texts—the polemicist had to be Cavalcanti, responding to Dante’s challenge: “L’intenzione di Dante non è di contrapporsi all’amico, ma di coordinarsi, o meglio, di coordinare lui a sé. La polemica contraddirebbe non solo l’atteggiamento, ma l’intenzione del libro nei suoi confronti” (8). But the intentionality of any text, let alone of a text as opaque as the Vita Nuova vis-à-vis the man it labels “primo de li miei amici” but also casts as precursor John the Baptist to Dante’s resurgent Christ, is far less transparent than Tanturli assumes. In response to Tanturli, Giorgio Inglese correctly points out that the Vita Nuova already indicates a divergence between Dante and Guido—“Tra l’autore della Vita nuova e il suo destinatario si percepisce un distacco”—and prudently notes that further precision as to the degree, intentionality, and trajectory of that divergence cannot be reconstructed from the data at hand: “che esso [il distacco] già corrisponda,—in piena coscienza dell’uno, dell’altro o di entrambi,—alla distanza obiettiva che corre fra la dottrina del ’libello’ e quella esposta in Donna me prega,—questo non si potrà affermare (perché Dante ne tace), e non si potrà negare, perché le effettive dichiarazioni di ’intesa’ fra l’autore della Vita nuova e il suo primo amico non consentono la conclusione”; see “... illa Guidonis de Florentia Donna me prega’ (Tra Cavalcanti e Dante),” Cultura neolatina, lv (1955), 179–210, quotation 182. Nonetheless, the theory of Donna me prega as reply to the Vita Nuova is put forward again, more assertively, by Enrico Malato in Dante e Guido Cavalcanti: il dissidio per la ‘Vita Nuova’ e il ‘disdegn’ di Guido (Roma: Salerno, 1997), a book that has stimulated considerable discussion, including a review article by Nicolò Pasero, “Dante in Cavalcanti: ancora sui rapporti fra Vita nuova e Donna me prega,” Medioevo romanzo, xxxii (1998), 388–414.

Taken as a whole, this investigation is troubling, for it offers the spectacle of philology degrading into pseudo-philology. The ideological rupture between Dante and Cavalcanti is a given. So, within an arena whose parameters have long been fully established (no one doubts the ideological split between the two), an enormous amount of “philological” energy is
devoted to establishing what cannot be established (a precise chronology for the *dissidio* between them). Since no amount of formalist comparison will yield a definitive chronology, the discussants are driven to base their arguments on opinions (which in themselves are perfectly legitimate, but not when presented as though philology), like Tanturli's opinion regarding the "perfetta intesa" between the two friends. Another example: in order to break the impasse regarding the chronology of the two texts to which his excellent formal analysis leads, Pasero appeals to *Donna me prega*’s character, noted by Tanturli, as more a refutation than a demonstration, and derives from the canzone’s adversative nature its polemical stance toward the *Vita Nuova*: “Nel caso dei nostri due testi, lo statuto di testo polemizzante compete a *Donna me prega* piuttosto che alla *Vita nuova*—ce lo confermano anche le reiterate dichiarazioni ‘avversative’ del testo cavalcantiano, spesso sottolineate dalla critica” (412). But—even putting aside the fact that the *Vita Nuova* is polemical enough in its own right, with or without adversatives—there is no reason that the target of Cavalcanti’s refutation needs to be the *Vita Nuova*: he could be aiming at any number of unknown targets, such as a text we do not have, or a fellow poet with whom he had conversed. Indeed, his target could, quite plausibly, be himself: he could be correcting the much more optimistic view of love taken, for instance, in his *ballata, Veggio negli occhi della donna mia*.

Finally, it is troubling to see the opacity of these texts violated so willfully. It is one thing to solicit a text, to probe it for meanings that are not immediately evident; we do this, as literary critics, and our readers let us know if they find our speculations compelling. But it is quite another to mount entire psychodramas on their backs, as Malato does: “La serie dei testi esaminati, dunque, dimostra come, contrariamente a quanto si è a lungo ritenuto, non sia mancata una ‘reazione’ da parte di Guido all’offerta della *Vita nuova*: nettamente negativa, di rifiuto, dettato forse dal fastidio (o dal risentimento) del ‘primo amico’ per il suo coinvolgimento—ritenuto probabilmente abusivo, o comunque per lui inaccettabile—in una situazione e in una dimensione ideale alla quale egli si riteneva del tutto estraneo” (65). Even less acceptable is to claim as established that which is conjecture. This Malato does when he constructs an argument that is one conjecture after another in order to use Dante’s *Poscia ch’Amor* and *Voi che ’ntendendo* to date *Donna me prega* and then claims to “aver stabilito che non solo la grande canzone di Guido non proceda la *Vita*
nuova e non possa essere stata presente a Dante quando elaborava il suo 'libello,' ma che, al contrario, Donna me prega segua quest’ultimo, lo pre-supponga, e . . . sia stata anzi addirittura pensata e scritta allo scopo di contestare l’ideologia rappresentata nell’operetta dantesca” (53). That Dante and his early friend were ultimately ideologically opposed we know, but no amount of strong talk will allow us, with the knowledge we currently have, to determine the exact sequence of action and reaction through which the rupture occurred.