

Dante's Love and the Creation of a New Poetry

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Dante's book of prose autobiography, poems, and critical analyses, the *Vita Nuova (New Life)* shows the progress of his love for Beatrice in sufficient detail to understand how it prompted a creative innovation in his poetry. In response to incidents that were crucial in his love for Beatrice, Dante describes a crisis in his ability to write. With its resolution, he begins to write in an original way and to lay foundations for his masterpiece the *Divina Commedia (Divine Comedy)*. Dante is informative for understanding creativity in the arts because he demonstrates how emotions can set problems to be solved artistically, illustrates the importance of externalization in artistic production, and shows how it is possible to learn from mistakes.

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Dante Alighieri is recognized as one of the world's most creative writers. Much of his early poetry, together with the last part of *Purgatorio* and much of *Paradiso* (second and third sections of the *Divina Commedia*, 1307–1321/1984), concerns Beatrice, and the question of Dante's creativity cannot be separated from his love for her. Here I draw on Dante's small book the *Vita Nuova* (1292–1295/1995, with English translations by Dino Cervigni and Edward Vasta; except where otherwise specified, quotations are from this publication.) This book, which contains his earliest surviving poems, was intended primarily for other poets; Dante showed it to only to a few people in his circle. It starts with his first meeting with Beatrice in 1274 and covers a period until 1292, two years after her death. The book is unusual in that, as well as 31 poems, the author supplies both their autobiographical contexts and structural analyses. Events are described that provoked a creative transformation that was critical for Dante's accomplishments as a poet.

Before turning to this book, I offer some background from the psychology of creativity, and a brief account of European romantic love, a principal part of Dante's literary background.

The Psychology of Creativity and the Role of Emotions

Psychological interest in creativity is now considerable (e.g., Sternberg, Lubart, Kaufman, & Pretz, 2005). Although inspiration was once seen as the source of creativity in great artists, recent scholarship has overturned the idea (see, e.g., Perkins, 1981; Weisberg, 1986). Its replacement comes from cognitive science:

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the idea of expertise (Chi, Glaser, & Farr, 1988; Ericsson & Lehmann, 1999), attainment of which requires at least 10000 hours of intense problem-solving. This works out to 10 hours a day for three years. It is no good just spending time in an activity. That is why few people improve past a certain point in pursuits on which they spend much time. One needs to develop skills in areas that present problems. Apprenticeship and coaching often help. In other words, the time must be spent effortfully constructing mental resources in the domain of interest. Gardner (e.g., 1993, 1997) supports this analysis from biographical studies of exceptionally creative people.

Averill (2005) has argued that emotions are important both as mediators and products of creative activity. As to mediation, it has been shown repeatedly that writers who have attained eminence are more likely than people from other groups to have suffered from emotional disorders (see, e.g., Pritzker, 1999). Kaufman and Baer (2002) found that mental illness has been prevalent among poets, particularly female poets, and they suggest that poetry may be especially rewarding to those who suffer emotional disorder. Various explanations have been offered: perhaps the most productive is that writing and emotional disorder share a sensitivity to feelings and inner turmoil. There are times in reading *Vita Nuova* when one wonders whether Dante had hysterical tendencies. As to emotions as products of creativity, Brand and Leckie (1988) studied 24 professional writers and found in them substantial positive emotion during the course of writing. Although in discussions of writers' emotions, references can be found to how this author's paranoia pervaded his stories, or that author's anger made its way into her poetry, no very distinct answers have emerged more generally to how emotions can contribute directly to particular works. For this we need two components: a theory and a means to test it.

One part of a theory can be connected with the psychology of expertise. When an emotion is strong and long-lasting, it can supply an element necessary for expertise: an obsessional drive to persevere. A second part derives from the Romantic theory of art (see Oatley, 2003). The idea was well put by Collingwood (1938): a work of art is the expression of an emotion that is problematic, articulated in a language such as poetry, music, or painting, so that

the emotion's depth can be plumbed, its experience then reinternalized by the artist and by audiences, and its significance understood.

A study of Dante's *Vita Nuova* allows us to test these pieces of theory. It requires that we regard the *Vita Nuova* as, in part, an emotion diary. The original emotion-directed autobiographer in the Western tradition was Augustine in his *Confessions* (401/2006), see also Stock (1996) on emotions in Augustine. There were also examples from the medieval period such as Guibert de Nogent, (1124/1996). In modern times the pioneers among psychologists were Georgina Gates (1926) who asked undergraduates to keep emotion diaries of incidents of anger, and Joanna Field (1931/1955) who kept a diary of incidents of happiness in her life, from which she discovered steps toward her own therapy. Pennebaker (e.g., 1997), who found that writing about emotionally problematic incidents conferred benefits on health, can be seen as a further contributor to this series.

It is not known how soon Dante recorded events after they occurred, and as with other autobiographical accounts, we do not know how much post hoc elaboration there was. For Dante's work, this shortcoming is countered to some extent for psychological analyses because his descriptions of his emotions in *Vita Nuova* are accompanied by the more behavioral data of the progression of his poems, which may be regarded as comparable for understanding the development of his creativity to Picasso's sketches and photographs of the progress of his work on *Guernica*, as analyzed by Arnheim (1962). The mixture of prose and verse on which Dante's book is structured derives from the ancient *satira* (B. Stock, personal communication, 2006), so that although there are diary-like entries, in Dante's case the emotions are also subject to his judgments both in the poems and in the prose as to how far these emotions advance the education of the soul. Allowing for such issues, two questions can sensibly be tested with the *Vita Nuova*: (a) Was there, for Dante, an emotion that was sufficiently motivating to explain the perseverance necessary for the attainment of expertise? (b) How did an emotion pose problems to be solved?

Dante's Apprenticeship in Courtly Love

In the *Vita Nuova*, Dante elaborated the quality of his love for Beatrice and conceived solutions to the problems it posed. Dante's love was modeled on courtly love, the name of which comes from aristocratic courts of France, such as those of Provence. The practices, invented in the 11th century, involved a knight coming to love a lady, higher born than himself, and devoting himself in fealty to her service. This kind of love occurred outside marriage. First a lady was seen at a distance and was unattainable. Then the knight would offer to do whatever the lady might wish, however difficult or trifling, and he would honor her. In return there was expectation of a reward (Provençal *guerdon*, Italian *guiderdone*, see, e.g., Barolini, 1993) that might be sexual, that might be conversation in which the lover came to know his lady, or that might be a little as a glance of approval. These practices gave rise to some of Europe's finest poetry of the time, such as the story of Lancelot and his love for Guinevere, wife and queen of King Arthur, told by the French poet Chrétien de Troyes, (1180/1990), in "The Knight of the Cart." It is thought that among the effects of these practices were beginnings of a civilizing process, and the

words "courtship" and "courtesy" derive from this process. First knights—who formerly one must suppose were rough quarrelsome fellows—were ennobled by their love and came to behave with courtesy and gentility (cf. the term "gentleman") in order to please their ladies. Ortega y Gasset (1932) proposed that the love that was at the heart of the civilizing process had two effects. First, in order to win the favor of a lady, the lover had to take others into consideration. Second, he had to act according to principles higher than self-interest. The effects of the presence of women in society were further discussed by Elias (1939/1978) who proposed that this presence was the principal force in the civilization of manners as European society moved beyond medieval customs. He argues that the process was founded upon the male shame of being coarse and brutish that became conscious with the consideration of women.

Emotions can be close to the heart of creativity because most emotions of force involve contradictions and therefore set problems. The problem identified by the poets of Provence was that love and worship of a lady trespassed on one's duty to love and worship God. This problem passed from France to the court of Frederick II in Palermo, Sicily, where new forms of poetry were devised. These include the sonnet, a 14-line form in which the first 8 lines (or octave) typically propose a topic, and the last 6 lines (or sestet) depict it in a different way or resolve the problem of the topic. This form was probably invented by Giacomo da Lentini, a poet in Frederick's court.

Teodolinda Barolini (1993) cites, for instance, a sonnet by da Lentini that begins as follows:

Io m'aggio posto in core a Dio servire,

Com'io potesse gire in paradiso,

(I have proposed in my heart to serve God that I might go to paradise, p. 15.)

Barolini explains that the problem posed in this sonnet—that love for a lady may conflict with one's duty to God—is treated with elegance, clarity, and a striking wit. After the opening lines (above), the poet says he does not wish to be in Paradise without his lady; without her it would not be Paradise. In the sestet, the problem is resolved: the poet continues that he does not say this to commit a sin, but rather because to see his lady's beautiful face in Paradise would be to see her also in glory, which by implication she deserves.

From Palermo, the courtly love tradition passed to Florence. Like the Provençal and Sicilian poets, the Florentine poets had an overriding preoccupation: by writing about it, to understand the nature of love. For them, rather than it being an aristocratic game, love was a matter of importance for everyone, including the rapidly urbanizing population among whom individuality was growing. Love is a potent force, but it is also intensely problematic. At that time, before the introduction of printing, poetry tended to be performed or sung, and it seems that by these means poets of Florentine school made these problems matters of considerable interest.

The most eminent and original poet in Florence when Dante grew up was Guido Cavalcanti, who was 10 years older than Dante. He saw love in the courtly way, in terms of nobility and longing, but he also saw it as the cause of profound disorientation, and the destruction of reason that brings the lover close to death.

Cavalcanti's is a secular rather than a religious mind. His voice is subjective and immediate: it strikes one as modern. One of his best-known poems is a sonnet of which the first quatrain is as follows:

*Voi che per li occhi mi passate 'l core
e destaste la mente che dormia,
guardarte a l'angosciosa vita mia,
che sospirando la distrugge Amore.*

(You who've pierced my eyes to my heart, awakening my sleeping mind, look at my anguished life, sighing, destroyed by Love. Translated by Cirigliano, 1992, p. 30–31.)

From his first meeting with Beatrice, in 1274, Dante set out on a path laid by the poets of Provence, Palermo, and Florence, of coming first to admire from afar, and then to worship, a lady whom he sees as the embodiment of all virtue. In the *Vita Nuova*, after Dante describes his first meeting with Beatrice, he describes his second meeting with her nine years later (i.e., in 1283, when they were both about 18), and also the development of his friendship with Cavalcanti. Dante says that many times between his two first meetings with Beatrice he "sought her, and found in her such noble and laudable bearing." He says the second meeting occurred when he saw her walking along a street, dressed in white, between two older ladies. He says she turned her eyes and greeted him "with exceeding virtue" (p. 49). He writes that he "experienced such sweetness that like one inebriated [he] left all company" and went to his room to think about "this most courteous one" (p. 49). He fell asleep and had a strange dream, which he recounts in prose and writes about in a sonnet: "*A Ciascun'alma Presa*" ("To Every Captive Soul," pp. 50–51), the first poem in *Vita Nuova*. In the poem of the dream, Lord Love holds Dante's burning heart in his hand and gives it to the poet's frightened lady to eat. Dante showed this sonnet to other poets to ask their opinions and among them was Cavalcanti. With this Dante seems to have joined the circle of Florentine poets, and Dante says that Cavalcanti became his best friend. The poem is thoroughly Cavalcantian in theme. Dante says that after the meeting and writing the poem, he became frail and weak from thinking about Beatrice, but despite being questioned as to who had "ravaged him," he kept her name secret.

Allegory in Medieval Thinking and Love Poetry

Many scholars have pointed out the importance of allegory in medieval thinking (see, e.g., Lewis, 1936). Although with the Provençal poets, interests began to swerve from religion toward love of an earthly kind, allegory remained central. By the time Provençal ideas had reached Palermo and Florence, allegory had become a medium of education by which one reached deep understandings. Love for philosophy was sometimes thought of in allegories with love for a lady. In each case, one was first attracted to external features, then, on the basis of this strong attraction, one devoted oneself and came at last to know one's beloved more intimately.

Among the problems that allegorical thinking raised in the psychology of courtly love was the one mentioned above, of the conflict between love of a lady and love of God. Guido Guinizzelli, whom Dante visited in Bologna during the period of composition of the poems of *Vita Nuova*, was writing about this

problem. Barolini discusses the issue, as follows, in relation to a *canzone* by Guinizzelli. (The Italian *canzone* derives from the Provençal *chanson*; this poetic form is longer than a sonnet and capable of narrative development.)

Guinizzelli's *canzone Al Cor Gentil Rempairà Sempre Amore* [In the Noble Heart Love Always Finds a Place] . . . argues that the noble lover should obey his lady in the same way that the angelic intelligence obeys God, thus implicitly setting up analogies between the lover and heavenly intelligence on one hand, and the lady and God on the other. (Barolini, 1993, p. 20)

No one was going to object to comparing love of a lady with love of philosophy, but comparing carnal love with the love of God was more dangerous. Conscious of the potentially blasphemous nature of this idea, in the final stanza of "*Al Cor Gentil*" ("In the Noble Heart") Guinizzelli imagines the time when he will come before God in Judgment, when God will accuse him: "How did you presume?" says God, to render "me through the likenesses of vain love?" The poet replies that since his lady had the semblance of an angel, a member of God's kingdom, "it was no fault of mine if I placed love in her" (Barolini, 1993, p. 20).

This poetry was important to Dante. In Canto XXVI of *Purgatorio*, Dante meets Guinizzelli and calls him the "father" of his poetry, and then pursues further discussions of poetic influences. Guinizzelli took the conflict between human and divine love to a point just short of one that Dante would later reach.

Dante's Turning Point in *Vita Nuova*

The episode in the *Vita Nuova* that Dante next relates, after he writes the poem of his strange dream, is of seeing Beatrice in church. Sitting directly in line between him and Beatrice is another lady. Dante conceives the idea, again derived from Provençal courtly love, to use this lady as a screen: to pretend she is his beloved and thereby keep secret the identity of his lady. Dante says he writes some poems to the screen lady that he does not include in his book. Then, after "some years and months," he is extremely distressed when the screen lady leaves Florence. At the beginning of *Vita Nuova*, Dante gives the impression that Beatrice will be his only love, so one may think that his distress at the departure of the screen lady is because he no longer has her as the means of keeping his love secret. But he says that with the screen lady's departure, he "became greatly disheartened, more than [he] would have previously believed" (p. 55). This passage comes eight lines after he says that he made a list of "sixty of the most beautiful ladies of the city." The reader may thus start to intuit that Dante has quite a tendency to fall in love and to be particularly affected by women's visual appearance. We see more of this later in *Vita Nuova*. For instance during his grief at Beatrice's death, Dante is comforted by yet another lady, to whom he becomes attracted.

At the time of the screen lady, external sources (see, e.g., Reynolds, 2006) indicate that Dante gets married to Gemma Donati with whom he will have several children. Around the same time Beatrice also gets married. Neither his own wife nor Beatrice's husband appear in any role whatever in Dante's works. Unlike that of some Provençal knights, the *guiderdone* (reward) of Dante's love for Beatrice would not be sexual, at least not in the ordinary sense: this, indeed, was part of the problem that his love set him.

With the departure of the screen lady from Florence, Dante declares rather disingenuously that the Lord Love suggests another screen lady, and he follows the suggestion. But talk occurs, which Dante says begins to “defame him viciously.” The gossip reaches Beatrice. Then Dante meets her on the street again, and this time she does not greet him. So much grief then seized him that he “withdrew to a solitary place to bathe the earth with bitterest tears” (p. 63).

Dante later writes that perhaps he had been guilty of some “disgrace” to the second screen lady. Might he have recognized that he had used her without her consent for his own purposes? He wants to apologize, though not to the second screen lady but to Beatrice! He writes a *ballade* addressed to Beatrice, to explain himself.

Some time later, Dante describes how among the guests at a wedding “many ladies presented their beauties.” Resolving to serve these ladies, he says: “I felt a wondrous tremor commence in my breast’s left side and quickly spread throughout my body.” Leaning against a wall from this excitement, he looks up to see Beatrice among the ladies, and says: “at that moment my spirits were so destroyed by the power of Love. . .that no spirits were alive but those of sight.” Then “many of these ladies, noting my transfiguration. . .mocked me to this most gentle one” (pp. 71–73).

So Dante nearly fainted, a physiological event, and the ladies make fun of him to Beatrice. Now he writes three sonnets about the episode. The first starts: *Con l’altre donne mia vista gabbat*, (With the other ladies you mock my aspect, pp. 72–73), the next contains the lines *e quand’io vi son presso, i’ sento Amore/che dice: “Fuggi, se l’perir t’è noia.”* (and when I am near you, I hear Love say: “Flee, if death disquiets you.” pp. 74–75). The next sonnet starts:

*Spesse fiate vegnonmi a la mente
le oscure qualità ch’Amor mi dona,
e venmene pietà, sì che sovente
io dico: “Lasso! Avviene elli a persona?”*

(Often there comes to mind the dark quality that Love bestows on me and there comes to me pity, so that often I say: “Ah! Can this happen to someone?” pp. 76–77.)

Pity, we might think, is self-pity.

A few pages further on, Dante meets a group of Beatrice’s friends. one of them addresses him by name, and says:

“To what end do you love this lady of yours, since you cannot bear her presence?” . . . I then spoke these words to them: “Ladies, the end of my love was the greeting of this lady. . .and in this greeting lay my beatitude for it was the end of all my desires. But because it pleased her to deny it to me, my Lord Love, in his mercy, has placed all my beatitude in that which cannot fail me.” (p. 81)

Apart from the shrewdness of the lady who addresses him, this passage is remarkable in at least two other ways. One is pointed out by Ryan (1993) that: “Dante uses instead of the customary ‘*felicità*,’ the theologically charged word *beatitudo/beatitudine*” (p. 137). Another is that in response to his snub in the street, Dante formulates the problem of his love as needing to be independent of accidentals such as whether or not Beatrice acknowledges him.

Then after the ladies had spoken among themselves, the one who had addressed him says:

“We pray you, tell us where this your beatitude lies.” And I, in reply, said so much: “In those words that praise my lady.” And then replied the one who was speaking to me: “If you were speaking the truth to us, those words that you have said to us in making known your condition you would have used with another purpose.” Hence I, thinking about these words, in shame departed. . . (p. 81)

Dante asks himself why, since “so much beatitude” lay in words that praised Beatrice, has he has instead been using words of a different kind. Then he writes:

Therefore I resolved to take as the subject of my speaking always and ever what would be in praise of this most gentle one; and thinking much upon it, I seemed to have taken on a subject too lofty for me, so that I dared not begin. (p. 81)

By “speaking” Dante means “writing.” He says he was some days in what we may take to be a crisis, until one day, he says, walking “down a road beside which ran a very clear stream, I felt such a strong desire to write that I began to conceive the mode I might follow” (p. 81).

This was a turning point for Dante. The *canzone* he then presents is one of the two most famous poems in *Vita Nuova* (the other being the sonnet: “*Tanto Gentile E Tanto Onesta Pare/La Donna Mia*”; “So Gentle and So Honest Appears/My Lady,” pp. 110–111). The *canzone* is addressed to the ladies of Beatrice’s circle with whom he had been conversing. It starts as follows:

*Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore,
i’ vo’ con voi de la mia donna dire,
non perch’io creda sua laude finire,
ma ragionar per isfogar la mente.
Io dico che pensando il suo valore,
Amor sì dolce mi si fa Sentire,
che s’ io allora non perdessi ardire,
farei parlando innamorar la gente.*

(Ladies who have understanding of love, I will speak with you of my lady, not that I believe I may exhaust her praises, but in order to relieve my mind. I say that as I think of her worth, Love speaks to me so sweetly, that if I did not lose courage, I should make everyone fall in love by my words. (Translation from Auerbach, 1929/2007, p. 47)

With this, Dante takes a path on which his love is creatively transformed into poetry that works (as he would describe in the unfinished *Il Convivio*, *The Banquet*, 1304–1307/1990) at four levels: literal, allegorical, moral, and analogical (signifying our relationship with God). The *Vita Nuova* thus comes to form one of the principal foundations of the *Divina Commedia* (1307–1321/1984). Dante would have other crises and other acts of great creativity before he completed the *Commedia*; these included his grief at the death of Beatrice in 1290, and the *inferno* of his exile from Florence in 1302.

One matter that strikes the modern reader in a way that evidently it did not strike Dante is how love was considered entirely a matter for men. Perhaps, as Dante implies in “*Donne Ch’avete Intelletto D’Amore*” (“Ladies Who Have Understanding of Love”), because women already understood love, they had no need of ennobling aspirations. Barolini (2003) discusses the stark gendering of these assumptions; she points out, too, that although Beatrice says noth-

ing whatsoever in *Vita Nuova*, when she meets Dante in *Paradiso*, she becomes positively loquacious.

I propose that three kinds of creative transformation occurred during Dante's days of crisis that ended with his writing of "*Donne Ch'avete Intelletto D'Amore*" ("Ladies Who Have Understanding of Love").

First, following the challenge of the lady who said Dante was lying when he said he spoke only in praise of Beatrice, his love changes from self-absorbed frustration and embarrassment to generosity, so that he can write: "I should make everyone fall in love by my words," and thereby experience the nature of love. He thus solves both the problem of how to make his love immune from accidents and the problem of insincerity of which he was accused. It is here he begins, I think, to express the sense that would permeate his work subsequently, and which was not present in previous religious writers (Ryan, 1993), that we can come to know God not solely by revelation, authority, or from the Bible, but by means of the natural world. In particular we come to know the nature of God's love by experiencing human love, for instance in what we would now call sexual love.

Second, Dante works on literary implications of this theme of knowing God through human love. With "*Donne Ch'avete Intelletto D'Amore*" ("Ladies Who Have Understanding of Love"), he takes further than it had been taken before the allegorical idea of love (see the previous section called "Allegory"). In this poem, Dante crosses the divide, as it were, from simile to metaphor. The lady is no longer like an angel as she was in Guinizzelli's *canzone*. Beatrice becomes the embodiment of love. Dante's *canzone* shows several indications of her as a Christ figure. His intense and urgent emotion, now transformed into a generous love for Beatrice, becomes a metaphor (allegory) for the relationship one might properly have with God, as well as of God's love for the world. We see this, for instance, in the last two lines of the third stanza, where Beatrice takes on the role of savior.

*Ancor l'ha Dio per maggior grazia dato
che non pò mal finir chi l'ha parlato*

(God has given her an even greater grace: that one cannot end in evil who has spoken to her, pp. 82–83.)

Stock (personal communication, 2006) points out that from this time Dante is able to accomplish a Platonic movement in his poetry, catalyzed by an emotion, from phenomenal appearance, via language, to an ideal form such as Beatrice as savior. This argument derives from Auerbach (1929/2007), whose book is generally accepted as the best introduction to Dante. The argument is that what Dante accomplished, starting with the *Vita Nuova*, was a depiction for the first time in European literature of ordinary human life that could become, by way of verbal expression, an ideal that could exist in the mind of the reader. In Plato's (375 BCE/1955) conception, says Auerbach, truths are ideals beyond any of us. Our ordinary world is illusion, at best a shadow of these truths, with literary art only a shadow of such shadows. This idea not only had considerable influence in itself, but it expressed the more general intuition that everything of real importance takes place beyond the human realm. It was Dante, argues Auerbach, who created the first literary characters who are recognizable as humans enacting day-to-day human actions, experiencing human phenomenology, and making human choices expressed with the

underlying idea that there is something profoundly important about the human form of life. Starting in this *canzone*, actions and thoughts of ordinary human existence and passion are transformed into words with apparent simplicity, with unforced meter and rhyme, such that the verbal forms become ideals, not on some unreachable plane, but in the mind of the listener or reader.

Third, Dante's crisis prompted a transformation in the quality of his poetry from apprentice pieces written under the strong influence of poets like Guinizzelli and Cavalcanti, to original compositions that would themselves become influential. As Johnson-Laird (1993) has argued: creativity within a genre has to be mastered first, before new genres can be created. Dante created a new genre that had a number of attributes. As Stock (personal communication, 2006) has put it, from this point on, Dante's poetry came to incorporate ethical insights into the nature of love in a way his predecessors' poetry had not. Moreover, Dante's poetry was written in a vernacular derived from the language with which he had been brought up, but augmented with words from other dialects and from Provençal. This synthesis would become the basis of modern Italian. His (1302–1305/1996) book *De Vulgari Eloquentia (On the Eloquence of the Vernacular)* is a manifesto (unique in its time) for this movement. In it, Dante says the *canzone* is the most noble kind of poem and, rather immodestly perhaps, he offers as illustration the *canzone* that was his turning point in *Vita Nuova*, "*Donne Ch'avete Intelletto D'Amore*" ("Ladies Who Have Understanding of Love"). In *Purgatorio* XXIV, Dante meets the poet Bonagiunta who asks him whether he is not the one who wrote poems in the *stil nuovo* (new style) and mentions this same poem as an example. In modern times Dante is seen as the foremost poet of the *stil nuovo*, and Grayson (2003) interprets the mention of this *canzone* in the conversation with Bonagiunta in *Purgatorio* as an indication that the new style began with this very poem. Dante replies to Bonagiunta with what Nelson (1986) describes as gentle irony: "*I mi son un che, quando/ Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo/che'e' ditta dentro vo significando.*" (I am one, who when Love breathes into me, takes note and, according to the way he speaks to me inwardly, I write in [alphabetic] signs. Nelson, p. xxix). Here is a beautiful expression of the theory of art which five hundred years later would be called Romanticism, in which an emotion prompts its own externalization into a language such as that of words.

The Psychology of Love and of Creativity

Averill (1985) has proposed that to Finck (1887) should go the honors as the first to argue that Western romantic love is not universal but socially constructed. Finck claimed that it did not exist before Dante. Even if this is an exaggeration, it seems probable that Western romantic love was influenced by Dante because it is clearly not just biological nor even a single entity, but rather, as Averill (1985, 2005) points out, a complex of elements that were joined together in the love story that Dante created in *Vita Nuova*. Love involves (a) sudden onset, (b) physiological arousal, (c) idealization of the loved one, and (d) commitment to the loved one with willingness to make sacrifices. Because Dante became famous, the pattern became recognizable in the West as romantic love. The modern variation is that, whereas for Dante union with the beloved was imaginative and spiritual, we moderns tend to see physical union as critical. For Dante, the resolution of

the conflict between human and divine love was of seeing the one as an earthly intimation of the other. For us moderns, something has occurred which Dante would have disapproved. In our more secular age, we no longer have a conflict between love and religion: we are perfectly happy for love itself to be a religion.

Dante became an expert (cf. Gardner, 1997; Ericsson & Lehmann, 1999) in poetry by drawing on the influence of other poets, by undertaking an apprenticeship with Cavalcanti (see also Simonon's [1999] work on mentors in art) and by solving problems within the established genres of his craft. He is known to have been well educated in a tradition that valued poetry, and he says he had written poetry before the first poem in the *Vita Nuova*. From the time of this poem, at least three years passed before the first poem of his maturity, "*Donne Ch'avete Intelletto D'Amore*" ("Ladies Who Have Understanding of Love").

Importantly for our understanding of creativity, the unusual combination of a diary of emotions—that included episodes of love, sweetness, bitter tears, and shame, as well as physiological perturbations—keyed to a developing series of poems, allows us to derive three conclusions, as follows.

The first general conclusion about creativity comes from the answers to two questions posed earlier. Emotion can contribute to creativity both as a motivator (see, e.g., Piirto, 2005) and as a problem to be solved (see Djikic, Oatley & Peterson, 2006). On the motivational question, if we take Dante at face value in the *Vita Nuova*, he became driven by love from 1274, and the issue was seldom out of his mind at least until 1292, two years after Beatrice died. It became for him what Polanyi (1958) called "indwelling knowledge." After the *Vita Nuova*, the nature of love was a primary motivator once more in his writing of the *Divina Commedia*, from 1307 to 1321. So although creative people may be sustained in different ways to undertake the hard work necessary for real creativity, Dante's case indicates that a fully engaging emotion can be one of these ways. We may, in addition, note that empirical effects of mood have been repeatedly found on creativity (e.g., Isen, 1990) with positive moods generally promoting creative flexibility, but negative moods being perhaps important for concentrating attention. On the second question, despite the strong connection often recognized between emotions and creativity in the arts, there has been little in the psychological literature to show how this connection works. The case of Dante shows that it can work because an emotion, love, may provide not only the motivation but problems to be solved artistically, just as problems arise in science and mathematics that engage discoverers in their solution. In his poetry, Dante solved the problem of how he might experience and express his love for Beatrice, and at the same time offer an understanding of the relation of such love to the most profound questions of human existence.

The second conclusion is the importance of externalization. Among the defects of the theory of inspiration is its assumption that a work of art is fixed. The artist receives it passively and passes it on to the reader or audience member who, for all we know, is also passive. The real artist is more active. The issue was well put by the dancer Martha Graham: "The difference between the artist and the nonartist is not the greater capacity for feeling. The secret is that the artist can objectify, can make apparent the feelings we all have" (cited in Gardner, 1993, p. 298). Although all art involves making something and putting it out there into the world, the significance of this seems to have been insufficiently

recognized by researchers in creativity. Artists work hard. What do they work on? They work on improving their objectifications. Precisely because these are external, they can be worked on: they are not constrained by the limits of human memory. Though some great literature, for instance Homer's (850 BCE/1987) *Iliad*, was probably composed without writing, once writing in an alphabetic script had been invented and had come into use in a literate community, it is difficult to imagine a poet who would not use it to see how things were with a poem that he or she had conceived, and try variations to make it better. We know from modern poets such as Yeats (see Parkinson, 1964) the extensive drafting and redrafting that can go into even very short poems. We do not have Dante's drafts or notes, or any progression toward any single poem of the kind that Arnheim (1962) studied with Picasso's *Guernica*. We therefore have to fill this gap somewhat speculatively. To do this, we do have Dante's critical analyses, which indicate that externalized structure was a close consideration for him. We do, moreover, know that Dante made use of externalization because he explains how he passed the first poem in *Vita Nuova*, "*A Ciascun'Alma Presa*" ("To Every Captive Soul") around to other poets, and requested "the faithful of love to judge [his] vision" (p. 51). The idea of allegory with which Dante worked is itself about externalization of a kind that, once in language form, could also be reinternalized as an inward idea and as ideal. The special challenge that Dante faced was to externalize something that was strongly felt but inarticulate. This had been done by Cavalcanti, and Dante followed him insofar as love was painful, but to write of love as both intimate and transcendent was far more difficult. That is why one may indeed see as "gently ironic" Dante's statement in *Purgatorio*, XXIV: "I am one, who when Love breathes into me, takes note and, according to the way he speaks to me inwardly, I write in [alphabetic] signs" (Nelson, 1986, p. xxix).

The third conclusion, as Gardner (1997) has emphasized, is that creative people learn from mistakes of both technical and emotional kinds. This depends on the previous issue: externalization. Whereas for a behavioral psychologist learning takes place by reinforcement, for a cognitive approach (of which this article is an example) learning often takes place by mistakes (see, e.g., Sussman, 1975; Papert, 1980). The output of implicit theories are translated into externalized objects, such as actions or pieces of writing, and these can then be challenged in the external world. Cognitive progress thus parallels scientific progress and is dependent on theories that can be tested in the way described by Popper (1962). Because Dante's poems in *Vita Nuova* were attempts to solve problems set by events in his life, we do have a progression. In it, the most striking change is from the poems that preceded "*Donne Ch'avete Intelletto D'Amore*" ("Ladies Who Have Understanding of Love") to that poem and those that followed it. The mistake from which Dante learned so much was indicated by Beatrice's friend, who pointed out that his words were about something other than praise of Beatrice. Until this juncture, Dante had not realized this. The recognition caused him shame and a crisis during which he could not write. It also prompted him to a change in himself and in the genre in which he worked, which laid a foundation for the *Divina Commedia*.

Attaining *Paradiso*

Finally Dante comes to the *Divina Commedia*, which many commentators regard as one of the most creative pieces of poetry

ever written. As Auerbach (1929/2007) explains: the fundamental idea of the *Divina Commedia* is that everyday human life is important because we human beings are unique in the universe in having a hand in creating who we become. In his pilgrimage through *Inferno* and most of *Purgatorio* (the first two sections of the *Commedia*) Dante is guided by Virgil. Then, toward the end of *Purgatorio*, he once again meets Beatrice, his beloved lady of the *Vita Nuova*. She upbraids him for his faithlessness to her on earth, is then convinced of his repentance, and becomes his guide through the heavens. The final words of *Paradiso* are:

...ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle
sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa
l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.

(But like a wheel in perfect balance turning, I felt my will and my desire impelled by the love that moves the sun and other stars. [1307–1321/1984, p. 585])

In terms of the modern psychology of love, Jenkins and Oatley (see Oatley, Keltner, & Jenkins, 2006) have proposed that human social emotions are based on three primary systems of social goals: assertion (source of angry emotions and of shame), attachment (source of emotions of trust and social anxiety), and affiliation (source of emotions of affection including love). Of these, affiliation, on which human cooperation is based, is the most recent to emerge in evolutionary history and the most distinctive to the human species. Although we moderns might not see love of another human being as representative of the forces by which sun and stars are moved, we may be able to see love in its romantic, familial, and friendly forms (based on affiliative affection), as a prototype of the creative and constructive in human life. To put it in a Dante-inspired way: the human capacity for love is our principal divine gift.

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