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In literature, the usual course of the othering process of a female character is for her image, as the subject of a male gaze, to become dissected and objectified so much that she is nothing more than a detached body. Traditionally, if the subject is found to be “lacking” in some aspect, or if she cannot be dissected, then the gazer may undergo distress. In the *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia*, Dante Alighieri takes on the role of gazer, and Beatrice Portinari becomes his subject. By classifying Beatrice as a divine being both while she is alive and after her death, Dante creates tension in his own understanding of himself and the status of his salvation. This thesis follows the development of Dante's gaze through both works in order to show how the focus of his gaze moves from an earthly to a heavenly subject, and how Beatrice's image, as the subject, consequently parallels this development.

LOVE MAY BE BLIND, BUT DANTE ISN'T:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GAZE
IN *VITA NUOVA* AND THE
COMMEDIA

by

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To my family who taught me the value of education.

I hope this paper shows that I value it as well.

To my teachers along the way that have encouraged

my imagination and inspired my quest to share

my knowledge and love of learning with others.

I hope my future students will benefit from my

past influences as much as I have.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

[A young man and a friend walk into a large house filled with partygoers.]

Friend: [Smoothly] "Let us attend the ladies."

[As the young man reluctantly follows his friend into a room filled with female attendees, the sound of an intensely beating heart soon overtakes all the other noise from the party. The man begins to sweat and appears to be close to fainting. He begins to grope the walls and use them for support. As he fumbles near a large painting, we get a close up on his eyes. Immediately following the close up, the camera finds the object of his gaze: a young woman standing across the room. The camera cuts back and forth between the young man's eyes and the view of the lady; the sound of the heartbeat continues with muffled party noises in the background. The young woman is talking with friends, and appears to be completely oblivious to the young man's invasive gaze. After a few minutes of these exchanging camera shots, other women in the room are shown to be staring at the young man, followed by their laughter and mocking. His friend, who has been mingling with the ladies notices the spectacle, grabs his friend by the arm, and leads him to the safety of the foyer. Sound returns to normal, and the young man is knocked out of his trance-like state.]

Friend: "What's wrong with you?"

Young Man: "I'm in love."

This script reads like the lines of a modern teen movie—at times romantic, at others, comical. However, it is actually the story of Dante Alighieri and "his Beatrice," as recollected in *Vita Nuova*, written between 1292-94. One could argue that, had Dante

been writing in modern times, his text would have become the archetypal script for the modern romantic movie. Some readers may find more connections between Dante's obsessed/crazed lover and a horror film in which a Nosferatu-esque stalker slowly closes in on his prey. Or, as the "Lord of Love" forces a naked Beatrice to eat Dante's fiery heart in chapter three, other readers may envision a sci-fi/fantasy epic. No matter which cinematic genre the reader recalls, the point is that Dante's medieval text resembles various contemporary works because of his concentration on the gaze and the female subject's alterity.

The male gaze upon a female subject was a common literary convention long before film developed as a medium. In most classic examples, the female subject represents the male viewer's "other." The male's objective gaze verifies his own existence as a human being while simultaneously raising questions about his identification as a male. The gaze of a male literary figure may be used to dissect and objectify the female subject's body, therefore creating a violent situation. Similarly, violation occurs when one subject (the male in this case) attempts to define the other in such a way that he/she may become the "same." The gazer's hospitality or acceptance may only be reserved for subjects that can be labeled and identified as "similar," thus removing the threat of otherness.

Problems may arise if the "other" cannot conform to the gazer's desired image. Not only is hospitality and acceptance withheld from the subject of the gaze, but also the gazer himself may be affected by his own inability to comprehend his subject. Lacan looks at the relation of the gaze and otherness:

The gaze is crucial to Lacan's explanation of subjectivity and the function therein of the Other because the subject is shored up by the Other's gaze. In other words, the subject will sacrifice her or his desire in order to be seen by the Other, so that she or he may construe her or his self as whole, as ontologically coherent. Put simply: if I am seen by the Other [. . .] and if the Other reflects an image of me that is whole, unproblematic, and beyond question, then I must be more than a self-induced illusion, more than a figment of my own imagination. But, of course, for the Other to confer wholeness on the subject in this way, the Other in itself must lack nothing [. . .]. (Gaunt, 81-82)

However, for Lacan, this feeling of wholeness is illusive because the gazer is always looking for a wholeness outside of himself, always leaving an absence within himself. Therefore, he will be traumatized whenever he realizes that the Other will not make him whole; such would be Lacan's explanation of the symptoms of lovesickness (82). In Dante's *Vita Nuova*, the relation to the object of the gaze becomes complicated when the narrator experiences severe physical pain and suffering after each of his viewings of Beatrice. Modern interpretation might lead a reader to brush these instances off as the unexplainable signs of "lovesickness." This paper will attempt to show that the bodily suffering that Dante's character experiences throughout *Vita Nuova* is a manifestation of his anxiety in dealing with this indefinable threat of the "other."

Though film's use of the gaze came much later than literary use in chronological terms, it is worth considering how this traditional literary trope is employed, in a similar manner, within modern popular culture. Laura Mulvey is known for her psychoanalytical approach to cinema's role as visual pleasure. Mulvey's discussion concentrates on the gaze of a male (subject) upon a female (object). She states, "The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their

traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (11). What Mulvey acknowledges is that, though film is a modern medium, the traditional use of the gaze has found its place within it. This conclusion does not set Mulvey’s research apart from the film criticism that came before, or followed after. However, what Mulvey concludes later on in her discussion does set her apart from other critics, as well as connect her to this study of Dante’s dual use of the gaze.

Mulvey appears to have been one of the first film critics to acknowledge that the traditional set up of the female as object of other characters’ gazes, as well as the audience’s gaze, can be problematic for those involved in the act of gazing. She suggests that,

[. . .] in psychoanalytic terms, the female figure poses a deeper problem. She also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure. Ultimately the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the absence of the penis as visually ascertainable, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organisation [sic] of entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father. Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the **gaze** and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the **look**, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified. (13)¹

Here, Mulvey suggests that, by gazing upon a female object, the male viewer is subjected to anxiety and pain along with pleasure. She concludes that the anxiety results within the viewer because a comparison between self and object highlights the inadequacies of the self. Though the pain that Mulvey’s hypothetical gazers experience is not necessarily the

result of the lovesickness that Dante experiences, she at least acknowledges that the gaze is not always used by authors or directors to relate pleasure.

What Mulvey does not discuss in her article is that lovesickness is still used in films to represent a not-so-pleasurable result of gazing for the one who engages in the gaze. Take for example the 1998 film *Can't Hardly Wait* in which the protagonist, Preston, pines away for Amanda, the girl of his dreams. Like Dante and Beatrice, most of the interaction between the two characters involves Preston's gazing at the unattainable Amanda (who ironically only spoke to him once before, like Beatrice's one greeting to Dante). The audience is made aware that Preston has created his own "heavenly" image of Amanda by his objectification of her body through the mode of gazing. His lack of actual two-way communication with the object of his gaze leads Preston to drown in his self-pity. Not only can the audience discern Preston's "lovesick" condition through visual clues, but he also verbally shares his feelings with his best friend, Denise. The example presented here can be found in dozens (if not hundreds) of other romantic movies. In other words, Dante's dualistic use of the gaze has found a way to translate itself for use in a modern medium such as film.

As mentioned earlier, the gaze in literature has also been associated with its objectification of the subject—usually a woman who is unaware of the attention.² In *The Art of Courtly Love* (dated late 12th century), Dante's contemporary Andreas Capellanus essentially claims the gaze as a convention of courtly love. Capellanus states, "For when a man **sees** some woman fit for love and shaped, according to his taste, he begins at once to lust after her in his heart [. . .]"(29). Capellanus goes on to describe the "dissection"

and objectification of the female body that often accompanies literary use of the gaze. Though the male may never physically touch the woman, the visual violation nonetheless occurs, as described by Andreas Capellanus in the following quote: “Presently he begins to think about the fashioning of the woman and to differentiate her limbs, to think about what she does, and to pry into the secrets of her body, and he desires to put each part of it to the fullest use” (Capellanus, 29). Though the man has no physical contact with the woman, the reader may feel that the man still has the ability to violate her with his eyes. In this case, the gaze becomes a convention of power for male characters and male writers.

Capellanus also makes another connection (not as commonly recognized as objectification) that this paper will seek to analyze between the gaze and the pain and suffering of the one who gazes. This feeling has come to be known as “lovesickness.” This lovesickness had become one of the most conventional characteristics of troubadour and love lyric poetry by the period in which Dante himself utilizes it. Guido Guinicelli, writing in Bologna slightly before Dante, attempts to balance sweetness and suffering in his works:

Your fine greeting and the gentle **glance** that you give when I meet you kills me; Love assails me and is quite unconcerned whether he give offense or favor, because he casts a dart through my heart which cleaves it through and divides it into parts; I cannot speak for I burn in great pain as one who **sees** his death. It passes through the **eyes** as does the bolt which strikes through the window of the tower and what it finds inside it breaks and splits. I remain as a statue of brass, in which neither life nor spirit dwells, except that it gives the appearance of man. (in Singleton, 71)

As chapter two of this paper will show, Dante, too, struggles with the glance and greeting of the living Beatrice of *Vita Nuova*. Love is likewise personified, and a battle rages within both of the poets' bodies, beginning with the eyes and culminating in the heart.

Dante, writing just over a century after Capellanus, would have been very familiar with the conventions of courtly love, and may have used his works to either reflect an appreciation for or a concern with the societal regulations established for male-female relationships/interactions. What Dante appears to do with the gaze in *Vita Nuova* is to highlight the dual nature of love through the trope of the gaze. To do so, he develops a text in which the gaze creates just as much burden and suffering (in the form of lovesickness) as it does pleasure and fulfillment for the person doing the gazing. As with the film camera, a double gaze occurs through literature as the readers visualize or gaze at the characters, who then may direct the gaze themselves upon other characters. This double gaze also emphasizes the important role that the eyes and sight played (and still play) in literature.

The complexity of the gaze in the *Vita Nuova* is apparent when Dante's poems are compared to those of his one-time friend, Guido Cavalcanti. Cavalcanti's sonnet, "Chi è questa che ven" from his *Canzoniere*, is very similar to *Vita Nuova* in that the male's gaze reflects clear power, but the female's own gaze is given attention, and arguably its own level of power within the text. Though it is not known if Cavalcanti's sonnet was written first, it is clear that Dante's contemporaries were likewise struggling with the alterity of the female figure in their lives and their works through this same paradigm of the gaze:

Who is she who comes, that everyone **looks** at her,
who makes the air tremble with clarity
and brings Love with her, so that no one
can speak, though everyone sighs?
O God, what she looks like when she turns her **eyes**
let love say, for I could not describe it.
To me she seems so much a lady of good will
that any other, in comparison to her, I call vexation.
One could not describe her gracefulness,
for every noble virtue inclines toward her
and beauty displays her as its goddess.
Our mind was never so lofty
and never was such beatitude granted us
that we could really have knowledge of her. (in Harrison, 70-71)

In this sonnet, Cavalcanti speaks to the woman's physical beauty, including her eyes, a feature often highlighted on Beatrice's own figure. However, other than admitting he cannot fully comprehend her, the speaker does not seem to experience the same amount of suffering that Dante does in *Vita Nuova* when he is unable to completely comprehend Beatrice's otherness.

Another poem in Cavalcanti's *Canzoniere* (number XIX) reads:

Before my **eyes** I see the heart

And the grieving soul that are slain,
That die from a blow that Love gave them,
And at that point when it **saw** my lady....
Tears rise up from my mind
As soon as it senses my lady;
They make, through the **eyes**, a conduit
Through which passes the grieving spirit
That enters through my **eyes** so weakly
That it cannot reveal any color
Beyond that which **imaging** could complete from it.

(in Harrison, 76-77)

In this poem, Cavalcanti “revises the traditional patterns of love poetry” (Harrison, 79). The tears of the last stanza blur the speaker’s vision so much that he must imagine the figure of the woman rather than observe it through the clear view of the gaze. Although in this instance the gaze is interrupted, Cavalcanti is able to recreate the image of the woman’s body using just his imagination, leaving him still in control of the gaze. Both Dante and Cavalcanti relate the physicality of the gaze in terms of the gazer just as much as the object of the gaze. However, where the subject of the gaze is often just given a body, the gazer is allowed a body, a mind, and a soul, because the reader views the scene through the gazer’s eyes.

From what context does the connection between the gaze and bodily suffering derive? Perhaps readers should consider the classical influences that medieval authors

like Dante and Capellanus would have been working with. Take, for example, the Roman god Cupid (Eros in Greek mythology), or the “Lord of Love” as Dante refers to him in the text. There is a plethora of mythology surrounding this classical, immortal character that directly links him to the concept of the gaze. Different versions of the myth argue over Cupid’s role as either a companion for Venus (Aphrodite), goddess of Love, or her son. No matter what his origin as a god, it is clear that Cupid’s purpose was to inseminate the hearts of both mortals and immortals with the various emotions related to love. To reach the heart of his target, Cupid used arrows, filled with the flames of emotion, which he shot through the eyes of lovers, rather than directly at the heart.³

By the Medieval period, the Ovidian tradition that love enters a man’s heart through his eyes was a common trope used in most troubadour and courtly literature (Gaunt, 79). In this tradition, if Cupid shot his arrows through the eyes, they would naturally reach the hearts of his targets, where their power would be released. Though modern readers recognize this notion as an anatomical fallacy, they must still consider the implications for the medieval author and his audience. In *Vita Nuova*, for example, Dante develops a clear connection between the two regions of the body. For instance, in one sonnet he writes, “The **eyes** grieving for pity through the heart/ while weeping have endured great suffering” (63). In yet another sonnet he writes, “Alas! by the full force of many sighs/ born of the thoughts that are within my heart,/ the **eyes** are overcome and have no strength/ to **gaze** at anyone who looks at them” (79). In both of these sonnets, Dante notes that whatever causes pain or suffering in the one “spirit” (as he refers to different parts of his body), likewise is felt by the spirit in the corresponding region.

The modern image of Cupid as a winged cherub whose arrows pierce the hearts of men varies greatly from the image that Dante and his contemporaries would have been familiar with. Though some classical texts do refer to the young, winged, mischievous Cupid, the oldest interpretations of the myth create a different image of the god altogether. Specifically, the Greeks believed that Cupid was an older, unsympathetic god, whose arrows could bring both great joy as well as great pain, because the recipient would be filled with passion for the next person he or she set eyes on. However, the passion felt by those wounded would not ensure that the object of the gaze would have mutual feelings. Therefore, the uncontrollable love, if unrequited, was known to lead to rape, war, and death rather than true love (the result expected from the modern myth). To see this conflict at work, one can also look to Dante's contemporaries. The quote from Guinicelli above speaks of Love driving a dart into the heart of the poet, only to bring a death-like suffering. Cavalcanti relates a similar experience:

My soul is basely dismayed at the battle it has with my heart, for if it feels that Love is even a little nearer than usual to it [the heart], it dies. It is as one without strength, who through fear has departed from the heart; and whoever would see how it has fled would surely say: this man is without life. The attack came first through the **eyes** and broke all strength immediately, so that the mind was destroyed by the blow. Whoever is he who feels most happiness, if he **saw** my spirits flee, would weep out of great pity. (in Singleton, 72)

The only problem with an account like the one directly above is that we are never given the reaction of the subject (lady). Cupid appears to torture only the poet, his anguish often unbeknownst to the lady whose presence causes the inception of the battle.

There are two ironies presented in the Cupid myth that relate to the topic at hand. The first irony is that love is known to be blind. If this phrase is applied to the personified god (Cupid), then it is very ironic for a being with no visual ability to shoot an arrow through the eyes of deities and humans so that they fall passionately in love with the first person they see. This irony is especially important to consider in Dante, because he develops the Lord of Love as a character that influences, if not solely drives, Dante's obsession with Beatrice (whom he literally brings to Dante in a dream vision).

The second irony relates to the origin of the word *passion*. The Oxford English Dictionary provides eleven definitions (with variations under each) simply for the use of the word as a noun. The two definitions that correlate to the modern usage of the word (as it might be used in film, for example) are those that define passion as an "amorous feeling" and a "sexual desire or impulse" (*OED.com*). However, the older origins of the word indicate that Dante and Capellanus would have heard the word used in a very different manner. Often used to refer to the suffering of Christ on the cross⁴, passion in the medieval period meant "suffering or affliction generally" and "a painful affection or disorder of the body or some part of it" (*oed.com*). The dual definitions of this word reflect the dual nature of love that is presented in many Medieval texts, such as *Vita Nuova*, *The Art of Courtly Love*, and the *Commedia*.

The uses of the word *passion* also become important when one considers that Beatrice's Christ-like presence may be a part of her unresolvable alterity in Dante's gaze. Not only does her womanhood represent the permanent lack of a penis, but her divine quality represents an immortality and heavenly nature that the mortal Dante could never

hope to reach. And although Dante was not the only medieval author to relate his lady to a divine being, scholar Barbara Newman claims that he pushes the theological metaphor the furthest. She notes that even in Dante's first meeting with Beatrice at the ripe age of nine, "She did not seem to be the daughter of any ordinary man, but rather of a god" (*Vita*, 4-5). In *Vita Nuova*, her "christiological dimensions" are reflected in "her mystic name, signifying 'she who makes blessed'; her crimson garments, the color of blood and flame; her association with the number nine, marking her as a miraculous being whose square root, so to speak, is the Blessed Trinity; her friendship with the lady Giovanna, who precedes her on one momentous occasion just as John the Baptist (Giovanni) preceded Christ..." (Newman, 182). When Beatrice finally greets (*salute* in Italian) Dante in *Vita Nuova*, it fills him with sickness and torture, but at the same time represents his literal salvation (also *salute*), a paradox which makes the adversarial effects of his gaze seem even more unusual. This personal salvation during Dante's own lifetime allows Beatrice's alterity to reflect "the otherness of the poet's own futurity" (Harrison, 138). Here, Beatrice's presence pushes Dante to deal with the otherness of his own afterlife while he still lives in the earthly realm.

Even when the couple is reunited in the *Commedia's* paradise, Beatrice maintains "all the honors of a celestial bride," only adding to the levels of otherness that continually affect Dante's gaze (Newman, 182). However, when one reads the *Commedia* after reading *Vita Nuova*, Dante's use of the latter as a necessary building block for the first becomes more clear. Yes, Beatrice's death in *Vita Nuova* is a necessary event for her heavenly reappearance in the *Commedia*. But more importantly, the interaction of the

poet and his lady's earthly gazes in *Vita* also works to highlight the importance of the development of their gazes in the heavenly realm. It is a *visual* journey that Dante undertakes in the *Commedia*, where his ultimate goal is to look at the face of God and be changed. Therefore, it is important to not only look at the development of the gaze in *Vita Nuova*, where Beatrice is considered divine, but still maintains an earthly presence, but to move forward to the *Commedia* and consider how it changes in the face of true divinity. This paper will consider the gaze in both realms about which Dante thought it so important to write.

CHAPTER II

VITA NUOVA

Like Capellanus and Cavalcanti, Dante provides, in the context of *Vita Nuova*, a female character who is the object of a male character's gaze. Not only is Beatrice the object of Dante the character's earthly gaze in this work, but she is also the object of Dante the narrator's. As the poet/narrator, he is recalling past events; his present understanding gives his gaze a broadened perspective, one that has already developed for a heavenly purpose. As Dante the character, however, he still uses the gaze for earthly desires until the change occurs in the text. Dante remarks early on that it is Beatrice's "image" that remains with him at all points in his life, noting the importance that Beatrice's body, as a physical subject of the male gaze, plays in his life as the gazer (*Vita*, 5). And though the gaze is his means of contact with Beatrice, her role in some scenes as an image that is also afforded a voice creates a slightly different reaction on Dante's part than his viewing of her body or her simple returned gaze would. Reacting to the scene in which Beatrice finally meets his gaze and offers her first (and only) "sweet greeting," Dante says, "And since that was the first time her words had entered my ears, I was so overcome with ecstasy that I departed from everyone as if intoxicated" (*Vita*, 6). When she first greets him, perhaps the "lovesickness" invoked is not so harmful for Dante as it is in later encounters. "Intoxication" does not quite elicit the same amount of sympathy or pity for the narrator as his later reactions like trembling, weeping, and sighing.

However, this greeting addresses the sense of hearing as much as, if not more than, the sense of sight, which may help to explain the difference in the severity of the reaction.

This first greeting does, however, soon relate back to the gaze, as Dante experiences his first vision following this event. Within this vision, the sleeping, naked Beatrice takes on the more traditional role as the exposed, dissected female subject of Dante's powerful male gaze:

In my reverie a sweet sleep seized me, and a marvellous **vision** appeared to me. I seemed to **see** a cloud the colour of fire in my room and in that cloud a lordly man, frightening to behold, yet apparently marvellously filled with joy [. . .]. It seemed to me that in his arms there lay a figure asleep and naked except for a crimson cloth loosely wrapping it. **Looking** at it very intently, I realized that it was the lady of the blessed greeting [. . .]. In one of his hands he held a fiery object, and he seemed to say these words: '**Behold** your heart.' And after a short while, he seemed to awaken the sleeping one, and through the power of his art made her eat this burning object in his hand. Hesitantly, she ate it. (*Vita*, 6)

The focus of Dante's vision is not only Beatrice, but a nearly *naked* Beatrice. Her nakedness makes her body vulnerable to the gaze, and the fact that she is asleep likewise enhances her vulnerable position. The scene is simultaneously very sexual and very disturbing because of the violation that occurs beyond the knowledge of the female object of the gaze. Beatrice's body undergoes objectification under Dante's gaze. Because she is asleep, her own gaze is limited and Dante's masculine authority is silently asserted within the scene.

Though this scene definitely reflects the traditional use of the female as the object of pleasure for the gazer, it also foreshadows the bodily suffering that Dante will experience in the wake of his gazing upon and objectification of Beatrice. His response

to the body of Beatrice changes from the lighthearted amazement of her first greeting to physical anguish when he is given the power of the male gaze. “After that vision my natural spirit began to slacken in its working [. . .]. It was but a short time before I became so weak and so frail that many of my friends were concerned about my appearance...” (*Vita*, 8). In this scene, Dante, like his classical predecessors, demonstrates that the Lord of Love can be both frightening and joyful to behold, suggesting the dual nature of love. He also describes Love forcing Beatrice to eat his heart, a reversal of the traditional gaze; in this reversal the gazer suffers, and his body is dissected and exposed as his object’s body has been. Therefore, Love, and not the male gazer, is the ultimate authority in this case, and both the viewer and the subject are affected by Love’s power and control over them. An important conjunction between two regions of the body, the eyes and the heart, is made, further connecting Dante’s theories to classical ideas about Cupid.

Even Dante hints at a “visionary blind spot” when it comes to this primary dream of Love carrying a nude Beatrice in his arms. Dante speaks “of the failure ‘to see’ the dream’s true meaning” (Harrison 18-21). Is the body of Beatrice actually repressed in Dante’s vision? Robert Harrison states that, “The cloth makes for Beatrice’s intangibility even as she lies in love’s arms. While it prohibits a view of her naked body, it also allows Dante to recognize the body as a body without violating a code of courtesy to which he was socially and ideologically bound. The cloth, then, acts as a censor, or as a prohibition, but at the same time it acts as the very opposite of this” (Harrison, 23). Dante appears to be fixated on the blood-red clothing that covers the child Beatrice on the

street, as well as the teenage Beatrice in his dream vision. Does this color represent her puberty or the loss of her virginity? (Mirsky, 40). Dante seems to be either repulsed or fixated upon these two feminine life events that mark the otherness of a typical human woman. Perhaps this sexual difference persuades Dante that it would be easier to explain Beatrice as a divine being whom he can never have hopes of reaching rather than a human woman whose otherness must be dealt with for a relationship to be formed. Mark Mirsky would answer that the blind spot Dante speaks of deals with the questionable nature of Beatrice and Dante's chastity: "Under the measured repetitions of *The New Life*, the summations, the tender professions of innocence and the showers of tears, deep in the rustling lines of the poetry lies the nude body of an adolescent girl. We will catch only a faint glimpse under the gauze of her scant cloth in the arms of Love [. . .]" (31). If Mirsky's theory were true, it must be noted that Dante would be offering his own body to the eyes of the gaze (in this case the reader's gaze). He would be putting himself in a position equal to that of Beatrice.

In the sonnet inspired by the first vision, Dante acknowledges that he is under Love's own constant gaze. Not only does Love take control of Dante's gaze at crucial points in the text, but Love's own gaze is often described by Dante. He recognizes that, although a manipulator of the gaze himself, Love is also negatively affected by gazing upon Beatrice. In a canzone, he describes Love after a meeting with Beatrice as follows:

All his **appearance** seemed to speak such grief
as kings might feel upon the loss of crown;
and ever sighing bent with thought, he came,

his **eyes** averted from all passers-by. (*Vita*, 16)

This description suggests that even Love, a strong, immortal, god-like presence, is affected by the image of Beatrice simply after a brief visit with her. Here, with the development of both Love's gaze and Beatrice's returned gaze (on top of Dante's traditional male gaze), the layers of gazing and gazers begin to thicken and intertwine into a web of theoretical entanglement.

Though the gaze can be used to give power to male characters, the dream vision scene cited above proves that it can also be simultaneously shown to have negative effects upon them. By this point, so early on in *Vita*, suffering is already presented as a result of the gaze. From Dante's first sight of Beatrice, when they are both nine years old, he is afflicted simultaneously with joy and pain. He also names the "spirits of sight" as working with the Lord of Love to bring the image of Beatrice before him. Dante relates the reactions of his heart (vital spirit), his brain (animal spirit, high chamber), his spirits of sight, and his soul (natural spirit) after he sees Beatrice for the first time as follows:

At that moment [. . .] the vital spirit [. . .] began to tremble so violently that even the least pulses of my body were strangely affected; and trembling, it spoke these words: 'Here is a god stronger than I, who shall come to rule over me.' At that point, the animal spirit [. . .] was stricken with amazement, and speaking directly to the spirits of **sight**, and these words: 'Now your bliss has **appeared**.' At that moment the natural spirit [. . .] began to weep, and weeping, said these words: 'Alas, wretch that I am, from now on I shall be hindered often.' (*Vita*, 4)

With this first textual reference to the gaze, Dante uses the language of suffering – trembling violently, stricken with amazement, a weeping wretch hindered by love – to relate the reactions of his body to the sight of Beatrice. What makes his reaction “lovesickness” rather than just sickness is that he simultaneously uses the language of love – god, amazement, bliss – to describe these same reactions.

In chapter five, the character Dante, being very aware of the workings of the gaze and imagery in his society, purposefully uses misdirected and misunderstood glances to protect the real object of his gaze from being disclosed. We can likewise say that he understands the social factors surrounding the gaze as reflected in a sonnet that reads, “I dress in happiness but in my heart I weep and waste away” (*Vita*, 11). When his “cover woman” dies in chapter eight, her dead, vulnerable body is put on display, reminiscent of Beatrice’s body in the initial dream vision. Although Dante names her a “worthy lady,” the reader is assured that he only has eyes and desire for Beatrice. The sight of the other woman’s body, instead of invoking remorse for her loss, merely brings Beatrice’s image to mind because he remembers seeing them once in each others’ company. Recalling her image, though her actual body is absent, still renders a similar effect to the other examples of lovesickness. He is left once again trying to hold back tears from the gaze of his neighbors.

Unexpectedly, Dante records a scene of anguish when he is removed from his position as the gazer. He must leave Florence when the lady who acts as his screen dies because, as stated before, he is very aware of others’ gazing upon him, and therefore, scared of the consequences. “Truly enough, I appeared to be in the company of others

but the journey so irked me because I was going further away from my bliss, that my sighs could hardly relieve the anguish of my heart” (*Vita*, 15). His similar negative reaction—whether Beatrice is in front of him or not—reiterates the idea, stated early on, that her image is always with him. Likewise, this image alone, without the presence of her physical body, is still enough to conjure up the emotions of suffering within Dante.

After he literally removes himself from the opportunity to gaze upon Beatrice, Dante notes for the readers that he is setting aside his physical subject (earthly, bodily Beatrice) for a while to focus on the effect that her greeting has upon him. In general, a greeting is the confirmation, between two or more people, of an earthly presence. Therefore, Dante begins to inquire into the alterity of Beatrice. He says, “Now I find it necessary to depart from my subject for a while in order to make clear the powerful effect her greeting used to have on me” (*Vita*, 17). He recognizes and affirms that her greeting affects him, while simultaneously claiming that her greeting no longer has the same effect. Dante the narrator, reflecting back on a complete life, leaves readers to ponder: What factor changes this effect? The readers at this point cannot form a conclusion without the knowledge of the events that occur in the rest of the text. However, Dante is suggesting that Beatrice’s impending death is the only answer to his lovesickness. Not only would her death bring about the removal of her body from his gaze, but it would also bring about an end to her earthly otherness. Although it has been established that her image will forever remain with him, her death will mean that he can categorize her as a divine being. He would no longer have to address the body of Beatrice, or her earthly image, which are the causes of his own physical suffering.

In this section in which Dante considers the effects of Beatrice's greeting, he goes into detail about Love's role in the reaction. He notes that whenever Beatrice appears in front of him, whether she greets him or not, the mere anticipation of her drives Love to take control of him "like a flame that consumed all past offences" (Vita, 18). The imagery of a flame here calls to mind the vocabulary often used to describe love and passion. However, one could also look ahead to the *Commedia* and consider flame imagery's traditional connection to suffering and repentance in the afterlife. If this were the case, then Dante here is suggesting that Love, as a part of his encounters with Beatrice, can bring about salvation, a claim he often makes for Beatrice. He also specifically speaks to Love's ability to control his function of sight when Beatrice offers a greeting: "And when she was about to greet me, one of Love's spirits, annihilating all the spirits of the senses, would drive out the feeble spirits of **sight**, saying to them, 'Go and pay homage to your mistress'; and he would take their place. And whoever might have wished to know what Love is, could have done so by **looking** at my trembling **eyes**" (Vita, 18). Here, all of the regions of Dante's body are rendered useless, leaving only his eyes to function for the whole body. However, even this region is not left under his control, as Love takes an assertive role in the encounter, and Dante is left without power. Therefore, Dante admits to being overpowered by Beatrice's own gaze here, which appears to be more powerful than Dante's. His position as a powerful male is jeopardized, leaving Dante to face the threat of Beatrice's otherness once again.

Looking back to the scripted scene from *Vita Nuova* provided at the beginning of the introduction, the reader may remember that Dante attends a wedding with a friend.

At this wedding, Dante sees Beatrice across the room, and the readers observe the almost comical action of the young man groping at the walls because of what appears to be “lovesickness.” Dante’s reaction is noticed by the other ladies, and Beatrice actually joins them to make fun of his actions. The scene, related in Dante’s own words, is as follows:

So I, thinking to please my friend in so doing, decided to remain with him in attendance upon the ladies. No sooner had I reached my decision than I seemed to feel a strange throbbing in the left side of my chest which before long spread to all parts of my body. Then, so as not to attract attention, I leaned against a painting that ran along the walls of that house, and fearing that people might have become aware of my trembling, I raised my **eyes** and, **gazing** at the ladies, I **saw** among them the most gracious Beatrice. Then my spirits were so disrupted by the strength that Love acquired when he **saw** himself so close to the most gracious lady, that none remained alive except the spirits of **sight**; and even these remained outside their instruments, because Love usurped their enviable seat to **view** the marvellous lady. And even though I was not myself, I was still very moved by these little spirits that bitterly protested, saying: ‘If this one had not knocked us from our position like a bolt of lightning, we too could have stayed to **see** the wonders of this lady as all our peers are doing.’ (*Vita*, 25)

This is the best example of Dante being attacked by a fit of lovesickness. Though his faculty of sight is the only region of his body that is able to function, Love once again takes hold of his eyes, as he mentions above. Therefore, he loses control of his own actions and emotions again. Perhaps he uses this reaction symbolically, in order to represent his inability to deal with the otherness of Beatrice’s body. She is an entity that he cannot control, grasp, or comprehend. The shock to his system is so great that it causes him to lose control of his whole body. For Harrison, this wedding scene shows that Beatrice’s “*presence* and her *appearance* must be thought of as a unity, yet

differentiated. Before Beatrice is perceived with the eyes, her presence already induces physiological disorder in her lover. As the locus of presence, her body precedes and at the same time withdraws behind her phenomenality, such that presence and appearance form a unity and not a compound” (Harrison, 48). Though in this scene it appears the Lord of Love has burdened the man with this sickness *before* he gazes upon the lady, his condition is merely amplified upon the sight of her. Love, which is living inside of Dante as his “master” (see dream vision quote), creates this condition of lovesickness, because Love usurps all his strength in order to gaze upon the wonders of Beatrice himself.

After his lovesickness is put on display, the gaze is used against Dante when the ladies attending the wedding, including Beatrice (much to his dismay), stop to watch him, and then mock his suffering. Later on, neighboring ladies continue to cast their gaze upon the singled-out Dante, defenseless from the effects of love. They not only take on traditionally non-feminine roles by gazing at him, but they likewise extend these roles by questioning his (a man’s) actions: “[. . .] one of whom, directing her **eyes** toward me and calling my name, said to me: ‘To what end do you love this lady if you cannot even endure the **sight** of her? Tell us, for surely the purpose of such love must be strange indeed’” (*Vita*, 33). Dante is receiving a double gaze here. Without control of his eyes, he is able to look in upon himself to analyze what is happening to him, and the ladies are gazing at him as well. In the canzone that follows this scene, Dante describes, for Beatrice’s benefit, his suffering:

You join with other ladies to deride me

and do not think, my lady, for what cause

I cut so awkward and grotesque a figure
when I stand **gazing** at your lovely form.
Could you but know my soul in charity,
then yours would melt from its accustomed scorn;
for Love, when he **beholds** me near to you,
takes on a cruel and bold new confidence
and puts my frightened senses to the sword,
murdering this one, driving that one out,
till only he is left to **look** at you;
thus, though his changeling, I am not so changed
but that I still can hear in my own soul
my outcast senses mourning in their pain. (26)

Within this sonnet, Dante recognizes that his lovesickness is related to his “gazing” at Beatrice’s “lovely form.”

He also notes that, when personified Love senses that Dante is within sight of the lady, he begins to take hold of Dante’s body (“takes on a cruel and bold new confidence”); Love then debilitates every part of his subject’s body (“puts my frightened senses to the sword, murdering this one, driving that one out”) until he alone is left to look upon Beatrice. Dante repeatedly speaks of Love throughout the text as if the personified being is waging a war upon his body. He says:

[. . .] Love, many times without warning, attacked me so violently that no part of me remained alive except one thought that spoke of this lady

[. . .] when this battle of love raged within me so, I went in all my pallor to **behold** this lady, believing that the **sight** of her would defend me in this battle, but forgetting what happens to me whenever I approach such abundant graciousness [. . .] not only did this **sight** not defend me but it ultimately annihilated my little remaining life [. . .]. (*Vita*, 30)

Like a disease or sickness attacks the physical body, so does the personified Love attack and wage a continual war in Dante's body. Since the negative effects do not hinder his desire to gaze upon Beatrice, he suggests that something in him, which he identifies as "pity," makes him believe the sight of Beatrice will bring him salvation from his suffering. However, the examples that he provides suggest that their encounters have quite the opposite effect:

So forcefully and suddenly Love strikes
that my life would all but abandon me
were it not for one last surviving spirit,
allowed to live because it speaks of you.

Hoping to help myself, I gather courage
and pale and drawn and lacking all defence,
I come to **see** you hoping to be healed;
but if I raise my **eyes** to **look** at you a trembling starts at once within
my heart and drives life out and stops my pulses' beat. (30)

Just as the sick were said to come to Jesus to be healed, so Dante seeks solace in Beatrice's presence. Once again, she is afforded the status of a divine being, which Dante uses to explain his reactions. Ironically, Dante reveals that though he ignorantly

thought the sight of Beatrice would heal his lovesickness, he comes to realize that gazing upon her actually causes his debilitating condition. After this self-realization, Dante goes on to write a sonnet in which he refers to love as “the dark condition” (30).

Though Dante is very aware of the negative effects of his gazing upon Beatrice, he states, upon self-reflection, that it does not hinder his drive to gaze upon her more. Here, he seems to speak of a very bodily gazing rather than recalling simply her image to mind or considering her divine appearance. Dante questions himself:

‘Since you take on so ridiculous an **appearance** whenever you are near this lady, why do you try to **see** her? Assume that she were to ask you this, and that all your faculties were free to answer her, what would your answer be?’ And to this another humble thought replies, saying: ‘If I did not lose my powers and were free enough to be able to answer her, I would tell her that no sooner do I call to mind the astonishing **image** of her beauty that the desire to **see** her overtakes me, and this desire is so powerful that it slays and destroys in my memory anything that might rise to restrain it; therefore, past sufferings do not hold me back from trying to **behold** her.’ (*Vita*, 28)

Here, the regions of the body, the mind and heart, do battle, like Love before them, and the heart appears to win every time, leaving the rest of the body to suffer for its boldness.

Dante’s use of the gaze and its relation to the female subject reflects the influence of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas’s theory of aesthetic emotion is deeply embedded in Dante’s texts. Aquinas said, “We call beautiful those things which, when seen, please” (qtd. in Harrison, 41). However, as scholar Robert Harrison points out, Aquinas does not mean “please” as in “pleasure,” but rather “placation.” Therefore, “What the beautiful brings to repose, or quiets and placates, is the restless commotion of appetite. It is as if the aesthetic subject is released...from the commotions of subjectivity itself....This

happens through the faculty of **sight**, which for Aquinas is a faculty of knowledge. The beautiful differs from the good and the true precisely because contemplation is induced through the faculty of **sight**” (41). This “aesthetic stasis” of placation, then, appears to be under the control of the subjected character, in this case Beatrice (44). She is, in essence then, in control of her own gaze and her own body at some points in Dante’s texts, which may devalue his own gaze, but would explain the mysterious power that causes his physical torment over her unnamable alterity.

In a canzone written after his self-realization of the powerful effects of her gaze, Dante writes:

My lady is desired in highest heaven;
I want to tell you what her power does;
a lady who aspires to graciousness
should seek her company, for when she walks,
Love drives a killing frost into vile hearts
that freezes and destroys their every thought;
and dare a thought remain to **look** at her
it has to change to good or else must die;
and if she finds one worthy to **behold** her,
he feels her power, for her least salutation
bestows salvation on this favoured one
and humbles him till he forgets all wrongs.
This too has God Almighty graced her with:

whoever speaks with her shall speak with Him. (*Vita*, 36)

What sets this canzone apart from others is that Dante mentions that vile hearts are affected in a different manner than pure hearts in the wake of Beatrice's gaze.

Furthermore, Beatrice, having the Christ-like powers that he claims she does, is able to discern between the two and hand out a fitting punishment (like only God is said to do).

Therefore, readers once again are left to ponder questions—Which type of heart is Dante?

Is he a mixture of both as his reactions would suggest?—which cannot be fully

comprehended until the narrative has come full circle. What the reader can know is that,

within this canzone, Dante acknowledges the power of the vision of Beatrice's body

engaging in the simplest movement – walking. He also acknowledges that the natural

reaction for those who gaze upon this moving body is to have impure thoughts. However

(and here is where the connection to lovesickness is made), he must beatify her body on

the page due to Beatrice's Christ-like status; therefore, he says that “Love drives a killing

frost” into the hearts of those whose eyes tempt them to think impure thoughts about her

body. Though she does not appear to control her own gaze in this passage (as she does in

those that follow), she has some power over the effects of her body and her movements.

In a later canzone, Love, as personified by Dante, has his own description of Beatrice, which centers around the gaze, and specifically the power of Beatrice's own gaze, when she chooses to return it:

From out her **eyes**, wherever they may move

come spirits that are all aflame with Love;

they pierce the **eyes** of any one that **looks**
and pass straight through till each one finds the heart;
upon her face you **see** depicted Love,
there where none dares to hold his **gaze** too long. (*Vita*, 36)

Here, Love's description of Beatrice sounds almost identical to that of the traditional view of Cupid.⁵ The spirits that emanate out of Beatrice's eyes might as well be Cupid's flaming arrows that likewise seek out the human heart as their target. And just as those that receive one of Cupid's arrows may fall victim to lovesickness or some similar ill effect, so do the "victims" of Beatrice's gaze suffer if they look too long. Just as a closer look at the role of the gaze in the *Commedia* would show, so does a look at *Vita Nuova* reveal that Dante, when giving physical descriptions of Beatrice, often begins with her eyes. This pattern emphasizes both his gaze upon her body, as well as her own ability to return an effective gaze. In his analysis of the above canzone, Dante fittingly notes that, "First I speak of her **eyes**, which are the initiators of love" (*Vita*, 38).

Composing a poem for an inquisitive friend who questions the nature of love, Dante writes,

A worthy lady's beauty next is **viewed**
with pleasure by the **eyes**, and in the heart
desire for the pleasing thing is born,
and for awhile this beauty lingers there
until Love's spirit is aroused from sleep.

A man of worth with ladies does the same. (*Vita*, 39)

In this chapter, Dante appears to be theorizing within his own work. He connects the actions of the eyes to those of the heart. He also goes one step further to propose that, when women likewise gaze upon men, the same order of effects take place: the eyes gaze, the heart feels, and Love takes over all the senses. Is he therefore revealing more about his own nature or about Beatrice in that she does not show signs of these inherent reactions. Is he revealing that she, indeed a divine being, is not susceptible to these inclinations; or is he rather owning that he must not be a man of worth, for his proven lady of worth does not react in the same manner in which he obviously does?

By this point in the text, Dante's classifying of Beatrice as a divine being has moved beyond the hypothesis stage, and he fosters its development further in the last half of the chapters. In the following canzone, Dante not only notes the power of Beatrice's gaze upon the human heart, but also its effects upon the human soul, hers being a divine gaze above all else.

The power of love borne in my lady's **eyes**
imparts its grace to all **she looks** upon;
men turn to **gaze** at her when she walks by;
the heart of him she greets is made to quake,
his face to whiten, forcing down his **gaze**;
he sighs as all his defects flash in mind;
all pride and indignation flee from her.

[. . .] and man is blessed at his first **sight** of her.
the **image** of her when she starts to smile
breaks out of words, the mind cannot contain it,
a miracle too rich and too strange to hold. (*Vita*, 41)

By noting that her sight is literally too much to take, Dante is re-enforcing Beatrice's alterity. She is so unattainable as a human that she must be divine; it is the only option that enables her to exist at all, whether in this world or the next, as an entity that Dante can look upon. To suggest that she is indeed divine rather than human, he must rely on his previous claim that her mere gaze implies salvation. To bolster his conclusions, Dante includes examples of other characters' realizations of the power of Beatrice's returned gaze over their hearts:

Such sweet decorum and such gentle graces
attend my lady's greeting as she walks
that every tongue is stammering then mute,
and **eyes** dare not to **gaze** at such a **sight**;
she moves benignly in humility
untouched by all the praise along her way
and seems a creature come from heaven to earth,
a miracle manifest in reality.
So charming she **appears** to human **sight**,
her sweetness through the **eyes** reaches the heart;

who has not felt this cannot understand.

And from her lips it seems there moves a spirit

so gentle and so loving that it glides

into the souls of men and whispers, 'Sigh!' (57)

By this point in the book, it is suggested that it is indeed Beatrice's returned gaze, rather than Dante's own gaze, that is the primary source of power.

So long a time has Love kept me a slave

and in his lordship fully seasoned me,

that even though at first I felt him harsh,

now tender is his power in my heart.

But when he takes my strength away from me

So that my spirits seem to run away,

my fainting soul is overcome with sweetness

and the colour of my face begins to fade.

Then in me Love starts working up such power,

he makes my spirits rant and wander off,

and rushing out they call

my lady, begging her to grant me grace.

This happens every time she **looks** at me;

I am more humbled than my words can tell. (59)

Here, Dante not only reinforces the idea of Beatrice's salvific power, but he returns to descriptions of Love's overpowering force very similar to those he began with.

After Dante has a dream vision foreshadowing Beatrice's death, he creates a canzone in which he equates sickness to love, relying on his readers' familiarity with the imagery of Cupid's arrows.

I seemed to be **aware** of dreadful things:
of ladies all dishevelled as they walked,
some weeping, others voicing their laments
that with grief's flame-tipped arrows pierced my heart. (*Vita*, 49)

Later in this same canzone, Dante once again is allowed to look at the body of Beatrice in a vision in a manner more like that of the traditional gaze trope. Like the first dream vision Dante has of Love, Beatrice's body is once seemingly on display for him. Though it is not clear whether it is a naked body this time, the cloth that covers her skin is now a white veil on her face rather than a see-through crimson one across her lower body. Here the contrast between the erotic and the spiritual is prevalent. Dante's gaze, if reflective of this shift in focus, would appear to have developed from earthly sights to more divine ones. Though he remains on earth in *Vita*, he is beginning to look to the heavenly sights he will encounter in the *Commedia*.

Even after Beatrice's actual death, connections between the regions of sight and the heart are formed. This time, the eyes and the rest of the body mourn *for* the heart rather than in response to a transgression of the heart. The heart in turn grieves and

suffers for the eyes, which have lost the object of their gaze, and the mind which is still affected just by a recalled image of Beatrice:

The **eyes** grieving through pity for the heart
while **weeping** have endured great suffering [. . .]
The power of my sighs fills me with anguish
each time the thought brings to my weary mind
the **image** of that one who split my heart [. . .]
When this imagining has hold of me,
bitter affliction bounds me on all sides,
and I begin to tremble from the pain [. . .] (*Vita*, 63-65)

Dante devotes an entire chapter (thirty-seven) to a discussion with his “damned” and “disloyal” eyes in which he reprimands them for looking upon another with a favor similar to that which they held for Beatrice. The reprimands come from his heart, which will never forget Beatrice, even though she is no longer in sight (74-75). He goes on in the next chapter to explain that the heart, representing desire, is in battle with his soul, representing reason (a throwback to Love waging war in his body). In the end, in his second to last vision, his heart is able to repent its desire to look upon Beatrice after her death and metaphoric sacrifice, just as Christians are said to be able to repent after the sacrifice and death of Jesus (78). Now, only Dante’s thoughts and sighs, sent up to heaven, may gaze upon her because the divine being is in the realm where she belongs. When his sigh returns as a messenger, he is unable to understand the description of

Beatrice, because she is now the ultimate other. Quoting Charles Singleton's *An Essay on the "Vita Nuova,"* Robert Harrison reiterates the idea that an alterity also lies between Dante the character and Dante the narrator. In this case, the character Beatrice functions as a crucial point in Dante's formation of his own singular identity. For his two personas to merge and escape alterity, he must undergo a revelation, which occurs upon the event of Beatrice's necessary death. However, he does not realize until the narrative's end, when he can look back with the eyes of a narrator, what an important role Beatrice's death played for his own life. He merely mourns the loss of her earthly body (Harrison, 6-7). With her death, no traces of a human female are left to grapple with. She is an entity who will no longer challenge his existence as a human male unless he takes on her new form.⁶

Though Dante seems to be taken unaware by lovesickness at the beginning of *Vita Nuova*, it is clear that he understands his affliction by the end of the piece. He knows that the Lord of Love has taken control of his body and drives him to gaze upon Beatrice whenever the opportunity arises. Though Dante should be filled with the joy associated with love at the sight of his beloved, his gaze and concentration upon Beatrice's form leads to his bodily suffering. Believing that his spirits of sight and his vital spirit (his heart) are connected, he denotes the great pain that other regions of his body undergo due to Love's control over his gaze. Foreshadowing the *Commedia*, Dante concludes:

After this sonnet there appeared to me a miraculous **vision** in which I **saw** things that made me resolve to say no more about this blessed one until I would be capable of writing about her in a more worthy fashion. And to achieve this I am striving as hard as I can, and this she truly knows. Accordingly, if it be the wish of Him through whom all things flourish that

my life continue for a few more years, I hope to write of her that which has never been written of any other woman. And then may it please that One who is the Lord of Graciousness that my soul ascend to behold the glory of its lady, that is, of that blessed Beatrice, who in glory **gazes** upon the countenance of the One *who is through all the ages blessed*. (*Vita*, 84)

And so he fulfills his promise in the *Commedia*.

CHAPTER III
THE *COMMEDIA* AND CONCLUSION

When Dante writes the *Commedia* in the shadow of its precursor, the *Vita Nuova*, he has already experienced the loss of his beloved Beatrice. No longer will there be chance encounters on the street. No longer will Dante attempt to categorize the object of his gaze in physical, earthly terms. She is now a pure, divine creature that Dante can no longer gaze upon unless he, too, can rise to the heavenly realm. For most people, this would seem impossible, but illusory ideas do not stop this poet. The *Commedia* then evolves as a result of his determination to understand why Beatrice's earthly presence affected him so, and as an attempt to experience her divine presence once again. Even though Beatrice does not appear as Dante's guide until the end of the *Purgatorio* (book two of three), the readers are reminded early in the *Inferno* (book one) of the importance of her own gaze, even in this new realm of being:

[. . .] I was a soul
among the souls of Limbo, when a lady
so blessed and so beautiful, I prayed her
to order and command my will, called to me.
Her **eyes** were kindled from the lamps of Heaven.

Her voice reached through me, tender, sweet, and low. (*Comm.*, 25)

In this new work, Dante significantly begins any description of Beatrice with her eyes. It would seem that Dante is aware, before this leg of his journey even begins, that Beatrice's gaze will be the means of his salvation. In *Purgatorio*, he also acknowledges that looking upon Beatrice "both satisfies and quickens appetite" (558). One must assume that at this point, this "appetite" is for spiritual sustenance rather than erotic pleasure. What sets the *Commedia* apart from *Vita Nuova* at its most basic level is the fact that the entire poem is Dante's *vision*. At no point does any event contained within it occur on the historical, tangible earth. And though visions play a vital role in *Vita Nuova*, Dante the narrator allows Dante the character to spend an equal amount of time in the real world, gazing at a real Beatrice as he does the deified Beatrice of his visions.

Before one delves into Beatrice's role as savior, it may help to consider what Dante's cultural and secular influences were. How did he come to raise a real-life woman to such a high, spiritual status? Once Beatrice leaves the world of flesh, must Dante create his own precedent? It is certain that Dante found inspiration in the songs of the troubadours and their ideas of courtly love. Initially inspired by the Platonic ideal of women, courtly poets believed: "The love of a woman [. . .] had a spiritualizing effect and acted as a ladder on which the lover could ascend to Heaven. It was a form of education in Platonics in which woman reflected the light of a heavenly idea" (Mirsky, 20). Here the problem of the mortal Beatrice who is found in *Vita Nuova* emerges, for:

If Dante places his beloved beyond this world and its touch, its consummation, his problem becomes how to get to her. Ought he to call his mistress down and to what purpose? Should she be an intercessory saint? He could carry on a courtship again with her on this earth only within the bounds of propriety or else risk a lewdness that would dissipate

the moral authority and probably the beauty of his lines. A saint only as a companion? Dante wanted to resume the courtship. This could only be done with impunity in the afterlife. But how would the rules of courtly love conform to the natural laws of Heaven? (Mirsky, 21)

Thus, the living Beatrice of *Vita Nuova* must disappear from Dante's mortal gaze, because she is untouchable, indefinable, and unidentifiable by Dante's terms. Since he cannot claim that she is the same as he, Dante must rid himself of the reminder of otherness. However, the issue remains unresolved, urging Dante to create the *Commedia* to further explore Beatrice's unique gaze and his susceptibility to it.

In his letter to Lord Can Grande della Scala, Dante assumes the role of commentator on his own work (in this case, *Paradiso* from the *Commedia*), and interestingly enough begins his commentary with a definition of what modern critics and theorists refer to as otherness or alterity. Though Dante is applying this definition to his discussion of *Paradiso* as being a part of a whole (*Commedia*), it may not be too bold to assume that he would also apply this familiar theory to other aspects of his work, i.e. the otherness of Beatrice within *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia*. He states:

As the Philosopher says in the second book of the *Metaphysics*, 'as a thing is in respect of being, so is it in respect of truth'; the reason of which is, that the truth concerning a thing which consists in the truth as in its subject, is the perfect likeness of the thing as it is. Now of the things which exist, some are such as to have absolute being in themselves; while others are such as to have their being dependent upon something else, by virtue of a certain relation, as being in existence at the same time, or having respect to some other thing, as in the case of correlatives, such as father and son, master and servant, double and half, the whole and part, and other similar things, in so far as they are related. Inasmuch, then, as the being of such things depends upon something else, it follows that the truth of these things likewise depends upon something else; for if the half is unknown, its double cannot be known, and so of the rest. (*Letters*, 198)

Thus, by Dante's own definition of otherness, he would claim that Beatrice, as a part of his human experience, is a necessary aspect of his knowledge and understanding of his own being. With this corollary set forth, it is easy to see how Dante suffers physical effects from his inability to completely grasp the identity of Beatrice, such a crucial aspect of his own identity.

The concept of the *donna angelicata*, or "lady-made-angel" of lyric poetry is often attributed to Guido Guinicelli, who wrote in Italy before Dante. With courtly love being an institution in which the male observer is always looking upward to a lady of "higher being," it is natural that the lady would eventually obtain divine status because of her elusive nature (Singleton, 68-69). The poet-lover realizes that his worship will produce no outcome other than his poetry. The lady, object of his gaze and always on a level above him, can therefore not solve the problem of Otherness that Lacan describes. In the *Commedia* Beatrice's "own co-agency is more fully asserted. The *donna angelicata* is no longer the passive object of Dante's gaze, as she was through much of the *Vita Nuova* [. . .]. The theophany that is her own gaze grows in intensity as her brightening eyes propel the pilgrim from sphere to sphere, until she must remind him that 'not only in my eyes is paradise' (*Par. XVIII, 21*)" (in Newman, 188).

Beatrice's presentation as a Christ figure in *Vita Nuova* develops a precursory identity for her appearance as a divine teacher in the *Commedia*. The connection between Dante's gaze and Beatrice's alter, divine identity also begins in *Vita Nuova*. Notwithstanding, in the *Commedia* Beatrice's gaze becomes the more powerful of the two, and it is through her eyes that Dante is able to travel through the afterlife: "she rides

on the chariot that represents the church, and Dante sees the gryphon change its nature in her **eyes** (*Purg.* 31.118-26)” (in Ferrante, 9). By looking into and through Beatrice’s gaze, Dante is able to engage in some activities of the divine when he looks upon Love in *Vita Nuova*, and God in the *Commedia*.

Joan Ferrante suggests that perhaps Dante uses Beatrice in an ironic manner in the *Commedia* because he does not entirely agree with the theologians of his age, or those that came before. Though these same men are given a place in paradise by Dante, he “gives the office of major theologian in his heaven to someone whose sex would have shocked virtually all the doctors of the church there. And he does not hesitate to have her correct them or other great thinkers, some of them by name, beginning with Plato” (Ferrante, 11-12). Perhaps, as Ferrante suggests, Dante the narrator is emphasizing the difference between earthly worship and that of God’s realm (12). No matter what his intentions in this matter, it is interesting to note that Beatrice is allowed to be very verbal in this afterlife, even as her own gaze acquires a power that could render speech useless. However, she is not afforded these same abilities in life, or at least the part of her life presented in *Vita Nuova*.

Though many scholars harp on the fact that Beatrice is allowed to speak so much in the *Commedia* compared to *Vita Nuova*, Ferrante notes that perhaps her clearly-marked moments of silence in the heavenly paradise may tell the reader more than her speaking lines: “She is silent as they pass from one realm to another, so that Dante can concentrate on her **eyes** and rise through them [. . .] she is silent as a bride when John comes to greet Peter and James [. . .] and she is silent again **looking** fixedly at the point of light [. . .]”

(16). Though Thomas Aquinas and St. Paul honored “silent” women in their works, what would they have thought of this silent Beatrice? This Beatrice who, having the right to speak, chooses not to unless to impart “divine truths”, is given a status above that of Virgil, who seems to have “something to say on virtually every occasion, whether he knows what is going on or not” (16-17). Her silence draws the attention to her eyes as much as the truths she occasionally imparts. With Dante’s focus on Beatrice’s eyes in both the earthly and heavenly realms, one would assume that Aquinas and Paul would conclude that he had been bewitched by flesh and blood rather than “saved” by a divine being.

Perhaps, the “silent” Beatrice of the *Vita Nuova*⁷ was more powerful than critics appear to give her credit for. Judging by Dante’s awareness of the cause of the suffering he undergoes just by gazing upon the muted Beatrice, he may have very intentionally “let her loose” among these theologians he wished to “reign in” or criticize for their anti-feminine theories. This is not to presume that Dante was a strong supporter of women’s rights. On the contrary, with this same material he could have just as easily been supporting the idea of the scheming, seductive Eve-like woman, capable of causing great anguish among her male counterparts, a figure that his theologian contemporaries and forefathers would have warned men about.

Conceivably, Dante’s framework for his revolutionary uses for Beatrice may not have been a complete revolt against his male predecessors, the theologians, but rather a reflection of the well-known female teachers and priests of his time. Though, as Ferrante notes, no one can prove his knowledge of medieval “women-teachers” such as Heloise

and Hildegard, there were many others that he may have likely heard of or come into contact with (19-20). Though his knowledge of female contemporary teachers is not certain, his knowledge of the “bride of Christ” analogy can be linked to his familiarity with works such as Bernard’s *Sermons*. However, as Ferrante points out, Dante subverts this traditional role, just as he often subverts the male upon female gaze in *Vita Nuova*: “Beatrice is both Christ, therefore the bridegroom, and the bride so Dante must be both the groom, a surrogate for Christ, presumably in his mission as saviour of church and state, and the bride, the soul being united with her God, which is a traditional reversal, although Dante introduces a striking new element by having the groom represented by a female, a double role-reversal” (21). This radical material, which can be found as early as *Vita Nuova*, is supported by its reappearance in the *Commedia*, along with other confusions of gender and gender identity. Is Dante in fact being radical with these reversals? As this paper has suggested, the gender confusion in his works may be simply a reflection of his actual struggles with the female other in his life and in his writings.

As Beatrice is reintroduced at the end of the *Purgatorio*, it appears that Dante will simply employ the same techniques of the gaze that he used in *Vita Nuova* before:

Here we are nymphs; stars are we in the skies.

Ere Beatrice went to earth we were ordained

her handmaids. We will lead you to her **eyes**;

but that your own may **see** what joyous lights

shines in them, yonder Three, who see more deeply,

will sharpen and instruct your mortal **sight...**’

‘Look deep, **look** well, however your **eyes** may smart.

We have led you now before those emeralds

from which Love shot his arrows through your heart.’

A thousand burning passions, every one

hotter than any flame, held my **eyes** fixed

to the lucent **eyes** she held fixed on the Griffon.

Like sunlight in a glass the twofold creature

shone from the deep reflections of her **eyes**,

now in the one, now in the other nature.

Judge, reader, if I found it passing strange

to **see** the thing unaltered in itself

yet in its **image** working change on change. (*Comm.*, 558)

Here, Beatrice’s servants promise Dante they will lead him not just to his lady, but to her eyes. Then, the focus shifts to Dante’s own gaze. Once again, Dante is a victim of Love’s arrows, which reach his heart through the faculty of sight. “Burning passions” keep his gaze, yet he willingly undergoes the torture in order to glory in just the reflection of Beatrice’s gaze.

Beatrice’s servants implore her to look upon Dante so that he can benefit from her gaze. The readers of the *Vita Nuova* may expect a less positive outcome, but they must consider that, just as the earthly Beatrice is gone, so has her gaze changed in order to reflect her new life. Upon seeing Beatrice for the first time in ten years, Dante says:

My **eyes** were fixed with such intensity
On quenching, at long last, their ten years' thirst
That every sense but **sight** abandoned me.
Tranced by the holy smile that drew me there
Into the old nets, I forgot all else—
My **eyes** wore **blind**ers, and I could not care.
When suddenly my **gaze** was wrenched away
and forced to turn left to those goddesses:
'He **stares** too fixedly, I heard them say.
And as a man is **blinded** by the light
When he has **looked** directly at the sun,
Just so I found that I had lost my **sight**. (*Comm.*, 562-63)

By admitting to a ten year thirst, Dante essentially acknowledges that he continues to gaze upon Beatrice in his mind, even though her body is absent from his sight. By the *Vita Nuova*'s end, Dante had already discussed the fact that he would continue to focus on Beatrice's image if he were separated for her for any period of time. What differs in the examples from the *Commedia* is that Beatrice can now definitively be associated with a divine source. In the quotation above, Dante begins to lavishly use fire imagery in order to describe Beatrice's presence. She, like Christ and God before is related to the sun itself, a presence so bright that it is blinding to the mortal eye. Some more examples of this imagery use follow:

Beatrice **looked** at me, and her glad **eyes**,
afire with their divinity, shot forth
such *sparks* of love that my poor faculties
gave up the reins. And with my **eyes** cast down
I stood **entranced**, my senses all but flown. (*Comm.*, 627)

Nothing displeased, she laughed so that the *blaze*
of her glad **eyes** *pierced* my mind's singleness
and once again *divided* it several ways. (679).

I **saw** her face before me, so *imbued*
with holy *fire*, her **eyes** so bright with *bliss*
that I pass on, leaving them unconstrued. (798)

Before Beatrice's death in the *Vita Nuova*, these quotations might have conjured up images of earthly *passion*, a love of two bodies rather than the admiration of one soul for another. With the significant event of Beatrice's death and ascent to a heavenly throne, the reader may look at this imagery as an effort by the poet to further the image of Beatrice as divine being. When one considers the prior discussion of the various definitions for *passion*, it does not seem so odd that both uses of the term would find themselves in Dante's two works. It seems that, though the context may change the interpretation, these two "divisions" of love come from a common ancestry. The *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia*, when read together, work to show this link and also to explain how one idea of love can develop into such a drastically different version of love.

Though one could argue that Dante's thoughts upon the subject of his gaze become purified throughout his journey, it is clear that he continues to use Beatrice as the subject of his gaze though he is aware of more divine subjects. He says:

If she said more, her words were lost on me,
for now my **eyes** were fixed once more on Beatrice,
my senses closed to all that was not she. (565)

Just as in *Vita Nuova*, Dante loses the use of all his senses except of the faculty of sight when he is in the presence of Beatrice. If his gaze is not fixed upon her in paradise—"Beatrice was looking upward and I at her [. . .]" (607)—it is sure to be fixed upon the same subject of her gaze. At one point in the *Paradiso*, Dante is distracted by the vision of another woman. He actually turns from Beatrice to gaze upon Empress Constance, whose visual and auditory (she is singing) presence appears to engage him. However, once she disappears from his sight, she is forgotten, and his gaze returns once more to Beatrice (who never leaves his thoughts even if she is not in sight) (619). Her sight immediately blinds him, which, juxtaposed with the image of Constance, makes the latter seem that much less brilliant and holy than the deified Beatrice.

Though the quote above parallels scenes from *Vita Nuova*, one aspect of these quotations allows the reader to begin to differentiate Dante's two works. When Dante addresses the reader directly, he conjures a third gaze. Whereas this gaze is always present when literature is read, it is not always directly invoked by a character or a narrator. Instead of complicating the situation, this third gaze only emphasizes the

importance of the visual journey that Dante has undertaken. As Beatrice now mediates between Dante and God, Dante likewise appears to take on a similar role for those still on earth by directly addressing the readers:

Therefore, reader, raise your **eyes** across
the starry sphere. Turn with me to that point
at which one motion and another cross,
and there begin to savor your delight
in the Creator's art, which he so loves
that is fixed forever in His **sight**. (*Comm.*, 677)

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As Dante appeals to readers to focus their sight above, he continues to lead them vicariously through the experience by the same means:

If you wish, similarly, to know the rest
let your **eyes** follow where my words shall lead
circling through all this garland of the blest. (680)

The previous two quotations also give the reader the impression that Dante's gaze, though still pointed in Beatrice's direction, is now of a spiritual, heavenly purpose rather than an earthly one. He is now able to use the knowledge of the narrator that he silenced for most of *Vita* in order to let the events unfold for the reader as they had first happened. Coming to terms with Beatrice's earthly beauty, he is asked now to focus on her "Second Beauty," presumably meant to signify her salvation (*Purg.*, 559).

Early on in the *Paradiso*, the play between gazes takes a central role. In the following quote, the reader witnesses Dante gazing at Beatrice, who is herself gazing at the sun (in substitution for God):

[. . .] when I **saw** Beatrice had turned left to raise
her **eyes** up to the Sun; no eagle ever
stared at its shining with so fixed a **gaze**.
And as a ray descending from the sky
gives rise to another, which climbs back again,
as a pilgrim yearns for home; so through my **eye**
her action, like a ray into my mind,
gave rise to mine: I **stared** into the Sun
so hard that here it would have left me **blind**;
but much is granted to our senses there,
in that garden made to be man's proper place,
that is not granted us when we are here.
I had to **look** away soon, and yet not
so soon but what I **saw** him spark and blaze
like new-tapped iron when it pours white-hot.
And suddenly, as it **appeared** to me,
day was added to day, as if He who can
had added a new Sun to Heaven's glory.
Beatrice **stared** at the eternal spheres

entranced, unmoving; and I **looked** away
from the Sun's height to fix my **eyes** on hers.

And as I **looked**, I felt begin within me
what Glaucus felt eating the herb that made him
a god among the others in the sea. (*Comm.*, 598)

One could argue that it is in this scene that Dante's gaze changes its focus to a more spiritual one. Though his gaze returns to Beatrice's image by the passage's end, he does take a moment to look forward to the object of her gaze, and this is when the change takes place. From this point, Beatrice's gaze holds new meaning for him. In her "sacred eyes," Dante can now see what he refers to as "visions," which he describes as pale images of human faces (615-16). In these instances, Beatrice's eyes are acting as mirrors, reflecting the souls that surround them in this part of paradise. Her mirror-like ability foreshadows an objective that Dante's own eyes will reach by the end of his spiritual journey.

Noting the evolution of her own body and gaze, and commenting upon Dante's faculty of sight, clearly inferior in this world, Beatrice says:

'If, in the warmth of love, I manifest
more of my radiance than the world can **see**,
rendering your **eyes** unequal to the test,
do not be amazed. These are the radiancies
of the perfected **vision** that **sees** the good

and step by step moves nearer what it **sees**.

Well I do **see** how the Eternal Ray,
which, once seen, kindles love forevermore,
already shines on you [. . .]'. (*Comm.*, 630)

To reiterate the important role that Dante's gaze plays in his spiritual journey, Beatrice informs him:

'You are so near the final health of man
you will do well to go clear-**eyed** and keen
into that good [. . .]'. (791)

Here, Beatrice is telling Dante that he must have clear, focused vision before he makes his final ascent to look upon God. Contemplating this, he looks down at the prior seven spheres he has traveled through, but they seem to pale in comparison to the promise of Beatrice's gaze, now equivalent to the eyes of Heaven, to which he once again turns (792).

As Dante's eyes are fixed on Beatrice throughout his journey through paradise, hers are always "fixed eagerly on the pre-dawn glow," knowingly looking ahead to the salvation she has already received and wishes to share with Dante (*Comm.*, 798). Therefore, Beatrice helps Dante to understand how his own gaze will change as they enter the eighth sphere. In the previous canto (XXII), Dante had looked upon the very Sun without any effect. However, as he looks toward Heaven's Sun (God) now, he notes that his vision is "dazzled" and his "senses reeled" (798). Beatrice has him turn once

again to her as she explains that he can now look on her without being blinded because he has “**seen** things whose power has made [him] able/ to bear the bright smile of [her] ecstasy” (799). Through the language of the gaze, Dante describes divine revelation, and his gaze now holds rank with Beatrice’s. To urge him to continue to direct his gaze upward, toward Christ and heavenly objects, Beatrice asks:

‘Why are you so enamored of my face
you do not turn your **eyes** to **see** the garden
that flowers there in the radiance of Christ’s grace?’ (800)

Like a priest, Beatrice appears to be urging Dante not to slip back into his old ways, including the use of the traditional male, earthly gaze.

As Dante makes the final ascent to the Empyrean, the seat of paradise, he takes the opportunity to praise his guide’s beauty, a trait noted in earthly encounters, but perfected in this heavenly paradise:

As feeblest **eyes**, struck by the sun, go **blind**,
so the remembrance of my lady’s smile
strikes every recognition from my mind.
From the first day I **looked** upon her face
in this life, to this present **sight** of her,
my song has followed her to sing her praise. (*Comm.*, 861)

Before Beatrice leaves Dante, he is blinded once more, only to receive “new-given sight” once he opens his eyes on Beatrice’s command. His eyes are now better mirrors to reflect God, and to look upon his radiance. Dante says:

Nor were my **eyes** confounded by that sea
and altitude of space, but took in all,
both number and quality, of that ecstasy. (864)

Unfortunately for Dante, he is now forced to part with his beloved Beatrice once again. This parting does not appear to be as dramatic as the first in which Beatrice left the earthly realm. Dante, having a deeper understanding of the spiritual world, must now be satisfied that he may have the opportunity to join her one day in the heavenly realm. He relates his last look at Beatrice as follows:

‘And if you raise your **eyes** you still may find her
in the third circle down from the highest rank
upon the throne her merit has assigned her.’

Without reply I **looked** up to that height
and **saw** her draw an aureole round herself
as she reflected the Eternal Light.

No mortal **eye**, though plunged to the last bounds
of the deepest sea, has ever been so far
from the topmost heaven to which the thunder sounds
as I was then from Beatrice; but there

the distance did not matter, for her **image**

reached me **unblurred** by any atmosphere. (871-72)

A holy Elder reminds him that to complete his journey, to look on Mary, mother of God, and God in the final realm, he must not let his eyes linger “on those things that lie below” (873). He must be willing to move on from Beatrice’s presence, and he must turn his gaze upward toward his goal. At the end of this spiritual path, Dante concludes the work with the following words:

Here my powers rest from their high fantasy,

but already I could feel my being turned –

instinct and intellect balanced equally

as in a wheel whose motion nothing jars –

by the Love that moves the Sun and the other stars. (894)

And so the circle is complete. The journey that Dante began nearly twenty years earlier with a single glance from a nine-year old Beatrice Portinari has come to an end. Dante’s gaze could be said to come into its own. Though Beatrice’s image will surely never leave him, he will no longer rely on her gaze to lead him on a righteous path.

To conclude, it is only fitting to return to *Vita Nuova*, and look at the changes that his gaze has undergone since the “threat” of the earthly Beatrice’s alterity is removed. After Beatrice’s death in *Vita Nuova*, the primary gaze of the text is reflected back upon Dante who is mourning the loss of his lady:

My **eyes** have **seen** how much of Pity's **look**
displayed itself upon your countenance
when you observed the bearing and the mien
which often I am forced by grief to show.
Then I became aware that you had **seen**
into the nature of my darkened life,
and this aroused within my heart a fear
of showing through my **eyes** my wretched state.

I fled then from your presence as I felt
the tears begin to overflow my heart
that at the **sight** of you was overwhelmed.
Later within my anguished soul I said:
'For certain with that lady dwells that Love
that makes me go about like this in tears'. (*Vita*, 71-72)

In this passage, Dante recounts an experience in which a woman observes his mourning for Beatrice from her window, and consequently shows him great pity. Unable to handle the reflected gaze of another, and of a woman specifically, Dante flees the scene. Robert Harrison notes that:

The passage describes a **visual specularity** whereby the self returns to itself through the image of the other in a reflective medium, in this case a window. Here then is a **spectator**. Dante has been looking for one. We notice that even before he saw the woman, he raised his **eyes** to see if he was being seen....This reflectivity of **sight** sums up the **specularity** that

will characterize the encounter with the new woman. Her **visible** compassion comes from the **visible** signs of grief Dante wears on his face, so much so that her **eyes** become a visionary monitor of his inward distress. (115)

Without the body of Beatrice to gaze upon, this new woman, or this *donna gentile* becomes “a reflection of the self that has lost the other” (117). In this specular self-reflection, Dante becomes his own subject, and it appears that Beatrice’s absence (which signifies the absence of the threat of otherness) allows him to come to terms with his own identity.

No wonder Dante’s classic tale, when translated to script format, as the scene that begins this thesis, does not appear to be anything other than the story of a modern-day lovesick teen. Women will always be “the other” to men in some sense, and the male gaze will always be present to grapple with this otherness. It appears that, although Dante receives “the truth” from Beatrice by the end of the *Commedia*, he is never able to truly touch the elusive Beatrice he admires from the beginning of *Vita Nuova*. In his texts, Beatrice becomes the ultimate other, one who cannot be consistently categorized or found to fit the same definitions of her male other. Her example is now put to use in other genres by names like Eastwood and Gibson, who remain incapable of resolving otherness any more than Dante could. Perhaps Dante, in his works foreshadowed his own eternal struggle with the concept of alterity. One has to wonder whether Beatrice remains the object of his gaze, or whether she has been replaced by some other divine figure in the afterlife. Unfortunately, it is Dante who is now mute, unable to provide new insight, but able to share for eternity his battle with alterity and his physical torment over

the object of his gaze that was Beatrice. At the end of *Vita Nuova*, when Dante promises to write of Beatrice what has been written of no other woman before, he seems to prophesy the *Commedia's* classification as one of the most well-known, revolutionary pieces of literature ever written. One is left to wonder, however, which piece of literature affected Dante's personal life the most. After all, is it the journey or reaching the destination that provides the most satisfaction for the traveler? One thing is certain; both pieces are linked as a visual journey in which the development of Dante's gaze acts as a reflection of his own spiritual journey.

¹ The emphasis added is by the author of this thesis. Throughout the paper, words pertaining to the gaze, sight, vision, etc. are bolded in quotes provided from primary and secondary sources. Other words to be emphasized may be italicized throughout as well.

² Whereas this paper will establish that Dante does use the gaze in its traditional form (female body as object of male gaze), the focus will be upon his relation of the gaze to the suffering inflicted upon the viewer. It is important, however, to show that Dante did not completely abandon the more traditional use of the trope, or attempt to completely redefine it; rather, he takes the gaze one step further to create another possible literary use for it.

³ Cupid's use of arrows is reminiscent of the hunting metaphors prevalent in Medieval texts that compared love to a wound, often inflicted upon a female character by a male character "hunting" for love. See Marie de France's *Lais* for several examples.

⁴ Yet another irony is that, through Beatrice the Christ-like figure, this paper works to show that Dante suffers through his own Passion more than Beatrice does throughout the course of his texts.

⁵ See the discussion of Cupid in the introduction to compare.

⁶ See the next chapter on the *Commedia*

⁷ Compare to the more verbal Beatrice of the *Commedia* discussed in Chapter III.

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