



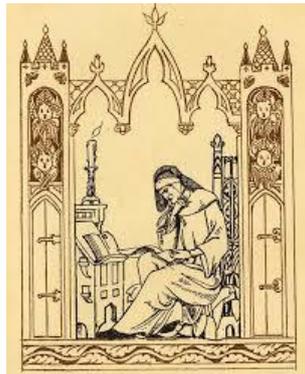
#### 44. *VITA NOVA*, DANTE'S "*NEW LIFE*" - I

Guido Guinizelli was master (sskrt. *guru*) to a young Florentine aristocrat, Guido de' Cavalcanti (1255-1300)<sup>1</sup>. Blessed with a strong personality, great intelligence and wisdom, Cavalcanti succeeded Guido Guinizelli in the magisterium (sskrt. *gurutva*). A group of young troubadours<sup>2</sup> gathered around him; among them there was Ser (Eng. *Sir*) Durante son of Alighiero degli Alisei<sup>3</sup>, better known as Dante Alighieri (1265-1321).



##### 1. Guido de' Cavalcanti

The latter soon became the most important rhymers and due to the perfection of his poetry, universal wisdom and elevate doctrine, he has to be acknowledged as the greatest exponent of the medieval Christian initiation.



##### 2. Dante writing the *Vita Nova*

For our purpose we will examine two of his most important works<sup>4</sup>: *Vita Nova* (the *New Life*), where Dante describes his initiatic experiences and the progress of his inner realizations (sskrt. *ādhyātmika*)

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<sup>1</sup> Cavalcanti was also disciple of the Florentine Ser Brunetto Latini, who referred directly to the initiatic line (sskrt. *paramparā*) of the Provençal troubadours. He was also influenced by the troubadour Ser Rustichello Filippi from Florence (1235 ~ 1295), Ser Bonagiunta degli Orbicciani from Lucca (1220 ~ 1290) and from Guittone del Viva d'Arezzo (1230-1294). The latter, however, in the second half of his life, abandoned the Holy Faith and entered the order of the *Gaudenti* Friars (*frati gaudenti*). This was an exoteric religious order that expressed itself in the Trovadoric style to turn Love towards the Church and the Papacy, in clear opposition to the Faithfuls of Love.

<sup>2</sup> Among these we can mention Gianni degli Alfani, Lapo Gianni, Cino de' Sigilbuldi from Pistoia, Dino Compagni, Francesco da Barberino, Dino Frescobaldi, Dante da Majano and others. Like Guido and Dante, many of these had Roman patrician origin.

<sup>3</sup> The Alisei family descended from the *gens* Anicia; among the ancestors of Dante there were the Roman emperors Petronius Maximus and Flavius Anicius Olibrius, Severinus Boethius, St. Benedict of Norcia, Pope Gregory the Great (Carlo Padiglione, *L'Arme of Dante Alighieri*, Napoli, Nobile ed., 1865).

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the already mentioned *Il Fiore*, Dante wrote: *Detto d'Amore* [*Statement of Love*], a short remake of the *Roman de la Rose*; using Tuscan vernacular he wrote the *Rhymes*, or rather his initiatic correspondence with different Faithfuls of Love; the *Convivio* [*Banquet*], inspired by Plato's *Symposium*, an unfinished treatise in vernacular written by Dante with the



*anubhava*); and the *Divine Comedy*, a vast poem that describes the correlations among his inner path (sskrt. *sādhaka anubhava*), the worldly events (sskrt. *ādhibhautika vikāra*) and the divine reality (sskrt. *ādhidivika sattā*). First, we will summarize the *Vita Nova*; in this way our Indian readers will be able to recognize the similarity between the initiatic path of the Holy Faith and those of Tantricism and *Bhakti*<sup>1</sup>.



The book's title reveals that it is the narration of the events leading Dante to his inner experiences on the path to realization. The *New Life*, in fact, follows his initiatic rebirth (sskrt. *dvijanman*). Dante begins his narration from that moment; he actually stated that his life before initiation (sskrt. *asādhaka bhava*) was not worthy of remembrance. Nine years<sup>2</sup> after his initiation, i.e. after having received the

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purpose of instructing the ruling class on how to govern. The *Convivio* wanted to be an exoteric application of the principles of the Holy Faith, expressed following the Aristotelian arguments. In this treatise Dante explains that like the Sacred Scripture, his writings must also be interpreted on four levels: the literal sense; the moral sense, a sum of instructions on initiatic behaviour and actions (sskrt. *karman*); the allegorical sense, that is its symbolic interpretation; and finally, the anagogic, namely the doctrinal one. In *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, he explains the reasons why it was time to abandon the Latin language, by then an exoteric and ecclesiastical language, and to use instead the vernacular. He describes how the Faithfuls of Love language had to be: illustrious, purified from the coarseness of the daily common language; courtly, suitable for topics proper to the imperial power; curial, apt to illustrate theological themes; and, finally, cardinal, convenient to describe the doctrines that are the key of Reality. In the *Monarchia*, Dante presents how the world should be governed. He writes about the origins of the Empire that dates back to a Roman, and even earlier, tradition; about the Church, which dates back to Christ and his ancestors, kings David and Solomon. For Dante Emperor and Pope are the two suns that illuminate Christianity (someone mistakenly said that one is the sun and the other the moon). The Emperor rules for the sake of the living, the Pope leads the souls of the dead to the heavens. Both are interdependent, and both had been in a poor state for centuries: the Empire must recover its universal power, the papacy must stop with its cravings for earthly power. Two *Eclogues* in Latin, on Virgil's style, in which Dante, with the pseudonym of Mopsus, takes up the poetic symbolism of the Augustan era, already in use at the Court of the Merovingians and Charlemagne. The *Questio de Aqua et terra*, a Latin treatise on the structure of our planet Earth, which was foundational for the three-world conception of the *Divine Comedy*. Finally, the Latin *Epistles* in which Dante calls on the Emperor Henry VII, admonishes and reproaches the great Italian feudal lords he was acquainted with, and scolds bishops and cardinals exhorting them to restore peace and justice in Christianity, by reviving the Imperial power and purifying the Church from earthly vices.

<sup>1</sup> We deliberately distance ourselves from any profane interpretation, be it literary, philological, historical or ideological, made by the academic scholars of Dante. Like the cherub with the flaming sword at the door of Eden, they turn their backs to it to keep away those who want to enter. But they have an opposite nature to the sapiential one of the cherubs and their weapon is only obtuseness. Even the rare comments written by esotericists are better. However, they are limited by their exclusively bookish knowledge or having participated in initiatic ceremonies devoid of any effectiveness, which prevents them from understanding the realities described in the *Vita Nova*, also because they never had those same experiences. An example is the book by Marcello Vicchio, *Dante l'iniziato*, Arcireale-Roma, G.E. Bonanno, 2015. Many of our *śakta* Indian readers, on the other hand, will be able to fully recognize the summed-up interpretation that follows.

<sup>2</sup> "This woman was accompanied by the number nine, in the sense that she was a nine, that is, a miracle [the divine action in the world], whose [square] root is only the admirable Trinity" (VN, XXIX.10). The number nine is the symbol of everything pertaining to Beatrice, the "Beatifying One". In fact, Dante's Dame is nothing but the Active Intellect, radiance of Divine Reality in the manifested world. The Active Intellect (sskrt. *Mahan Ātman*) is the principle that operates in the subtle world and that brings the graces of the three Persons of the Christian Trinity. This last conception, as it has been already pointed out in this Site, corresponds very closely to Sacciddānanda in the *Hindū* doctrines. What expresses the non-agent triplicity of the Trinity in the three-worlds (sskrt. *tribhuvana*), is symbolized by the number nine (3x3), which is actually the true name of Beatrice. In fact, in Latin the name of this most gentle Lady is *Beatr-IX*, the nine (IX) which beatifies. The individual or possible intellect (sskrt. *buddhi*) is the receptacle of spiritual influences, knowledge and virtues, and they are all useful to it when it will eventually be reunited with the universal or Active Intellect, *Mahan Ātman* as *jīva ghaṇa* or *Hiraṇyagarbha*. This, *inter alia*, wipes out the tenacious idea of the medievalists who see everywhere the influence of Avicenna and



mercy, his also nine-years old Dame<sup>1</sup> appeared for the first time to him<sup>2</sup> in a red dress. She was called Beatrice by those who did not know her real name.



### 3. The first sight of Beatrice nine-year old

This event announces Dante's achievement of the first degree of inner experience. At that sight the vital soul residing in the heart (sskrt. *jīvātman*) trembled and said: «Here is a God stronger than me coming to dominate me». The mind and the senses (sskrt. *antaḥkaraṇa*) in his head recognized: «Your blessedness appeared». On the contrary, the breaths (sskrt. *prāṇa*) that bind the soul to the bodily functions complained: «Now we will be under control». From that moment Love dominated the soul of the Poet by making their two wills one and same; and Love was always urging him to look inside himself for that Angelic Woman. It was as these fleeting and repeatedly inner experiences (sskrt. *antaranubhava*) that pushed Dante towards Love, were induced by her image always present in his heart. And he followed this attraction towards Love inspired by Beatrice, always under the guidance of reason<sup>3</sup>.



### 4. The second vision nine years later

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Averroes. These Arab philosophers, in fact, supported the absurd opinion that the passive intellect (sskrt. *buddhi*) was a supra-individual principle present in the individuality. On the opposition of Dante to this opinion see Francesco Perez, *La Beatrice svelata*, Palermo, Flacconio ed., 2001 (I ed. 1865), pp. 127-142.

<sup>1</sup> Jacopo da Lentini had also stated: “*The mercies [the initiations] must be reduced [rarely granted], they must not be spoken of anywhere, because they must appear as joys afresh; not even the Faithfuls of Love must find them before nine years have passed*”. In the Order of the Temple it took nine years of apprenticeship for a squire to be initiated as knight. (L. Valli, *Il Linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei “Fedeli d’Amore”*, Rome, Optima, 1928, p. 274). However, these temporal quantities based on the symbolism of the number nine must not always be understood in a literal sense. Nine, in Dante’s thought represents ‘the appropriate time, the necessary time’ (sskrt. *rtukāla*), the ‘time prepared by Providence or Divine Will’ (sskrt. *daivakṛta*). It is evident that the two “nine-year-old children” represent the degree of “child and maiden” of Francesco da Barberino, which was discussed in the previous chapter, the 43<sup>rd</sup> of this series.

<sup>2</sup> Unlike other circumstances, in which Dante met on the street, in church or elsewhere the human woman who had been assigned to him to represent Beatrice, as required by the knightly tradition, in this case this is a true apparition, as the Poet himself insists to describe.

<sup>3</sup> Dante never specifies the method (sskrt. *prakriyā*) he had used. This constant evoke of the image of Beatrice to the mind would allude to an interior visualization technique (sskrt. *dr̥ṣṭi* or *darśana*). We know, however, that Dante also utilized the divine names ‘I’ and ‘EI’, traditionally used as *mantras*.



After another symbolic nine years, along his path, Dante had a new apparition of Beatrice, wrapped in an immaculate white dress<sup>1</sup>. For the first time Beatrice addressed her *salute* to Dante (Provençal *salut*; it. *saluto*). This symbolised the achievement of a higher spiritual influence (sskrt. *anugraha*); the *salute* in fact charges the initiate (sskrt. *sādhaka*)<sup>2</sup> with new power, virtue and wisdom. In a state of spiritual tension, Dante retired at home in solitude. During the night he had a vision in dream: he saw Love, joyful and ardent as the very sun, with the flaming heart of the Poet in his hand.



## 5. The night vision

He was holding in his arms a sleeping Beatrice, wrapped in a blood coloured cloth. Once the woman woke up, Love forced her to devour Dante's flaming heart. Then, while crying<sup>3</sup> and still with Beatrice in his arms, he climbed up into the sky. The vision seems a summary of Dante's entire initiatic journey. It starts with his first experiences as a neophyte (marked by the red dress of Beatrice), and it continues with the prediction of Dante's reaching the highest of skies<sup>4</sup>. Shocked by the message received in dream, Dante wrote a sonnet to the wisest troubadours of his circle (sskrt. *kula*) asking them to explain its meaning.



## 6. Love flies to heaven bringing Beatrice

<sup>1</sup> In the hermetic symbolism, which we will discuss later, death to profanity was represented by the black colour, the initiatic rebirth by red, while white indicated the higher purity. See the colours of the three *guṇa* of Hinduism. The white colour, the *sāttvika* one, is the symbol of having reached the highest limit of beatitude as also Dante states.

<sup>2</sup> It could have been a passing of grade ritual with the granting of a more powerful technique for initiates who had already reached high levels of realization. It is possible that also Lapo Gianni took part to the same ritual together with Dante (Valli, *cit.* p. 185).

<sup>3</sup> In the *parler cloz* to cry means to simulate, to act in such way that others do not understand the true meaning.

<sup>4</sup> We will later examine Dante's journey towards the highest of the heavens and its conclusion once beyond them. It was a true *devayāna* accomplished in life.



Only Cavalcanti was able to interpret his dream. Guido, his *guru*, recognized in Dante's dream the premonition of the achievement of the most perfect realization by his extraordinary disciple. However, he expressed this opinion with incertitude, since even he, the master, had not experienced it and could not aspire to such a high spiritual level. After that vision, Dante engaged in a more severe asceticism to obtain Love's blessings. In everyone's eyes, he became thinner and looked distracted. To those who asked him what he was suffering from<sup>1</sup>, he answered by playing with words that it was heartache for some lady in Florence. One day while he was in a church preying, he saw a girl staring at him and he seized the opportunity to choose her as screen to hide the truth.



## 7. The "screen-woman"

In this way the curiosity of the people was satisfied. However, after a few years the "screen-woman" left Florence and Dante could no longer hide behind that alleged earthly love. He pretended to be desperate for the absence of his "screen-woman", but the beatitude that he felt in his heart often emerged in attitudes of pure joy. These contradictions increased the suspicion of the curious. His bizarre behaviour could rightly be interpreted as a *trance* (sskrt. *samādhi*) induced by initiatic practices.

The danger was above all represented by the Inquisition; this institution, administered by the Dominican Order, willingly confused<sup>2</sup> the initiatic schools with some clandestine folk pseudo-religions, such as the Cathars and Waldesians present at that time in Florence. The need to hide his state of intense initiatic rapture from the outsiders, coincided in fact with a period of persecution of esoteric organizations. Dante alerted not only the troubadours of his initiatic family, but also other organizations that were derivations or branches of the knights of the Order of the Temple's<sup>3</sup>. As expected, the

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<sup>1</sup> Certainly, these were not only the profane (sskrt. *adīkṣita*) or his adversaries, but also the other knights of the Holy Faith who had not understood the grade of Dante's realization.

<sup>2</sup> Typical confusion of the profanes, both in the past and in the present times, who do not know, or want to distinguish between false religions, sects, heresies, witches' covens and all that transcends religious exotericism. By deliberately confusing what is superior with what is inferior, the external religion purposely tends to misunderstand the terms "esotericism" and "gnosis" (sskrt. *jñāna*), passing them off as synonyms of luciferianism, satanism or worse. In the 5<sup>th</sup> sonnet of *Il Fiore*, Love thus exhorts the knight: "I am your God and every other belief set aside; do not believe neither Luke nor Matthew nor Mark nor John". Instead of seeing the overcoming of the external scriptures in favour of a higher knowledge, exotericism claims to see it as an act of rebellion.

<sup>3</sup> In a sonnet, Dante reminds the Faithfuls of Love of the words of the prophet Jeremiah about God's command to protect the Temple of Jerusalem. In this case he alludes to the Order of the Temple and all its branches. Among those, the Holy Faith was clearly the most important for the transmission of wisdom. In many parts of the Poet's works, "to contemplate" means "*cum Templo*" (in Latin: with the Temple), to indicate, with wordplay, the identity between con-templation (sskrt. *dhyāna*) and Order of the Temple. This means that the initiatic knowledge and the organization which was keeping it were the one and same thing. On the Holy Faith as a tertiary order of the Templars see Robert L. John, *Dante Templare*, Milan, Hoepli, 1987.



Inquisition, named “Rude Death”<sup>1</sup>, hit right at that moment. A Faithful of Love, that Dante does not name and who was spiritually very close to Beatrice, was sentenced to death. The same ‘representative’ of Love, Guido de’ Cavalcanti, was crying for the terrible crime.



### 8. The victim of “Rude Death”

But in their jargon to cry also meant “to hide”: it was an alert to all troubadours. Dante, in order to escape persecution, fled the city in search of the “screen-woman”. In his narration, a character dressed in rags joined him in his escape. It was Love, also on the run and disguised as a pilgrim. And thus, the path they took together turned into a realization journey. The Grace of Love covers that path and the fountain of teachings became as vast as a river. During this period of concealment Dante evidently obtained unexpected spiritual gifts. Love, in order to protect him, advised him to find another “screen-woman”: this was the exterior religion<sup>2</sup>.



### 9. Return to Florence

Our Poet rode back to the city to take on the new disguise that Love recommended during the apparition. He began to see a circle of Franciscan friars and in that period he became a member of the St. Francis Third Order<sup>3</sup>. Despite having assumed that burdensome external cover with seeming enthusiasm, Beatrice, the active Intellect (sskrt. *Mahan Ātman*) continued to dialogue intensely with his

<sup>1</sup> “Rude Death” is the exact opposite of “Gentile A-mor” (Noble Love - ‘In-mortality’): it indicates the plebeian Church which is the enemy of noble immortality.

<sup>2</sup> Cavalcanti, alluding to this historical emergency that led Dante to the simulation, states: “Let the Religion be kept to one side, making sure not to be disliked”. The important thing is to preserve the quintessence in your heart!

<sup>3</sup> The Third Order was reserved for lay people who assumed the rule of St. Francis remaining married and living in their private homes. Around the end of the 1280s the Dominicans were more influential in Florence, but since they ran the Inquisition, it was more prudent for Dante to choose Franciscanism.



*buddhi*, filling him with graces and knowledge. At this point, in the *Vita Nova*, the meaning of “Beatrice” becomes double. She represents not only the Universal Intellect, but also the *sampradāya* of the Holy Faith, the initiatic family of the Faithful of Love, including those who had not understood the height of the last inner states reached by Dante. The troubadours, outraged by his sanctimonious behaviour, denounced him of treason for having renounced the initiatic path and for having become a profane devotee of the exterior Church. He was therefore denied participation in the rituals (of the *salut*) of the initiatic assembly (sskrt. *satsaṅga*). This interdiction weakened the Poet: in fact, when witnessing those periodic rites of *salute*, he was wholly pervaded by Love and each time he acquired new power from it. After this exclusion, Dante kept apart sad and lonely.



### 10. Dante's lonely

Then Love appeared to him like a child dressed in white clothes. God explained to him that the Holy Faith, probably through the convocation of a Court of Love, had judged tedious (it. *noioso*<sup>1</sup>) his behaviour. He still could not assume any exterior conduct at his will, because the other Faithfuls of Love would not have understood it. Only those who, like Love himself, stood at the centre of the wheel of becoming (*bhavacakra*), could completely transcend the forms.



### 11. Dante and Love

However, being Dante close to that spiritual degree, Love suggested him to write a ballad defending himself, to permit the Beatrice-Court of Love (sskrt. *satsaṅga*) to be aware of his inner situation. Dante wrote to the master of the Holy Faith explaining the reasons of his behaviour, reaffirming that in his heart he was always a true Faithful of Love. Soon after, another knight took Dante to a gathering for a wedding. As soon as he arrived there, he understood from the sudden trembling of his heart and from the agitation of all the other vital breaths, that he was at a meeting of unknown initiates. Fearing he had been brought to a Court of Love to be officially expelled, Dante instinctively tried to hide his inner excitement<sup>2</sup>. Suddenly he saw Beatrice and other members of his own initiatic family. At that moment

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<sup>1</sup> The medieval Tuscan word *noioso* (tedious) derives from the Provençal *ennoi* and this, through the ancient Lombard *inodio*, takes its origin in the Latin form *in odio* (in hate). Hate vividly represents the aversion against Love (the God *Amor*), of the ecclesiastical exotericism of that period.

<sup>2</sup> The text says that he “leaned on a painting to hide”, which means that he assumed an ostentatious mask of indifference.

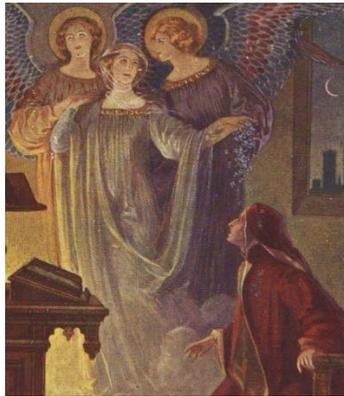


he became unable to retain his sudden, ecstatic transfiguration. These rapid behavioural changes were so visible that everyone started to laugh at him, including Beatrice<sup>1</sup>.



### 12. Dante is led to a wedding party

Returned home, Dante sent a sonnet to Beatrice (his master) and to the other troubadours, trying to explain what had happened during that meeting. He declared that just by looking at them (sskrt. *darśana*) he felt filled by an uncontrollable power as if he was attending a ritual *satsaṅga*.



### 13. Ecstasy of Dante viewing Beatrice

Love had possessed him and granted him that overwhelming ecstasy. For the first time, in that instance, Dante stated that to really understand his inner state, his fellow Faithfuls of Love should have reached his same level of realization.

*Maria Chiara de' Fenzi*

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<sup>1</sup> The curious phenomenon of rapture is easily recognized as a *samādhi*. This *saṃskṛta* term has been translated by Eliade with the senseless neologism of “*enstasy*”. Indeed, the various kinds of *samādhi* represent precisely an artificial displacement of the individual consciousness out of its ordinary condition. Therefore, these are simply ecstatic states. It is precisely the ordinary state of waking consciousness that should rather be called “*enstasy*”.