

TEODOLINDA BAROLINI

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JOHN J. KINDER and DIANA GLENN

THE POETIC EXCHANGES
BETWEEN DANTE ALIGHIERI
AND HIS «AMICO» DANTE DA MAIANO:
A YOUNG MAN TAKES HIS PLACE
IN THE WORLD



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This essay is a greatly amplified translation and revision of selected sections of my commentary to Dante's lyrics, *Rime giovanili e della 'Vita Nuova'* (Milano, Rizzoli, 2009). In translating, I have also added a substantial amount of new critical material. My accompanying essays to the correspondence sonnets with Dante da Maiano, which are the first poems in the order of presentation in *Rime giovanili e della 'Vita Nuova'*, were written more than a decade ago, at the beginning of a *rime* project that has expanded to take up more of my life than I had anticipated. In the intervening years, I have had many more thoughts on these most juvenile of Dante's *rime giovanili*. Moreover, I have moved ever farther away from the disparaging view of these poems that was standard in twentieth-century commentaries. By the time I set to work translating my Italian commentary to these sonnets, in 2010, I had taught the correspondence sonnets between Dante Alighieri and Dante da Maiano a number of times, to students who did not share the formulaic prejudices against these «Guittonian» poems that were the conventional wisdom of my youth. I felt freer, consequently, when I was translating my earlier self, to pursue what had in any case already been my inclination in the Italian version, where I saw more significance in these early poems than I had been quite prepared to see.

The additions to my earlier readings have been added in the spirit of that greater significance, taking a tip from Dante Alighieri's remarkable use of the verb *significare* in one of his first poems (and one of my additions is a meditation on the significance of *significare* in the sonnet *Savete giudicar*). In particular, I have done much more to contextualize these sonnets. For instance, in my Italian commentary I discuss *Savete giudicar*, Dante's reply to Dante da Maiano's riddle sonnet, *Provedi, saggio*, without looking at the other respondents to the poet from Maiano. Here I discuss the replies of Guido Orlandi

and Chiaro Davanzati, whose pragmatic interpretations of Dante da Maiano's cryptic reference to his dead mother throw into sharp relief Dante Alighieri's deliteralized and psychologizing interpretation, making it easier to see how Dante Alighieri at eighteen years was already anomalous in his interest in the psychology of desire and in his willingness to find deep significance. In the discussion of the *tenzone* on the greatest sorrow of love, called in Italian «la tenzone del duol d'amore», I similarly add context to further illuminate the world of male rivalry and honour codes that, while noted in the Italian *cappello introduttivo*, I now more fully unpack. I show how Dante Alighieri threads his way through a world that was deeply suspicious of a man who could engage in visionary behaviour, and how he reclaims in the *Vita Nuova* the word «farneticare», used in derogatory and gendered fashion by Dante da Maiano. The word «amico» itself turns out to tell a story: in the context of young males seeking to take their places in the poetic agora – the work that in anthropological and sociological terms truly underlies these exchanges – «amico» is a word that signals posturing and rivalry masking as friendship. It has nothing to do with the idea of a friend as an alternate self, «alter idem» in Cicero's *De Amicitia* (XXI 80). Dante's first great meditation on friendship, the sonnet *Guido, i' vorrei*, tellingly does not include the word «amico», reintroduced into his poetry later.

Original to this essay are the sprightly and fast-paced renditions of the sonnets by Richard Lansing, whose lovely translations of the poems will be an integral part of an English version of *Rime giovanili e della 'Vita Nuova'*. It was while translating the sections on the correspondence poems with Dante da Maiano that I realized that if I continued to do the translation myself I would have an *ovra inconsummabile* on my hands because I kept on adding material – and that if I did not desist I would never get to volume 2 and to the great lyrics of Dante's maturity. The decision to give the translation of volume 1 over to the capable hands of Andrew Frisardi, a poet and translator of the *Vita Nuova*, and to get on with volume 2 was surely helped along by remembering the friendly admonitions of John Scott, who over the years has urged me to get my commentary done: how wonderful it is to experience the generous expression of collegial *cura* (as compared to *noncuranza*, French and English *nonchalance*) with respect to one's work! I am deeply grateful to John, not only – as we all are – for his far-reaching and stimulating and critically important contributions to our understanding of Dante and the medieval *forma mentis*, but also for taking the time to express an interest in my work, a generosity not all that common among scholars. I am thus particularly happy to dedicate to him this little *saggio* of an English

translation of *Rime giovanili e della 'Vita Nuova'*, with gratitude for all that he has done for the world of Dante studies.

I. *Provedi, saggio and Savete giudicar*: The Manufacturing of Significance

Provedi, saggio, ad esta visione: Dante da Maiano to several poets

Provedi, saggio, ad esta visione,
 e per mercé ne trai vera sentenza.
 Dico: una donna di bella fazione,
 4 di cui el meo cor gradir molto s'agenzia,
 mi fé d'una ghirlanda donagione,
 verde, fronzuta, con bella accollienza;
 appresso mi trovai per vestigione
 8 camiscia di suo dosso, a mia parvenza.
 Allor di tanto, amico, mi francai
 che dolcemente presila abbracciare:
 11 non si contese, ma ridea la bella.
 Così, ridendo, molto la basciai:
 del più non dico, ché mi fé giurare.
 14 E morta, ch'è mia madre, era con ella.¹

*Consider well, wise friend, this dream of mine,
 and please reveal its true significance.
 To wit: a lady who is beautiful,
 to do whose pleasure is my heart's delight,
 presented me a garland as a gift,
 with leaves all green, arranged quite pleasantly.
 Then soon I found myself, it seemed to me,
 apparelled in a shirt that had her size.
 And then, my friend, I got my courage up
 and threw my arms around her tenderly:
 she offered no resistance, only laughed.
 And while she laughed, I kissed her many times:*

¹ The text of the poems is from the edition of DOMENICO DE ROBERTIS, *Dante Alighieri: Rime*, in *Le Opere di Dante Alighieri*, Edizione Nazionale a cura della Società Dantesca Italiana, 5 vols., Florence, Le Lettere, 2002. The five volumes (technically, three *volumi* consisting of five *tomi*) are not paginated sequentially throughout. Rather, Volume I, *I documenti*, consists of two *tomi* comprising one unit; Volume II, *Introduzione*, consists of two *tomi* comprising a second unit; and Volume III, *Testi*, consists of one *tomo* comprising a third unit. Most of my citations of De Robertis come from Tomo 2 of the *Introduzione*, where the critical material is located.

*I'll say no more, on this she made me swear.
Then one who's dead – my mother – was with her.*

Savete giudicar vostra ragione: Dante Alighieri's response

Savete giudicar vostra ragione,
o om che pregio di saver portate;
per che, vitando aver con voi quistione,
4 com so rispondo a le parole ornate.
Disio verace, u' rado fin si pone,
che mosse di valore o di bieltate,
emagina l'amica openione
8 significasse il don che pria narrate.
Lo vestimento, aggate vera spene
che fia, da lei cui disiäte, amore;
11 e 'n ciò provide vostro spirto bene:
dico, pensando l'ovra sua d'allore.
La figura che già morta sorvene
14 è la fermezza ch'averà nel core.

*You're wise enough to explicate your theme,
O man of learning held in high esteem;
so, steering clear of starting a dispute,
as best I can, I'll answer your fine words.
A true desire, one rarely satisfied,
inspired by beauty and great worthiness,
is what the gift you spoke of earlier
did signify, in your friend's view.
The shirt, the gift of her whom you desire,
denotes her love, of this you can be sure.
And so your spirit did foresee the truth,
that is, in view of what she then did next.
The image of the one already dead
is constancy that she'll bear in her heart.*

The sonnet *Savete giudicar vostra ragione* is Dante Alighieri's response to a riddle-sonnet, *Provedi, saggio, ad esta visione*, sent by Dante da Maiano to fellow poets requesting that they provide the «vera sentenza» ('true significance' [2]) of the vision he recounts.² Commonly held to be one of Dante

² The other respondents are Chiaro Davanzati, Guido Orlandi, Salvino Doni, Ricco da Varlungo and ser Cione Baglione. The responses, along with Dante da Maiano's sonnet, are preserved in Book XI of the *Giuntina*. For printed texts of the other responses to Dante da Maiano's *Provedi, saggio*, see DANTE DA MAIANO, *Rime*, ed. by Rosanna Bettarini, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1969.

Alighieri's earliest poetic forays, *Savete giudicar* is by critical consensus dated to slightly before 1283, a date that emerges from consideration of other exchanges between the two Dantes. This is the date indicated by Dante Alighieri in the *Vita Nuova* for his own erotic visionary riddle, *A ciascun'alma presa e gentile core*, a poem that, like *Savete giudicar*, belongs to the correspondence between Dante Alighieri and Dante da Maiano: Dante da Maiano was one of the three poets who responded to *A ciascun'alma*.³ If we accept the *Vita Nuova*'s date of 1283 for *A ciascun'alma*,⁴ then *Savete giudicar* would most likely precede it by a little, both on stylistic grounds and because it seems improbable that Dante Alighieri would write to Dante da Maiano in the highly respectful tone that we encounter here *after* having received Dante da Maiano's extremely disrespectful response to *A ciascun'alma* (the vulgar and mocking sonnet *Di ciò che stato sè dimandatore*, to which we shall return). Whatever the case, when we read *Savete giudicar* and the other correspondence poems with Dante da Maiano, we are reading the work of a very young poet, no more than seventeen or eighteen years old.

These very early poems help us to remember that their author developed in time, that he was not adult-born like Athena from the head of Zeus as the poet of the *Commedia*: even Dante Alighieri wrote early poems of modest artistic value and experienced a diachronic process of development and change that we can study and map. Moreover, Dante Alighieri lived in a given historical moment, to which these texts bear witness – and part of the witness is that in writing about these poems we need to use his full name in order to avoid confusion. In other words, Dante was not always already Dante. In corresponding with Dante da Maiano, «a member of Guittone's school writing in the Provençal style» («un provenzaleggiante della scuola guittoniana»),⁵ Dante Alighieri reveals that he too started his poetic life as a stylistic follower of Guittone d'Arezzo.

It is interesting that the sonnet to which Dante Alighieri takes the trouble to respond should narrate a vision – «Provedi, saggio, ad esta **visione**» ('Consider well, wise friend, this dream of mine'), writes Dante da Maiano in

³ The three respondents to *A ciascun'alma* are Guido Cavalcanti, Dante da Maiano, and (with less certainty) Terino da Castelfiorentino.

⁴ The date given by Dante of 1283 for *A ciascun'alma* is persuasive, also because the poem is similar to others of this vintage. In other words, the fact that the *Vita Nuova* prose fits *A ciascun'alma* into a complex retroactive autobiographical design – whereby the dream described in *A ciascun'alma* occurred the night following Beatrice's first greeting, which occurred nine years after their first encounter, which occurred when Dante was nine years old – does not necessarily compromise its biographical plausibility.

⁵ *Rime della 'Vita Nuova' e della giovinezza*, ed. by Michele Barbi and Francesco Maggini, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1956, p. 155.

his opening verse – for vision will hold a privileged place in Dante Alighieri's imaginary. Even if a taste for the enigmatic is part of the Occitan rhetorical repertory, we should not discount the fact that here, in one of his earliest poetic experiences, we find Dante working to come to terms with a concept that will later mean so much to him, one that he will continue to develop in the *Rime*,⁶ in the *Vita Nuova* (where the word «visione» is prominent beginning in chapter III [1]),⁷ and above all in the *Commedia*.⁸ Not long after receiving Dante da Maiano's visionary riddle Dante Alighieri composed a visionary riddle of his own, *A ciascun'alma*, to which he subsequently gave a high-profile position as the first poetic text of the *Vita Nuova*.

Dante da Maiano narrates his vision in an explicitly diachronic form, with great attention to his speech («Dico» [3]) and non-speech («del più non dico» [13]). Dante Alighieri confirms the narrativity of *Provedi, saggio* with the verb «narrate» (8) in his response (similarly, Chiaro Davanzati uses «narrasti» in his reply to *Provedi, saggio*: «Amico, proveduto ha mia intenzione / a ciò che mi narrasti per tua scienza».)⁹ The story that Dante da Maiano narrates, whose explicit eroticism reminds us that unsublimated sexuality is part of the tradition inherited by the stilnovist poets, is the following: first he receives the gift of a garland from a beautiful woman, then he finds himself putting on her shirt, then he embraces her sweetly, «dolcemente presila abbracciare» (10), then, seeing that «non si contese, ma ridea la bella» ('she offered no resistance, only laughed' [11]), he kisses her many times, «molto la basciai» (12). At this point in his story, Dante da Maiano passes to the «più non dico» (13) – words that remain in Dante Alighieri's textual memory: «più non ti dico» says Ciaccio in *Inf.* VI 90 – adding only the cryptic infor-

⁶ See, for instance, my introductory essays to *Ciò che m'incontra* and *Donna pietosa*, in *Rime giovanili e della 'Vita Nuova'*.

⁷ References to the *Vita Nuova* (including the title) follow the edition of Domenico De Robertis: *Vita Nuova*, Milano-Napoli, Ricciardi, 1980. My Roman numeral refers to the chapter number in the Barbian order adopted by De Robertis while the parenthetical Arabic numeral refers to the chapter number in the edition of Guglielmo Gorni (*Vita Nuova*, Torino, Einaudi, 1996).

⁸ Dante represents visionary experience in his *rime* but he thematizes vision in his prose: whereas he never uses the word *visione* in his lyrics, he uses it seven times in the prose of the *Vita Nuova*, beginning with the «maravigliosa visione» of III 3 (1, 14). After showing his interest in *visione* in the larger mystical sense in the *Vita Nuova*, Dante retrenches (the *Convivio's* only use of *visione* is technical, appearing in a discussion of optics in III ix, 9), before the expansive treatment of the *Commedia*. On the concept of vision in the *Commedia*, see TEODOLINDA BAROLINI, *The Undivine Comedy*, esp. ch. 7, *Nonfalse Errors and True Dreams of the Evangelist*.

⁹ Chiaro's sonnet of response to Dante da Maiano's *Provedi, saggio* is *Amico, proveduto ha mia intenzione*, which begins: «Friend, my intellect has attentively considered that which you narrated according to your knowledge» (1-2). We will come back to the significance of Chiaro's use of «amico» in the incipit.

mation that with the beautiful lady a dead woman also appeared, and that she is «mia madre» (14).

What is most striking – and anomalous with respect to his peers – in Dante Alighieri's response is the seriousness with which he effects a total transposition from the event described to what he sees as its meaning. The commitment with which the young Dante Alighieri throws himself into the work of manufacturing significance is highlighted by the verb *significare*, used to denote the deeper significance of the gift narrated by Dante da Maiano: «**significasse** il don che pria narrate» ('is what the gift you spoke of earlier did signify' [8]). We see here Dante Alighieri's first use of a verb (perhaps influenced by Cavalcanti's «**Significàstimi**, in un sonetto / rimatetto, / il voler de la giovane donna»),¹⁰ that throughout his life he will use rarely and in signature moments,¹¹ as in the famous claim that he is a poet who manufactures significance in consonance with Love's dictation: «a quel modo / ch'e' ditta dentro vo **significando**» ('in that manner that Love dictates I go signifying' [*Purg.* XXIV 53-54]). Immediately following are the verses in which Dante distances the lyric production of his youth, written in a «dolce stil novo» (*Purg.* XXIV 57), from that of previous lyric poets who, he says, did not achieve the «sweet new style». As Dante wrote the verses of *Purg.* XXIV that became official Italian historiography, with their signature «vo significando», did his mind go back to his own youthful Guittonian correspondence with a poet who never evolved beyond Occitan and Guittonian mannerisms to reach the sweet new style? Obviously we cannot know, but the sheer rareness of the verb *significare* in Dante's poetic lexicon is suggestive: after he composed *Savete giudicar*, Dante never used *significare* in his verse again until he wrote *Purg.* XXIV. Subsequently he uses *significare* to distill his entire poetic enterprise in *Par.* I: «Trasumanar **significar per verba** / non si poria» ('Going beyond the human cannot be signified in words' [*Par.* I 70-71]).

Regarding the interpretations of Dante da Maiano's vision offered by the young Dante Alighieri (the garland is the desire sparked by the lady, the garment signifies her requital of his desire, the dead woman steadiness in love), more important than the specific glosses is his move to psychologize, his pro-

¹⁰ This hapax in Cavalcanti's poetry is also from a correspondence sonnet: *Gianni, quel Guido salute*, verses 3-5 («You meant to signify, in a rhymed sonnet, the will of the young lady»).

¹¹ The prose of the *Vita Nuova* contains two uses of the verb *significare* and two of the noun (*significato* and *significazione*), while the *Convivio* contains 26 uses of the verb and two of the noun *significanza*. Most strikingly, the *Commedia* contains no uses of the noun and only three of the verb *significare*, which after *Purg.* XXIV recurs in «Trasumanar **significar per verba** / non si poria» (*Par.* I 70-71) and «'l suo voler piacermi / **significava** nel chiarir di fori» (*Par.* IX 14-15).

nounced effort to interpret the internal motivations of the soul. This effort is completely absent in the poem of Dante da Maiano, and also from those of the other respondents. For instance, let us take the example of the cryptic reference to the dead mother of the last verse of *Provedi, saggio*. Guido Orlandi interprets the mother as coming to castigate the poet for having breached the secrecy of a love affair. It is not correct, chides Guido Orlandi, to disclose your love and then to use «I dreamed it» as an excuse: «non bona convenenza è palesare / amor di gentil donna o di donzella, / e per iscusà dicere: “io sognai”» (‘It is unseemly to expose the love of a noble lady or maid, and then as excuse to declare: “I dreamed it”’ [*Al motto diredàn prima ragione*, 9-11]). Hence, continues Orlandi, your mother comes to punish you: «dicer: “Non dico”. Pensa chi t’appella: / màmmata [sì] ti vene a gastigare. / Ama celato, avra’ne gioia assai» (‘Say: “I do not tell”. Think who calls you: your mother comes to punish you. Love secretly and you will have much joy’ [*Al motto diredàn prima ragione*, 12-14]). While not issuing the stern reproof of Guido Orlandi, Chiaro Davanzati would like Dante da Maiano to keep his mother separate from his love life: «Di tua madre ti guarda da pensare, / ch’altra tua cosa s’avverrà con ella» (‘Avoid thinking of your mother, because other things will happen to you with her’ [*Amico, proveduto ha mia intenzione*, 13-14]).

Only Dante Alighieri deliteralizes and deepens the significance of Dante da Maiano’s mother (explicitly called «mia madre» by Dante da Maiano, an identification duly confirmed by Chiaro Davanzati and Guido Orlandi in respectively «tua madre» and «màmmata» [= «tua mamma»]). Dante Alighieri removes the literal biographical quality of the reference by excizing «madre» from his reply altogether, replacing it with the more generic and evocative «figura» and thus giving himself the opportunity to manufacture significance: this «figura» (‘image’) now can represent the steadiness of the lady in love, the unwavering firmness of her desire. Dante Alighieri is analyzing desire, as the choice of «fermezza» in «è la **fermezza** ch’averà nel core» (‘is constancy that she’ll bear in her heart’ [14]) testifies: this is a word that resonates with the philosophy and psychology of desire. We need only remember that Arnaut Daniel’s sestina begins «Lo **ferm** voler qu’el cor m’intra» (‘The firm desire that enters my heart’) and that Dante in *Io son venuto* writes «ch’io son **fermo** di portarla sempre» (‘for I am resolved to carry it [the thorn of love] always’ [51]). Moreover, there is no word of greater thematic importance for Dante’s personal trajectory: here the lady is said to be as unwavering as death, and later in his life Dante will require himself to be unwavering even after (his lady’s) death.

In the verses «Disio verace, u' rado fin si pone, / che mosse di valore o di bieltate» ('A true desire, one rarely satisfied, / inspired by beauty and great worthiness' [5-6]), we can see the great Dantean theme of desire in its role as the motor of human life. Desire that arises from virtue or beauty («Disio verace ... che mosse di valore o di bieltate»), and to which one can rarely bring an end («u' rado fin si pone»), is the motor that pushes us along the path of our life, the «cammin di nostra vita» of the *Commedia's* first verse. Desire is both lack – «ché nullo desidera quello che ha, ma quello che non ha, che è manifesto difetto» ('For no one desires what he has but rather what he does not have, which is manifest lack' [*Conv.* III xv 3]) – and the spiritual movement with which we attempt to fill that lack: «disire, / ch'è moto spiritale» ('desire, which is a spiritual motion' [*Purg.* XVIII 31-32]). Thus, desire is a function of time, the medium that confers mortality – movement, change, absence of being – and that condemns us always to desire. These are the principles that, according to Dante, govern the temporal journey of life (and that govern the narrative journey as well, in imitation of the voyage of life):¹² «Omne quod movetur, movetur propter aliquid quod non habet, quod est terminus sui motus ... Omne quod movetur est in aliquo defectu, et non habet totum suum esse simul» ('Each thing that moves, moves because of something that it does not have, which is the goal of its motion ... Each thing that moves exists in some defect and does not possess all its being at once' [*Ep.* XIII 71-72]).

In *Savete giudicar*, we can already catch a glimpse of a much more mature Dante, one who will openly tell us that desire is the motor of the spirit, a motor that stops only when the spirit arrives at its goal: «così l'animo preso entra in disire, / ch'è moto spiritale, e mai non posa / fin che la cosa amata il fa gioire» ('so the captured soul enters into desire, which is a spiritual motion, and it never rests until the beloved thing causes it to rejoice' [*Purg.* XVIII 31-33]). We are at the beginning of the path, where we are in a position to note how the rich current of Dante's meditation on «disio verace» wells up from the small spring of these verses, and how the concept of desire that is «moto spiritale» exists *in nuce* in «disio ... che mosse di valore o di bieltate».

The dependent clauses of these verses are not ornamental fillers, but fully functional, contributing to the analysis of «true desire». The first clause pushes forward, toward the desired end, the goal of the voyage, and therefore poses the question of fulfilment, here defined as rare («u' rado fin si

¹² For the textual voyage that imitates the voyage of life, see *The Undivine Comedy*, esp. pp. 21-26.

pone»). If we put this phrase in the context of the verses from *Purg.* XVIII just cited, we see that it treats the issue of the soul's arrival at the «la cosa amata [che] il fa gioire». The second clause instead folds backward, toward the beginning of the journey, the source from which the soul's desire originally flowed, noting that the stimuli that induce the spirit to desire the beloved object – to make it beloved – are virtue or beauty («che mosse di valore o di bieltate»). We are already in the presence of Dante's signature obsession.

II. The *tenzone* on the Sorrow of Love: Testing Male *Valore* in the Poetic Agora

Per pruova di saper com vale o quanto: Dante da Maiano to Dante Alighieri

Per pruova di saper com vale o quanto
 lo mastro l'oro, adducelo a lo foco;
 e, ciò faccendo, chiara e sa se poco,
 4 amico, di pecunia vale o tanto.
 Ed eo, per levar prova del meo canto,
 l'adduco a voi, cui paragone voco
 di ciascun c'have in canoscenza loco,
 8 o che di pregio porti loda o vanto.
 E chero a voi col meo canto più saggio
 che mi deggiate il dol maggio d'Amore
 11 qual è, per vostra scienza, nominare:
 e ciò non movo per quistioneggiare
 (che già inver' voi so non avria valore),
 14 ma per saver ciò ch'eo vaglio e varraggio.

*To ascertain the worth and weight of gold
 a goldsmith places it within a fire;
 and doing this, he clarifies and learns,
 my friend, if it's of great or little worth.
 And so to gauge my poem's worthiness,
 I'm sending it to you, my touchstone for
 whoever claims to rank among the wise,
 or who is praised and held in high regard.
 I ask, this being the wisest of my poems,
 what kind of suffering brought on by Love,
 in your experience, is worst of all:
 and this I ask, though not to stir debate,
 (for, with respect to you, I'd be outclassed),
 but just to know my worth and future promise.*

Qual che voi siate, amico, vostro manto: Dante Alighieri to Dante da Maiano

Qual che voi siate, amico, vostro manto
di scienza parmi tal, che non è gioco;
sì che, per non saver, d'ira mi coco,
4 non che laudarvi, sodisfarvi tanto.
Sacciate ben (ch'io mi conosco alquanto)
che di saver ver' voi ho men d'un moco,
né per via saggia come voi non voco,
8 così parete saggio in ciascun canto.
Poi piacevi saver lo meo coraggio,
ed io ·l vi mostro di menzogna fore,
11 sì come quei ch'a saggio è 'l suo parlare:
certanamente a mia coscienza pare,
chi non è amato, s'elli è amadore,
14 che 'n cor porti dolor senza paragio.

*Whoever you may be, my friend, I find
the learning you display to be no joke;
and so I smart for having failed at least
to offer, not to say my praise, some cheer.
Be well assured (I know a thing or two),
compared to yours my learning is but scant,
and I don't row my boat as well as you,
so you seem wise in everything you do.
And since you wish to know my point of view,
I'll tell you openly without deceit,
like one conversing with a man who's wise.
My understanding leads me to believe
that anyone who loves but is not loved
bears in his heart a grief beyond compare.*

Lo vostro fermo dir fino ed orrato: Dante da Maiano to Dante Alighieri

Lo vostro fermo dir fino ed orrato
approva ben ciò bon ch' om di voi parla,
ed ancor più, ch'ogni uom fora gravato
4 di vostra loda intera nominarla;
ché 'l vostro pregio in tal loco è poggiato,
che propiamente om no·l poria contar là:
però qual vera loda al vostro stato
8 crede parlando dar, dico disparla.
Dite ch'amare e non essere amato
ène lo dol che più d'Amore dole,
11 e manti dicon che più v' ha dol maggio:

onde umil prego non vi sia disgrato
 vostro saver che chiari ancor, se vole,
 14 se 'l vero o no di ciò mi mostra saggio.

*The sure and graceful manner of your speech
 confirms the good that others see in you,
 and more as well, for anyone would be
 hard pressed to register your praise in full;
 now your acclaim has soared to such a height
 that no one could appraise it properly:
 and so whoever thinks he credits you
 with all due praise, I say, speaks foolishly.
 You claim that loving without being loved
 entails the harshest pain of Love there is,
 yet many say there is still greater pain.
 So in your wisdom, if you do not mind,
 I ask you to shed further light on this,
 and if experience can show it's true.*

Non canoscendo, amico vostro nomo: Dante Alighieri to Dante da Maiano

Non canoscendo, amico, vostro nomo,
 donde che mova chi con meco parla,
 conosco ben che scienz' à di gran nomo,
 4 sì che di quanti saccio nessun par l' à;
 ché si pò ben canoscere d' un omo,
 ragionando, se ha senno, che ben par là.
 Conven poi voi laudar, sarà for nomo
 8 e forte a lingua mia di ciò com parla.
 Amico (certo sonde, a ciò ch' amato
 per amore aggio), sacci ben, chi ama,
 11 se non è amato, lo maggior dol porta;
 ché tal dolor ten sotto suo camato
 tutti altri, e capo di ciascun si chiama:
 14 da ciò vèn quanta pena Amore porta.

*Although, my friend, I do not know your name,
 whoever it may be that speaks to me,
 I know indeed his learning's such a legend
 no one else can claim to be his peer:
 for one can recognize intelligence,
 in conversation, by the words employed.
 Since I must praise you without naming you,
 it's hard to form the words upon my tongue.
 My friend (of this I'm sure, for I have felt*

*true love), know this full well: whoever loves
but is not loved will bear the greatest pain;
this kind of anguish has the upper hand
on all the rest, and takes the name of chief:
from this comes every pain that Love inflicts.*

Lasso, lo dol che più mi dole e serra: Dante da Maiano to Dante Alighieri

Lasso, lo dol che più mi dole e serra
è ringraziar, ben non sapendo como;
per me più saggio converriasi, como
4 vostro saver, ched ogni quistion serra.
Del dol che manta gente dite serra
è tal voler qual voi lor non ha como;
el propio sì disio saver dol, como
8 di ciò sovente dico, essend'a serra.
Però pregh'eo ch'argomentiate, saggio,
d'autorità mostrando ciò che porta
11 di voi la 'mpresa, a ciò che sia più chiara;
e poi parrà, parlando di ciò, chiara
e qual più chiarirem dol pena porta,
14 d'el[]o assegnando, amico, prov'e saggio.

*Alas, the pain that hurts and grips the most
is that of thanking you, not knowing how;
a wiser sort than I should take my place,
a mind like yours, to tie up all loose ends.
The pain that you ascribe to some who love
is yearning you and they feel differently;
I'd like to understand this feeling well,
for often, as I say, I'm gripped by it.
And so I now request that you, my sage,
cite which authority substantiates
your view, so it can garner more prestige.
Then our discussion will have clarified
which suffering begets the greatest pain,
as we resolve, my friend, the pros and cons.*

This exchange of sonnets between Dante Alighieri and Dante da Maiano is known as the «tenzone del duol d'amore» ('poetic exchange on the suffering of love'), so named by Flaminio Pellegrini in an essay of 1917. This set of sonnets compels us to begin by dealing with a problem of attribution. The problem arose because of an error in the text that contains them, the collection of *Sonetti e canzoni di diversi antichi autori toscani*, printed by the pub-

lishing house of the Giunti brothers in Florence in 1527. The «Giuntina», as it is known in the critical literature, is the first printed edition of the lyrics of Dante and other «antichi autori toscani»; it constitutes our only source of the poetry of Dante da Maiano and *a fortiori* of the correspondence between Dante da Maiano and Dante Alighieri. The correspondence between the two Dantes can be found in Book XI of the Giuntina, where the five sonnets that make up the *tenzone del duol d'amore* appear in the order preserved in modern editions, but with the following headings:

1. «Dante da Maiano a Dante Alaghieri» (*Per pruova di saper*)
2. «Risposta di Dante Alaghieri a D. da Maiano» (*Qual che voi siate*)
3. «Risposta di Dante Alaghieri a D. da Maiano» (*Lo vostro fermo dir*)
4. «Risposta di Dante Alaghieri a D. da Maiano» (*Non canoscendo*)
5. «Risposta di Dante da Maiano a Dante Alaghieri» (*Lasso, lo dol*)

The error is evident: the editors of the Giuntina present three «responses of Dante Alaghieri» one after the other, thus abandoning the alternating pattern that an exchange requires. The simplest solution is to restore alternation, attributing the third sonnet to Dante da Maiano and assuming that the editor intended to write the heading «Risposta di Dante da Maiano a Dante Alaghieri» instead of the opposite in the third position. That is the solution endorsed by Barbi: «The order is correct with respect to the meaning of the poems and cannot be changed; but in the attribution of the sonnets an error has evidently occurred, because there are three of Dante Alighieri's sonnets in a row (2, 3, and 4). The correction that seems obvious, and we can even say certain, is to change the rubric for sonnet 3 to *Dante da Maiano* in order to re-establish the alternating order. Modern scholars have accepted this correction, with the exception of S. Santangelo, who proposes exchanging the attributions between the two Dantes in such a way that Dante Alighieri becomes the proposing writer with sonnets 1, 3, and 5 and Dante da Maiano the respondent with sonnets 2 and 4».¹³

As for the modern editors of Dante's *Rime*, Contini and De Robertis follow Barbi, while Foster-Boyde accept Santangelo's proposal, thus adding one text to their canon of Dante Alighieri's poems (and so arriving at a total of 89 poems instead of 88). I find both Santangelo's arguments and those added by Foster-Boyde unconvincing. They are based on the idea that the pre-

¹³ «L'ordine è giusto per il senso e non si può mutare; ma nelle attribuzioni dei sonetti evidentemente è incorso un errore, perchè se ne avrebbero di seguito tre di Dante Alighieri (2, 3, e 4). La correzione che si presenta ovvia, e possiam dire sicura, è di sostituire nel son. 3 *Dante da Maiano* per ristabilire l'ordine alterno. Così hanno accettato i moderni studiosi, a eccezione di S. Santangelo che propose di scambiare le attribuzioni fra i due Danti in modo che l'Alighieri diventasse il proponente coi sonetti 1, 3, e 5 e il Maianese rispondesse coi sonetti 2 e 4» (Barbi-Maggini, p. 159).

sumably mature poet, Dante da Maiano, would not have addressed a young unknown poet, Dante Alighieri. But the most recent editor of Dante da Maiano, Rosanna Bettarini, writes that Dante da Maiano «must have been a little younger than Chiaro and Monte and very close in age to Dante Alighieri» («doveva esser un po' più giovane di Chiaro e di Monte e press'a poco dell'età dell'Alighieri» [p. xvi]); in this case, the entire argument based on the mature poet opposed to the younger poet collapses. De Robertis confirms Bettarini's position, noting with respect to the presumed difference in the two Dantes' ages, that «we have no proof that Dante da Maiano was the older and more practised love poet» («cosa di cui non s'ha alcuna prova, che questi [Dante da Maiano] fosse il più anziano ed esperto in materia» [*Introduzione* 2, p. 934]).

Above all, there is no justification for opposing such poorly supported biographical conjectures to the Giuntina, the only textual authority that we possess with respect to the correspondence between the two Dantes. I follow De Robertis in thinking that the arguments of Santangelo and Foster-Boyd are far from being sufficiently persuasive to justify four corrections of the Giuntina instead of one: «If it were not for that incongruous attribution, would we be debating proper manners and who was older than who? It seems to this editor of the *Rime* that the most economical hypothesis is to leave the Giuntina as it is, with the one correction of the rubric of the third sonnet, and that this is the hypothesis by which interpretation must abide».¹⁴

In the preliminary sonnet, *Per pruova di saper com vale o quanto*, Dante da Maiano's octave is devoted to the true matter of this *tenzone*, which is not the stated question (what is the greatest suffering in love), but the much more socially compelling question of proving one's worth as a man and as a poet, of testing oneself in the poetic agora. As gold is tested by a goldsmith to discover its true value, so this poem will be submitted to the test of an interlocutor. And not just any interlocutor will do: «l'adduco a voi, cui paragone voco / di ciascun c'have in canoscenza loco, / o che di pregio porti loda o vanto» ('I'm sending it to you, my touchstone for whoever claims to rank among the wise, or who is praised and held in high regard' [6-8]). In the tercets Dante da Maiano turns to the putative topic of the *tenzone*, asking his interlocutor to name the greatest suffering caused by love: «che mi deggiate il dol maggio d'Amore / qual è, per vostra scienza, nominare» ('what kind of

¹⁴ «Se non fosse stato per quell'incongrua attribuzione, saremmo forse a quistioneggiare di convenienze e del non aver l'età? Quella di lasciare le proposte di Giunt[ina] come stanno, con la sola correzione per A 3, pare all'editore delle rime l'ipotesi più economica; con la qual deve pur confrontarsi l'interpretazione» (*Introduzione* 2, p. 935).

suffering brought on by Love, in your experience, is worst of all' [10-11]). But the real *materia* is the question of a man's *valore*, his comparative worth – «che già inver' voi so non avria **valore**» ('for, with respect to you, I'd be outclassed' [13]) – expressed in the oft-repeated verb *valere* ('to be worth', 'to possess value'). Dante da Maiano is motivated by the desire to ascertain his value, present («vaglio») and future («varraggio»): «e ciò non movo per quistioneggiare / (che già inver' voi so non avria valore), / ma per saver ciò ch'eo **vaglio e varraggio**» ('and this I ask, though not to stir debate, [for, with respect to you, I'd be outclassed], but just to know my worth and future promise' [12-14]). The multiple uses of *valere* echo the great canzone of Guittone d'Arezzo, *Ora parrà s'eo saverò cantare*, in which the Aretine poet addresses the question of his worth as man, poet and lover.¹⁵

In his response, *Qual che voi siate, amico, vostro manto*, Dante Alighieri replies to the question posed by Dante da Maiano only in the last two verses, explaining that pain without equal is carried in the heart of «anyone who loves but is not loved»: «chi non è amato, s'elli è amadore» (13). In other words, the unrequited lover suffers most of all. But again the true *materia* of the poem is the contest between the two young men, who seem to use flattery as a means of managing the aggression that animates their wary exchange. Dante Alighieri addresses Dante da Maiano in a stylized fashion which suggests contained aggression, with repeated references to the wisdom of his interlocutor and self-deprecating references to his own comparative lack of knowledge, noting that «compared to yours my learning is but scant»: «che di saver ver' voi ho men d'un moco» (6).

In this *tenzone* both young poets are unstinting in their praise, seeming to sublimate aggression through stylized compliments. But aggression is not always sublimated in these exchanges. Interestingly, unsublimated aggression comes to the surface in a sonnet written by none other than Dante da Maiano, who, in his mocking response to *A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core*, addresses Dante Alighieri slightly as «amico meo di poco canoscente» («my friend who understands but little» [*Di ciò che stato sè dimandatore*, 3]). Dante da Maiano further disparages Dante Alighieri as delirious, announcing that he will not alter his interpretation of *A ciascun'alma* until he

¹⁵ «The poem [*Ora parrà*] is a testing ground; its purpose is to prove that the poet, now that he flees Love, is still worth what he used to be worth: «s'eo varrò quanto valer già soglio» (2). The repeated forms of *valere* (*varrò* [2], *valer* [2], *valer* [6], *valere* [12], *valor* [14]) keep the tension alive; the issue on the table is a man's worth, his moral/poetic measure» (T. BAROLINI, *Guittone's «Ora parrà», Dante's «Doglia mi reca», and the «Commedias»'s Anatomy of Desire*, reprinted in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture*, New York, Fordham U. Press, 2006, pp. 47-69, citation p. 48).

has submitted Dante Alighieri's urine for examination by a medical doctor: «né cangio mai d'esta sentenza mea / finché tua acqua al medico no stendo» ('nor will I change my verdict until I have given your water to the doctor' [*Di ciò che stato sè dimandatore*, 13-14]). Here we see again the pattern of *Provedi, saggio* and *Savete giudicar*: we see the same divergence between Dante da Maiano, the literalist who yet desires to be interpreted (*Provedi, saggio, ad esta visione*), and Dante Alighieri, who in his response to *Provedi, saggio* moves markedly farther away from the literal than the other respondents (*Savete giudicar*). In a reversal, now it is Dante Alighieri who proposes a mysterious vision (*A ciascun' alma*) and Dante da Maiano who, as one of three interpreter-respondents, again shows his literalist bent (*Di ciò che stato sè dimandatore*): he refuses to engage in any interpretation of *A ciascun' alma*, a sonnet whose vision of Love holding the poet's sleeping beloved and then awakening her to feed her the poet's heart apparently is too extreme for Dante da Maiano's tastes. Cavalcanti, by contrast, interprets Dante's vision in the key of existential and epistemological fullness and completion: «Vedeste, al mio parere, onne valore / e tutto gioco e quanto bene om sente» ('You saw, in my opinion, all worth and all happiness and as much good as man feels').

In these exchanges we can see ideological positions carved out as these rival poets debate not so much the greatest suffering of love but the degree of metaphysical access permitted to love poetry. For Cavalcanti – and this is the great convergence between him and Dante – the access is unlimited (it is the poet, the Cavalcantian «I», whose access is sharply delimited, and this is the great divergence between him and Dante). Dante da Maiano's reply to *A ciascun' alma* may well mark the first time that Dante is mocked for his spiritualizing tendency (as Guinizzelli was mocked by Bonagiunta, and as Cino da Pistoia will be mocked by Onesto degli Onesti, for this is an ongoing debate in the Italian lyric tradition), but it is not the last. Cecco Angiolieri will take Dante to task for what he considers a self-contradiction in the sonnet *Oltra la spera*, engaging in an almost lawyerly parsing of the sonnet, as though he had taken a tip about the value of «quistioneggiare» from Dante da Maiano's *Per pruova di saper*. Cecco objects that in one stanza Dante says «io no'llo 'ntendo» and that in another he writes «sì che lo 'ntendo ben»:

Ch'al mio parer ne l'una muta dice
 che non intendi su' sottil parlare,
 di quel che vide la tua Beatrice;
 e poi hai detto a le tue donne care
 che ben lo intendi: e dunque contradice
 a sé medesimo questo tu' trovare.

(*Dante Alighier, Cecco, tu' servo amico*, 9-14:

«In my opinion in one stanza you say that you do not understand the subtle speech of the [thought] that saw your Beatrice; and then you said to your dear ladies that you understand it well: and therefore your poetry contradicts itself»)

Another Cecco, Cecco d'Ascoli, ridicules Dante's view that women are numinous carriers of the divine: «*Maria va cercando per Ravenna / chi crede che in donna sia intellecto*» ('He who thinks that there is intellect in women is looking for the Virgin Mary in the streets of Ravenna' [*Acerba* IV, IX 4401-4402]).

Cecco Angiolieri critiques Dante in a sonnet that begins *Dante Alighier, Cecco, tu' servo amico*, an incipit whose prominent use of the word «amico» brings us back to the poetic exchange of Dante Alighieri and Dante da Maiano: poetic rivals in the agora of public opinion who call each other «amico» but clearly are not thinking in terms of the friend as an «alternate self» – «alter idem» (XXI 80) – of Cicero's *De Amicitia* when they do so. Dante da Maiano writes that he does not intend to start a dispute, «*ciò non movo per quistioneggiare*» (*Per pruova di saper*, 12), but that is precisely what he intends; he thinks that his prestige can be enhanced by a public dispute with Dante Alighieri, and in fact he is reluctant to let the matter drop. In *Lo vostro fermo dir* Dante da Maiano poses his question again; indicating that Dante Alighieri's first reply is not satisfactory, he notes that many believe there is a greater suffering than unrequited love: «*Dite ch'amare e non essere amato / ène lo dol che più d'Amore dole, / e manti dicono che più v'ha dol maggio*» ('You claim that loving without being loved entails the harshest pain of Love there is, yet many say there is still greater pain' [*Lo vostro fermo dir*, 11]). Despite being flatly contradicted, Dante Alighieri will not play along – one gets the impression that he doesn't think there is any value to be attained by continued disputation with Dante da Maiano – and he reiterates the same response in *Non canoscendo* that he had previously given in *Qual che voi siate*: «*sacci bene, chi ama, / se non è amato, lo maggior dol porta*» ('know this full well: whoever loves but is not loved will bear the greatest pain' [10–11]). Dante da Maiano keeps pressing, and requests further documentation in *Lasso, lo dol*. He tries to push Dante Alighieri into a show of learning, requiring that his rival provide an authority to buttress his point of view: «*Però pregh'eo ch'argomentiate, saggio, / d'autorità mostrando ciò che porta / di voi la 'mpresa, a ciò che sia più chiara*» ('And so I now request that you, my sage, cite which authority substantiates your view, so it can garner more prestige' [*Lasso, lo dol*, 9-11]). But Dante Alighieri will not be drawn, again suggesting that he does not think there is anything to be

gained by «proving» himself («Per pruova di saper») to the likes of Dante da Maiano.

That Dante Alighieri may have considered Dante da Maiano not his intellectual peer may be inferred from a later use on Dante Alighieri's part of the very verb, *farneticare*, with which Dante da Maiano belittles him in *Di ciò che stato sè dimandatore*, casting him as not masculine and hence not authoritative. As we saw previously, Dante da Maiano refuses to engage in interpretation of the visionary sonnet *A ciascun'alma*, in which Love feeds the poet's heart to his beloved. Rather, Dante da Maiano claims that Dante Alighieri is here engaging in a speech act of a fabulous type («favoleggiar loquendo»), one moreover that he seems to experience as violating gender boundaries; he seems to feel that Dante Alighieri's sonnet is not manly and he essentially advises him to regain his manhood. He does this by suggesting to Dante Alighieri that he wash his testicles, a highly gendered cure for his proclivity to *favoleggiar*: «che lavi la tua collia largamente / a ciò che stinga e passi lo vapore / lo qual ti fa favoleggiar loquendo» ('wash your balls thoroughly, so that the vapors that cause you to speak in *favole* will be extinguished and pass away' [*Di ciò che stato sè*, 7-9]). Having offensively gendered Dante's *favoleggiar* as female, Dante da Maiano reaches the conclusion that the vision related in *A ciascun'alma* is nothing but «hysteria», using *farneticare* to classify Dante Alighieri's sonnet in this negative sense: «sol c'hai farneticato, sappie, intendo» ('know simply that you have been delirious, as I understand' [*Di ciò che stato sè*, 11]).

About a decade later, circa 1292-1294, Dante Alighieri will «reply» to this vulgar and anti-intellectual attack when he writes the prose frame of the *Vita Nuova*, a work that features as its first poem precisely the visionary *A ciascun'alma*. The chapter that treats the phenomenology of visions, an examination that lays the foundation for all Dante's later thought on visionary experience, boasts Dante Alighieri's only uses of the adjective *farnetico* and the verb *farneticare*: he describes himself, as he foresees Beatrice's death, behaving «as a delirious person», «sì come farnetica persona» (XXIII 4 [14 4]), and then marks the moment when «I left behind this delirium», «poi che io lasciai questo farneticare» (XXIII 30 [14, 30]). The choice of *farneticare* in the prose gloss of the great visionary canzone *Donna pietosa* seems like a way of reclaiming the term and recontextualizing it within an intellectual tradition that is beyond the scope of Dante da Maiano. Dante Alighieri is rejecting Dante da Maiano's offensive «sol c'hai farneticato, sappie, intendo» and making the point that to behave «as a delirious person» – «sì come farnetica persona» – can be completely appropriate and not incompatible with virility, as when Dante in the *Commedia* experiences ecstatic visions and is bent

over «a guisa di cui vino o sonno piega» ('as one whom wine or sleep bends over' [*Purg.* XV 123]). To understand that there can be a legitimate *farneticare* requires greater learning and an erudition that embraces a wider range of authorities: one has to get beyond the intellectual provincialism of a Dante da Maiano.

Coming back to the early 1280s and the milieu of strutting peacock poets showing their feathers (captured by Chiaro Davanzati in his incipit *Di penne di paone e d'altre assai*), there is another intriguing feature of Dante Alighieri's replies to Dante da Maiano, and that is his insistence that he doesn't know his interlocutor's name. Both Dante Alighieri's replies begin by ostentatiously calling «amico» a man whom he simultaneously claims not to know. In the first reply this lacuna is casually stated, with the emphasis on the learning of the unknown interlocutor: «Qual che voi siate, amico, vostro manto / di scienza parmi tal, che non è gioco» ('Whoever you may be, my friend, I find the learning you display to be no joke'). In his second reply Dante Alighieri devotes the entire octave to not knowing the name of the man to whom he is writing, beginning with this lack of knowledge – «Non canoscendo, amico, vostro nomo, / donde che mova chi con meco parla» ('Although, my friend, I do not know your name, whoever it may be that speaks to me') – and again connects the absence of the name to the presence of great learning: «conosco ben che scienz' à di gran nomo, / sì che di quanti saccio nessun par l' à» ('I know indeed his learning's such a legend no one else can claim to be his peer' [*Non canoscendo*, 3-4]). Throughout the octave of *Non canoscendo* Dante Alighieri plays with language clustered around knowledge – not only *canoscere*, but also *scienza*, *sapere*, and *senno* – in order to emphasize his own ability to recognize, assess, and value learning in someone else, even someone he does not know. The verb *canoscere* weaves through the octave: not knowing your name («Non canoscendo»), Dante Alighieri says, I do nonetheless know you («conosco ben») to be of great learning, because one can know («canoscere») such a thing about a man from his speech, «ché si pò ben canoscere d'un omo, / ragionando, se ha senno, che ben par là» ('for one can recognize intelligence, in conversation, by the words employed' [*Non canoscendo*, 5-6]).

While Dante da Maiano performs his standing and attainments with his fluent *ragionare*, Dante Alighieri has to do something even more difficult. He will have to cope with the handicap of praising his interlocutor without knowing his name, in a situation that strains his very ability to produce language: «Conven poi voi laudar, sarà for nomo / e forte a lingua mia di ciò com parla» ('Since I must praise you without naming you, it's hard to form the words upon my tongue' [*Non canoscendo*, 7-8]). Dante Alighieri's almost

provocative continued emphasis on his ignorance of his rival's name is worthy of further analysis in light of the sustained meditation on the relationship between names and glory in the *Commedia* (a dynamic whose emblem is Dante's use of «nominanza» as a key word for fame in *Inf.* IV and *Purg.* XI).¹⁶ It is an ignorance that seems even stranger in the *second* reply – was there really no way, in the time between reply 1 and reply 2, to find out the identity of an interlocutor who possesses legendary learning? – and that seems calculated to up the ante between the two poets and to make the point that Dante Alighieri has the harder task. Similarly Dante Alighieri shows he is a strong competitor by reutilizing in *Qual che voi siate* not just one of Dante da Maiano's rhymes but all of them and even reprising a few of his rival's rhyme-words.¹⁷ The studied quality of the diction and the tortuous complexity of the syntax, all massively Guittonian, also become weapons in the young poet's arsenal.

The interest of this *tenzone* has traditionally been considered to reside more in its hyper-Guittonian form than in its content. However, if by content we refer not to the amorous issues discussed but to the performance being staged, then the Guittonian pedigree of the ritualized honorifics allows us to see how content and form are thoroughly intertwined. The formulaic usage of «amico» can be seen in Guittone's incipits, to wit: *Messer Bottaccio amico, ogn'animale*; *Messer Giovanni amico, 'n vostro amore*; *Mastro Bandino amico, el mio preghero*; and *Finfo amico, dire io voi presente*. We saw Chiaro Davanzati's similar use of «amico» in his incipit *Amico, proveduto ha mia intenzione*, responding to Dante da Maiano. In Dante's poetry we find the use of «amico» as a form of address in an incipit also in the early *Se Lippo amico sè tu che mi leggi*, a poem whose genre, *sonetto rinterzato*, testifies as well to Guittone's influence. The word «amico» then disappears from sight, not used in the great meditation on friendship that is the sonnet *Guido, i' vorrei*, and rarely in Dante's lyrics (generic uses may be found in *La dispietata mente*, *Tre donne*, and *Doglia mi reca*). The fact that Dante writes one of the world's great poems of friendship without using the word «amico» suggests that the word was still redolent to him of rivalry and competition, that – at least when used in poetry, where it had such a clear history – it still betokens a ritualized formula of address used between two men who are rivals, not

¹⁶ On the relation between names and fame in the *Commedia*, see *The Undivine Comedy*, esp. chapter 6, «Re-presenting What God Presented».

¹⁷ Also of note are the pronounced use of *rima equivoca* and of *rima composta*, e.g. «par l'à» in *Non canoscendo*, verse 4 and «par là» in *Non canoscendo*, verse 6. This is an artifice of which traces remain in the *Commedia*: see «pur li» rhymed with «urli» in *Inf.* VII 28, «Oh me» rhymed with «chiome» in *Inf.* XXVIII 123, and «ci ha» rhymed with «sconcia» in *Inf.* XXX 87.

friends. When Dante wrote *Guido, i' vorrei* his Guittonian mannerisms and the exchange with Dante da Maiano were not yet very distant, and – although he had clearly evolved an ‘idea’ of friendship that is consonant with Cicero’s *De Amicitia* – he was not yet prepared to use a word that he had used in the recent past in a very different manner.¹⁸

The reclassification of the word «amico» was however occurring in Dante’s prose, where Dante worked systematically on the concept of *amicitia* over the years. Beginning in the prose of the *Vita Nuova*, Dante makes explicit what is implicit in a sonnet like *Guido, i' vorrei*, namely the link between making poetry and making friends. This is a link expressed in the labeling of Cavalcanti «primo de li miei amici» (‘first among my friends’ (VN III 14 [2, 1]) and – in confirmation that a friend would be (unlike Dante da Maiano) intellectually equipped to understand the curious visionary subject matter of *A ciascun’ alma* – it is Guido’s reply to *A ciascun’ alma* that «was almost the beginning of the friendship between him and me» (‘fue quasi lo principio de l’amistà tra lui e me’ VN III 14 [2, 1]). The prose of the *Vita Nuova* thematizes and theorizes friendship, just as it thematizes and theorizes vision. Hence we find Beatrice’s brother ranked as «uno, lo quale, secondo li gradi de l’amistade, è amico a me immediatamente dopo lo primo» (‘one who, according to the grades of friendship, is friend to me immediately following the first friend’ VN XXXII 1 [21, 1]). Dante moves away from the Guittonian formulaic usage of «amico» and foreshadows the *Commedia* also in the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*’s adoption of a phrase that perfectly captures the eventual Dantean symbiosis between friendship and poetry: Dante self-identifies in the poetic catalogues of the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* as «amicus eius», referring to himself not by the name «Dante» but by the tag «his friend», stipulating that he is the one who is the friend of the poet Cino da Pistoia. Ultimately «amico» reappears in the *Commedia* in contexts that show that Dante has redeemed it as a term of profound intimacy rather than ritualized rivalry.¹⁹

¹⁸ In *Rime giovanili e della ‘Vita Nuova’* I read *Guido, i' vorrei* in the light of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero’s *De Amicitia*.

¹⁹ For «amico» in the *Commedia*, see the discussion of *Purg. XXII* in the introductory essay to *Deb ragioniamo insieme un poco, Amore*, in *Rime giovanili e della ‘Vita Nuova’*. A similar but speedier trajectory could be posited for *saggio*: Dante’s reference to Guido Guinizzelli in the verse «sì come il saggio in suo dittare pone» (*Amore e ‘l cor gentil sono una cosa*, 2) is not a ritualized honorific, as in his Guittonian address to Dante da Maiano, «o om che pregio di saver portate» (*Savete giudicar*, 2). It is rather a genuine tribute to Guinizzelli, akin to the use of «saggio» for Vergil in the *Commedia*.

The rivalries between magnate lineages were at the root of the political faction that the *Commedia* indicts and deplors; they affected Dante's life profoundly, beginning with his early and complicated friendships with the two magnates Guido Cavalcanti and Forese Donati. Dante's work is steeped throughout in the blood feuds and rivalries of magnate culture, whose ritualized codes of honour find their way into the *Commedia* as well. Dante Alighieri will eventually make clear the heavy burden imposed on men by society's codes of honour. We remember the concept of communal «shame» («onta») in the episode in which Dante encounters his cousin Geri del Bello in the *Inferno*: Geri is angry that his death has not been avenged «by anyone who shares the shame of it» («per alcun che de l'onta sia consorte» [*Inf.* XXIX 33]), and Dante seems to be refusing to accept the ritual shame that is his lot as Geri's kinsman. From the young man who used the *tenzone* as a tool of professional and social self-promotion, and who was willing to work with the currency of male honour, he has become a man who is capable of shining a hard light on the value of such codes and stepping out of their confines altogether.