MARY ALEXANDRA WATT

TAKE THIS BREAD:
DANTE'S EUCHARISTIC BANQUET

Long before Dante's pilgrim found himself "nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita," (*Inf.* 1:1), Dante, the writer, had become well-practised in the effective use of framing metaphors.¹ As early as the *Vita Nuova*, Dante had used the device in an attempt to characterize his writing and, by extension, as a means of controlling its reception. Although the prosimetric form of the *Vita Nuova* might bear a superficial resemblance to the "vidas" that occasionally accompanied collections of courtly love poetry, Dante's "vida" is quite different. Written by the poet-lover himself, by the poet-protagonist, this "new" life is considerably more authoritative, even if more subjective, since its author was an eyewitness to the events it recounts. It is, however, the framing metaphor, the "book of memory,"² that confirms the authoritative nature of the work. Dante describes the sum of his pseudo-autobiographical recollections as a "book," elevating the status of the work beyond a simple "vida" and, more importantly, implying that he, as the writer of this authoritative book, is, therefore, an "*auctor*."³ Concomitantly, it is the imposition of the framing metaphor that justifies the exegetical exercise that follows. In transforming the writer into an "*auctor*," or author, the framing metaphor simultaneously transforms his memories into a work worthy of the explication that Dante willingly provides.

The metaphor, however, does more than elevate the status of the work and its creator. It also highlights a distinctive duality inherent in the project of the *Vita Nuova*. The image of the book of memory, coupled with the image of Dante transcribing, editing and glossing what he finds therein, creates and underscores the two roles that Dante must assume in order to effect the purpose of the work; to render comprehensible the significance of the events surrounding the life and death of Beatrice. As the protagonist in the story of his own life, Dante is oblivious to the meaning of the events at the time they took place. As the copyist, poring over the chronicle written in the book of his memory, however, Dante has the lux-

ury of retrospection and is, therefore, able to expand the role of the copyist to include editing and explication. Thus Dante the copyist, will also, at times, function as both redactor and exegete of those events recorded in the *libello*. It is in the creation of these two roles, protagonist and copyist, facilitated by the imposition of the framing metaphor, that Dante establishes the paradigm upon which he will continue to rely in the series of pseudo-autobiographical works that follow and which exhibit clear links to the *Vita Nuova*, the *Convivio* and ultimately, the *Commedia*.

Further, it is in the framing metaphor and the duality it engenders that we see the genesis of the continual tension that characterizes the relationship between these works.

Establishing Dante's dual role as protagonist and copyist, with all that entails, is instrumental in establishing the temporal tension between then and now, between knowing and not knowing and between that which is hidden and that which has been revealed. Like the "nunc et tunc" dichotomy of St. Augustine's conversion model, this dichotomy facilitates the retrospection necessary for an effective and authoritative exegesis of one's life events and provides the paradigmatic structure onto which the antithetical states of knowing and not knowing are then engrafted.

Moreover, this tension interacts with the authoritative implications of the metaphor by creating an affinity between the *Vita Nuova* and the Gospels. This affinity, in turn, underscores and reveals the christological implications of the events it recounts. In the *Vita Nuova*, the protagonist's state of "not knowing" is akin to the disciples' state of not knowing prior to Christ's resurrection. Just as the resurrection ultimately provided the disciples with an epiphany, so too is Dante's blindness to Beatrice's christological significance ultimately remedied by Beatrice's death and "resurrection" in Chapter 39. In light of this revelation, the copyist *cum* redactor can be confident in including the episode with Giovanna and Beatrice in Chapter 24,⁴ for surely this incident has been revealed as significant, though, like so many other events, its true meaning was not evident at the time it took place. Dante, the copyist/redactor, must, therefore, also include the recurrence of the number nine in association with Beatrice, as well as the natural phenomena surrounding her death, for they have now been revealed as portents and confirmation of the affinity Beatrice bears to Christ.

Earlier in the work, the reader has been alerted to this shift from not knowing to knowing by Dante, the copyist *cum* exegete, who confirms in Chapter 3, "lo verace giudicio del detto sogno, non fue veduto allora per alcuno ma ora è manifestissimo a li più semplici." The reader, however, like

Dante, the protagonist, and like the disciples, was not certain as to precisely what it was that they did not know. The affirmation clearly intends to liken the shift to that chronicled in the Gospels since the phrase itself echoes the Gospel of John.⁵ These Giovannine echoes imbue Dante's *libello* with a status far beyond mere chronicle. Indeed it is a species of gospel; the gospel according to Dante, in which he can write those things whose meanings have been made clear by the death of his Christ figure, his redeemer, Beatrice.

In the years following the completion of the *Vita Nuova*, however, another event even more cataclysmic than the death of Beatrice, caused Dante to consider, again in retrospect, the significance of the events that inspired his earlier poetry and, in particular, those events in which Beatrice figured most prominently. Thrust once again, this time by his exile, into the role of exegete, Dante, not surprisingly, approaches the *Convivio* in much the same way as he did the *Vita Nuova*.⁶

Stylistically, the *Convivio* differs substantially from the *Vita Nuova* but from its outset the *Convivio* makes it clear that the work is, like the *Vita Nuova*, exegetical.⁷ Moreover, Dante's explicit mention of the *Vita Nuova* and his assertion that the *Convivio* will expand upon the earlier work suggests most strongly, however, that, at least to a certain extent, the *Convivio* will effect a re-reading of the *Vita Nuova*.⁸

The link between the two works is further reinforced by Dante's reprise of the same structural device employed in the *Vita Nuova*, the framing metaphor. The pivotal role played by the framing metaphor in terms of both the structure and the hermeneutic strategy in the *Vita Nuova* is repeated in the *Convivio*, though the choice of the banquet as the signifier of the metaphor marks the *Convivio*'s departure from the earlier work of his "gioventute."

Dante's simultaneous adoption and revision of an element of his literary past echoes a tension akin to that which characterized the entirety of the *Vita Nuova*. The attempt to break with the past while, at the same time, seeking to reconcile it with the present, lies at the heart of both projects. The temporal distinction created by the dichotomy of continuity and rupture first introduced in the *Vita Nuova*, is, in the *Convivio*, extended beyond the confines of the *libello*, subtly transforming the revelations of the book of memory into mere prophecy of that which will be revealed in the light of exile. Both works must reconcile two disparate parts of a single entity; a single life that has been cloven into two distinct segments by the intervention of a cataclysmic event, but in the *Convivio*, the two opposing parts of the *Vita Nuova* have been fused into a single past; the unknowing

"then," while the post-exile events have assumed the place of the better informed more fully enlightened "now."

To highlight this distinction, Dante adopts a technique present in the *Vita Nuova*, expressing the dichotomy in language infused with scriptural echoes. Here, his choice of Pauline allusions, however, serves to underscore the temporal aspect of the *nunc et tunc* dichotomy, as Dante characterizes the earlier work as a product of his youth, easily evoking St. Paul's own disposal of childish things.⁹

Structurally, Dante's choice of this particular signifier, the banquet, coupled with the intentional link to his earlier work, effectively creates a similar dichotomy between the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*. In contrast to the diachronic figure of the "book of memory," the synchronic figure of the banquet creates a more static narrative rooted in the present, thus more emphatically associating the earlier work with the past. The synchronic nature of the banquet metaphor combines with the *Convivio*'s predominantly allegorical focus¹⁰ to preclude the possibility of a progressive narrative, further establishing the *Convivio* as the fixed point from which the exegete might legitimately look back.

Dante's reprise of a framing metaphor then, links the two works while the choice of signifier, the banquet, relegates the *Vita Nuova* to the realm of "then" and presents the *Convivio* as the author's most recent version of "now." The *libello* is thus transformed into a first chapter in the greater book of "now" which the *Convivio* constitutes, just as the two seemingly contrasting parts are transformed into complements which interact symbiotically.¹¹ The *Vita Nuova* provides the rudiments of the *Convivio*'s project while the *Convivio* furnishes a revised significance to the *Vita Nuova* and further enhances the role that Dante fashioned for himself in its pages.

The enhancement of Dante's status as writer, is nonetheless still tied to the figure of Beatrice, but the perspective of the *Convivio* allows him to see her in a different way. Towards the end of the *Vita Nuova* the vision of Beatrice led Dante the copyist/exegete to focus on the implications of the various phenomena associated with Beatrice. Her death and *post mortem* appearance to Dante caused him to consider, in retrospect, the recurrence of the number nine, her relationship to Giovanna and the circumstances surrounding her death. Dante the copyist/exegete understood these signs as a clear indication of a nexus between Beatrice and Christ. The image of Beatrice in all her glory serves a function akin to Christ's appearance to Saul on the road to Damascus and is one of the earliest hints at an affinity between Dante and Paul that will continue to inform the pseudo-auto-

biographical works that follow. In the context of the *Vita Nuova*, Beatrice's *post mortem* appearance establishes, in essence, the first of many turning points in Dante's ongoing literary project. It is the first point at which Dante's sight is altered and he can look back and read Beatrice's signs. It is the point at which he ceases to see through a glass darkly.

Dante the exegete, in his pre-exile state, thus saw himself as the divinely selected gospeller of Beatrice. Accordingly, his love for her and its by-product, his poetry, as well as the prophesied work were afforded an authority that was merely hinted at in Dante's first use of the image of the book. Dante's exile, however, generates an even greater revelation, thrusting the epiphany of the *Vita Nuova* decidedly into the past and revealing its insight as incomplete. Exile reconfigures Dante and adds yet another dimension to his persona. This new persona will not detract from the *Vita Nuova*, as Dante has made clear,¹² rather it will enhance it, as he suggested it would.¹³ In the *Convivio* as the host of a supper at which he offers the bread of new light,¹⁴ Dante creates a stunning, if not immediately obvious, analogy between himself and Jesus Christ. Yet the analogy ought not to be unanticipated. Indeed, the introduction of the banquet metaphor causes the reader to recall and rethink the many christological associations already present in the *Vita Nuova*. In this light, the episode in Chapter 24 of the *Vita Nuova* takes on a substantially enhanced significance. One can extend the analogous relationship implied in the episode so as to understand that not only is Giovanna to Beatrice as John was to Christ, but also that Guido Cavalcanti is to John as Dante is to Christ. Giovanna and Beatrice can also, therefore, be read as types of Guido and Dante. Similarly, Beatrice of the *Vita Nuova*, can be seen as a *figura* of what Dante will become in the days following his exile.

The figural relationship between Beatrice of the *Vita Nuova* and Dante of the *Convivio* is masterfully underscored by the fact that Dante, in the *Convivio* has adeptly chosen an image which represents a later Christ than that alluded to in the *Vita Nuova*. The analogy in the *Vita Nuova* was to a Christ whose mission and, therefore, Dante's as well, was still mere prophecy. In the *Convivio* the analogy is to a more mature Christ on the brink of fulfilment of that prophecy. The banquet metaphor in which Dante is the host breaking bread, teaching his disciples, therefore, allows Dante to fulfil the prophecy of the *Vita Nuova* and create a new covenant. Just as the New Testament fulfilled earlier scriptures, so too will Dante's new testament fulfil and rely on earlier scriptures, those of others but mostly his own. The *Vita Nuova* is prophecy, *figura*; it is the unknowing "then."

It is important, however, to recognize that this newer, more enlightened "now" does not detract from the truth of the *Vita Nuova*, but rather, it merely reinterprets its signs. Beatrice thus remains a Christ figure, but her significance is expanded. She is a Christ figure certainly, but in the *Convivio*, her associations are no longer merely evidence of her divinity but rather, they paint her also as a type of Dante himself, in the sense that she is a *figura* of the Christ-like figure that Dante will become in both the *Convivio* and ultimately in the *Commedia*.

It is through the temporal posteriority of the *Convivio* with its attendant "truer" perspective in combination with the analogous relationship to Jesus Christ, that Dante expresses the new and truer role in which we are to envision him. He is no longer simply an *auctor*, he is now also a redeemer. But he is even more capacious for Dante's new wisdom and love of philosophy have resulted in an intellectually expanded Christ figure. While the inspiration for the *Vita Nuova* was predominantly mystical or spiritual, the rational inspiration for the *Convivio* has not erased, but rather it has simply enhanced the ultimate purpose of the earlier work. While the interpretive exercise of the *Vita Nuova* focused on the redemptive significance of Beatrice vis-a-vis Dante, in the *Convivio*, that configuration is revealed as a pre-figuration of the role that Dante will now assume vis-a-vis his banquet guests as he casts himself, in turn, as their redeemer. Accordingly, his offer of bread, of new light thus creates a new covenant, creating a relationship between the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio* akin to that between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Gospels.

That the focus has now shifted to the figural relationship between Dante and Christ, rather than that between Beatrice and Christ, is reinforced throughout the *Convivio*. Dante, for example, reprises Christ's disdain for priests and law-makers¹⁵ and adopts His habit of "speaking in parables."¹⁶ Just as in the *Vita Nuova* Beatrice's withholding her salutation, and later, her death spurred Dante on to challenge the lyric poets and adopt a new style, exile resituates him yet again, encouraging the challenge he mounts in the *Convivio* against the "litterati" and "law makers."¹⁷ This resituation, however, must not contradict the essence of Beatrice's role in the *Vita Nuova*; that is, to establish that Dante is somehow uniquely blessed, lest it undermine the essential authority on which Dante now builds his expanded authority as redeemer. The *Convivio*, therefore, requires a difficult narrative balance on Dante's part. He must look forward, yet keep the past in mind. Accordingly, in the *Convivio*, Dante takes great pains not to negate the divine selection revealed in the events of the *Vita Nuova*. He states quite clearly that this work will not detract from the earlier piece

and implicitly recognizes that he remains obliged to the authority established therein. Even though the *Convivio* suggests that at the end of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante did not see his true destiny, it does not suggest that he was mistaken as to its divine nature. The error of the *Vita Nuova* can be corrected, for it was only a misperception. It is perception, then, that is corrected in the *Convivio* not the object perceived. Dante is by no means denying a divine destiny and, accordingly, does not want to be seen as turning away from such destiny to embrace either a worldly female or a profane doctrine. Accordingly, reason and the pursuit of knowledge in the *Convivio* are, at all times, linked to God and are essentially Christian in nature just as his exile is expressed in Christian terminology.¹⁸

The true nature of this redemption is revealed in a variety of ways. One of the earliest and perhaps most complex examples is found in the first book of *Convivio*,¹⁹ where Dante places himself at the feet of banquet guests waiting to gather what falls. The image recalls the gospel story²⁰ of a Canaanite who asks Christ's mercy for her sick daughter. When Christ says "it is not good to throw the children's bread to the dogs," she responds that even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table, convincing Christ that she is virtuous even if she is not a Hebrew. The story was typically used by Christians to justify Paul's preaching to the gentiles, especially once the Jews proved themselves "unworthy" through their disbelief.²¹

The dual image of Dante as both host and worthy dog, or gentile, recalls the grammatical duality produced by Dante's use of both first person singular and first person plural at the beginning of Book I, a device he will later use in the *Commedia*. Here, as in the *Commedia*,²² the shift from "I" to "we" produces an effect in which the narrator, though clearly an individual empathizes with his audience. The effect is one of inclusion and differentiation at the same time; in this case, telling the reader that Dante like them, hungers for redemption, but also that Dante is the one who will bring it.

The adoption of the role of redeemer is the most notable enhancement of the role Dante played in the *Vita Nuova*. There, in the context of the story of his literary evolution, he hinted at his own coming literary redemption. Here in the *Convivio*, not only is Dante's redemption imminent but he presents himself as a literary redeemer, saving those to whom redemption was not originally available but who may receive it should they prove worthy. Here, however, we note that the affinity between Christ and Dante is not completely developed, though it is substantially more explicit than it was in the *Vita Nuova*. In the *Convivio*, the affinities between

Christ and Dante and the redemptive role that has been revealed to Dante is expressed most often typologically, as Dante assumes a Pauline aspect, a technique which he will reprise in the *Commedia*.

This Pauline affinity, evident in the author's relegation of the *Vita Nuova* to his youthful past, sees its greatest development in Book IV, where Dante embarks on a redemptive mission to Christianize pagan literature. While Dante's study of philosophy has given him the tools to read and understand the ancient authors, exile has assured him of his divinely appointed authority to interpret them and place them within a Christian context. Nowhere is this expanded authority as pronounced as in the case of Dante's treatment of Cato of Utica to whom he refers as "sacrossimo" (*Conv.* IV, v, 16) and of whom he asks "E quale uomo terreno più degno fu di significare Iddio, che Catone?" (*Conv.* IV, xxviii, 15-19) Indeed, Cato, the Roman who committed suicide rather than suffer injustice, will find the ultimate redemption when Dante spares him an eternity in Hell and appoints him instead, as gate keeper of Purgatory. (*Purg.* 1:28-108).

The divine authority of this redemptive mission, is confirmed through Dante's evocation of Pauline language, immediately before and after both references to Cato. In the latter of the two citations (*Conv.* IV, xxviii, 15), Dante invokes the same doctrine used by Paul (circumcision "of the heart") to justify preaching to the Gentiles²³ and by the church in its interpretation of the story in *Matthew* noted above.²⁴ Just as Paul showed the Gentiles the way to redemption, so too does Dante bring the possibility of redemption to the pagans and pagan writers whom he deems worthy. Similarly in *Convivio* IV, Dante cites Virgil's *Aeneid* as authority for his political views with respect to the divine authority of the Roman Empire,²⁵ rewriting the relevant section so as to attribute the words of Jupiter to "Dio."

If, as Michelangelo Picone suggests ("Fra autobiografia e tipologia" 112), the *Vita Nuova* represented opposing ideological worlds (classicism and Christianity) en route to reconciliation²⁶ then surely the *Convivio* continues the effort.²⁷ But here the emphasis is different. As Picone has observed, in the *Vita Nuova* Dante's relationship to the classical authors was rooted in *imitatio*, that is, that Dante, in writing his *libello* integrates "the theory of pagan love (eros) into the vision of Christian charity (caritas)." ("Dante and the Classics" 58) The reconciliation process is essentially one of absorption. In the *Convivio*, Picone points out, the classical authors are treated in a different way. Picone suggests that Chapters 25 through 28 of Book IV illustrate most clearly Dante's reconciliation process in the *Convivio*. Here, Dante ranks the quotations of classical authors "within an

encyclopedic Christian system. For him there does not seem to be a rupture between pagan truth and Christian truth, but continuity. Thus the classical fables and myths are fully capable of being restored to modern learning," ("Dante and the Classics" 60).

At the same time as Dante includes the pagan authors within a Christian rubric, he adopts a number of forms not typically associated with Christian writing, such as his use of the "allegory of the poets"²⁸ to give structure to his work. Dante's decisive statement on the issue of *auctoritas*, that an *autore* is one who is not only to be believed but obeyed,²⁹ helps legitimize his adoption of such forms. *Auctoritas* in Dante's hands, suggests that a particular model of writing is to be followed by those aspiring to *auctoritas* and, conversely, that a form used by an *autor* is legitimate. By using the forms of acknowledged *auctores* Dante continues to present himself as an *autor* while lending his Christian authority to the non-Christian forms, and thereby, continues his project of redeeming non-Christian authors. Here then is where we see Dante at his most Pauline. He is not supplanting the classical authors but including them, and Christianizing them.

The use of the banquet metaphor, however, allows Dante to do much more than resituate himself in terms of his literary endeavour. Whereas the *Vita Nuova* was, at its most expansive, a book chronicling Dante's poetic evolution, the scope of the *Convivio* is such that it also comprises a treatise on Dante's political evolution. Indeed it is the inclusion of this narrative thread that most clearly marks the expanded nature of the *Convivio* and most characterises it as a second chapter. As Picone notes, the final aspiration of the *Vita Nuova* was not to seek an historical reintegration into the "*civitas terrena*" but to find "l'iter intellettuale che conduce alla integrazione assoluta nella *civitas eterna*." The *Convivio* on the other hand is a book intentionally destined to restore its author in the esteem of the Florentine *civitas* from which he was unjustly estranged. ("*Vita Nuova*: Fra Autobiografia e Tipologia" 63)

Notwithstanding the apparent disparity such a divergent narrative thread might otherwise introduce, the adaptability of the framing metaphor permits Dante to maintain a sense of internal cohesiveness throughout. The metaphor is not only ideally suited to the expression of Dante's literary progress but, in its implicit analogy between Christ and Dante, is ideal for framing his political story since Dante, like Christ, has been unjustly accused and excluded. Just as the analogy between himself and Christ permitted Dante to assume the role of redeemer of the non-Christian writers, his role as an exile and, therefore, an external

observer, in this narrative thread justifies another pseudo-messianic role; teacher and redeemer of society.³⁰ Without offering us an explicit exegetical explanation, Dante has, in essence, created an image which represents his reality. It is almost as if he had written "And so I imagined my life, the false accusations and marginalisation, as the life of Christ." Just as the true story of his literary evolution lay in the allegorical interpretation of his writing, here too the true story is also located in the allegorical meaning of the metaphor he uses to give form to his story.

The figural relationship between Dante and Christ created by the framing metaphor permits Dante to exploit a series of metaphors which are also associated with Christ and which can, in turn, accommodate multiple allegorical meanings. Figuring society as a flock of sheep which has strayed from the right path,³¹ for example, allows Dante as the teacher-host of the supper, and as a Christ-figure to lead the way, the right way, back to the fold. The reiteration of path imagery, for example, the "way" being wrong,³² affirms the affinity between Dante and Christ.³³ Finally, Dante's representation of himself as the host of the banquet at which the "new light" will be given recalls not only Christ's reference to himself as the light that will bring people out of the darkness but also recalls the episodes in the New Testament in which Christ is figured as the provider of bread which, in turn is associated with the salvation of the faithful.³⁴ Dante's new role as saviour extends, therefore, not just to literature but to the society that wrongfully rejected him.

In choosing a framing metaphor that lends itself as easily to one narrative thread as to the other, Dante mirrors a technique which has its beginnings in the *Vita Nuova*; the suggestion of one story by the imagery of the other. As in the *Vita Nuova*, where the same imagery lent itself as easily to the writer's story as to the love story, here too, the imagery and structure of the *Convivio* is equally adept at telling the political story and the writer's story, both of which, in turn, share redemption as one of their goals. While at times the political message is clearly distinct, as in Dante's use of invective³⁵ and at other times his literary story is distinct (as in the digression on the meaning of *auctor*) most often both stories are layered one on top of the other, making his role as *auctor* intrinsic to his political role.

This is most evident in *Convivio* IV. What we see throughout the final completed *trattato* is that the layering is not simple coincidence in the sense that the two stories are parallel; rather it is an intertwining in which the authority of one story is contingent on the other and in which each narrative thread provides the basis for the other. This intertwining is clearly

evident in an example cited above, where Dante attributes the words of Jupiter to "Dio." (*Com.* IV, iv, 11) Having thus redeemed and Christianized the work, Dante then proceeds to rely on it in support of his political argument. His literary story, his revised literary mission, therefore, becomes intrinsic to his political story for only in redeeming a pagan authority, in this case, Virgil, can Dante legitimately set the pagan work alongside the "Scriptures" whose prophecies prefigure and find their fulfilment in Dante's political fortunes.

Similarly, in *Convivio* IV, v, 6 Dante poses a coincidence of Aeneas's arrival in Italy with the birth of King David, both of which he uses to confirm the historic basis of his political argument that the world was at optimal disposition for the birth of Christ during the reign of the Roman Empire. In so doing, not only does Dante establish a parallel in terms of Christian and Roman dynastic succession,³⁶ but he also, thereby, assigns to the *Aeneid* the same historical value as he affords Orosius and indeed the Old Testament.³⁷ That Dante's calculation as to the coincidence of the two events is dubious³⁸ only confirms the importance of the insertion of the Virgil reference to his project. Dante has had to revise either the biblical history or the "history" according to Virgil in order to locate the latter amongst the writings which confirm the fulfilment of the messianic prophecies.³⁹ In Dante's hands, Virgil's *Aeneid* becomes intrinsic, along with the Gospel of Luke,⁴⁰ to the expression of Dante's political aspirations.

The unfinished state of the *Convivio* ought not, however, to be taken as an abandonment of its ideas and revelations; quite the contrary. Dante's failure to complete the work suggests merely the intervention of yet another event, vision or revelation that causes him to refocus, to see the events from yet another perspective, that of the *Commedia*. Indeed, the *Convivio*'s incomplete state corresponds quite easily to the location of the pilgrim at the start of the *Commedia*; that is, in the "middle" of his journey. From a literary perspective it is not much of a stretch to suggest that the literary journey that comprises the *Commedia*, picks up in the middle of Dante's unfinished *Convivio*. The *Convivio* may, therefore, be seen as an essential step in the pseudo-autobiographical journey that culminates in the *Commedia*;⁴¹ a necessary component in a much larger literary construct whose fundamental structure is triune. Within that triune structure, the *Vita Nuova* may be seen as corresponding to John's prophecy and the *Convivio* to the Last Supper and revelation of God's will, while the *Commedia* fulfils the prophecies of the first two, comprising the crucifixion,⁴² descent, resurrection and ascension. Thus Dante's banquet, his

Convivio, is essential to this sequence. Moreover, Dante's failure to complete the work does not detract from its role in the larger construct; rather, it confirms it. An unfinished *Convivio* begs closure and in many ways anticipates the *Commedia*. The eucharistic offering and the promise of redemption are, indeed, ultimately fulfilled in the pilgrim's Easter journey. The *Commedia*'s reprise of the paschal drama marks the terminus of Dante's pseudo-autobiographical *iter* as well as the typological fulfilment of its christological affinities and Giovannine aspirations. With the pilgrim's ascension and the final vision of the *Commedia*, Dante the pilgrim, Dante the writer and Dante the Christ figure all breathe the same sigh, 'It is finished.'⁴³

University of Florida

NOTES

¹By "framing metaphor" I mean a metaphor that is introduced early in the work, which seeks to characterize the work as a particular object or event and which is sustained throughout the duration of the text.

²"In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria dinanzi a la quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice: Incipit vita nova." *VN* 1: 1.

³In the Middle Ages, the notion of the book was charged with significance beyond a mere physical description of an object. According to Michelangelo Picone, for Dante to consider a work a "libro," it had to carry the weight of *autoritas*, such as that which he afforded the Bible, or Virgil's *Aeneid*. Picone suggests that, in light of the research on the symbolism of the book in the Middle Ages, Dante would have held the *libro* in high esteem and that for Dante, few writings qualified as "books." In fact, adds Picone, the term *libro* for Dante could only have been applied to those writings which imitated divine scripture. ("L'Ovidio di Dante" 108)

⁴"E poco dopo queste parole, che lo cuore mi disse con la lingua d'Amore, io vidi venire verso me una gentile donna, la quale era di famosa bieltade, e fue già molto donna di questo primo amico. E lo nome di questa donna era Giovanna, salvo che per la sua bieltade, secondo che li altri crede, imposto l'era nome primavera; e così era chiamata. E appresso lei, guardando, vidi venire la mirabile Beatrice," (*VN* 24) Michelangelo Picone suggests that we are to interpret the episode as meaning that Primavera is to Beatrice as John the Baptist was to Christ, that is, as a precursor or indeed, as a herald. ("*Vita nuova* e la tradizione romanza" 70)

⁵As Domenico De Robertis notes, the entire phrase recalls *John* 12: 16; "His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to him." (*VN n.*)

⁶Giuseppe Mazzotta has long recognized the pivotal role played by exile in Dante's hermeneutics. In his landmark work, *Dante, Poet of the Desert*, he writes, "the desert . . . is where we are like nomads and where we turn what is alien into the familiar; but there we also come to know that what is familiar is never a tamed truth and that behind it steadily lurk signs that have to be interpreted and not simply understood." (13)

⁷"E con ciò sia cosa che la vera intenzione mia fosse altra che quella che di fuori mostrano le canzoni predette, per allegorica espozione quelle intendo mostrare, appresso la litterale istoria ragionata; sì che l'una ragione e l'altra darà sapore a coloro che a questa cena sono convitati." (*Conv.* I, i)

⁸*Conv.* I, i, l6 "E se ne la presente opera, la quale è *Convivio* nominata e vo' che sia, più virilmente si trattasse che ne la Vita nuova, non intendo però a quella in parte derogare, ma maggiormente giovare per questa quella; veggendo sì come ragionevolmente quella fervida e passionata, questa temperata e virile esser conviene." (emphasis mine); *Conv.* II, ii, I "Cominciando adunque, dico che la Stella di Venere due fiato rivolta era in quello suo cerchio che la fa parere serotina e matutina, secondo diversi) tempi, appresso lo trapassamento di quelle Beatrice beata che vive in cielo con gli angeli e in terra con la mia anima, quando quella gentile donna, cui feci menzione ne la fine de la Vita nuova, parve primamente, accompagnata d'Amore, a li occhi miei e prese luogo alcuno ne la mia mente." (emphasis mine)

⁹"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then shall I know just as I also am known." I *Cor.* 13:11-12.

¹⁰This is confirmed in *Conv.* II, xii, 5 " . . . io, che cercava di consolarme, trovai non solamente a le mie lagrime rimedio, ma vocabuli d'autori e di scienze e di libri: li quali considerando, giudicava bene che la filosofia, che era donna di questi autori di queste scienze e di questi libri, fosse somma cosa. E imaginava lei fatta come una donna gentile . . ."; *Conv.* II, xii, 8 "per che io, sentendomi levare dal pensiero del primo amore a la virtù di questo, quasi maravigliandomi apersi la bocca nel parlare de la proposta canzone, mostrando la mia condizione sotto figura d'altre cose: . . ."

Whether or not Dante did, in fact, originally compose the poem as allegory has been the subject of much debate. Francis Fergusson, for example, simply does not believe Dante, saying, "But I think she was a real woman, and I cannot believe that *I 'oi che intendendo* (sic) was originally written to celebrate philo-sophia, the love of wisdom, genuine though that love was in Dante." (41) It would seem, however, that what is most important is not so much what the truth actually was but what Dante intended us to accept as the truth.

¹¹Pietro Cudini refers to this alternatively as a "legame di continuità -opposizione" (xix) and a "rapporto di continuità-diversità" (133), but stops short of exploring the symbiotic nature of this rapport.

¹²"non intendo però a quella in parte alcuna derogare," (*Conv.* I, i, 16)

¹³"ma maggiormente giovare per questa quella," (*Conv.* I, i, 16)

¹⁴*Conv.* I, xiii, 12 "Questo sarà luce nuova, sole nuovo, lo quale surgerà là dove l'usato tramonterà, e darà lume a coloro che sono in tenebre e in oscuritate

per lo usato sole che a loro non luce.”

While many critics have noted the biblically allusive nature of this language, surprisingly, the relationship between Jesus as the host of the last supper, surrounded by his disciples (or as the provider of light and bread in general) and Dante as the host of this new banquet where bread and new light will be offered appears in none of the authorities I have consulted.

¹⁵Dante continually associates his audience with sheep, recalling the image of Christ and by analogy, casts himself as Dante the Good Shepherd; *Conv.* I, i, 7 “Oh beati quelli pochi che seggono a quella mensa dove lo pane de li angeli si manuca! e miseri quelli che con le pecore hanno comune cibo!” Just as Jesus held the Saducees and priests in disdain, so too does Dante reject the priests and law-makers and speaks instead to the common people for they, like him, have been rejected and oppressed by the authorities. The Gospels contain examples of Jesus’s rejection of the authority of the Scribes, Saducees and Pharisees. Chapter 5 of the *Gospel of Matthew*, in particular, encapsulates the sentiments of Christ towards these lawmakers and enforcers of the law; “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (*Matt.* 5 :20)

See also *Matt.* 15:14 “Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” See also the entirety of *Matt.* 16 which further underlines Christ’s attitude towards the Pharisees and Saducees. Dante is equally scathing in his treatment of these groups. A particular focus of his disdain is “colui che è amico di sapienza per utilitate, sì come li legisti, [li] medici e quasi tutti i religiosi.” (*Conv.* III, xi, 10)

¹⁶*Matt.* 13:34-38 “All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without parables He did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ‘I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.’”

¹⁷Dante makes no secret of his disdain for the so-called “litterati” (*Conv.* I, ix, 3: “E a vituperio di loro dico che non si deono chiamare litterari, pero che non acquistano la lettera per lo suo uso, ma in quanto per quella guadagnano denari o dignitate.”) and implicitly distinguishes himself from them.

¹⁸As was indicated above, the framing metaphor forged an affinity between Dante and Christ thereby establishing a Christian context for Dante’s marginalisation.

¹⁹“E io adunque, che non seggio a la beata mensa, ma, fuggito de la pastura del vulgo, a’ piedi di coloro che seggono ricolgo di quello che da loro cade ...” (*Conv.* I, i, 10)

²⁰*Matt.* 15:26-27.

²¹The Jews historically referred to themselves as the “sons of God” because they were the chosen people who had preserved the true religion of the world and to whom God had entrusted His promises. The gentiles were called “dogs” for their idolatry and their deep moral corruption. (*La Sacra Bibbia* 70)

²²In *Inferno* I, Dante uses both the first person singular and plural to describe his predicament. He starts with the image of the collective road of our life, but then he shifts the focus to his own individual situation. (“Nel mezzo del cammin

di nostra vita, mi ritrovai ..." *Inf.* I: 1-2) He can thus pronounce that while this is his own story, it is also the story of the collective of humanity.

²³*Rom.* 2:28, 29 "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."

²⁴*Conv.* IV, v, 16; *Conv.* IV, xxviii.

²⁵*Conv.* IV, iv, 11 "E in ciò s'accorda Virgilio nel primo de lo Eneida, quando dice, in persona di Dio parlando: 'A costoro — cioè a li Romani — né termine di cose né termine di tempo pongo; a loro ho dato impero senza fine.'" The reference is from *Aeneid* I, 278-9: "His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono:/ imperium sine fine dedi." ("To the Romans I set no boundary in space or time. I have granted them Dominion, and it has no end." (Knight 36). As Cesare Vasoli notes, Dante's opinion in this respect is not expressed only in the *Convivio* but rather appears in *Ep.*, VII, 11-2 in which Dante stases that the "Romanorum gloriosa potestas nec metas Italie nec tricornis Europe margine coarctatur" and although "vim passa in angustam gubernacula su contraxerit," still "indique ... de inviolabili iure fluctus Amphitritis attingens vix ab inutili unda Oceani se circumcingi dignatur."

²⁶Michelangelo Picone sees the *Vita nuova* as an amalgam of classical text and Christian commentary which represents the encounter of opposing ideological worlds (classicism and Christianity) en route to reconciliation. ("La *Vita nuova* fra autobiografia e tipologia" 112)

²⁷Dante's interpretation (*Conv.* IV, xxii, 15: "per queste tre donne si possono intendere le tre sette de la vita attiva, cioè li Epicurei, li Stoici e li Peripatetici, che vanno al monumento, cioè al mondo presente che è recettaculo di corrutibili cose, e domandano lo Salvatore, cioè la beatitudine ...) of the Gospel of Mark (that portion which narrates the appearance of the angel outside Christ's empty tomb) is just one of the many examples of Dante's efforts to integrate and give a Christian context to the secular sciences.

²⁸For example, Dante notes the choice between allegory of the poets and allegory of the theologians in Book II of the *Convivio*. (*Conv.* II, i; 3 "L'uno si chiama litterale, [e questo e quello che non si stende più oltre che la lettera de le parole fittizie, si come sono le favole de li poeti. L'altro si chiama allegorico,] e questo è quello che si nasconde sotto 'il manto di queste favole, ed è una veritade ascosa sotto bella menzogna: ..."; II, i, 4: "Veramente li teologi questo senso prendono altrimenti che li poeti; ma però che mia intenzione è qui lo modo de li poeti seguitare, prendo lo senso allegorico secondo che per li poeti è usato." As Hollander points out, the mixing of the two types of allegory was frowned upon and yet Dante has done so. (*Studies in Dante* 41-46) Although for Hollander the significance of the introduction of this option lies in the fact that it buttresses Dante's claim to truthfulness of his poem, I would suggest that in the present context the import lies in the fact that it legitimizes the mixing of what was previously considered a secular format with that of a Christian format. Dante is fashioning a new role for the Christian poet, he is setting parameters that previously had not been

sanctioned though in practice may have occurred. Antonio d'Andrea has also noted the novelty of this mixing, suggesting that Dante's attempts to combine the allegory of the poets and of the theologians, however, produce the result that "Lo statuto del senso letterale rimane così in sospeso e riflette la sua ambiguità sulla stessa." (72)

²⁹*Conv.* IV, vi; 5 "E così 'autore', quindi derivato, si prende per ogni persona degna d'essere creduta e obedita."

³⁰As Cudini suggests, although the exile experience was a negative one, it serves to imbue Dante with an "eccezionalità" and confirms the novelty of his cultural mission. (*Convivio* 56, 57)

³¹*John* 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."; *Matt.* 10:6: "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

³²*Conv.* IV, i, 9; "...proposi di gridare a la gente che per mal cammino andavano, acciò che per diritto calle si dirizzassero;"; *Conv.* IV, xii, 19: "...lo buono camminatore giugne a termine e a posa; lo erroneo mai non l'aggiugne, ..."; *Conv.* IV, xvi, 10: "E per lo cammino dritto e da vedere ..."; *Conv.* IV, xxii, 6: "...così questi umani appetiti per diversi calli dal principio se ne vanno, e uno solo calle e quello che noi mena a la nostra pace."; *Conv.* IV, xxiv, 12: "...che entra ne la selva erronea di questa vita, non saprebbe tenere lo buono cammino, ..."; *Conv.* IV, xxviii, 2: "...l'altra si è, che ella benedice lo cammino che ha fatto ..."

³³*Matt.* 7:13, 14: "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

³⁴Jesus is frequently portrayed as the light which will bring the people out of the shadows; *Matt.* 4: 14-16: "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned.'"; *John* 3:19: "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness more than light, because their deeds were evil."; *John* 8:12: "I am the light of the world. he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life."; *John* 12:46: "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness."

The association of bread with life and salvation is also omnipresent in the New Testament. Christ invariably is represented as one who offers bread (*Matt.* 14:26), multiplies bread (twice in the Gospel of Matthew) and indeed characterizes himself as bread (*John* 6:35: "And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.'" *Matt.* 26: "And while they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.'" Dante recalls many of these associations in presenting his banquet at one at which he will also serve bread. His general invitation to the "miseri" recalls Christ's practice of eating with those most despised by society; *Matt.* 9:11,12: "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard that, He said to them,

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." Dante's continual reiteration that the knowledge he is imparting is divine in nature completes the association in recalling Christ's words to Satan; in *Matt.* 4:4 "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

³⁵*Comm.* IV, xxvii; 11 "Oh misera, misera patria mia! quanta pietà mi stringe per te, qual volta leggo, qual volta scrivo cosa che a reggimento civile abbia rispetto!..." provides one such example. See also *Comm.* IV, vi 19-20 "E dico a voi Carlo e Federigo regi ..."

³⁶By placing the two "histories" side by side, Dante draws a parallel between Roman imperial legitimacy which traces its roots back to the exiled Trojan Aeneas, and Christ's own roots which can be traced back to King David and indeed back to Adam.

³⁷*Comm.* IV, v, 6 "E tutto questo fu in uno temporale che David nacque e nacque Roma, cioè che Enea venne di Troia in Italia che fu origine de la cittade romana, sì come testimoniano le scritture." As Vasoli points out, the "scritture" to which Dante refers are, for the foundation of Rome, *Aeneid* I, 1, sgg. and for the birth of King David, Orosius, Eusebius of Cesarea and Livy.

³⁸Vasoli cites Busnelli and Vandelli with respect to the dubious conclusion drawn by Dante in this regard, both of whom note that any of the authorities available to Dante at the time of the *Convivio's* writing, would reveal a difference of almost a century between the two events.

³⁹Dante's project, in terms of his treatment of Virgil's writing would not have seemed extraordinarily outlandish given the medieval tendency to consider Virgil as a species of pre-Christian prophet and his 4th Eclogue in particular, as a messianic prophecy. For more on the medieval perception of Virgil, see Comparetti, *Virgil in the Middle Ages*.

⁴⁰*Comm.* IV, v, 8 "Nel mondo mai non fu né sarà sì perfettamente disposto come allora che a la voce d'un solo, principe del roman popolo e comandante, fu ordinato, sì come testimonia Luca evangelista." In fact, *Luke* merely attests to the existence of such a ruler, and does not conclude that this implies that the world was perfectly disposed at that time to the birth of Christ. (*Luke* 2: 1; "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.")

⁴¹The relationship between the *Commedia* and the *Convivio* is somewhat problematic. Some critics suggest that we cannot consider the *Convivio* when reading the *Commedia* given that the date of the *Commedia* is 1300 and, therefore, predates the actual writing of the *Convivio*. (see Pertile, "Dante's Comedy beyond the Stilnovo," 58) I am more inclined to agree with Robert Hollander who points out that Dante himself included frequent allusions to the *Convivio* in the *Commedia*. "[T]he pages of the poem are dotted with references to explicit passages in *Convivio*, usually in full accord with the ideas earlier expressed, but sometimes with the express purpose of cancelling a wrong bit of doctrine or a piece of disloyalty to Beatrice." He concludes, "It seems difficult to argue that Dante did not want any reader who happened to be aware of the text of the earlier *Convivio* not to

address the relation between the two works from one end of the Comedy to the other." (Hollander, "Dante's Deployment of *Convivio* in the Comedy.")

⁴²See Watt, "The Cruciform *Commedia*" for more on how the underlying narrative structure of the *Commedia* is laid out on the shape of a cross, thus representing in its entirety, crucifixion and its redemptive significance.

⁴³"Cum ergo accepisset Jesus acetum, dixit: Consummatum est. Et inclinato capite, tradidit spiritum." *John* 19:30.

WORKS CITED

- Alighieri, Dante. *Convivio*. Ed. P. Cudini. Milan: Garzanti, 1980.
- . *Convivio*. Ed. Cesare Vasoli. Vol. 5, part 2, of *Opere minori*. Milan: Ricciardi, 1988.
- . *La Commedia secondo l'antico vulgata*. Ed. Giorgio Petrocchi. 4 vols. Milan: Mondadori, 1966-7.
- . *La Divina Commedia*. 3 vols. Ed. Natalino Sapegno. Florence: La nuova Italia Editrice, 1985.
- . *La Vita Nuova*. Ed. Domenico De Robertis. Milan: Ricciardi, 1984.
- . *Tutte le opere*. Ed. Fredi Chiappelli. Milan: Mursia, 1965.
- Comparetti, Domenico. *Vergil in the Middle Ages*. Trans. E.F.M. Benecke. London: Allen & Unwin, 1895.
- D'Andrea, Antonio. "L' 'Allegoria dei poeti': Nota a *Convivio* II.1." *Dante e le forme dell'allegoresi*. Ed. M. Picone. Ravenna: Longo, 1987. 71-78.
- De Robertis, Domenico. *Il libro della "Vita nuova"*. Florence: Sansoni, 1970.
- Fergusson, Francis. *Dante*. New York: Collier Books, 1966.
- Hollander, Robert. *Studies in Dante*. Ravenna: Longo, 1980.
- . "Dante's Deployment of *Convivio* in the Comedy." EBDSA, 7 October, 1996.
- Holy Bible. *The New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982.
- Leo, Ulrich. "The Unfinished *Convivio* and Dante's Rereading of the *Aeneid*." *Mediaeval Studies* 13 (1951): 41-64.
- Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Dante, Poet of the Desert. History and Allegory in the "Divine Comedy"*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Nardi, Bruno. *Dal "Convivio" alla "Commedia" (Sei saggi danteschi)*. Rome: Istituto Borromini, 1960.
- Lino Pertile, "Dante's Comedy beyond the Stilnovi," *Lectura Dantis* [virginiana], 13 (Fall 1993).
- Picone, Michelangelo. "La *Vita Nuova* e la tradizione romanza." Padua: Liviana, 1979.
- . "La *Vita Nuova* fra autobiografia e tipologia." *Dante e le forme dell'allegoresi*. Ed. Michelangelo Picone. Ravenna: Longo, 1987. 59-69.
- . "L'Ovidio di Dante." *Dante e la "bella scola" della poesia: autorità e sfida poetica*. Ed. Amilcare A. Iannucci. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

- _____. "Dante and the Classics." Trans. Susan Iannucci. *Dante: Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Amilcare A. Iannucci. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. 51-73.
- Sales, M.M., ed. *La Sacra Bibbia*, Vol. I. Turin: Lega Italiana Cattolica Editrice, 1949.
- Vallone, Aldo. *La Prosa del Convivio*. Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1967.
- Virgil. *Eclogues*. Trans. H. Rushton Fairclough. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938. Vol. 1 of *Virgil with an English Translation by H. Rushton Fairclough in two volumes*. 2 vols. 1938.
- _____. *The Aeneid*. Trans. W.F. Jackson Knight. London: Penguin, 1958.
- Watt, Mary Alexandra. "The Cruciform Commedia: An Iconographic Approach." *Quaderni d'italianistica* vol. 19: 2 (1998): 115-135.