



45. VITA NOVA, DANTE'S "NEW LIFE" - II

Since no one had been able to explain his spiritual situation¹, Dante began pondering over the meaning of his swings of mood, so erratic and contradictory. With an introspective investigation, he lucidly described his persistently alternating shifts of attraction and repulsion for Beatrice-Holy Wisdom. With a burning desire, Love constantly drove him to meet his Dame. This happened through an inner vision and by meeting Beatrice in person (i.e. the teacher surrounded by the *satsāṅga*). As soon as the vision appeared (sskrt. *darśana*), the spirits responsible for the sight (sskrt. *caḡsus*) were strengthened, almost as if they were coming out of their natural organs (sskrt. *netra golaka*). The other exhalations and powers of the soul, on the contrary, suffered as if they were about to die. Love, then, forced him to move away from the vision to keep him alive². After sending to his master these reflections in the form of three sonnets, Dante realized that, as a result of that clarification, he could then dominate these contrasting sensations. He had already overcome that obstacle and was now able to conceive a higher spiritual domain.



1. Gathering of a Court of Love

Being summoned before a Court of Love, the Faithfuls requested him to better explain his inner state, encouraging him to abandon reticence and modesty. The river of wisdom that filled him with such grace inspired him to write about the intimate union between his own intellect and the Active Intellect, Beatrice. Thus, he addressed the sonnet "*Donne ch'avete intelletto d'Amore*" (*Ladies that have intelligence in Love*) not to any Faithful of Love, "*but only to those who are gentle and who are not simple females*"; that is only to the most qualified among them. The love between the Poet and his Dame was so sweet that, by talking about it, he would have been able to make people fall in love. According to the secret language, Dante thus affirmed that he had reached the spiritual grade of master (sskrt. *gurutva*). Although his knowledge of her was much deeper, henceforth he would have spoken of Beatrice in a simpler form, so as to be understood by the other initiates. Through Dante, Beatrice-Holy Wisdom had descended from heaven to earth to bestow the miracle of the spiritual influence (sskrt. *anugraha*)³. The Faithfuls of Love should have taken advantage of this divine grace until possible. In fact, according to Dante, Beatrice

¹ The other Faithfuls of Love, including their master, showed little understanding, and mocked the Poet for his sudden *samādhis*.

² This experience is well known in the way of *Bhakti* as the pain of "union and separation" (sskrt. *samyoga-viyoga*).

³ The active and the possible intellects (*Mahan Ātman* and the individual *buddhi*) were thus united in spiritual marriage, as stated in the *Convivio* (II.2.2). Beatrice and Dante had since been integrated into the primordial androgynous, the "wife-husband" of Francesco da Barberino, that is the identification with Love, the only dweller of the heart.



would later be called back to heaven for a much higher mission, anticipating in this way the overcoming of his magisterial experience to carry out a more universal role.



2. Vision of Beatrice's death

The troubadours of the Court of Love answered him with the *canzone* “*Ben aggia l’amoroso e dolce core*” (“*be blessed your loving and noble heart*”); in this way not only was he absolved of every suspicion and recognized as a teacher, but also emerged their enthusiastic recognition for his great inner experiences. Through other sonnets addressed to the Faithfuls of Love, the new master urged them to let their women (intellects) follow the example of Beatrice. Meanwhile, the Poet addressed the sonnet “*Amore e’l cor gentil sono una cosa*” (“*Love and the gentle heart are one thing*”) to his best friend, Guido de’ Cavalcanti, expressing how Love had taken total possession of his heart. It is a humble yet firm statement on the surpassing his own master. From that moment on Cavalcanti began to withdraw himself from the scene, leaving the command of the Holy Faith to his best disciple. It was not a consentient parting. Guido was embittered and left his spiritual family forever. For the sadness caused to the Florentine initiates, the abandoning of their old master was lamented as the “death of Beatrice’s father”.



3. Beatrice recalled to heaven

Having fallen ill for *nine* days, Dante had an agonizing vision of his own death, immediately followed also by that of Beatrice. Thereupon, his vision became more and more sweet¹. He saw his Dame lying dead and then ascending to the heavens carried by a cloud of angels singing “Glory in the highest heaven”². The certainty that this vision would assure him inner peace took over in his heart. The quotation from the *Vita Nova* testifies to the prophetic nature of his vision. Death indicated a coming qualitative leap in his initiatic experience. The death of Beatrice was indeed his own death, which allowed the

¹ The Poet refers to it as the sweetest death, in clear antithesis with the “Rude Death” sentences issued by the Inquisition.

² Thus, an inner rebirth followed this death. Similarly, the angels had sung “Hosanna in the highest heaven” when the Christ was born. This was the first sign indicating that Dante was in the process of identifying himself with Jesus the Messiah, or that he would have achieved the same level of realization. This allusion would soon be followed by other confirmations.



ascension of his soul¹ to the highest of the heavens, source of every peace. After a few days Dante had a new vision. He saw Love joyfully taking possession of his heart. This God pointed to two noble Ladies who seemed to be approaching. The first one was Primavera (Spring), also called Giovanna (Joan)², followed by Beatrice. Primavera was the Dame of Guido. The meaning of the vision was that Dante had indeed surpassed his master. Therefore, he received the enthusiastic recognition of the Faithfuls of Love.



4. Vision of "Spring" and Beatrice

Although Dante had proposed a triumvirate for the conduction of their initiatic family³, Guido politely refused on the grounds that he had already assumed the *gurutva* of another esoteric organization⁴.



5. Cavalcanti abandons Joan "Spring" for the "Dame of Toulouse"

Left alone at the helm of the Florentine group, Dante infused it with such great power and spiritual wisdom that soon other "Dames" (sister initiatic organizations, probably from the Templar circle) turned

¹ The imminent pacification of his soul (*śānta Ātman*) was now possible since Dante had transcended the alterity of his individual *buddhi* and *Mahan Ātman*-Beatrice.

² Love explains that Primavera (in Italian "prima verrà") means "she who came first"; and her name was Joan because, like John the Baptist, she had announced the advent of the Saviour. On the other hand, Beatrice, who follows Joan, is declared identical to Love. Thus, the God declared the His identification with Dante through Beatrice. It is another confirmation that Dante represented a second Christ. In this imaginative way the Poet confirmed that he had universalized his magisterium.

³ A proposal expressed in the sonnet "*Guido, i' vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io*" ("Guido, I wish that Lapo you and I").

⁴ Much has been discussed on this matter. In fact, this initiatic organization called Mandetta or "the woman from Toulouse", must have had characteristics identical to those of the Florentine Court of Love, which excludes the recurring hypothesis that it was a Cathar sect. Rossetti interprets the name of Mandetta as if Guido had received the "mandate" to save that initiatic family of Toulouse from internal and external threats.



to him as their Grand Master¹. In this period of intense teaching came the “death of Beatrice”. Dante preferred not to comment this subject, citing, among other reasons, that he did not wish to become “*a praiser of myself*”. It is evident, therefore, that the “death of Beatrice” was in reality the apotheosis of the Poet’s interior realization.



6. Dante transported to heaven by Beatrice-Active Intellect

Furthermore, he deemed such effort unnecessary as his realization had transcended in every way the level of understanding of the other Faithfuls of Love. With the purpose of better explaining this concept, we will refer again to the miniature by Francesco da Barberino presented and explained in chapter 43 of this series. Beatrice, the soul of the Poet, had left the earth where she had lived until then with Dante in the form of the androgynous “*wife-husband*”, to ascend to the sky riding on the white horse of Love².

Although difficult to understand, the initiates of the various organizations recognized that the Poet had achieved an incomparable spiritual eminence. No doubt that at that moment Dante was recognized as *Imperator*, spiritual leader of the Latin Christianity initiatic paths.



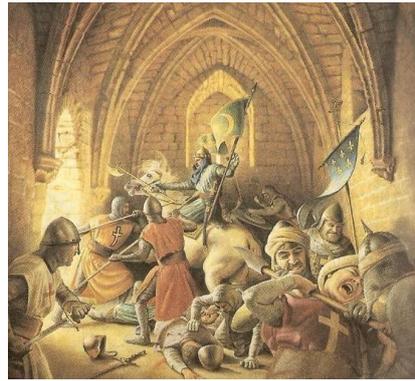
7. Dante among the Princes of the Earth

This extraordinary experience of “dying in life” occurred in 1291, coinciding with a historical event that put the Order of the Temple in grave danger. Therefore, he decided to inform the Princes of the Earth with a letter about his new dignity and on the difficult coming times. As always, Dante quoted Jeremiah’s first Lamentation³ to allude to the danger of destruction of the Temple. In that same year, in fact, the Muslims conquered St. John of Acre, massacring all the Templars who defended the city.

¹ This is openly stated in the two splendid sonnets “*Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare la donna mia quand’ella altrui saluta*” (“My lady looks so gentle and so pure when yielding salutation by the way”) and “*Vede perfettamente onne salute chi la mia donna tra le donne vede*” (“He sees an affluence of joy ideal who sees my lady, in the midst of other ladies”).

² The account of this experience will be included in the *Paradise*, the third canticle of the *Divine Comedy*.

³ Some scholars claim that these quotations from the Old Testament testify a Jewish-Qabalistic influence exercised on Dante, forgetting that for Christians the whole Bible is a sacred text. This claim is in line with the very recent idea that Western civilization allegedly has Jewish-Christian origins. The truth is that before Marx, Freud and Einstein the Jewish communities were entrenched in their ghettos, with little or no cultural exchange with the external environment that they considered “impure”. Their influence began to be exercised secretly, as we shall see, only since the Renaissance, and finally spread in the 19th century. Dante, in line with the Christian traditional positions recognizing the responsibilities of the Jews for the capital condemnation of Jesus, exhorting the Christians wrote of them: “Men be, and not like sheep gone mad, so that the Jew who



8. Massacre of Templar Knights in St. John of Acre

With this defeat, the Holy Land was lost forever and, at the same time, the myth of the invincibility of those knight-monks collapsed¹. Dante's new responsibility, therefore, coincided with a particularly serious historical contingency. He sent the *canzone* "*Gli occhi dolenti per pietà del core*" ("The eyes which mourn the sorrow of the heart") to the initiates, with which the new Grand Master invited everyone to "cry", that is to say to simulate, to hide. And at the same time, he exhorted them to "sigh", to deepen their knowledge and to strengthen the practice of virtues. His friend Cino da Pistoia, the only Faithful of Love who always recognized Beatrice as the most perfect Dame, declared himself available to assist in this task. For this reason, Dante called him "Beatrice's brother" recognizing in him an inner reality very close to his own.

One day the Poet was concentrated drawing the image of Beatrice assumed into the sky. The form that he had spontaneously depicted was that of an angel. He then noticed that someone was watching him. These men were neither "gentle" nor "dames", but he had to honour them nonetheless. It was clearly a control by the Inquisition. However, since his sketch corresponded to the canons of the religious iconography of the angels, they could not allege anything. For this reason, he decided to take on a new outward appearance, accepting the love of a young noblewoman, and very beautiful Lady. In the *Convivio*² he described her as the beautiful and very honest daughter of the Emperor of the Universe³, called Philosophy by Pythagoras⁴. In fact, he had already completed the entire initiatic path of Pythagorean wisdom (gr. Σοφία, read *sofia*), and thus he assumed the exterior philosophy as a tool for arguing, partially giving up the use of the *trobar clus*⁵. This is the reason why Dante still appears today perfectly in line with the theology of St. Thomas and with the philosophy of Aristotle, despite having

lives among you not deride you" (*Paradise* V.80). And, not surprisingly, he calls Judecca (ghetto) the deepest of the hells. Who sustains a Judaizing reading of Dante's work is Sandra Debenedetti Stow, *Dante e la mistica ebraica*, Firenze, La Giuntina, 2004, closely followed by Gian Maria Molli, *La Rinascita di Dante*, Roma, Arkeios, 2010. The latter also relies on the "authority" of occultists such as Max Heindel, Rudolf Steiner, Dion Fortune etc., demonstrating his lack of discrimination. The studies of Giorgio Battistoni (for example, *Immanuelo Romano, L'Inferno e Paradiso*, G. Battistoni, (ed. by), Florence, La Giuntina, 2000) are of a completely different weight. His works are interesting, written with great thoroughness and rigor. However, this scholar forgot to report that it was Immanuelo Romano who drew his inspiration from Dante and not vice versa, thus contradicting the thesis on the alleged Jewish influences on the *Divine Comedy* that he set out to disprove.

¹ The historical exposition of that critical moment will be covered in a forthcoming chapter dedicated to the Order of the Temple.

² *Convivio* II.15.

³ That is Love. Note the title of 'Emperor', which alludes to the initiatic function of Dante, by then identified with Love.

⁴ Philosophy simply means "desire for wisdom"; a useless distraction for one who has already identified himself with *sofia*.

⁵ In fact, Guittone d'Arezzo and Bonagiunta degli Orbacciani, both Faithfuls of Love in their youth, had publicly revealed the existence of the secret language of the troubadours. Thus, expressions incomprehensible for those unfamiliar with this jargon had become a source of suspicion for meddlers and adversaries. The definitive abandonment of the *trobar clus* will take place in the *Divine Comedy*.



spiritually transcended both these exoteric perspectives. Therefore, Love requested Dante to lower the level of his doctrinal expositions so as not to be noticed by the spies of the King of France and the Inquisition. And the Poet adapted himself unwillingly.



9. Dame Philosophy

The art of philosophical rhetoric gave him satisfaction, but at the same time he regretted the use of such an external instrument. Before being completely influenced by the philosophical temptation, Dante recalled the vision of Beatrice. In this way he abruptly rejected the allurements of philosophizing and his thoughts recovered the true sapiential sense that, through the spirits, oozed from his heart¹.

The *Vita Nova* continues with a sonnet enigmatic only in appearance. Dante turns to some “pensive” pilgrims who travel through Florence heading for Rome. He emphasizes that they were going there to see the Veronica, without mentioning any interest at all in obtaining the vision (sanskrit. *darśana*) of the pope in a collective audience. The latter was generally the purpose of the Romeos, as were called those who went on pilgrimage to Rome. Instead those “pensive pilgrims” (not Romeos!) were going to see only the Veronica (from the Latin *vera icona*, true icon), the true face of Christ².



10. The Veronica

In them we recognize the defeated Knights Templar on their return from the Holy Land, eager to find the true image of Christ after having lost his Holy Sepulchre. Dante turned to them asking to stop in Florence. From there, in fact, Beatrice, the wisdom of the Poet, had risen to the highest of the heavens. If they agreed to share his tears, those pilgrims could have recognized in the heart of Dante the true face of the Savior. The pilgrims sent two representatives who requested him to illustrate his true inner height, in order to decide whether to or stop there or continue to Rome.

¹ We remind the reader that, in the secret language, spirits or breaths represent the virtues and the knowledge dwelling in the heart.

² Veronica is a veil on which the face of Jesus Christ was miraculously imprinted, still presently preserved in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.



11. A Romeo, a Pilgrim and a Palmer

To this request for clarification Dante replied with the last sonnet of his work. Here he affirms that the knowledge (the spirit) dwelling in his heart had gone beyond the highest sky. A new awareness had pushed him beyond that limit. There, he had the vision of a self-luminous Dame, that he was unable to describe with the faculties of the mind (sanskrit. *antaḥkaraṇa*). However, the mind, in its limited capacity, maintained the feeling that the gentle light reminded him of Beatrice. This was all he could perceive, and this was the answer to the two pilgrims. However, as soon as he concluded his confession on the inadequacy of the human mind to “remember” what he had known directly, Dante declared that he had the “wonderful vision” of the divine mystery. With “wonderful vision” Dante did not mean a new spiritual experience, but the project of narrating his knowledge in the *Divine Comedy*. So, he concluded the *Vita Nova* by assuming the commitment to spend the rest of his earthly life explaining what had never been said before; that is to say that his soul, in the glory of Beatrice, had the eternal direct vision of the One who is always blessed. This epilogue, therefore, is the prelude to the *Divine Comedy*.

Maria Chiara de' Fenzi