DANTE: Vita Nuova: second half

REVIEW FROM TUESDAY:
Dante develops the **prosimentrum** form from Boethius

Alternating verse and prose, he creates an anthology of poetry, grounded in a love story and a critical analysis of literary forms. The act of reading the self becomes central: reading the book of life; reading and rereading his own poetry.

The figure of Beatrice: an idealized object of love; but also a poetic muse

Dante takes the old idea of an idealized women (Lady P, Monica, the Virgin Mary) and turns it into an object of literary worship

**SO:** Beatrice is an object of desire, but also a source of inspiration; she is a MUSE for a new, Christian, Civic, Vernacular poetry

**AND:** the allegory is numerological as well as spiritual: the number 9
The new ideas of love and love poetry:

Love is grounded in an intelligence of mind, not just a feeling of heart

It is a function of understanding, not just experience; it requires brains.

But it also is, in itself, an act of nobility: KEY POINT: Dante takes the idea gentility (Gentilezza) and makes it an internal, moral quality; the issue is that Dante and his literary group want to make love poetry NOT the province of the courtly, aristocratic, erotic, game BUT the province of the civic, educated, spiritual quest

Poems XIX and XX are key to defining this new idea of poetry
What Dante and his friends called dolce stil nuovo: the sweet new style
Ladies who know by insight what love is

Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore

Love is a matter of knowledge, of intelligence
Love poetry is an intellectual activity
This is an example of what Dante and his friends called the dolce stil nuovo, the sweet new style
This kind of poetry does not simply talk about the experience of love (see Romance of the Rose)
It talks about knowledge, intelligence, or inner comprehension of love

The structure of the poem: Each stanza begins, in Italian, with a proper name or important person of address:

Donne: the ladies of the world
Angelo: the angel of the Lord
Madonna: my own lady, but of course, the earthly lady as a figure of the Madonna
Amor: Love personified who talks of the lady
Canzone: the poem itself, now addressed directly in the second person; Dante makes the poem itself into a kind of person
Poem XIX is the pivotal poem of the book: it is a canzone, that is an extended series of multiple sonnet units, keyed to defining the stilnovisti notion of love.

The opening words of each stanza chart, in microcosm, the world of the VN: Donna, Angelo, Madonna, Amor, Canzone.

The poem elevates Beatrice into an idealized figure of spiritual power:

> Love says of her: “How can a mortal thing
> Have purity and beauty such as hers?”
> Then looks again and to himself he swears
> A marvel she must be which God intends.

The phrase translated as “marvel” is cosa nova: literally, a new or unique thing.

cosa nova / vita nova

Poem XX: Love and the noble heart are but one thing

una cosa
New things, new life, new style, single things

These are the key terms of renewal and understanding in the work.

But they are also the ways in which Dante transforms a world of THINGS into a world of IDEAS.

AND IN ADDITION: Dante must transform a world of courtly love into a world of city love.

NOW: central to this idea of the sweet new style was an idea of MALE FRIENDSHIP. Dante and his teachers and friends, are now part of a CREATIVE, LITERARY GROUP; MALE FRIENDSHIP IS ABOUT SHARED READING AND WRITING:

PROSE III, END; PROSE XX BEGINNING

Dante circulates his poetry among friends. Reading and writing of poetry becomes the shared activity among men.

In a world of young men of civic, urban, commercial birth and experience, nobility must be defined and created. It is not something they are born into. THIS IS KEY
NOW:
We need to understand the larger purpose of the VN: as a treatise on love, poetry, language, and understanding.

The core of the critical section is Prose XXV: here Dante defines the nature of vernacular verse and its relationship to Latin.

**Langue d’oc**: Provencal; the language of Southern France (i.e., where “yes” is oc)
**Lingua del si**: Italian; the language of Florence (i.e., where “yes” is si)

“The first to write as a vernacular poet was moved to do so because he wished to make his verses intelligible to a lady who found it difficult to understand Latin.”

He defines the nature of personification and the uses of classical mythological figures.
“Ancient poets spoke of inanimate things as if they had sense and reason.”

Virgil: had the gods speak; other Latin poets use personification: notice the quotations Here!!

He defines the audience: educated people, and his friends
In the narrative of the story, Beatrice dies. Prose XXVIII: notice the opening from Jeremiah: the importance of the city.

Central to the VN is the idea of transferring the ideals of courtly love, classical virtue, and religious devotion into the commercial city world.

Notice how he calls attention to the number 9 in this section.

Section XXIX explains the importance of the number 9 LOOK AT THIS CLOSELY

Section XXX returns to the idea of the quotation and the heading. Dante seems to begin the work all over again. He now has a Latin quotation from Jeremiah *Quomodo sedet sola civitas* (How does the city sit alone) and he says this is “like a heading to the new material that follows”

But, he’s not quoting the entire passage from the Latin bible because his intention is to write the work in the vernacular: SOLAMENTE VOLGARE
This is the poem on the death of Beatrice
It is a *canzone* (like XIX a *sequence of linked sonnets*)
Notice the imagery of eyes, tears, heart, talk. The anatomy of love.

Dante takes the idea of the BLAZON (the rhetorical description of the woman as a sequence of body parts) and turns it into a spiritual form of praise

Dante is not interested in eroticizing Beatrice; he’s interested in spiritualizing her

The nature of mourning and love:
this poem is an essay on loss and separation.

What is the nature of mourning and how does the poet effectively announce his own literary birth through the elegy of another?

This is the core issue in literary history and the core issue for the *Book of the Duchess*.

But also remember the part in Book VI of the *Aeneid*, when Virgil writes an elegy on the death of Marcellus!
How is poetry an art form, a craft? Dante makes this argument throughout the book. If the purpose of the *Romance of the Rose* was to argue that loving is a craft, that there is an Art of Love, then Dante argues there is an Art of Poetry.

THUS, we see an image of Dante the artist in section XXXIV:

“I sat drawing an angel on some wooden boards”

Then: “I returned to my work of drawing figures of angels and as I drew, there came to me the idea of composing some anniversary verses.”

Remember Giotto here: the idea that, at the close of the 13th century in Italy, a new ideal of art emerges:

Realistic on the surface
Allegorical beneath

Art, and literary narrative, function as BOTH realistic representations of this world AND allegorical representations of the world of the imagination or the spirit
Beatrice reappears to Dante in a vision:

Section XXXIX:

Beatrice seems to appear to Dante “in a vivid impression” almost at the “ninth hour” “clothed in the crimson garments in which she first appeared before my eyes”

They key discussion here is the nature of sight! Dante responds to the ocular erotics of the Romance of the Rose; he wants to make clear that it is inner vision, not external sense impressions, that is the site of true love. “I was ashamed that my eyes had indulged in such inconstancy”

NOW, notice the imagery of the next section XL:

Dante begins by stating that it is the time when pilgrims go to St. Peter’s in Rome, to see the image of Veronica’s veil:

“the blessed image which Jesus Christ has left us as an imprint of his most beautiful countenance”

This image contrasts the imagery of human art and the sense impression of the everyday: it is a way of talking about a different kind of sensory experience
NOTE: this may or may not be the actual thing that Dante and his contemporaries saw in Rome in the late 13\textsuperscript{th} century. The object may have disappeared in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. This item is in Rome now, but it is unclear whether it is the same thing from the Middle Ages.

KEY POINT: the Veil has no Biblical authenticity; stories of the Veil emerge in the early Middle ages. By the year 1300 it becomes a prominent relic in Rome and the Pope, in that year, declared it a “wonder of the city.”

SO: for Dante and his readers, it is a very important image.
Whatever the nature of this relic, Dante uses it here in the VN for the following reasons:

To represent a form of pictorial representation that transcends human artistry

To provide an analogy to the ways in which spiritual images can imprint themselves on the imagination

To focus on the idea of Pilgrimage as a religious and social ritual that involves the journey to a physical object that is a representation of something holy and thus transcendentally non-physical

Love is a pilgrimage not only because it is a journey in Dante but because it is a journey to a spiritual state that transcends the physical

RELICS ARE THE SPIRITUAL VERSION OF THE BLAZON

BLAZON: RHETORICAL DISMEMBERMENT OF A WOMAN INTO HER BODY PARTS FOR PURPOSES OF EROTIC PLEASURE

RELIC: THE PHYSICAL DISMEMBERMENT OF A HOLY BODY INTO PARTS FOR PURPOSES OF SPIRITUAL HEALING
AT THE END OF THE VITA NUOVA:

Dante announces that he will write no more in this way

“I hope to compose concerning her what has never been written in rhyme of any woman. And then may it please Him who is the Lord of courtesy that my soul may go to see the glory of my lady, that is of the blessed Beatrice, who now in glory beholds the face of Him qui est per omnia secula benedictus”

SO HERE IS AN IMPORTANT QUESTION:

WHY DOES THE VITA NUOVA END IN LATIN?

COMPARE THE ENDING OF THE CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE BOOK OF THE DUCHESS NEXT WEEK:

THE DREAM VISION
THE ALLEGORY OF DESIRE
THE BOETHIAN TECHNIQUES OF TEACHING AND DISCUSSION
THE INFLUENCE OF VIRGIL AND THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE
READING THE SELF: THE POET AND THE BOOK
THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE POET’S BIRTH THROUGH ELEGY