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WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS: TURNING TO VISUAL ART IN MEDIEVAL ITALIAN LITERATURE

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In memory of Gladys D. Bruhns

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the representation of visual art in the poetry of Giacomo da Lentini, Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch through the lens of cultural practices for making, seeing, and interpreting art in late thirteenth and fourteenth century Italy. By turning to visual art, medieval Italian poets explored the possibilities for representing immaterial phenomena through the textual representation of an image, thereby exploiting tensions between artificial, naturalistic, and divine representation in order to convey meaning that is experienced rather than narrated to readers. My dissertation shows how these poets recurrently turn to art to reflect on representation not in terms of its verisimilar capacities, but rather as a means for inciting the reader to visualize, through text, phenomena that are typically experienced but unseen, thereby extending the limits of textual representation. While select studies have examined visual representation in individual works by these authors, no sustained critical study of the representation of visual art in medieval Italian literature exists. In adopting an interdisciplinary approach, this dissertation contributes to scholarship on visual and textual representation in late medieval Italy, making an intervention through the study of non-descriptive uses of ekphrasis employed by Italian poets in order to convey meaning that resists mimetic representation. My study uncovers heretofore unrecognized intervisual — in addition to intertextual — relationships in ways in which each author deploys visual art, revealing that in turning to visual art, medieval Italian poets dialogued with one another in developing a repertoire of images and practices for employing art as a means for representing immaterial and invisible phenomena through text.

In "turning to visual art", my dissertation considers the ways in which these poets develop a unique form of ekphrasis that is not concerned with visual content, but rather, with the kind of knowledge that visual experience can facilitate. How, for example, can visual terms be employed to transform external realia or experiences into immaterial images in the mind's eye?

Beginning with Giacomo da Lentini, the image of the poet's beloved is introduced as a representation of absence, and thus as a visual manifestation designed to convey the experience of longing rather than a physical description of the *donna*. By not describing his beloved yet using her image to convey the experience of her absence, Lentini invites readers to understand and empathize with his internal emotions, invoking mental images that bypass the need for external ones. Likewise for Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch, visual art becomes a means through which these poets call upon readers' own knowledge of emerging practices for seeing and engaging with visual art including painted walls, images of angels, and portraits, in order to convey immaterial phenomena understood through experience. My study examines the ways in which these medieval poets exploit conventions of visual art in order to represent immaterial phenomena with ethical, social, and religious meaning through text.

Introduction

> Humana man non credo che sospinta
> mai fosse a tanto ingegno quanto in quella
> mostrante ogni figura lì distinta
>   eccetto se da Giotto, al qual la bella
> natura parte di sé somigliante
> non occultò nell'arte in che suggella. (*Amorosa Visione IV.13-18)*[1]

> I do not believe human hand was ever
> extended with so much genius
> as every single figure there made manifest
>   unless by Giotto, from whom beautiful Nature
> hid no resemblant part of herself
> in the art on which he sets his seal.

In the fourth canto of the *Amorosa Visione*, Boccaccio depicts himself entering a room covered with paintings on all four walls. Significantly, these are not human made images, but rather representations of divine art designed to be contemplated in sequence, in order to impart morally edifying knowledge to the viewer. The images on the walls depict the triumphs of Wisdom, Earthly Glory, Wealth, and Love, followed by Fortune in a subsequent room, leading the reader to anticipate an ekprhastic description of these murals. How might Wisdom, for instance, be depicted in visual terms? Instead of describing the images, however, Boccaccio seeks to convey their unique quality by comparing them to the work of the celebrated artist, Giotto.[2] Although

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[1] Text cited from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Amorosa Visione*, ed. and trans. Robert Hollander, Timothy Hampton, Margherita Frankel (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986).
[2] Cited by Dante in *Purgatorio X* as surpassing the fame of his former mentor, the painter Cimabue, Giotto is later referenced by Boccaccio in both the *Amorosa Visione*, as well as the *Decameron,* making an appearance as a protagonist on the sixth day, fifth story. In Cantos X-XII of Dante's *Purgatorio* he describes three main scenes carved in relief on the terrace of the prideful, emphasizing what the figures *appear* to be saying in order to communicate their intended message, rather than providing readers with a textual composition of the artworks. Norman E. Land has observed this alongside Dante's reaction to those punished for their pride, who carry heavy caryatides (medieval sculptural decorations at the tops of columns), to argue that Dante describes the art through his reaction to it. He has also pointed out how this differs from Virgil's description of the painted wall in the Aeneid, where the narrator is responsible for communicating meaning to the viewer. See for example Norman E. Land, "The Poet's Eye I," in *The*

Boccaccio as narrator eventually lists the figures represented on each wall in the remainder of the text, his initial response to viewing the images is to compare them to human art. That is, in order to convey the extent and effect of the images' splendor to the reader, Boccaccio draws a comparison between divine representation and the art of a contemporary artist familiar to his readers, Giotto, demonstrating that his primary interest is in artistic execution rather than content. In emphasizing the achievement of Giotto's art in this passage, the natural hierarchies of representation are challenged given that the art of Nature, God's art, reveals its secrets to the Florentine painter; rather than a mere imitator of nature, Giotto is positioned as an artistic rival to divine art.

Through the *Amorosa Visione*'s comparison between Giotto's art and the art of Nature, Boccaccio points to several of the main questions concerning the representation of images that guide this project.[3] For example, in turning to visual art in order to convey the experience of observing images in the *Amorosa Visione*, Boccaccio suggests there is a lack or limitation in his ability to express the same conditions through words, relying instead on his reader's familiarity

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Viewer as Poet: The Renaissance Response to Art (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 49-71. In *Decameron* VI.5, Giotto is introduced as a master of natural representation even though his art is not mentioned in the novella. Rounding out the references to Giotto by the "three crowns" of Italian literature, Petrarch lists a *Madonna* painting by the painter among his possessions in his *Testament*, written in Padua in 1370, solidifying Giotto's presence and impact on theories of art and representation in Trecento literature. In describing Giotto's *Madonna* painting in his testament, Petrarch declares that, "The ignorant do not understand the beauty of this panel but the masters of art are stunned by it," underlining its intellectual value. See Jens T. Wollensen, "'Ut poesis pictura?': Problems of Images and Texts in the Early Trecento," in *Petrarch's Triumphs: Allegory and Spectacle*, ed. by Konrad Eisenblchler and Amilcare A. Ianucci (Ottowa: Dover House Editions Inc., 1999), pp. 183-210 (184); For the original Latin text and English translation, see Theodor E. Mommsen, *Petrarch's Testament* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957); on Petrarch's references to extant works of art of his time see, Ernest H. Wilkins, "On Petrarch's Appreciation of Art," in *Speculum*, 36:2 (1961), 299-301.

[3] Boccaccio's interest in the complex relationship between imitation and visual representation is further underlined through the *Amorosa Visione*'s imitation of Dante at the structural and figural level. In composing a dream vision with an accompanying guide in *terza rima*, the meter invented by Dante, Boccaccio imitates the framework of the *Commedia*. However by invoking the tension between divine and human representation, he also draws on Dante's example of *acheiroipoietic* art in the *canto X* of the *Purgatorio*. See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for more on Boccaccio's use of visual representation in both the *Decameron* and the *Amorosa Visione*.

with conventions for viewing and engaging with visual art in order to invoke images in their imagination that bypass the need for external ones. At stake then, is the problem of recreating the experience of viewing images through a non-visual medium, so that readers will immediately understand and empathize with the narrative as if observing an actual image. As such, it is not enough to ekphrastically narrate the visual content of the images, but rather in turning to a known artist, whose paintings could be seen and experienced, Boccaccio overcomes the limits of textual description by appropriating the effects that make Giotto's art come to life for viewers; that is, the ability to represent the natural world with such beauty, authority, and accuracy that it mirrors the experiences of viewers and even rivals God's own art. In evoking Giotto's art, Boccaccio thereby underlines a series of tensions concerning the role of textual and visual representation, including the relationship between human and divine art, the tension between materiality and experience, and the dynamics between internal and external visualization in connection to both images and text.

The representation of the narrator's experience in this passage of the *Amorosa Visione*, which pointedly sidelines the content of the paintings in an effort to focus on the experience of viewing art, raises a set of questions including how to represent immaterial phenomena like an experience, emotion, or spiritual presence, through visual media? And how does turning to visual art facilitate insights into the nature of both visual and textual representation, experience and knowledge?

This dissertation explores the ways in which medieval Italian poets including Giacomo da Lentini, Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch extend the possibilities and limits of textual representation by writing about art, by including representations of artistic practice, references to works of art, or allusions to the experience of viewing art at key moments in their work. I argue

that by turning to visual art, medieval Italian poets develop a framework for considering the ways in which images convey meaning that is experienced rather than narrated; that is, how the idea of images incites readers to visualize, remember, and reflect on lived experience, and poets can call upon readers' own knowledge of and engagement with visual art without recourse to an ekphrastic description of a work of art. At stake for these poets, then, is how visual experience might contribute to poetic understanding interpretation, and the ways in which engagement with visual art can be employed to not merely describe or narrate a situation but to activate readers' knowledge of phenomena that may be experiential in nature, or conceptual, but that lack material form.

In considering the representation of visual art in medieval Italian poetry my project examines three principle ways in which the poets engage with visual art in their texts: art in terms of the practice of making and creating works of art, by referring to either fictive or extant works of art, and by calling upon readers' own experiences of viewing or engaging with visual art. Each category corresponds to developments for making, interpreting, and engaging with visual art in late thirteenth and fourteenth century Italy, with authors turning to one or more of these modes of engagement. The shift from the two-dimensional iconic image to the representation of three-dimensional space in narrative cycles in the early Trecento expanded opportunities for medieval artists to develop pictorial devices that could convey a fuller range of human experience by exploiting tensions between artificial and naturalistic visual representation; for example, a painted figure could appear to enter into the same physical space as the viewer, or a divine being could be depicted in the act of materializing, bridging the earthly and spiritual planes and making an invisible form visible. By calling forth and appropriating these new ways of interpreting and engaging with material, visual, and artistic culture through text, medieval

Italian poets therefore also assumed ongoing tensions in medieval Italian art concerning the possibilities and limits for representing immaterial phenomena through a material form within their poetry.

In examining representations of visual art in medieval Italian literature through the lens of cultural practices for making, seeing, and interpreting art in the Trecento, this dissertation is concerned with the complex relationship between visual and textual representation, and the ways in which medieval Italian poets employ the verbal representation of an image, even when lacking a detailed description of its content, in order to challenge traditional boundaries for representing experience in a material form. I argue that rather than relying on the verisimilar capacities of visual representation, the authors in my study turn to visual art precisely in order to engage with the underlying tensions emerging in Trecento art concerning seeing and experiencing immaterial phenomena, from emotions, to behaviors, to spiritual encounters. In doing so, these poets develop a unique form of ekphrasis that is not concerned with visual content, but rather, with the kind of knowledge that visual experience can facilitate. If part of the process of seeing involves the transformation of external and material realia into internal and immaterial images beheld in the mind's eye, Trecento artists and poets attempt to effect the reverse of this process, by giving form to emotions, concepts, or spiritual phenomena. In turning to visual art at all, these poets explore tensions concerning the representation and the relationship of the visible and the invisible world, examining the role of representation in light of emerging practices for seeing and interpreting meaning through innovations to making and engaging with art. By focusing on moments when poets turn to visual art, my project does more than explore the complex surprising dynamics between visual and verbal representation in the work of each respective poet, but also sheds light on intervisual and intertextual relationships in the application of art for

each author. In observing when and how each poet turns to visual culture, it is possible to reveal an intervisual space made up of recurring images and patterns for employing textual representations of art that connect written language to readers' experiences in order to facilitate new possibilities for visualizing immaterial phenomena like social experiences or spiritual encounters. In turning to visual art, then, medieval Italian poets dialogued with one another in developing a repertoire of images and practices for employing art as a means for representing immaterial and invisible phenomena through text.

Although renewed interest in the practice of seeing and experiencing images in the late middle ages has led to recent studies on the application of optical and visual theory within medieval literature, no sustained critical study of the relationship between images and text in medieval Italian literature currently exists. I use this poetic phenomenon of "turning to visual art" as a lens through which to consider the ways in which medieval poets engage with theories of representation. My project adopts a chronological approach that traces the intervisual and textual relationships between these authors, through both recurring images and innovative ones, while also considering the correlation between visual representation in the texts and developments in visual art in the Trecento period. This dissertation contributes to scholarship in late medieval Italian literature and visual art by shedding light on the ways in which medieval poets turned to practices for making, viewing, and engaging with art in order to challenge the limits for representing the visible and invisible world, and significantly, in revealing an intervisual and textual dialogue between medieval Italian poets concerning the role of visual representation within their texts.

I. "Ut pictura poesis" in the Trecento: Representation Without Imitation

The relationship between text and image is often interpreted through the lens of the Horatian notion, "ut pictura poesis," or "as is painting, so is poetry".[4] Historically, this argument has been used to suggest that there is a necessary similarity or comparability between the literary and visual arts in terms of their respective abilities to represent the natural world.[5] Underpinning the comparison between visual and textual media then is the question of the imitation of nature; that is, how text and images represent and reproduce nature, from the depiction of individuals to the portrayal of everyday life. Prompted by the "rediscovery" of naturalistic representation through literary and artistic models from antiquity, both artists and writers in the late medieval period investigated the efficacy of visual and textual media to achieve verisimilar representation, imitating the techniques and methods of the ancients in the process, including Pliny the Elder's descriptions of artists and visual representation in Book 35 of the *Natural History*.[6] Encouraged by the development of three-dimensional space in painting, artists and writers alike were deeply invested in developing theories of imitation that would establish ways of evaluating and categorizing verisimilar representation.[7] However, for medieval viewers who relied on images to

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[4] See Horace, and H. Rushton Fairclough, *Satires: Epistles: The Art of Poetry*, Loeb Classical Library 194 (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1926).

[5] The endeavor to produce verisimilar conditions that facilitated the audiences' engagement with text or images motivated artistic and literary creation in the Renaissance, leading to the development of literary and pictorial devices that would rival nature. In terms of scholarship on verisimilar representation, the notion that literature is modeled after and transforms the material world is not novel. The authoritative study on the role of mimesis in early modern to contemporary literature remains Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. See the recent edition edited and translated by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[6] On the appropriation of Pliny's description of art and artists by medieval Italian poets, especially Boccaccio, see Paul F. Watson, "The Cement of Fiction: Giovanni Boccaccio and the Painters of Florence," in *MLN*, 99:1 (1984), pp. 43-64, and Justin Steinberg, "Mimesis on Trial: Legal and Literary Similitude in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," in *Representations*, 139:1 (2017), pp. 118-145.

[7] Widely considered the first post-classical treatise on visual theory, Leon Battista Alberti's *De Pictura* (1435), established a tradition for evaluating the practice of making and viewing visual art in terms of technical accuracy, that is, through the proportionate use of perspective, space, and distance in painting to achieve three-dimensional representation on a two-dimensional surface. See Leon Battista Alberti and

convey and reinforce their beliefs concerning the metaphysical world, developments in verisimilar representation were predominantly applied to depictions of spiritual beings or heavenly spaces in order to make these figures and structures visible; that is, developments in visual representation created new possibilities for representing the life and experiences of divine figures, encompassing a fuller range of knowledge and emotions that previously were inaccessible through flatter, less dimensional images. Consequently, emerging practices for representing and viewing the surrounding world in Trecento visual art were increasingly juxtaposed with the sight, interpretation, and cultural practices for engaging with immaterial and divine phenomena recurrent in visual representation in the middle ages, thereby setting up the tension between physical and spiritual or immaterial representation exploited by medieval poets in the turn to art in their texts.

To examine the relationship between vision and its cultural determinants in the medieval period is also to situate it in the context of the intellectual traditions preceding and following it, especially the Renaissance. Traditionally studies focused on the "rebirth" of naturalistic representation and perspective in the Renaissance have eclipsed the study of developing visual theories in the middle ages, nearly rendering them a contradiction, given that a "rediscovery" negates the possibility of continuity with the immediately preceding traditions. Consequently, the relationships between making, viewing, engaging with, and writing about visual art in the late medieval period have received significantly less attention than parallel phenomena in the Renaissance. In considering the representation of visual art through text prior to the Renaissance then, my study is interested in the relationship between vision and knowledge as determined through the social practices and spiritual beliefs in late medieval Italy, and realized through the

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Rocco Sinisgalli, *On Painting: A New Translation and Critical Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

textual representation making, viewing, and engaging with images that is not strictly dependent upon mimetic descriptions of the work of art in question. How do texts exploit conventions of visual art in order to represent immaterial phenomena – ethical, social, and spiritual meaning – through a poetic structure.

In examining parallel relationships for representing experience through visual and textual media, my study is indebted to the work of both literary scholars and art historians writing in the last thirty years or so, who have begun to revisit the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in order to shed light on the complex tensions underpinning visual and verbal representation in late medieval Italy, including the work of Michael Baxandall, Norman Land, Michelangelo Picone, and Enrico Fenzi, who have observed not only rivalries but also ways in which text and images grapple with different ways of representing similar concepts.[8] Picone's studies on the *Vita Nuova* in particular have guided my reading of the correlation between Dante's poetic or authorial development and practices of reading, editing, and engaging with visual representations which, in the context of the *libello* reveal an ascending order of images of the beloved that increasingly reflect and ultimately merge with divinity through the dualistic nature of a visual representation like that of the Veronica Veil.[9] Fenzi also provides a model for considering how visual representation presents an opportunity for poets to construct a physical approximation of a

[8] See Norman E. Land, *The Viewer As Poet: The Renaissance Response to Art* (University Park, P.A.: Pennsylvannia University Press, 1994); Michael Baxendall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), especially the second chapter, "The Period Eye", pp. 29-108, and *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350-1450* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Creighton Gilbert, *Poets Seeing Artists' Work: Instances in the Italian Renaissance* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1991); Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York: Phaidon, 2014).
[9] See Michelangelo Picone "Strutture poetiche e strutture prosastiche nella *Vita Nuova*," in *MLN*, 92 (1977), pp. 117-129 and "Peregrinus amoris: la metafora finale," in *Vita Nuova e tradizione romanza* (Padova: Liviana Editrice, 1979), pp. 129-192; On authorial development in the *Vita Nuova* and elsewhere in Dante, see also Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of the Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

spiritual or absent presence through an image in observing a subtle reference to the Veronica Veil in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, indicating a continuity in the ways in which these poets employ images to convey spiritual experience.[10] And in recent studies, Paolo Borsa, Vincent Moleta, and Teodolinda Barolini have suggested that the use of images to represent spiritual presence bears a relationship to the representation of absence conveyed through the portraits of the beloved imprinted on the heart, as first introduced in the poetry of Giacomo da Lentini.[11]

Through identifying and isolating moments of visual representation or experience within the texts of these medieval poets, and interpreting them through the lens of spiritual representation or emotional longing, these scholars have set a precedent for considering the ways in which visual representation in medieval Italian literature points to meaning beyond itself, that is, how representations of visual art convey experience like longing or spiritual presence without framing it as such. These studies have tended to revolve around one central image in the work of one author, revealing important patterns in the use of recurring images while also narrowing the possibility of noticing further intervisual connections in uses of visual art among medieval Italian poets. My dissertation contributes to the emerging dialogue of the role of visual representation in medieval Italian literature by addressing in a chronological order the significant ways in which the poets turn to visual art beginning with the poetry of Giacomo da Lentini, followed by Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch. Although my approach is guided by the previously cited studies in terms of considering the relationship between visual representation and meaning that reveals a

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[10] See Enrico Fenzi. "Note Petrarchesche *R.V.F.* XVI: *Movesi il vecchierel,*" in *Italianistica: Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, 25:1 (1996), pp. 43-62.

[11] See in particular Paolo Borsa, "L'immagine nel cuore e l'immagine nella mente" dal Notaro alla 'Vita Nuova' attraverso I due Guidi," in *Les deux Guidi: Guinizelli et Cavalcanti: Mourir d'aimer et autres ruptures*, ed. Marina Gagliano, Philippe Guérin, Raffaella Zanni (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2016), pp. 75-92, and "Immagine e immaginazione: una lettura della *Vita Nuova*," in *Letteratura e Arte*, 16 (2008), pp. 139-157; see also Teodolinda Barolini Andrew Frisardi, and Richard Lansing eds., *Dante's Lyric Poetry: Poems of Youth and the 'Vita Nuova'* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

spiritual, moral, or emotional concept, my study differs from existing scholarship in that it identifies representations of visual art not as ekphrastic descriptions of visual media, but rather as intentionally denying the description of art in order to incite the reader to imagine and empathize with the types of experiences generated through the idea or emotion conveyed by the images. That is, my dissertation is specifically interested in the ways in which medieval Italian poets turn to visual art in order to explore possibilities for conveying experience that resists representation by invoking the reader's own familiarity with conventions for viewing and engaging with visual art, thereby eliminating the need for an external representation. In exploring the ways in which medieval Italian poets appropriate practices for seeing and engaging with visual art in order to convey immaterial phenomena, my dissertation uniquely examines the stakes of considering visual representational through a non-visual and material format, like text.

II. Between Angels and Icons: Turning to Visual Art

In the late Duecento the potential for representing the visible world through art significantly changed with the transition from the two-dimensional image to the representation of three-dimensional space in painting. Significantly, this transition expanded opportunities for developing verisimilar representation, moving away from the flat and non-spatially specific representation of figures in Byzantine art. In a recent study, Péter Bokody has shown that fourteenth century pictorial realism, developed through spatial coherence between figures in an image, allowed for a more imitative depiction of space, time, and emotion in paintings.[12] Although references to reality or nature were not absent from images produced prior to 1300, the transition to images engaging with three-dimensional space in the Trecento created

[12] See Péter Bokody, *Images-within-Images in Italian Painting (1250-1350): Reality and Reflexivity* (Burlington, V.T.: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 1-9.

unprecedented opportunities for painters to explore the relationship between artificial and natural space in painting.

The painter most celebrated for employing the representations of three-dimensional space and thereby reintroducing the naturalistic representation into the visual arts, is Giotto.[13] Despite Giotto's synonymy with pictorial realism however, art historians have recently begun to reconsider his development of three-dimensional space through theories of seeing and viewing sacred images in the late medieval period. Andrew Ladis for example, has shown that Giotto's representation of virtues and vices in the Scrovegni Chapel elicits a reading of the overall fresco cycle that is built on a method of comparing and contrasting visual registers of images, inviting readers to engage with the figures depicted as though through the act of spiritual meditation.[14] Likewise, Mary Pardo has suggested that Giotto's innovative use of spatial devices like gestures and architectural portals is designed to facilitate the representation of the point of mediation between the natural and metaphysical worlds.[15] For example, in analyzing the *Annunciation of Saint Anne* fresco in the "Life of Joachim" cycle of the Scrovegni chapel, Pardo points to the representation of the angel entering through the frame of a window as a literalization of the moment when the divine becomes visible. The angel, whose torso enters into the physical space of the Anne's home, and is thus visible to the kneeling Anne, is completely truncated by the architectural divide between interior and exterior space. That the rest of the angel's body

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[13] Giotto's life and artistic production developed in parallel to Dante's writing. Born circa 1267 and living until 1337, he is responsible for the fresco cycles in the Scrovegni Chapel, in Padua, likely painted between 1303-1305.

[14] Ladis has also drawn attention to how the necessarily comparative reading initiated by the presence of the virtues and vices aligns with late medieval practices of memory, rhetoric, and meditation by engaging the cognitive principles of similarity, analogy, and contrariety. See Andrew Ladis, *Giotto's O* (2008), p. 17. For more on medieval memory and the crafting of images see Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*: *Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[15] See Mary Pardo, "Giotto and the 'Things Not Seen, Hidden in the Shadow of Natural Ones,'" in *Artibus et Historiae*, 18:36 (1997), pp. 41-53.

disappears on the external side of the window frame underlines the issue concerning the visibility of immaterial and spiritual beings, and reveals the subtle ways in which Giotto's art engages with the question of ways of seeing and representing immaterial phenomena in the Trecento, which is central to my consideration of visual art in this project.

Figure 1. Annunciation to Saint Anne, Scenes from the Life of Joachim, Giotto, Arena Chapel, Padua, c. 1304-1306. ©Web Gallery of Art, accessed 08/05/2020.

As Hans Belting has shown, there is a precedent for considering the intersection of sight and images in the late Duecento that anticipates Giotto's visual study of divine representation. In *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art,* Belting provides a historical periodization of the sacred images, and the practice of seeing and making images, from

Byzantium to the late middle ages.[16] His study contextualizes the role of icons, or sacred images believed to portray not just a likeness, but rather, the very presence of the divine in medieval images, such as in the case of portraits of icons, or "acheiropoietic" objects and relics. In this context, the relationship between the viewer and the image is one of veneration, so that engagement with the image was considered spiritually moralizing. However, in alignment with shifting social conditions and to accommodate the interests of viewers, images were subsequently transposed from more traditional private spaces to a public setting accessible to wider audiences, a transition that also facilitated the wider development of secular images outside of a religious setting and thus a reconsideration of the function of seeing and engaging with images. For example, in considering the representation of a traditional devotional image, the Madonna enthroned, Belting shows that its iconography evolved from an isolated image in a panel painting to a mural fresco in which the Madonna is accompanied by other divine and human figures categorized by a divine order of being, such as in Duccio's *Maestà,* citing the emerging mendicant orders, particularly the Franciscans, and rising urbanism as the underlying motivation for the transition from the icon to the narrative scene.[17] Central to this evolution then, is the question of access and engagement with images, and also what it means to materialize divine presence through visual representation. In tracing the development of viewing and engaging with icons, Belting demonstrates how Giotto and fellow medieval painters Duccio and Simone Martini created art that sought to address the tension between the representation of visible and immaterial objects, revealing the influence of spiritual practices of seeing and experiencing images in their respective stylistic development.

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[16] See Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
[17] See Belting, *Likeness and Presence* (1993), pp. 349-351.

In examining the intersection of optical theory and cultural practices of seeing through the lens of textual depictions of visual representation, experiences of looking, or artistic practice, this project traces the evolution of images as bearers of experiential meaning in medieval Italian literature. That is, I argue that rather than relying on the verisimilar capacities of visual representation, medieval Italian authors including Giacomo da Lentini, Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch turned to visual art in order to appropriate and engage with underlying issues emerging in Trecento art concerning the representation of immaterial phenomena, like divine presences, in their own literary production. In so doing, these authors develop a visual poetics concerned with the representation of the absent and imperceptible in their texts, from the geographically inaccessible *donna* of the lyric poets to the divine likeness of Beatrice in Dante. In turning to art in order to give form to abstract concepts like emotions or behaviors, Boccaccio extends the issue of representing the unseen to include questions of social decorum. Given the mimetic challenge posed by the endeavor to represent the abstract or invisible, the turn to visual art by these medieval poets also addresses the tension between vision and knowledge by drawing on practices of seeing and optical theories designed to explain the phenomenon of experience and the relationship of seeing to cognition.

III. Structure

This dissertation follows the chronological development of the representation of visual art in medieval Italian literature of the Trecento. In beginning this study with Giacomo da Lentini, traditionally considered the earliest poet in the Italian literary canon, and the first to represent visual media like paintings in his poetry, I trace the evolution of the representation of visual art in subsequent medieval literature, in particular through a chapter on Dante's *Vita*

Nuova and one on Boccaccio's *Decameron*. The coda to this dissertation examines Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and *Familiar Letters*. My purpose in adopting a chronological structure is to contextualize the employment of visual representation within the literature of the main canonical authors of medieval Italian literature. Ultimately, this dissertation shows that the representation of visual art in medieval Italian literature is not strictly used as a means for conveying verisimilar representation. Rather, in turning to art, medieval Italian activate their readers' knowledge and experience of visual culture to invoke experience and emotion, that is, immaterial phenomena that resist visual representation. Significantly, the appearance of recurring images and practices for employing art reveals intervisual textual connections across texts and authors that indicate a dialogue concerning the role of representation among these authors, and introduce a new lens for considering the relationship between visual and textual representation in late medieval Italian literature.

Chapter 1 ("Painting the Air: Nature and Art in Lyric Poetry") examines the earliest inclusion of the representation of visual art in the medieval Italian canon, and specifically the introduction of painting and painters within the vernacular poetry of Giacomo da Lentini. As the first Italian author to turn to visual art in the Italian literary tradition, Lentini set a precedent for the ways in which future writers, including Dante, employed references to visual art to express meaning that resists mimetic representation. In particular, he introduces the image of the beloved painted on the poet's heart, an image that suggests not her physical likeness, but her presence, in spite of her absence. Lentini also turns to the practice of painting in order to express emotions like frustration and desire. It is thus through Lentini that the association between visual art and the representation of experience, is established. I argue that Giacomo da Lentini draws on references to images in Provençal lyric poetry and medieval optical theory to establish a practice

for the medieval Italian literary tradition in which visual art specifically conveys affective experience to viewers. I argue that by considering the relationship between affect, emotion, and visual representation, Lentini shows how painting can be employed as a device that represents experience. In turning to visual art, Lentini also raises the question of the potential of verbal and visual representation, employing descriptions of visual phenomena to explore the representational possibilities for both images and text.

Chapter 2 ("Picturing Angels, Seeing Beatrice: Representation Beyond the Material") explores Dante's turn to visual art in order to appropriate and reinterpret the image of the beloved, rendering Beatrice not only a portrait in absence, but a reflection of divinity according to his spiritual and ethical schema. The *Vita Nuova* in particular explores the translation of visual experience into verbal description, merging different references to works of visual art, including painting, with both prose and verse in order to experiment with effective modes of representation. I show that Dante turns to visual representation, both at a structural level through the prosimetrum format, and at the figural level, through his employment of images, to develop a context through which material objects transcend their physical limitations in a reflection of divine order and grace. This chapter reveals that the privilege of images to transcend material limitations ultimately presents the poet with a model for constructing liminal spaces through which to explore the intersection between the physical and divine causes of his love. Focusing on the *Vita Nuova* permits me to examine how Dante's use of visual art to convey divine order and presence creates a framework through which he explores the implications of creating *acheiroipoietic* art in the *Commedia*.

Chapter 3 ("Painting without Precedent in the *Decameron"*) considers how Boccaccio appropriates recurring images used by Dante, like the angelic appearance of the beloved, in order to question the ethical and moral significance of cultural practices in light of changing social conditions in the late Trecento. More than his predecessors, Boccaccio's representations of visual art in the *Decameron* reveal his intimate knowledge of pictorial development and specific works of art in the fourteenth century, leading to an increased presence of art, both fictional and extant, throughout the text. In this chapter I argue that in considering both the spiritual and secular function of images in the Trecento, Boccaccio explores ways in which visual art can subtly critique and subvert established norms by providing a material, form to otherwise non-mimetic experiences like behaviors, desires, and moral failings. In treating these immaterial behaviors and themes as art objects, Boccaccio is able to consider them in terms of their economic and social value, their effects on viewers, and as objects to be exchanged, coveted, or used to subvert their theological or ethical significance. Central to his investigation is the tension between visual and textual representation in terms of each medium's freedom to depict unprecedented and innovative themes, underlining the complex rivalry and collaboration between visual and textual media that underpins the text. In engaging with pictorial stylistic development and the artists of his time in the *Decameron*, making them the protagonists of several *novellas*, Boccaccio also raises implications for his own identification as a visual artist despite his recognition as a writer.

The coda ("Painting for Posterity"), examines Petrarch's engagement with the art of self-portraiture and its relationship to the poet's construction of his persona and reputation for posterity, so that the image represents his true genius and intellectual likeness to readers. At stake are the potentially surface level and incorrect assumptions made about Petrarch and his

work by uneducated viewers, and the question of how a visual representation of the poet's likeness can convey awareness of his scholarship and merits through a material form. I argue that by appropriating the recurring images generated by his predecessors, including the portrait of the beloved, Petrarch instead turns the reflection of the images' meaning inward, expressing concern with the limitations of a visual image to represent Petrarch's true essence, or intelligence and character, to viewers. In so doing, he shifts the focus of visual representation developed through Lentini, Dante, and Boccaccio from a reflection of spiritual or ethical concerns to one of self-legacy. While Petrarch's employment of visual art emphasizes the representation of experience and knowledge rather than verisimilitude, and is thus conceptually in alignment with the other poet's turn to visual art within the Trecento, his transition to the expression of self re-poses the question of what it means to imitate natural likeness of a person through art. In this respect, his interest in portraiture and the expression of self-identity edges closer to the discourse on naturalistic representation, raising implications for understanding the development of aesthetic theory in early fifteenth century visual culture, and more broadly, within humanism.

Chapter One: Painting the Air: Nature and Art in Lyric Poetry

Giacomo da Lentini is considered the first Italian poet to include metaphors of painting in his poems, setting a precedent for the ways in which future writers, including Dante, employed references to visual art to examine the role of representation. [1] In particular, Lentini introduces the image of the beloved painted on the poet's heart, an image that suggests not her physical likeness, but her presence, in spite of her absence within his poetry. As a notary at the exceptionally cosmopolitan court of Frederick II, Lentini would have been exposed to a broad range of literary and artistic styles in a court that bridged late Byzantine and early European medieval cultures in terms of doctrine, politics, religion, and even literary and artistic expression even though not necessarily an artist himself.[2] Although Lentini's primary sources of visual influence remain unclear, his experience at court likely determined his approach to visual theory and representation through his engagement with philosophical doctrines on vision in circulation at the time. For example, despite the fact that Lentini does not refer to paintings or other works of art in each one of his approximately forty existing poems, contemporary readers of Lentini would recognize predominant elements of medieval visual and philosophical theory throughout his poetry. This includes poetic interpretations of Andreas Capellanus' twelfth century treatise, *De Amore,* demonstrating the continuation of pre-established visual theories from nearby European cultures, and their induction within the medieval Italian literary tradition.

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[1] On Lentini's role as the originator of the sonnet form and his overall corpus, see Richard Lansing ed., *The Complete Poems of Giacomo da Lentini* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); Christopher Kleinheinz, "The Early Italian Sonnet (1220-1321)", pp. 76-7; Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante and the Lyric Past," in *Dante and Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 23-46; and Gianfranco Contini ed., *Poeti del Duecento* (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1995), pp. 49-90. See also Paolo Borsa, "L'immagine nel cuore e l'immagine nella mente" dal Notaro alla 'Vita Nuova' attraverso i due Guidi," (2016), pp. 75-92; Vincent Moleta, Voi le vedete Amor pinto nel viso (V.N. XIX, 12), *Dante Studies*, *with Annual Report of the Dante Society*, No. 110 (1992), pp. 57-75.

[2] See Vincent Moleta, "Voi le vedete Amor pinto nel viso (*V.N.,* XIX, 12): The Roots of Dante's Metaphor," in *Dante Studies*, 110 (1992), pp. 57-75; On the influence of Byzantine iconography in late medieval Italian art see Belting, "Pilgrims, Emperors, and Confraternities: Veneration of Icons in Byzantium and Venice," in *Likeness and Presence* (1993), pp. 184-207.

Beginning with Lentini, the poets of the Italian love lyric turned to natural philosophy, including the models created by Capellanus, in order to investigate the physical mechanics of love, drawing on optical theory in particular to convey the depths of love's potentially destructive nature. As such, recurring images that emerged in lyric poems through the endeavor to describe the effects of love on the poet's sight, including love's arrow piercing the poet's eye or heart physically, and the transformation of the poet into a statue or stone through a Medusa-like glance from his beloved.[3] Recurrently, the poet's beloved *donna* was responsible for projecting deadly arrows in the lover's direction, not through the use of a bow or similar device, but rather through her eyes; that is, the donna's *gaze* became a device for inflicting emotional turmoil on the poet, through a single glance.[4] However, despite the mortal risk posed by engaging with the *donna*, these poets still yearned to behold her, thus comparing her appearance to objects found in nature as surrogates reflecting her likeness, especially in her absence. In representing the effects of love, medieval Italian poets therefore explored a tension between the experience of seeing the *donna* in person and apprehending her image in her absence. Central to the question of representation of the *donna* in the love lyric then is the relationship between sight and experience, and the role of images in recreating an impression of the beloved's presence.

Comparisons between nature and the beauty of the *donna* inevitably invoke the question of visual representation; it is through a portrait, for example, that the lady's image can be

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[3] These are recurring themes in particular in the poetry of Guido Guinizelli's sonnet "Lo vostro bel salute e 'l gentil sguardo," for example, as well as Guido Cavalcanti's poem, "Tu m'hai sì piena di dolor la mente". For more on both poems see Gianfranco Contini ed., *Poeti del Duecento* (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1995).

[4] On the evolution of tropes related to seeing and representing the *donna* see especially Paolo Borsa, "L'immagine nel cuore e l'immagine nella mente" dal Notaro alla 'Vita Nuova' attraverso i due Guidi," in *Les deux Guidi: Guinizelli et Cavalcanti: Mourir d'aimer et autres ruptures*, ed. Marina Gagliano, Philippe Guérin, Raffaella Zanni (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2016), pp. 75-92; Ronald L. Martinez, "Guido Cavalcanti's 'Una figura della donna mia' and the Specter of Idolatry Haunting the Stilnovo," in *Exemplaria*, 15 (2003), pp. 297-324; Vincent Moleta, Voi le vedete Amor pinto nel viso (V.N. XIX, 12), *Dante Studies*, *with Annual Report of the Dante Society*, No. 110 (1992), pp. 57-75.

preserved and sustained in a way that might even be more approachable than the "live" version of the *donna*. As such, in drawing visual comparisons between the appearance of the *donna* and the beauty of nature, the medieval lyric poets discovered new ways to visualize the lady's power of her love, and to represent the *donna's* likeness in her absence through visual art. Giacomo da Lentini's poem "Meravigliosamente", for example, includes the representation of the beloved's portrait imprinted on the poet's heart. By increasingly turning to visual art in order to convey impressions like beauty or absence then, Lentini and his contemporaries developed new means for exalting the lady and giving a visible form to her virtues. In this respect, the poets' primary interest in turning to visual art was not to accurately imitate the *donna*'s physical features, but rather to depict her inherent qualities, like her pity and kindness, which motivate the poets to write poems in her honor, following the *Provençal* tradition. By turning to visual art, the lyric poets thus explored the idea of what a portrait can convey, especially in terms of its ability to provide a material and visible structure to an immaterial phenomena like experience.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the act of seeing was intrinsically connected to ethical, moral, and theological issues concerning the understanding of the world. Such reliance on sight to interpret social, theological, and epistemological questions enabled poets and artists to draw on philosophical theories of vision, in order to ask questions about the nature of representation in both poetry and art.[5] Following the lead of natural philosophers, Italian poets

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[5] On the relationship between emerging themes in visual representation based on natural philosophy see Frede Jensen ed., *Tuscan Poetry of the Duecento: An Anthology* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc.), pp. xviii-xx; Also, Giorgio Agamben, "The Word and the Phantasm: The Theory of the Phantasm in the Love Poetry of the Duecento," in *Stanzas*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 63-134; Wayne J. Storey, "Part One: Pre-Pretrarchan Experiments in Written Poetics," in *Transcription and Visual Poetics in the Early Italian Lyric* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993), pp. 5-200; Karla Malette, "Rereading Le Origini: Sicilian Romance Poetry and the Language of Natural Philosophy," in *The Kingdom of Sicily, 1100-1250: A Literary History* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2005); see also Rossed Arqués ed., *La poesia di Giacomo da Lentini: Scienza e filosofia nel XIII secolo in Sicilia e nel mediterraneo occidentale: Atti di convegno tenutosi*

took a particular interest in reconciling their experiences in the world with theological and metaphysical beliefs through their poems, such as the question of love and its effects on the body.[6] In employing Capellanus' theory to explain his experience of lovesickness to readers then, Lentini developed a structure for rationalizing his actions and emotions influenced by his love. And in turning to both natural philosophy and visual representation in order to represent the effects and experience of love, Lentini establishes a relationship between visual art and the representation of experience within the Italian lyric.

This chapter explores Lentini's invention of a visual poetics that uniquely challenges the traditional limits of visual representation by emphasizing the depiction of the unseen. That the first image of painting within poetry is introduced alongside the emergence of the vernacular lyric tradition, underlines the tensions between verbal and visual representation raised by Lentini in employing descriptions of visual phenomena through a poetic structure. However, the motivation to depict immaterial phenomena, from emotions to attitudes, is also a consequence of the influence of natural philosophy, through efforts to understand the relationship between body, mind, and soul, that is, the dichotomy between the external and internal senses. In examining Giacomo da Lentini's turn to visual representation within his poetry and his adoption of late medieval optical theories, this chapter argues that the relationship between art and nature is therefore central to the development of the poetics of praise in the Italian lyric tradition. By considering the relationship between affect, emotion, and visual representation, Lentini shows how painting can be employed as a device that represents experience, establishing a precedent

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all'Università Autonoma di Barcellona (16-18, 23-24 ottobre 1997)" (Palermo: Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani, 2000).

[6] For more on Andreas Capellanus see *The Art of Courtly Love*, ed. and trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). On the diffusion of *De Amore* among twelfth and thirteenth century poets see Don A. Monson, *Andreas Capellanus, Scholasticism, and the Courtly Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2005).

that impacts the representation of visual art in medieval Italian poetry throughout the thirteenth century.

I. Vision before Perspective: Natural philosophy in the Trecento

The relationship between visual and textual representation is fundamentally also a question of the relationship between vision and knowledge. Before Leon Battista Alberti published his treatise on art, *De pictura,* in the early fifteenth century however, there was a less formulated understanding of how practices for making and engaging with art were specifically connected to social and religious expectations for representation in the late medieval period. Alberti's treatise formulated practical approaches to creating art and also explained the newly discovered theory of linear perspective. Significantly, it was written for the general public, indicating a certain level of cultural awareness, appreciation, and interest in visual theory existed in medieval Italy during this time.[7] According to Alberti's description of the painter's relationship to sight at the start of Book 1, the aim of painting is to represent the visible. He writes,

> I call a sign anything which exists on a surface so that it is visible to the eye. No one will deny that things which are not visible do not concern the painter, for he strives to represent only the things that are seen. (*De pictura*, I.ii)

At the origins of the first established art theory then, the objective of painters is to represent seen things or objects, visible on a particular surface by the viewer's eye, and not mediated through any other internal sense. Later in Book II of the treatise Alberti argues that painters and Nature share the common goal to represent what is visible, and argues that in fact, painting derives three

[7] Alberti did, however, follow up this work with a version he translated himself into Latin, *De pictura* (1439-41), which was more technical and aimed directly at scholars. See Leon Battista Alberti, and Rocco Sinisgalli, *Leon Battista Alberti: On Painting: A New Translation and Critical Edition*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); also, Giuseppe, Barbieri. *L'inventore Della Pittura: Leon Battista Alberti E Il Mito Di Narciso* (Vicenza: Terra Ferma, 2000).

core properties of representation from Nature: first, objects are observed and recognized within a space; second, the object's dimensions are appreciated and evaluated next to surrounding surfaces; finally, the colors of the object are observed and noted according to the lighting through which it is perceived, what Alberti refers to as the "reception of light". These claims underline the relationship between painting and Nature, and foreground the theory that the ultimate goal of painting according to fourteenth century Italian aesthetic theory is to accurately and realistically represent to the viewer what can be seen in nature.

In Book I of *De pictura*, Alberti expands his claim that the goal of painting is to represent what is visible by defining the kinds of shapes and lines that appear on a surface, and emphasizing that these forms may appear differently according to lighting and the viewpoint of the observer. Besides emphasizing naturalistic, or direct representation, Alberti's text also sheds light on early modern approaches to viewership by taking into consideration alterations to the object based on its distance from the viewer, background lighting, and relationship to its surroundings. It is crucial to note from Alberti's claims that, although two dimensional, painting is approached as a three-dimensional experience both for the painter in the process of representation, and also for the final observation of the viewer. That is, both the painter and the viewer consider the object or its painted representation from a particular perspective, and therefore experience the object or its representation based on the material conditions that make it possible for the object to be seen, such as adjacent structural forms or the effects of light. This suggests that at least by the Quattrocento, accounting for the viewer's perspective and physical experience of a work of art through his or her unique perception of elements such as lighting and space, was established as essential criteria for evaluating the aesthetic value of visual art.

The theory described by Alberti in *De pictura* set a precedent for how early modern scholars interpreted approaches to visual art that has obstructed attempts to understand how both artists and viewers of art engaged with painting or sculpture before the theory was codified. For example, Giorgio Vasari's *Le vite de' piú eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani* (c. 1550) which examines the biographies and theories of the greatest Italian artists going back to the thirteenth century painter, Cimabue, opens with instructions for how to determine if a painting is of good or bad quality, emphasizing accurate spacing as determined by the viewer's eye, and the naturalness of the main object or figure's appearance in terms of color and light. Given that both Vasari and Alberti's views on art theory were supported by evidence found in literary sources, such as Dante in his comparison between Cimabue and Giotto's abilities to represent nature in *Purgatorio XI*, or Boccaccio's praise of Giotto's masterful skill in representing nature in *Decameron* V.6, it is surprising to note that only recently have scholars begun look deeper into visual theory in the thirteenth century, before it was systemized by Alberti or Vasari.[8]

The extromission theory of vision remained influential in the late thirteenth century, in which the eye sent out an optical ray that connected with the viewed object then returned to the eye transporting an understanding of the true meaning of the object, and finally conveyed this information to the mind or the heart where the object was visualized.[9] This theory established a

[8] See *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. R. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), especially Chapter 8 by Michael Camille, "Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing," pp. 197-223. See also Petér Bokody, *Images-within-Images in Italian Painting (1250-1350): Reality and Reflexivity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015).

[9] Although Augustine does not address visual art directly, he did take a keen interest in imagery of dreams and prophecies. In general Augustine laid out a hierarchy including three levels of vision within his writing, the highest being intellectual vision which is the only level that could facilitate perception of divine truths. This was followed by spiritual vision, which was connected to images and dreams, and finally at the lowest level there was corporeal vision, which includes physical sight. See Cynthia Hahn,

tenable relationship between vision and knowledge, insofar as the understanding aspect of seeing was mediated by the mind and the memory; that is, just seeing with the eyes was not considered enough of a resource to facilitate understanding an object in plain view of the beholder. Rather, interpreting and understanding an object extended from the intersection of the rays that 'grabbed' an image of the object meeting with the viewer's mind and repository of knowledge and experiences in order to provide an understanding of the object. In this sense, the act of seeing quite literally required active participation from the viewer in the form of contemplation in order to facilitate the process of taking in and understanding a perceived object. The cognitive activity implied by the contemplative part of extromission theory is lacking in Alberti's flatter, or more immediate description of viewership, which relies on the distance and light perceived directly by the eyes according to the viewer's angle of perception. The incongruities between the internalized visual phenomena of extromission theory and the more materialist Albertian theory of vision, which are only separated by one century, reveal shifting practices for seeing and interpreting visual phenomena in the late medieval world.

Extromission theory continued to have a widespread impact on optical perception throughout the middle ages, with theories of vision also intervening in questions of religious belief and an effort to understand how corporeal sight could lead to unhindered perception of the divine. The underlying question developed through these theories ultimately asked both viewers and makers of images to consider how to give form to the invisible; that is, how to understand visual experience. Late Byzantine cultural influence addressed this question through the cult of the divine images, which introduced the practice of contemplating a divine portrait to catch a

"Vision" in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Normal Europe* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), pp. 44-64.

glimpse of the divine spirit itself.[10] In this method, "activating" or "entering" into a space of divine sight was through solitary contemplation of an image that would trigger a vision. Artistically, this also raised the profile of portraiture and the idea of capturing an individual's likeness for the purposes of recalling its unique characteristics.

At the same time as Byzantine life and culture faded in thirteenth century Italy image making, Gothic adornment and architecture rapidly gained in popularity in France and northern Europe. This is because according to some, Gothic visual projects provided an interim space between lived visual experience and divine vision, most often expressed artistically through monumental building projects such as cathedrals. Much of the theory attributing the aim of these cathedrals to divine revelation comes from the writing of Abbot Suger, who was charged with leading new construction at the French cathedral and basilica, St. Denis, in the first half of the twelfth century. Abbot Suger's personal motivations for rebuilding St. Denis are best summarized in his own writing. In *De administratione*, he writes,

> When out of my delight in the beauty of the house of God - the loveliness of the many-coloured gems has called me away from all external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues: then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling as it were in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven, and that by the grace of God I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner.[11]

Suger's reflection on his own experience when contemplating the divine within his "many-colored gem" covered cathedral, underlines transitions in theory and materiality in the Middle Ages. On the one hand, Suger perfectly describes the effects of *cogitatio* when achieved through an extromission theory of objects, by underlining how the shift from gazing on the materiality

[10] Hans Belting traces the use and making of devotional images in his seminal study on icons and late medieval visual culture. See Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
[11] Text cited from Erwin Panofsky and Gerda Panofsky-Soergel. *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St. Denis and its Art Treasures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

around him leads to a vision of divine immateriality. However, on the other hand, by emphasizing the value of the artistic components and their rootedness to the space of the cathedral Suger does ultimately suggest that divine beauty, otherwise considered transcendent and not visible through direct sight, can in fact be perceived if it meets certain criteria for beauty. That is, Suger argues that objects with a certain quality of *perceptible* material beauty have a higher capacity for facilitating a divine vision than contemplating an object with perceptibly less material beauty. His argument then, straddles the underlying cultural question, which asked how to perceive transcendent, ethereal, and invisible visions of divinity while grounded in a created and physical world.

There is much debate in scholarship concerning whether Suger was truly championing the greater production of visual arts in order to support his theory, which was an idea first circulated with the publication of Erwin Panofsky's work analyzing medieval aesthetics according to Suger's claims. However, it is still possible to turn to his writing in order to identify shifting cultural attitudes towards vision and visualizations, and even some perspectives toward artistic practices. It is crucial to understand the context from which the arts and the development of artistic theory emerged in the twelfth century in order to have a clearer picture, as viewers and readers, of the different ways of seeing practiced culturally leading up to the thirteenth century, and what theories of vision were most influential to Giacomo da Lentini, Dante, and the other poets of the Due- and Trecento.

In response to changing social and political conditions, as well as the influence of theological and philosophical systems for understanding the role of sight, late medieval artists and authors made their own significant developments toward investigating the relationship between vision and representation through their respective mediums. According to extromission

theory, the eye connects with objects through sending out visual rays in order to perceive and interpret them, while in intromission theory, the eye receives *species* that originate in the object itself, For intromission theory then, perceived objects in nature could be known and learned through the viewer's own senses. Significantly, this change made it possible for intromission theory to expedite a new relationship between viewers and objects naturally existing in the world. Michael Camille has also noted that artistic practices and the reception of visual art were most immediately impacted by the transition from extromission to intromission theory, drawing attention to wax seals and mirrors as the two major symbols of "self-pictorialization" in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as mediums that had the capacity to transmit visible species via their specific form of materiality. Unsurprisingly, these mediums are referenced frequently throughout medieval poetry, given their highly expressive qualities, including in *canto XIII* of Dante's *Paradiso* as a means of stamping, so to speak, divine impressions on "mortal" seals.[12] By pointing to the links between wax, impressions, and memory on the one hand, and the reflective quality of mirrors on the other, he underlines the capacities of both mediums to convey things – impressions, images, visualizations – that are not really there. In this sense, both wax seals and mirrors were mediums that achieved the problem of giving form to the invisible in an age when people strove to envision the divine. Examples like the wax seal or mirror demonstrate how the shift from one theory of vision, which remained much more theoretical, became more grounded in the physical, tangible, and immediately knowable for medieval viewers.

The most natural and parallel medium to explore this discussion in Trecento culture remains written text since seeing and observing is nearly always intertwined with explaining what is seen and known. Boccaccio notably calls attention to dynamics between visual and

[12] *Canto XIII* of the *Paradiso* addresses at length the question of divine matter and form. See in particular verses, 67-69 for the reference to wax in *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

textual representation in the *Author's Conclusion* to the *Decameron*, in which he challenges the freedom of artists to create multiple layers of meaning within their work, whereas his writing is more frequently censored.[13] For example, he alludes to the potential eroticism found in the painting of Saint Michael or Saint George piercing the side of a dragon *at any point of their choosing*, the emphasis juxtaposed between the location of the penetration and the choice of the artist. Of course, Boccaccio's example was meant to broaden what was considered culturally appropriate in text, given that he believed visual artists had more liberty than authors to depict what were then considered immoral topics. However, what Boccaccio is reacting to, at least in some sense, is the cultural shift in visual perception, insofar as he is attempting to confront the cultural understanding of seeing (or reading in this case), and interpretation. Michael Camille provides insight into this issue, explaining that in the fourteenth century,

> Optics and semantics were intimately associated in both theory and practice, in models and in making images. Seeing and reading, within the theoretical system described here are presented as synonymous. This is the most radical idea for art history, that our dichotomies of "text and image," even our bifurcated semiotics, is based upon thinking that would have been alien to the fourteenth century, when seeing and reading were part of the same bodily operation, involving perception and cognition in the search for knowledge. (Camille 216)

If Camille is correct in asserting that seeing and reading in the late medieval period were understood to be physiologically rooted in the same bodily functions and have the same fundamental relationship to both knowledge and cognition, then new questions are raised about the relationship between painting and writing in the late medieval period. Namely, when Boccaccio expresses frustration that his writing is restricted by social thematic limitations and directly compares this to what he perceived as freedom in painting, is he really addressing deeper questions about meaning and how to directly engage with viewers' experiences unhindered by extromission? That is, the need to step back and reflect over the content given the more direct

[13] See the *Author's Conclusion* in the *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Milano: Mondadori, 1985).

relationship between vision and visual arts? Although it is not possible to go back and definitively define Boccaccio's intention, it is equally irresponsible to impose artistic theory established in later periods, such as that of Alberti, to pre-modern works of art or literature, in order to simplify the relationship among art, writing, and meaning as linear, or two-dimensional, and wanting of deeper aesthetic meaning. Rather, the course of transitions in visual theory and the strong relationship between practices of seeing, reading, and understanding in the thirteenth century point to the existence of culturally sensitive environment in which these factors were very much considered, especially in works like Boccaccio's, or Giacomo da Lentini's, which turned to representations of visual arts in order to expand limits of verbal or visual expression.

II. Painting on the Heart: Giacomo da Lentini and the Portrait of the Beloved

Despite Lentini's significant contributions to the lyric tradition, his motives for turning to visual representation have largely been overlooked. There is little background information available concerning Giacomo da Lentini's origins, except some evidence through court documents that he served as a notary at the court of Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily, Germany, and Jerusalem between approximately 1233 and 1240. Very few records of Lentini exist prior to his arrival at the Sicilian court or during his tenure there, although he is probably the person referred to as "Iacobus de Lentino" from a document dated April 1240. According to some surviving records Lentini was known to have worked on documents concerning the possessory holdings of Frederick II, and was not specifically known for any administrative writing concerning artists at court or otherwise. It is therefore challenging to determine any precise sources for Lentini's literary influences or educational training prior to his arrival at the Sicilian court, which might otherwise have indicated thematic sources of influence

in his poetry and more significantly, may have revealed where Lentini turned to for visual references. Nevertheless, some conclusions may be drawn from his imitation of themes and language in Provençal lyric poetry as well as his exposure to shifting aesthetic values in Duecento Italian visual and social culture.

Between the Occitan *troubadour* poets and the *Stilnovists* of the late Duecento several "schools" of lyric poets emerged at Italian courts, including the Sicilian school of poets at the court of Emperor Frederick II, who reigned from 1220 to 1250. Significantly, the poetry of the Sicilian school is among the first written in Italian vernacular, generating a new series of words and images associated with the themes of love and praise. In fact, it is through the dissemination of poetry by the *Sicilian* school that many themes established by French *troubadors* were recycled and employed to new poetic ends.[14] Although the poems of the Sicilians were less interested in the repercussions of eroticized love, their development of comparisons between the workings of nature, the representation of the natural world, and the sincerity of their devotion to their lady created a precedent for later poets to draw on in order to dramatize the praise of the *donna* through her resemblance to a celestial being.[15] Between the *troubadours* and the *stilnovists* then, there is an evolving question of the effects of love and weighing the benefits of praise through the lens of natural philosophy, theology, and representation.

While Giacomo da Lentini stands out among his contemporaries in the canon of medieval Italian literature, he is by no means the only poet or thinker of his era to engage with questions of

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[14] See Michelangelo, Picone, "Aspetti della tradizione/traduzione nei poeti siciliani," in *Percorsi della lirica duecentesca: dai Siciliani alla Vita Nova* (Florence: Cadmo, 2003); Also, Karla Malette, "Vernacularity and Sicilian Culture," in *The Kingdom of Sicily* (2005), pp. 110-130.

[15] For more on the transition between the troubadour poets, the Sicilian school of poets, and Tuscan and Stil novist poets see *Dante's Lyric Poetry*, ed. Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyd (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1967); Fred Jensen, *Tuscan Poetry of the Duecento: An Anthology* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994; *Da Guido Guinizelli a Dante: Nuove prospettive sulla lirica del Duecento*, ed. Furio Brugnolo and Gianfelice Peron (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2004); Eugenio Savona, *Repertorio tematico del dolce stil novo* (Bari: Adritica Editrice, 1973).

visual representation and transmission within his literary corpus. Poems from the thirteenth century often circulated in *tenzone* form, as parts of ongoing conversations, in verse, between groups of poets. The sonnet in which Lentini addresses Andreas Cappellanus' theory, "Amor è un desio che ven da core", appears as a *tenzone* written between himself, Jacopo Mostacci, and Pier della Vigna. This *tenzone*, first appears in the manuscript Barberini lat. 3953, commencing with Mostacci's thoughts and solicitation to his fellow poets to share their views on the nature of love, and following with Lentini and della Vigna's responses. Mostacci sustains that love is an invisible pleasing force found in the disposition of the beloved (Ben trova l'om una amorositate/ la quale par che nasca di piacere,/ e zo vol dire om che sia amore), while della Vigna counters that although love is indeed an invisible substance, it can be perceived through its magnet like quality ("Per la virtù della calamita non si vede come questa attiri a sé il ferro").[16] Della Vigna's reference to iron is inspired by studies in the natural sciences that were popular in the court of Frederick II, and introduces the imagery of metal-like substances to the vernacular lyric tradition. Images of metal and metallic substances are later a recurring image in the writing of Bolognese

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[16] Jacopo Mostacci

Solicitando un poco meo savere
e con lui mi vogliendo diletare,
un dubio che mi misi ad avere,
a voi lo mando per determinare.
On'omo dice c'amor à potere
e gli coraggi distringe ad amare,
ma eo no [li] lo voglio consentire,
però c'amore no parse ni pare.
Ben trova l'om una amorositate
la quale par che nasca di piacere,
e zo vol dire om che sia amore.
Eo no li saccio altra qualitate,
ma zo che è, da voi [lo] voglio audire,
però ven faccio sentenz[ï]atore.

Pier della Vigna

Però c'Amore non si pò vedere
e non si tratta corporalemente,
manti ne son di sì folle sapere
che credono c'Amor[e] sia nïente.
Ma po' c'Amore si face sentire
dentro dal cor signoreggiar la gente,
molto maggiore pregio de[ve] avere
che se 'l vedessen visibilemente.
Per la vertute de la calamita
como lo ferro at[i]ra no si vede,
ma sì lo tira signorevolmente;
E questa cosa a credere mi 'nvita
c'Amore sia, e dàmi grande fede
che tutor sia creduto fra la gente.

Both poems cited from, *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. Contini (1995).

poet, Guido Guinizelli, who refers to both diamonds and iron in several poems.[17] Scholarship on this *tenzone* and the intellectual sources of these poets demonstrates a relationship between themes in their poetry and established doctrines according to the natural sciences discussed at court.[18] Fewer articles exist, however, addressing the specific role of imagery and vision present throughout the *tenzone*, but especially clear in the Giacomo da Lentini's response to his peers.

The language of Lentini's part of the *tenzone*, "Amor è un desio", imitates Capellanus' general theory about the transmission of love by emphasizing the role of the eyes in taking in the lover's image and imprinting it on to the poet's heart. In the first stanza for example, Lentini outlines how love is first born through the vision, that is, through the poet's eyes receiving the image of the beloved, and is then nurtured in the heart ("li occhi in prima generan l'amore/ e lo core li dà nutricamento"; "the eyes are the first to generate love, and the heart provides nourishment"). The remaining sections of the poem continue to underline the role of vision in inducing feelings of love, following Capellanus' theory that love is born from a visual impression transmitted through the eyes, and not a feeling that first emerges from within the heart. While this poem does not directly address painting, it does provide readers with insight into Lentini's beliefs regarding the potential of vision, and the role of sight in affecting the viewer's emotions. The language of the sonnet is filled with references to the eyes and their significance as the portal through which affectation is experienced, since without the first sight of the beloved, the poet cannot be gripped by feelings of love. More significantly, the *tenzone*'s aim to interpret Capellanus' theory in poetic form demonstrates the extent to which philosophical theories circulated and were accepted at the court of Frederick II, and consequentially how they

[17] See in particular the reference to diamonds in the third stanza of Guinizelli's *canzone* "Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore". Precious stones are also a central theme of the third strophe of Lentini's canzone, "Amor non vole ch'io clami".
[18] See in particular Giorgio Agamben, "Narcissus and Pygmalion," in *Stanzas* (1993), pp. 63-72.

may have been brought to Lentini's attention. His poetic adaptation of Capellanus' philosophy reveals both Lentini's deep awareness of contemporary thought of his day and also highlights his attentiveness toward understanding the experience of love, internally as well and externally. It makes sense then, that as a poet Lentini would be interested in exploring how to capture, through textual representation, the visually grounded experience of falling in love.

Although Lentini borrows the core philosophy of "Amor è un desio che ven da core" from the natural sciences in order to describe the phenomenological mechanics of love, his sonnet also reveals his interest in the physiological process through with the lover recognizes he is in love, that is, the steps through which he physically falls in love. Overall, the poem draws attention to the role of vision in this process, and on the concept of an image of the beloved printed on the lover's heart, emphasizing the three step process in the relationship between sight, contemplation, and knowledge.

> Amor è uno desi[o] che ven da' core
> per abondanza di gran piacimento;
> e li occhi in prima genera[n] l'amore
> e lo core li dà nutricamento.4
> Ben è alcuna fiata om amatore
> senza vedere so 'namoramento,
> ma quell'amor che stringe con furore
> da la vista de li occhi ha nas[ci]mento:
> ché li occhi rapresenta[n] a lo core
> d'onni cosa che veden bono e rio
> com'è formata natural[e]mente;11
> e lo cor, che di zo è concepitore,
> imagina, e [li] piace quel desio:
> e questo amore regna fra la gente.[19]

[Love is a desire which comes from the heart as a result of the wealth of great pleasure. First the eyes generate love and then the heart nourishes it. Although at times one can love without seeing the object of his love, the passion that furiously takes hold of the lover is the one that is born from the eyes. This is because the eyes represent to the heart

[19] All Italian citations of Lentini's poetry cited from Giacomo da Lentini and Gianfranco Contini, *Poeti del Duecento* (1995), pp. 55.

> everything that they see, good or bad, in it natural appearance, and the heart, which conceives this image, depicts internally the object, and likes that desire. This kind of love reigns over people.]

In the last tercet of the sonnet, Lentini describes the heart as the part of the body that holds the beloved's image ("e lo core che di zo è concepitore, / imagina e [lì] piace, quel disio")[20]. By emphasizing the heart's role as active conceiver of the beloved's image, Lentini underlines the predominance of the extromission theory of vision in circulation at the time. However, even within his traditional account of visual and amorous theory, readers can discern some subtle contradiction between his emphasis on the role of sight in birthing, or generating an image ("e li occhi in prima genera[n] l'amore; da la vista de li occhi ha nas[ci]mento") and the role of the heart in contemplating and conceiving the image.

Figure 2. Jehan de Grise, *The Offering of A Heart, and the Lover Offers the Lady Money*, Alexander Romance, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 264, folio 59r, c. 1344. © Oxford Digital Bodleian Library, accessed 08/07/2020. This illuminated image demonstrates one of several recurrent images of an exchange between the lover and the lady, including the heart.

[20] Lentini's view is recurrent in his other poetic works, such as in the last stanza of the canzone, "Guiderdone aspetto avere", in which he emphasizes the physiological response to the heart's receiving, or in this case, being stripped of the beloved's image.

> La figura piacente
> Lo core mi diranca:
> Quando voi tegno mente,
> Lo spirito mi manca – e torna in ghiaccio.

In his notes on "Amor è un desio", Gianfranco Contini suggests that the term "imagina", or image, refers to contemplation or fixation.[21] According to this definition and to the rest of Lentini's indications within the sonnet, the heart controls the impression of the beloved's image and fixating on this image is what communicates feelings of love, pain, and joy to the lover. The notion that the lover's image is received and stamped like a wax impression on the lover's heart so that he may return and fixate on it, aligns the sonnet with theories questioning how to visualize invisible forms. Although the intention to investigate invisible forms is not explicitly stated, the example at the very least shows that Lentini had familiarity with visual theories and the relationship between vision and knowledge. Importantly, the way in which Lentini describes the effects of the lover's image on the heart shares a parallel structure with his descriptions of paintings and the act of painting in his other poetic works, suggesting Lentini drew inspiration for his use of painting metaphors from the same sources as for philosophical theories on the physiology and phenomenology of love that were prevalent in the late thirteenth century.

In the first stanza of his *canzonetta*, "Meravigliosamente", Lentini ascribes the act of contemplation to the painter and compares the feelings and actions of the painter to the physiological and phenomenological mechanics of love described in "Amor è un desio". Lentini makes this comparison by establishing a parallel between the artist who contemplates the model for his painting ("examplo") with the heart carrying, and thereby fixating on the figure of the lover ("figura"):

> Meravigliosamente
>   un amor mi distringe
>   e mi tene ad ogn'ora.
> Com'om che pone mente
> in altro exemplo pinge
> la simile pintura,
>   così, bella, facc'eo,

[21] See Contini, *Poeti del Duecento* (1995), p. 68, note 12.

che 'infra lo core meo
porto la tua figura. (vv. 1-9)

["Extraordinarily/ A love now grips me fast/ And always rules my thoughs,/ As one who gazes at/ A model with great care/ Can paint its replica,/ So too, my love, can I,/ For in my heart I bear/ The image of your form."][22]

There are several important layers in this stanza, which lend themselves to establishing a visual poetics in Giacomo da Lentini's poetry. As discussed above, the dichotomy between the roles of the painter and of the lover's heart share parallel functions; both receive images, the painter through his vision, and the heart also through the sight of the beloved; and both the painter and the lover's heart are tasked with contemplating the original figure so that the imitated image is painted either on the canvas or the heart. The central difference between the agency of the painter and the agency of the heart is that the vehicle of transmission is different: the painter's finished painting theoretically provides a direct, or three-dimensional image of the beloved, that the poet can return to and physically contemplate, while the image imprinted on the lover's heart requires assistance from the words of the poet in order to be revealed.

Lentini's comparison between the roles of the artist and the lover's heart in the opening stanza of "Meravigliosamente" also reflects a relationship between medieval theories of vision and the actual practice of image making in the Middle Ages. The relationship between sight and feeling can be noted in several verses of the *canzone*, for example in verses 17-18 when Lentini directly references his hidden gaze ("ca pur vi guardo ascoso,/ e non vi mostro amore"), and in verses 22-24 of the third stanza ("e quando voi non vio,/ guardo in quella figura,/ e par ch'eo v'aggia avante"). Notably, in the second example, Lentini turns to the concept of an actual visual representation, specifically painting, to express the relationship between what he sees and feels. In an article elaborating on the relationship between sight, knowledge, and the production of art,

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[22] English citations of Lentini's poetry cited from the recent edition by Richard Lansing, *The Complete Poem of Giacomo da Lentini* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

Michael Camille examines an illuminated image of a male head that indicates the different sections of the brain and eyes, and labels them with their presumed function. Each label is connected to prevalent medieval optical and cognitive theories, especially those of Avicenna, Aristotle, and Aquinas. By picturing the medieval theory of sight as extra- or intromission, the illuminated image itself reveals the shift from the Augustinian model of the eye "reaching out" to grasp an image to the more Aristotelian, or Aquinian interpretation of the eye *receiving* the image and internalizing it.[23] Lentini's sonnets like "Amor è un desio" and "Meravigliosamente" hint at his general awareness of shifting medieval theories of vision, revealing that he participates in ongoing philosophical debates about how vision and cognition operate in his poems.

The second stanza of "Meravigliosamente" introduces an example of painting through a clever series of verses connected by variations of the verb "parere" or "to appear" in the first part of the stanza. "Parere" itself is used four times in four consecutive verses, while the words "porti" and "pinta" lend themselves to the lyric quality of the sound as well.

> In cor **par** ch'eo vi porti,
>   pinta come **parete**,
>   e non **pare** di fore.
> O Deo, co' mi **par** forte.
>   Non so se lo sapete,
>   con' v'amo di bon core:
>   ch'eo son sì vergognoso
> ca pur vi guardo ascoso
> e non vi mostro amore. (vv. 10-18)

["I seem to bear you in my heart,/ Portrayed as you appear,/ Which can't be seen outside./ O God, how cruel it seems,/ I don't know if you know/ How truly I love you,/ For I'm so timorous/ I watch you secretly And don't show you my love."]

[23] See Michael Camille, "Before the Gaze: The Internal Senses and Late Medieval Practices of Seeing," in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000).

The first two verses of this stanza repeat Capellanus' theory that the image of beloved is imprinted on the lover's heart ("In cor par ch'eo *vi porti"*) and that visual representations aim to imitate nature ("pinta come parete"; "painted as you are"). They also contain the first two instances of the verb "parere". The third instance occurs in the following line, which also intriguingly plays with the idea of invisible images by reminding the reader that images imprinted on the heart are at once visible to the heart but invisible on the outside ("e non pare di fore"). The fourth and final instance of "parere" follows in the next verse. This line sets up a dichotomy between the painted image of the lady, only visible to the lover, and the actual presence of the lady as she gazes at the lover. The dichotomy directly engages with the theme of limits of representation; the question posed by this stanza is, what does it mean for an image to be visible to the artist, and how is its meaning altered based on the viewer's experience of the work of art? The last verses of the stanza, "ca pur vi guardo ascoso/ e non vi mostro amore" addresses this question through revealing the problem the poet is unable to reconcile: his love for his lady remains hidden and he is unsuccessful at finding an equally subtle, or hidden, means of conveying his feelings. While these last two verses draw on the trope of unrequited love underpinning the entire genre of this poetry, they also call to mind the image of Dante leaning against the painted wall in the *Vita Nova*, turning to visual art as a means to express an unspoken tension.

The tension between images that can and cannot be seen is a central theme throughout the second stanza of "Meravigliosamente" and also a recurring question throughout the poem. Italo Bertelli in particular has noted the relationship between the visual themes of "Meravigliosamente" and the canzone's emphasis on psychological and sentimental expression.

> Il tema poetico della 'canzonetta' si viene svolgendo in modo stilisticamente e 'retoricamente' ben controllato sul piano di una nitida coesione espressiva; così

> come il motive dell'accorata vicenda d'amore prosegue nei termini di un'essenziale linearità psicologico-sentimentale: il poeta non osa neppure voltarsi a "riguardare" la sua bella, e non può fare altro che lasciar trasparire la sua chiusa passione con profondi sospiri d'angoscia. (Bertolli 12)

Bertolli's article observes Lentini's desire to express his interior feelings, drawing connections to style and theories of vision, however it does not point to a method through which Lentini tries to resolve the issue of "expressing the inexpressible" through his poem, such as turning to representations of visual art. Nevertheless, this canzone addresses this problem in each stanza. In the third stanza Lentini returns to the image of painting, comparing the image of the painting to the notion of blind faith. Although this third and final explicit reference to painting in "Meravigliosamente" is not as clearly connected to medieval visual theories as the example previously discussed, it is nevertheless points to a relationship between desire, sight, and painting ("Avendo gran disio/ dipinsi una pintura"), which is explored in Lentini's other painting references, and also indicates that Lentini believed that the aim of painting is to imitate nature ("bella, voi simigliante").

> Avendo gran disio,
> dipinsi una pintura,
> bella, voi simigliante,
> e quando voi non vio,
> guardo n' quella figura,
> e par ch'eo v'aggia avante:
> Come quello che crede
> Salvarsi per sua fede,
> Ancor non veggia inante. (vv. 19-27)
>
> ["Having a great desire, I had painted a picture of you, beautiful and resembling you, and when I don't see you I look at that image and it seems as though I see you in front of me.]

On its own, Lentini's reference to painting in this stanza is not used metaphorically, and is instead a direct reference to a portrait.[24] Importantly though, it is a striking example of the poet representing himself as the artist behind the lady's portrait ("dipinsi una pintura"). The stanza concludes, however, with a simile relating the possibility of visual idealization through the painted figure to the concept of blind faith in salvation. Notably, the stanza ends on the question of sight ("Ancor non *veggia* inante"), underlining Lentini's emphasis on visual representation and ways of seeing. In fact, the stanza can be viewed as a move by Lentini to continue questioning limits of representation, given that he creates a parallel between the poet who hopes a physical representation of his beloved in the form of a painted portrait will satisfy his desire for her, and the believer who must rely on his faith without the assistance of visual representation to feel satisfied. In the last stanza before the *congedo*, Lentini reaffirms the same notion that ends the third stanza of giving sight to "invisible" or intangible things such as faith. In the case of the final stanza, Lentini turns however, to the idea of communicating through gesture, an arguably visually-reliant method for conveying meaning.

> Sacciatelo per singa,
> zo ch'eo non dico a linga,
> quando voi mi vedrite. (vv. 52-54)

["Know by the signs,/ that which I don't say with words,/ when you see me."]

Once again, Lentini places greater emphasis on the viewer, or in this case reader's ability to interpret meaning based on visual signs rather than through words. In the above-cited passage, Lentini explicitly asks his lady to recognize the feelings he hopes to convey to her through

[24] The image of the lady's portrait painted on the beloved's heart is a significant contribution to the representation of visual art in lyric poetry. As Paolo Borsa and Teodolinda Barolini have shown, the portrait painted on the heart is an image that holds great interest for Dante, and emerging in a slightly altered form as a painting on the face in the *Rime petrose* and in the *canzone* "Donna ch'avete inelletto d'amore" in the *Vita Nuova*.

gesture rather than by voice, implying that there is a limitation to what feelings he can express through textual representation. This may also point to an underlying belief that while medieval audiences might misinterpret words, they are less likely to misidentify a painting or visual representation that imitates a figure, gesture, or action in nature. Throughout this *canzonetta*, and with and without direct reference to painting, Lentini explores possibilities for visual and verbal representation that emphasize the first-hand experience the poet attempts to communicate to his audience. He concludes by giving more weight to the capacity of visual representation through paintings, signs, and gestures, to more accurately convey his feelings to his beloved.

Recently, it has been suggested that Lentini's artistic references were drawn from the artistic practices that flourished at the court of Frederick II under his direction.[25] Vincent Moleta, for example, argues that Lentini drew inspiration for metaphors of painting in his poetry from the tradition of portraiture derived from images of icons in the Byzantine visual artistic culture, made popular in Sicily after the 1204 sack of Constantinople and the migration of Greek and Byzantine artists to Italy.[26] Within the Byzantine tradition, icons were believed to represent not just the likeness of the saint or divine figure portrayed in the image, but rather the figure's actual presence. In this sense the images were not mere imitations but divine vestiges reflecting the essence of the subject.[27] Frederick II was also known to take a deep interest in the arts, and in particular revived the Roman artistic traditions of the portrait bust and the portrait profile relief.[28]

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[25] See for example, Willibald Sauerländer, "Two Glances from the North: The Presence and Absence of Frederick II in the Art of the Empire; The Court Art of Frederick II and the Opus Francigenum," in *Studies in the History of Art*, vol. 44, 1994, pp. 188–10.
[26] Vincent Moleta, "Voi le vedete Amor pinto nel viso" (1992).
[27] For more on the role of icons between antiquity and the late medieval period in Italy, see "Church and Image: The Doctrine of the Church and Iconoclasm," in Belting, *Likeness and Presence* (1994), pp. 144-163.
[28] On the relationship between art at the court of Frederick II and Italian literature see, Christie K. Fengler and William A. Stephany, "The Capuan Gate and Pier della Vigna," in *Dante Studies*, 99 (1981), pp. 145-157.

For example, following a successful military campaign, Frederick II held a Roman-style parade in Rome and erected a triumphant monument to his victory, decorated with portraits and portrait reliefs, on the Capitoline hill.[29] Though it remains unclear whether Lentini would have been familiar with the monument that stood on the Capitoline Hill during Frederick II's reign, the monument's existence does position him at a court profoundly interested in visual culture. While the revival of artistic traditions focused on the portrait of the individual at the court of Frederick II, from portrait busts to icons, potentially accounts for Lentini's invention of the portrait of the lady painted on the heart, the Byzantine tradition from which the portraits of icons emerge also offers the poet a model for picturing the *donna's* likeness in her absence. In this respect, the portrait of the lady is not a verisimilar representation of her physical features, but a visual representation that embodies her noble qualities and attributes. However, while the visual model for the kind of image Lentini turned to in his poetry may have been influenced by the role of icons, his understanding of the effects of the image were influenced by northern European theories of visual transmission, seen through his application of Andreas Capellanus' *De Amore*, within his poem, "Amor è un desio che ven da core". What emerges through this intersection of artistic traditions and theological and philosophical theories is a new style of poetry that turns to visual imagery in order to establish a poetics of absence.

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[29] For further on Frederick II's monument, see M. Guarducci, "Federico II e il monumento del Caroccio in Campidoglio," *Xenia. Semestrale di Antichità*, 8 (1984). Suggestively, this column would have stood only a short distance away from Trajan's column, built c. A.D. 113 following the conquest against Dacia, and decorated with victorious reliefs, which also likely served as a source of visual inspiration for Dante's ekphrastic description of sculptural reliefs in canto X of the *Purgatorio*. Nancy Vickers has suggested that Trajan's column in Rome may have served as a source of inspiration for the reliefs in *Purgatorio* given the presence of a figure kneeling before a rider on horse, an image resembling the narrative of Trajan and the widow. See Nancy Vickers, "Seeing is Believing: Gregory, Trajan, and Dante's Art," in *Dante Studies*, 101 (1983). Pp. 67-85.

There is direct evidence underlining Giacomo da Lentini's awareness of the French lyric tradition, as well as popular French iconography, especially through the poetry of Provençal poet Folquet de Marseille. Known alternatively as Folquet de Marselha, or Folques de Toulouse, he was active in troubadour circles in the 1170s until he experienced a religious conversion in 1195 and was subsequently elected Bishop of Toulouse in 1205. His surviving poems were known in the courts of Richard Coeur de Lion (reign 1189-1199), Raymond V, Count of Toulouse, and as far as the Barcelona court of Alfonso II of Aragon (reign 1164-1196), who was also the Count of Provence until the 1170's. Significantly, Folquet is the only poet Dante places in the *Paradiso,* where Dante meets him in the third circle of heaven, or the circle of Venus, in canto IX. Folquet's role in this canto is to describe through his own example, and that of the biblical Rahab, how past amorous behavior can be converted and dedicated to love for God and raise the individual to the heights of heaven.[30] Dante's decision to place the Occitan poet in heaven and to reference verses of his poetry, are a testament to Folquet's influence poetically and thematically on Dante and his predecessors, such as Giacomo da Lentini. Significantly, Folquet's elevated position demonstrates a possibility of redemption for a poet, like Dante, who pursued love inappropriately in youth before turning toward more noble pursuits, reinforcing the idea of the ennobling effects of love underpinning the *Divine Comedy*.

While Dante's representation of Folquet's path in life and in the afterlife have been well-mined by contemporary medieval scholarship, Folquet's relationship to visual representation and his role as a source for images in Dante and, more directly, Giacomo da Lentini is less observed. In the corpus of Folquet's poetry, there is only one specific reference to painting, in the poem, "Amors, per so m'en soi eu recresuz". This poem introduces a curious approach to representing visual art through text, especially when observed within the context of a potential source for

[30] See the Notes to Canto 9 in Durling and Martinez' edition of *Paradiso*, especially pages 203-205.

Lentini. Specifically, Folquet sets out to describe the viewer's perspective when observing a work of art, thereby underlining the experience of taking in the work of art rather than actually noting what the painting contains ("c'aissi com mais prez' hom laida ***pentura***/ de long, no fai cant es de pres venguz; just as one appreciates an ugly painting from afar / more than it is from up close"). Folquet's description of experiencing the painting is introduced within the context of a comparison to a human experience ("presava eu vos mais can no•us conoissa"; "I appreciated you more before I knew you"), which is a contrast adopted by Lentini in his own applications of painting, underlining Folquet's role at the very least as a model for how to employ representations of visual art within poetry for Lentini.[31]

The first two stanzas of Lentini's canzone "Madonna dir vo voglio", are a vernacular Italian translation of Folquet's poem, "A vos, midontç, voill retrair'en cantan", as originally noted by the scholar Francesco Toracca.[32] In the third stanza of Lentini's version and

[31] Although it is unclear if Giacomo da Lentini was familiar with this particular poem, it is still important to note that Folquet's description of Love as personified link him to the French and Provençal lyric tradition, and indicate these sources as crucial when considering Lentini's iconographic fonts. See for example, "Amors, per so m'en soi eu recresuz":

> Amors, per so m'en soi eu recresuz
> de vos server, que mais no n'aurai cura;
> c'aissi com mais prez' hom laida ***pentura***
> de long, no fai cant es de pres venguz,
> presava eu vos mais can no•us conoissa;
> e s'anc ren volc, mais n'ai qu'er non volria:
> c'aissi m'en pres cum al fol queridor
> que dis c'aurs fos tot cant el tocaria.

Amore, per questo mi sono tirato indietro dal vostro servizio, al punto che non me ne interesserò mai [più]; perché come si apprezza di più un bruto **dipinto** da lontano di quanto non si faccia quando [gli] si è venuti vicino, [così] vi apprezzavo di più quando non vi conoscevo; e se mai volli qualcosa, ora ne ho di più di quanto ne vorrei: perché mi è accaduto come allo stolto postulante, che chiese che fosse oro tutto quello che toccherebbe.

Italian and French text for Folquet de Marseille cited from Folquet de Marseille, and Paolo Squillacioti, *Le Poesie Di Folchetto Di Marsiglia* (Pisa: Pacini, 1999).
[32] See F. Toracca, "A proposito di Folchetto" (1897).

continuation of Folquet's original poem, Lentini introduces the imagery of painting through the description of a painter dissatisfied with his ability to accurately portray his model's likeness in his work of art. As the first poem transcribed in Vat. lat. 3793, the position of "Madonna dir vo voglio", its themes, and its relationships to external (that is, non-Italian) sources are important for setting the tone and images adopted by Dante and other poets of his generation. The early inclusion of "Madonna dir vo voglio" also underlines Lentini's importance in the cannon of Duecento poets, and suggests a chronological order through which his readers became familiarized with his writing style and choice of themes. The significance of this choice is also crucial because Lentini does not reference painting or visual representations in each of his known poems, so the position of "Madonna dir vo voglio" as a canzone that directly references painting, sets his reader's expectations for anticipating a pattern of visual references in the poems that follow. The proof of his influence on later poets can be found in Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, in which Dante specifically cites "Madonna dir vo voglio" for its elegance, and use of vocabulary lending it a "noble" air.[33] Dante's specific reference to this poem furthermore draws a link thematically between Giacomo da Lentini, Dante, and Folquet de Marseille.

While "Madonna dir vo voglio" is a *canzone* composed of five stanzas, Folquet's poem "A vos, midontç, voill retrair'en cantan" ("My lady, I wish to tell you in song") is a fragmentary poem composed of two stanzas that do not contain any explicit reference to painting. However, the second stanza introduces a crucial concept for later comparison between visual and verbal representation in medieval Italian literature, that is, the idea that words cannot fully express the manner in which the poet desires to represent his beloved and his own feelings to his audience.

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[33] See Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia* (I, XII, 8), in which Giacomo da Lentini is described by Dante as, "prefulgentes eorum quidam polite locuti sunt, vocabula curaliora in suis contionibus compilantes, ut manifeste apparet eorum dicta perspicientibus, ut puta *Madonna, dire vi voglio….*". Dante argues also in *De vulgari eloquentia*, that Folquet's *canso* "Tant m'abellis l'amoros pessamens" is an example of Occitan eloquence.

Folquet highlights the limits of verbal representation by languishing over the inability of his words to convey the sentiments he experiences to his lady. He leaves this problem unanswered as his poem ends fragmented and incomplete shortly after raising the issue. The second stanzas of Folquet's text and Lentini's translation are as follows:

Folquet de Marseille

Parer non pot per dic ni per senblan
lo bens ce vos voigll ab † len carna fe †
mas nie[n]s es so ce vos dic: si•m te
al cor us fioc[s] qu*e* no•s † remuda o dan.
Per cal raisons no m'ausi consuman?
Savi dion e l'autor veramen
qe longi*nc* us, segon dreic et raiso[s],
si convertis e natura, don vos
deves saber car *eu* n'ai eissamen
per longi*nc* us en fioc d'amor plaisen[34]
[…]

Giacomo da Lentini

Lo meo 'namoramento
non *pò parire in detto*,
ma sì com'eo lo sento
cor no lo penseria nee diria lingua;
e zo ch'eo dico è nente
inver' ch'eo son distretto
tanto coralemente:
foc'aio al cor non credo mai si stingua,
anzi si pur alluma:
perché non mi consuma?
La salamandra audivi
che 'nfra lo foco vivi stando sana;
eo sì fo per long'uso,
vivo 'n foc'amoroso
e non saccio ch'eo dica:
lo meo lavoro spica e non ingrana

[34] English translation for both Folquet and Lentini's texts cited from Akash Kumar, *Sì come dice lo Filosofo: Translating Philosophy in the Early Italian Lyric* (Columbia University PhD dissertation, 2013), pp. 7-8. French cited from, *Le posie di Folchetto di Marsiglia*, ed. Squillacioti (1999); Italian citation from *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. Contini (1995).

Folquet: It cannot appear by word nor by image / the affection that I hold for you in faith / but I what I say to you is nothing, and so I hold / in my heart a flame that does not die. / Why does it not consume me? / Wise men and authorities say truly / that long use, according to right and reason, / changes itself into nature, and so you / must know that I equally have / pleasure through long use in the flame of love.

Lentini: My amorous state / cannot be put in words, / but as I feel it / neither the heart could comprehend nor could language express; / and what I say amounts to nothing / considering that I am gripped / with all my heart: / I have a flame in my heart that I do not believe will ever be extinguished, / but it burns: / why does it not consume me? / I have heard of the salamander / that lives within the flame and remains whole; / and so do I through long use, / I live in the amorous flame / and I do not know what I say: / my work seeds and does not ingrain itself.

The first two verses in both versions introduce the idea that the image of the beloved cannot appear ("parer"/"parire") in words ("non pot per dic"/" non pò parire in detto"), demonstrating Lentini's imitation of Folquet's poem. However, there is a subtle but critical difference between Folquet's and Lentini's versions of these first two verses. In Folquet's original poem, he suggests that there are also limits to visual representation of the beloved ("ni per semblan"), whereas Lentini's translation excludes the possibility that images share the same representational limits as words, and emphasizes instead the boundaries of textual representation.

By mirroring Folquet's stanzas Lentini shows he is attentive to Folquet's subtle question concerning the limits of visual and textual representation. It follows then, that Lentini's continuation of the poem in three additional stanzas takes this concern into consideration. For example, in Folquet's third verse of this second stanza, he again emphasizes the limits of his speech to his lady ("mas nie[n] es so ce vos dic: si•m te" // "but what I say to you is nothing"), which is also the central theme of the subsequent verses in Lentini's stanza ("Cor no lo penseria nee diria lingua; / e zo ch'eo dico è nente" // "the heart cannot understand and language cannot express it; and what I can say amounts to nothing"). Folquet's second stanza concludes by questioning why love is all consuming and suggesting that over time the heart grows used to the "flames" of love ("en fioc d'amor plaisen"). Lentini echoes this idea in his second stanza and expands the concept with imagery of the salamander, believed during the medieval period to be reborn in flames ("La salamandra audivi/ che 'nfra lo foco vivi stando sana;/ eo sì fo per long'uso,/ vivo 'n foc'amoroso").[35] Although nearly a direct translation, Lentini's words are visually more stimulating to readers than what is found in Folquet's original version of the poem, as seen through Lentini's employment of visual cues familiar to medieval audiences, like the

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[35] The poet Bonagiunta Orbicciani subsequently adopts the imagery of the salamander being reborn in flames in his poetry.

salamander, in order for him to ensure his readers understand the intended meaning behind his words.

The third stanza of Giacomo da Lentini's "Madonna dir vo voglio" continues to focus on the theme of representation and in doing so introduces the image of the poet as a painter into the repertoire of images in the Italian lyric. This imagery first appears as a comparison between a man unable to scratch an itch and a painter unable to produce a portrait of his beloved according to her likeness. The parameters of this comparison foreshadow the main artistic concern in later thirteenth century and early fourteenth century painting, that is, an accurate representation of nature. Importantly, in "Madonna dir vo voglio" the image of the man with his itch and the unhappy painter are both introduced in order to convey a particular feeling experienced by the poet, in this case, frustration, and are not included for the purpose of describing the contents of the referenced painting. The third stanza is as follows:

> Madonna, sì m'avene
> ch'eo non posso avenire
> com'ero dicesse bene
> la propria cosa ch'eo sento d'Amore.
>   Sì com'omo in prodito
> lo cor mi fa sentire,
> che già mai no'nde'è chito,
> mentre non pò toccar lo suo sentore.
> Lo non poter mi turba,
> com'om che pinge e sturba,
> e pure li dispiace
> lo pingere che face,
>   che non fa per natura
> la propria pintura*; (vv. 33-46)*
>
> ["It comes to pass, my love,/ That I cannot succeed/ In putting into words/ The very quality of love I feel;/ My heart prompts me to feel/ Like one who has an itch/ And never gains relief/ As long as he can't scratch the spot itself. / My lack distresses me,/ Like one who paints, then rubs it off,/ And yet still finds unfit/ The picture that he paints, and blames himself/ For failing to depict/ An image perfectly; Sill one should not bear blame/ for what one grabs when falling in the sea. "]

In the first section of the stanza, Lentini continues to lament his inability to fully express his feelings to his lady ("ch'eo non posso avenire / com'ero dicesse bene"). Expressing inadequacy is a trope in lyric poetry and not remarkable, except to align the canzone within this tradition of literature. The novelty in Lentini's poem lies in his particular use of visual representation within his work. In the second part of the stanza Lentini provides two main descriptions; that of the man with an insatiable itch and that of the dissatisfied painter. Neither description is central in and of itself to the poem. Rather, the descriptions exist for the sole purpose of heightening the reader's understanding of the poet's lived experience, that is, they are designed to communicate Lentini's feeling of inadequacy and frustration with his status. The question at hand then, is why Lentini's textual expression of his failure and frustration at the beginning of the third stanza is not able to communicate those feelings to the reader and why Lentini turns to visual representation instead.

These metaphors introduce two critical assumptions concerning the representation of visual arts within Lentini's poetry. The first assumption assigns aesthetic value to the representation of art; Lentini's verses assign the highest artistic value to flawless representations of nature by underlining the feeling of frustration when a painter fails to perfectly achieve this objective. The ability to perfectly imitate nature through visual art does in fact become the highest praised art in late thirteenth century and early fourteenth century Italian cultures, as indicated by the earliest treatises on art and aesthetics Giorgio Vasari in his sixteenth century histories of artists (*Le vite*), Leon Battista Alberti (*De pictura*), and Cenninno Cennini (*Il libro dell'arte*). Even Dante and Boccaccio convey this aesthetic qualification to modern readers in their representations of artists such as Giotto within their literary production.[36] The second assumption concerning visual art in Lentini's stanza is that visual representations have a

[36] See for example, Boccaccio's comparison between Giotto's art and that of nature in *Decameron* V.6 and in *canto IV* of the *Amorosa Visione*.

particular capacity to communicate human emotions and feelings. Within this assumption lies the subtle suggestion that visual art can inherently communicate experience in a way that remains unattainable in textual representation. This is because unlike text, which audiences experience sequentially in a linear format, paintings, works of art (at least in the thirteenth century) have a quality of "wholeness" that is experienced immediately, enabling viewers to react emotionally to the work of art and to also acquire a deeper level of understanding regarding the narrative that does not require additional textual support.

By turning to visual metaphors and rhetorical representations of visual art in order to convey the sentiment of frustration ("lo non poter mi turba"), Lentini invites his readers to engage with visual art as a means with which to empathize with his interior emotions. Put otherwise, turning to representations of visual art in order to more accurately reflect the poet's feelings suggests that Lentini deliberately makes an effort to translate the immediacy of visual reaction that comes from viewing a work of art in person, to the less-immediate, and perhaps less genuine impact that comes from describing an emotion. Lentini's motivation to capture visual impact through his words is supported by his further use of visually-laden language in the final two stanzas, which provide the reader with the sense that the poem is an attempt to verbally capture the narrative flow of a painted fresco cycle, so that the reader can follow the poet's thoughts not word-by-word, but image-by-image, reminiscent of the altarpieces that dominated the landscape of painting during the Duecento. Often existing as triptychs that presented a central image and two flanking, complementary images containing figures related to the central image, the separate pieces of the triptychs nevertheless provide a sense of visual narrative to the viewer. In a court as artistically diverse as that of Frederick II, Lentini would surely have been exposed

to some form of altarpiece painting, and may have been interested in the possibilities for expression contained in these expanded visual narratives.

Lentini's turn towards visual representation not only introduces the rhetorical image of painting to the canon of medieval Italian poetry, but also introduces it as intrinsically associated with a desire to convey meaning typically experienced when engaging physically with a work of art. Rather than introduce a less nuanced representation of painting or of a painter that simply provides a surface-level description of the visual components in the work of art, Lentini expands the possibilities for visual representation by emphasizing art's role in communicating his metaphor to the reader. Effectively, he shifts the emphasis from textual representations of painting that detail visual elements within a work of art, to a sort of anti-ekphrasis lacking description that is used as a means for representing immaterial phenomena, like experience, that the reader can empathize with. This aim is achieved in "Madonna dir vo voglio" by introducing painting not for painting's sake, that is, to merely describe a work of art, but rather uses the example of painting in order to bolster and clearly communicate his description of frustration. The role of the painter and his failed painting are not meant to invoke a painted image for the reader to visualize. Instead, the description is designed in a way that invites the reader to empathize with the poet's feelings; it is the process of trying and failing that provides the basis for the comparison. The hierarchy between images and text that Lentini introduces by turning to visual representation in the third stanza of "Madonna dir vo voglio" in response to the limits of verbal representation first raised by Folquet de Marseille, thus broadens the range of meaning communicated through visual representation in the poetry of the authors that follow Lentini.

Giacomo da Lentini's role in inventing the sonnet form is another connection that ties him to the Provençal lyric traditions. There are several theories explaining the origins of the

sonnet, however the two most agreed upon by scholars are that the sonnet is either the *strambotto*, a Sicilian *canzuna* consisting of eight hendecasyllabic lines, and the *canzone* stanza, from the Provençal *canso* originally consisting of fourteen hendecasyllables. In his study on the sonnet's origins in the Italian lyric, Christopher Klenheinz notes that more of Giacomo da Lentini's sonnets share the same rhyme scheme as the *canso*, a form also practicd by Folquet de Marseille.[37] Kleinheinz also favors the argument that Lentini's closest influence came from Provençal troubadours and that through their example, "images, forms, themes, and much of the love terminology were taken over, Sicilianized as it were, by the poets in Frederick II's retinue" (Kleinheinz 25). Kleinheinz' observations on the connections between the Provençal troubadours and Sicilian school of poets also illuminate the shared body of images and visual themes common to both groups of poets. Specifically, Kleinheinz focuses on the principal of imitation, suggesting that Lentini's canzone, "Amor non vole ch'io clami," contains a dialogue addressing his attempts to both imitate the troubadours and also create new content using the same foundations. In a particularly telling strophe, the second of the canzone, Lentini draws on the infamous image of the ape of nature ("non vuol ch'io resembri a scigna"), known to medieval audiences as a symbol of imitation.[38]

> Per zo l'amore mi 'nsigna
> ch'io non guardi a l'autra gente:
> non vuol ch'io resembri a scigna,
> c'ogni viso tene mente.
> E per zo, Madonna mia,
> a voi non dimanderia,
> merzede ne pietanza,
> ché tanti son li amatory,
> ch'este scinta di savori

[37] See Kleinheinz, "The Early Italian Sonnets" in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (2008), pp. 22-25.

[38] In a noted passage of Jeun de Meun's section of the *Roman de la Rose*, "Art" is specifically described as limited in its abilities to imitate Nature using the trope of the imitating ape: "Si garde comment nature oevre/ Car mout voudroit faire autele oevre/ Et la contrefait comme singes./ Mais tan test ses sens nuz et linges/ Qu'el ne puet faire choses vives,/ Ja si ne sambleront naïves (vv. 16033-16038)."

merzede per troppa usanza. (vv. 11-20)

["And so I'm taught by love/ To disregard the norm:/ I musn't mime an ape/ That mimics what it sees; And so, my dearest one,/ I would not seek from you/ Reward or sympathy/ Since lovers so abound/ That, being overused,/ All pity tastes quite bland.]

In Kleinheinz' reading of this strophe, Lentini aims to convey his frustration that words like "merzede" had lost the unique quality of their meaning due to overuse. He also points out that Lentini aligns himself with the Provençal poets through their shared muse, Love, who leads him to imitate other sources ("ch'io non guardi a l'autra gente"). However, this very reference to Love as a personified being and the ruler of the poet's actions is itself another link to recurrent themes and images in the French lyric tradition, which more consistently depicted Love as an artist rather than the poet. In fact, this strophe can be read along the theme of limits of representation that would align it with Lentini's canzone, "Madonna dir vo voglio". Although there are no direct references to painting, the strophe compares the themes of verbal and visual representation by pitting the imitative behavior of the ape against the loss of sincere meaning in words that are too often repeated.[39] In this strophe and in the rest of the canzone, Lentini compares hierarchies of natural objects and species, such as gems, and questions the sincerity of representation. Following Kleinheinz' suggestion that this canzone is Lentini's expression of his new poetic style, even if Lentini does not intentionally set up a dichotomy between visual and verbal representation in this poem, the language of the canzone and the tension between words and images that it conjures makes this tension an element of the new poetic school as well, also evident in its recurrence in later duecento poetry.

Italian Poets of the Duecento are indebted to Lentini for inventing the sonnet and for his careful treatment of visual theory and images, seen through the numerous poets that followed

[39] The "ape of nature" is a recurring image in medieval Italian literature, referenced for example in the *Roman de la Rose* as well as *canto XXIX* of Dante's *Inferno*.

him imitated the structures of his poems, and echoed his vocabulary. Lentini's lasting impact is underscored by scholarship returning even as far back as Dante's observations in the *De vulgari eloquentia*, admiring his poems and describing Lentini as a model linguistically, and thematically. While there are several studies dedicated to investigating Lentini's theoretical and stylistic sources, such as his awareness of medieval philosophy and Provençal troubadour poetry, there have been surprisingly few attempts to examine Lentini's sources in the visual arts, or his familiarity with artistic practices in thirteenth century. Although there is limited historical evidence to draw from to provide this information, closer examination of the themes and language in his poetry reveals his acute interest in artistic themes and practices. For example, by imitating the initial two stanzas of Folquet de Marseille's "A vos, midontç, voill retrair'en cantan" Lentini demonstrates his interest in themes taken up by his predecessors. However, by continuing the poem and delving deeper into its original visual imagery, Lentini also shows a motivation behind his lyrics to create a new poetics grounded in questions of representation through images and text.

III. Painting Nature: Visual Representation After Lentini

Despite Giacomo da Lentini's position at the head of the vernacular lyric tradition, among the poets recognized for their influence on Dante, Guido Guinizelli remains the most frequently cited by scholars for the visual and lyrical qualities of his writing.[40] Guinizelli's poetry stands out for his representation of beauty found in nature and natural objects, especially those related to flora, fauna, and light. His fellow poets' appropriation and inclusion of these same natural references has been well documented in contemporary scholarship, and has

[40] See Italo Bertelli, *Da Giacomo da Lentini a Dante* (Pisa and Rome: Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2017); see also Roberto Antonelli, "Dal notaro a Guinizzelli," in *Da Guido Guinizelli a Dante*, ed. Furio Brugnolo and Gianfelice Peron (Padova: Il Paligrafo, 2004), pp. 107-146.

established Guinizelli as an authority for visual representation in subsequent poetic works in the thirteenth century. Although Guinizelli does not refer to painting in his poetic corpus, he notably emphasizes the description of natural objects throughout his poetry, highlighting the role of nature in constructing a frame through which to describe the beauty of his *donna*, almost as if she were an object found in nature rather than a human being. That is, the only way to understand her is through a comparison to nature. The most frequently cited natural objects include references to precious gems, natural light, especially the dawn, celestial beings, birds and flowers. Since Guinizelli is invested in poetry of praise, many of these natural objects are used to exaggerate the beauty of his lady or to emphasize a juxtaposition between the object within its surroundings. The frequency of these descriptions in each of Guinizelli's poems creates impression of reading a sequence of images, not unlike a series of painted panels organized to convey a theme or narrative. It is not clear that Guinizelli made efforts to intentionally imitate the style of thirteenth century mural paintings, which depicted a visual narrative spanning several panels or a walled space. However, contemporary scholars have acknowledged that Guinizelli's manner of describing natural and material objects is presented in such a way as to rouse the reader's aesthetic experience of the poem. For example in his commentary on the style of Guinizelli, Robert Edwards notes,

> Guinizelli draws on other natural images to describe the reality of subjective experience. […] More often he uses images not according to a sense of organic unity but for their power to express moments of perception within a shifting field of experience. He moves discretely from one to the next with an intuitive grasp of symbolic forms, but he cares little to assure that the images of a poem are all of a single piece. The energy of his poetry lies in these contrasts and juxtapositions and in the acts of perception they dramatize. (R. Edwards xxxiii)

As Edwards underlines, Guinizelli's poetic style leans on descriptions of natural objects to tap into the reader's subjective experience of the poem. This method is not dissimilar from the idea

of a viewer being moved by the subjective experience of directly perceiving a work of visual art, and reacting to the cohesion of content, colors, and the space. Although not explicitly drawn from painting or artistic theory, the aesthetic quality of Guinizelli's poetry and his known imitation of visual themes in the poems of Giacomo da Lentini point to the possibility that Guinizelli's style is a direct evolution of Lentini's original introduction of painting within his poetry as a vehicle for communicating meaning without iconographic precedent.

There is one particular *canzone* by Guinizelli that directly references painting and supports the notion that poets intentionally turned to representations of visual art in order to assign a tangible form to an otherwise immaterial and unimaginable concept. The *canzone*, "Donna mi Sforza", or "Lady Love Compels Me", addresses the poet's lady and outlines the deep frustration he experiences based on his unrequited feelings for her. Unlike some of his other poetry which contains references to somewhat brighter descriptions, *Donna mi sforza* is laden with more despondent visual references such as fire, a ship lost at sea, a lighting storm, and hostile winds. The desperate picture is rounded out at the end by the poet questioning whether his life is worth continuing in such a state, alluding to a juxtaposition between love and death frequently employed by Guido Cavalcanti in his poetry. Just before ending the *canzone* on this disheartening note however, Guinizelli breaks up his chain of metaphors and descriptions of visual experiences (the storm, the ship, etc.) that populate the preceding stanzas with verses directed at the reader's subjective experience. Significantly, in order to engage with the reader at this level, Guinizelli turns to the representation of painting so that he may accurately and successfully convey his feelings.

> che s'eo voglio ver dire,
> credo **pingere** l'aire.
> A pinger l'air son dato,
> poi ch'a tal son condutto:

lavoro e non acquisto. (vv. 46-50)[41]

["But if I wish to tell the truth, / I think I'm painting the air / Since I've been led to this end: / I toil and gain nothing."][42]

According to Pietro Pelosi's notes on the canzone, "pingere l'aire" refers to the poet's frustration in the face of his impossible desires, and "son dato" is his recognition and resignation of his destiny in light of his position.

By using an image of painting to do this work, Guinizelli is relying on his reader's ability to picture an attempt to paint the air, an impossible visualization, not so that the reader will think of a painting, but so that the reader will identify and empathize with a feelings of futility and helplessness. In other words, the representation of painting has nothing to do with a painting, but rather serves to communicate the poet's subjective feeling to the reader. However, this particular kind of reference to painting is not Guinizelli's invention. As previously discussed in this chapter, the model for Guinizelli's painting reference comes from the very first *canzone* in Giacomo da Lentini's collection of poetry, "Madonna dir vo voglio", in which he refers to a painting's inaccurate depiction in comparison to a man who cannot scratch an itch ("lo non poter mi turba/com'om che pinge e sturba"). The pattern suggests that Lentini's example not only served as a model, but established a precedent for the kind of meaning that could be communicated through representations of artistic practice within textual representations.

Robert Edwards has established a relationship between Guinizelli's poetic description of painting the air to two other poets who use the same example, Chiaro Davanzati and Bonagiunta Orbicciani,[43] though he does not examine the shared reference in detail. Importantly however, he

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[41] Italian versions of Guinizelli's poems cited from *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. Contini (1995).
[42] English versions cited from Guinizzelli, Guido, and Robert Edwards, *The Poetry of Guido Guinizelli*, (New York: Garland Pub., 1987).
[43] Bonagiunta Orbicciani: III.29-31

draws a connection between all three of these poets, and their reference to painting, and Giacomo da Lentini. While Edwards does not mention "Donna mi Sforza", he does reference a few verses in another of Guinizelli's poems, "Lo fin pregi' avanzato" ("That Sublime and Perfect Worth"). In the verses Guinizelli writes,

> com'om che pinge bene
> colora viso tale
> che li conven mal, tale
> è soffrire orgoglianza (vv.18-21)
>
> ["Like an artist who paints well/ but chooses colors/ badly suited to the face – that's/ what it is to endure her pride."]

These lines bear strong resemblance to the same above-cited verses in Lentini's *Madonna dir vo voglio*, and even imitate some of the same language verbatim, such as the beginning of both painting references, "com'om che pinge". Both sets of verses also emphasize the painter's frustration by his inability to achieve the image he desires. In Lentini's example, the painter fails to accurately portray the lady's exact likeness, whereas Guinizelli's painter makes a similar error by choosing the wrong colors for his depiction. Significantly, it is a kind of experience that is being compared, not content. Although the relationship between Lentini and Guinizelli's references to painting may seem more evident in this example, Guinizelli's similar turn to painting in "Donna mi sforza" employs the same model. In this poem Guinizelli also aims to depict, through textual representation, an understanding of the feelings associated with frustration at unrequited love, although the painting reference shifts to the idea of painting air, an

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> (Gioia né ben non è senza conforto)
>
> Perché seria fallire a dismisura
> a la pintura – andare
> chi pò mirare – la propria sustanza; (vv. 6.29-31)

["It would be a grave error to admire appearances of objects when one could perceive their true appearances. Next verse refers to an eclipse….."]

image that is paradoxically less imaginable than that of a painter making errors in the execution of his work.

The similar vocabulary terms along with the shared aims of each example demonstrates Guinizelli's familiarity with Lentini's turn toward representations of painting to convey an action rather than an object within his poetry. It also suggests that he was aware of Lentini's more subtle efforts to employ representations of painting as a way to express subjective experience. At the very least, the strong sense of visuality through Guinizelli's work combined with his knowledge of how Lentini employed references to paintings within his poems, establishes Guinizelli as an important link in the evolution of textual representations of visual arts in thirteenth century medieval Italian poetry, between Lentini and Dante. However, despite his notable contributions to many aspects of visuality in thirteenth century Italian poetry, Guinizelli remains most well remembered for one singular and significant visual image in a *canzone*, in which he compares his lady to an angel.[44] While there are many existing reasons for this, the important one remains the fact that through Guinizelli, Dante adopted a poetics that allowed him to describe the effects of love without being accused of describing baser passions such as lust.

In his most renowned poem, "Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore" ("Love returns always to a noble heart"), Guinizelli uses the congedo of his *canzone* to claim he confused his lady with an angel, thus justifying his passion for her as chaste and ennobling. Dante exploits this structure to the fullest in the *Commedia*, a poetic work constructed with the idea that his love for Beatrice is so ennobling that it causes him to be chosen by God to undertake the divine journey depicted in all three parts of the work. However, beyond the important idea that the lady can save

[44] Paolo Borsa has argued that Guinizelli's two defining visual contributions to the repertoire of vernacular images in Italian poetry include the image of the poet's beloved as an angel and the arrow of Love that pierces the poet as arrows that instead eminate from the eyes of the beloved. See Borsa, "L'immagine nel cuore e l'immagine nella mente" (2016), pp. 85-88.

the poet through her divine grace and beauty, by claiming that his lady "tenne d'angel sembianza" ("had the likeness of an angel"), Guinizelli also introduces a new way of describing vision in poetry that emphasizes the relationship between perception and experience. No longer required to fixate on an image imprinted on his heart to perceive his lady and understand his feelings for her, the poet describes the material and physical characteristics of the lady in order to project onto her qualities of divine, that is, unseen grace.

IV: Conclusion: Picturing Absence

Far from merely introducing a repertoire of painting-related images for later Italian poets to draw from in order to examine the possibilities and limits of visual imitation, Giacomo da Lentini's poems introduce the concept that paintings are deeply engaged with the question of visual transmission and the representation of experience. Motivated by a desire to praise the poet's beloved, representations of paintings are therefore employed in order to describe the effects of her love, both through her inherently ennobling attributes like pity and nobleness, as well as through the poet's internal emotional response. In this respect, the role of paintings within lyric poetry is to transform an invisible substance, such as emotions or attributes, to a material thing. As a material object, that can be seen and touched, the textual paintings are able to expose these normally invisible substances in a way that makes them immediately perceptible, recreating through textual description, the same experience as viewers. By turning to visual art, Lentini therefore explores the possibilities for fully representing his beloved in a way that visualizes her highest qualities, despite her physical absence for the poet, as well as her distance from the experience of the reader. That Lentini introduces the first examples of painting into the vernacular lyric tradition as a vehicle for realizing the poetics of absence establishes a model for

the way in which visual representations are employed by the poets following him, including Guinizelli and Dante.

Although Lentini's contribution has mostly gone unnoticed by scholars more interested in his historical, theological, and philosophical references and how Lentini's use of these themes influenced Dante, Boccaccio, or Petrarch. However, Dante's own turn to representations of visual art within the *Vita Nova* and the *Commedia* closely resembles the precedent established by Lentini for depictions of paintings, both in terms of theory and iconography. For example, like Lentini, Dante tends toward representations of visual art that facilitate an understanding of his own emotions rather than those that describe the content or composition of the work of art itself. Even when Dante does employ ekphrasis, such as in the first verses of *Purgatorio X* where he describes the reliefs on the terrace of the prideful, he places emphasis on the feelings, thoughts, and emotions which are summoned for the viewer through gazing at the work of art, rather than on describing each sculpted lattice or figure for the sake of providing a visual sense of the work to the reader. It is significant to notice then, that by the time Dante turns to representations of sculpture in the *Commedia* and to representations of painting in the *Vita Nova*, he does so with the understanding that their purpose is to communicate a more fully realized internal experience that transcends the structural limitations of the text, as first introduced by Lentini.

In order to interpret Dante's subsequent representations of both artists and works of art it is therefore critical to understand Lentini's depiction of visual arts within his poetry. This is especially key given that Dante follows Lentini's method of depicting the arts and his own frequent turn to visions, visualizations, and visual representations within his literary corpus. Although the visual quality of Dante's writing has received modest attention in recent scholarship, the majority of contemporary studies still focus on physical visualizations of his

writing in the forms of drawings and paintings by later artists, rather than on the literary and theoretical sources that influenced the visual representations within his works. However, in tracing the evolution of visual representation within Lentini's poetry, specifically his application of painting and portraits, a parallel use of visual art emerges in Dante's poetry that illustrates resonance of Lentini's influence. Drawing on Lentini, Dante also turns to visual representations in order to give material form to invisible substances. In doing so, he expands Lentini's even further within his own experimentation with the limits of verbal and visual representation with the *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia* inorder to explore the dynamics of divine representation of likeness in relation to his beloved Beatrice. From Lentini to Dante then, the use of visual representation within poetry develops as a means for providing a material form to abstract concepts without iconographic precedent. Motivated by the *donna*'s absence, the poems drawing on visual art seek to appeal to the reader's own experience of frustration and loss, by concretizing those invisible substances in a form that engages all of the senses, and predominantly that of sight. As best described by Cennino Cennini in his *Libro dell'arte* (c. 1437), the true aim of painting "calls for imagination, and skill of hand, in order to discover things not seen, hiding themselves under the shadow of natural objects, and to give them shape, presenting to plain sight what does not actually exist (Cennini 1)." Despite the century gap between the *Duecento* poets and Cennini's handbook, his definition accurately describes the way that representations of painting is employed by Lentini, Guinizelli, and even Dante in their poetry. Moreover, it suggests that by the time Cennini wrote his treatise, the theory explored by the *poeti* was no longer a poetic exercise, and was instead already integrated in late medieval and early modern practices of considering and making visual art.

Chapter Two: Picturing Angels, Seeing Beatrice: Representation Beyond the Material

The *Vita Nuova* remains one of Dante's most visually complex narratives, employing a diverse range of images and appearances corresponding to his poetic development throughout the text. Conceived as an autobiographical account of the poet's life and loves of youth, the narrative is propelled forward by Dante's encounters with Beatrice and his subsequent reflections on her miraculous presence in the world. As such, it is Beatrice's appearance that leads Dante to compose a sonnet marking his poetic debut, and her death that compels him to adopt a new poetics.[1] Yet the *libello*, or little book, both opens and closes with an image of Beatrice in Heaven, her (inherently) divine status revealed in retrospect through the poet's reflections and memories. Just as Dante's poetics evolve according to his love and loss of Beatrice, her visual appearance also motivates his stylistic development, placing emphasis on the role of representation in conveying her presence through her visual appearance, even in her absence. That Dante sees his beloved both directly, through a series of encounters, as well as indirectly, through his dreams and imagination even after her death, underlines the poet's use of images to explore the poetics of absence, that is, the relationship between appearances that are visible in the world and those that reflect an invisible or divine meaning.

As a text laden with imagery, there are multiple forms of visual representation within the *Vita Nuova*, both figural and structural. The question underpinning the role of images is not one of theme or iconography however, but rather one of likeness; that is, how visual representations convey appearances, especially in light of a subject's physical absence. For example, Dante exploits the imitative nature of likenesses in order to explore the ways in which Beatrice either resembles mortal women or comes to personify divine symbols at different stages of the text. For

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[1] On the relationship between the structure of the text and its relationship to Neoplatonism see Ronald L. Martinez and Robert Durling, *Time and the Crystal* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

example, alternate women become a screen for Dante's devotion to Beatrice, while she herself is described as a "similitudine", or a simulation of the number nine, the root number of miracles according to the poet's calculations.[2] While the first example raises the problem of outward resemblance but inward difference between the mortal women and Beatrice, similar to the tension created through inappropriately coveting images of icons, the latter points to a non-mimetic type of representation aligning the lady's being with her divine purpose on earth. The figure of Beatrice reflects the multidimensional meaning of images, implicating both the possibility of earthly and divine meaning.

The momentum generated through the progression of Dante's memories, dreams, and visions in the text consequently raises the question of analogies, both in visual representation and in meaning, illuminating a series of tensions between representations of objects that are present and absent, material and incorporeal, and internal and external. At the center of these analogies is Beatrice, her presence a resemblance to Christ and her death parallel to his heavenly ascension. As pointed out by Charles Singleton in his seminal study *An Essay on the 'Vita Nuova*', the analogy between Beatrice and Christ is not one of physical appearances, but rather one of actions.[3] That is, Beatrice is not like Christ because she shares any external visual resemblance with him, but because her life and death reflect his miraculous presence and ascension to heaven; each gesture, glance, and appearance, even in dream-visions, reveals the truth of Beatrice's divine semblance. Beatrice embodies these visual analogies in her appearance, given that she is at once mortal and miraculous, seen in person and in memory, and is both real and incorporeal.

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[2] The significance of the number nine is raised at different points throughout the text. Dante first sees Beatrice at the age of nine and he later dreams of her in the first of the last hours of night. Later he asserts that Beatrice is the number nine herself and gives an account of the significance of the number nine in Chapter 19.

[3] See Charles S. Singleton, *An Essay on the 'Vita Nuova*' (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949), especially chapter three, "From Love to Caritas", pp. 55-79.

In this sense, she embodies the dual nature of Christ, reflecting both God and human nature. By establishing such duality within the use of likenesses, Dante explores the different layers of meaning embedded within Beatrice's presence, turning to visual representation as a vehicle for picturing her despite the physical limitations of her mortal life.

The ability of images to transcend their material boundaries is not a theory without precedent in medieval visual culture. Painted images of saints were especially prevalent in late medieval Italy, influenced by the function held by Byzantine icons. In this context, it was understood that images conveyed the tangible presence of the saint to the viewer of the portrait, leading to the belief that such images could carry out miracles for the faithful. As objects of veneration these images were revered for their ability to convey the divine presence of the depicted subject rather than for their ability to portray an exact physical likeness. Yet in representing a saint, who existed in historical time, these images also point to the intersection between memory and vision in conveying a divine likeness that transcends the spatial, temporal, and even physical boundaries of the painted image. As Hans Belting has argued in *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, in the medieval period such devotional images prefigured the appearance of God for those still on earth seeking a glimpse of divine activity through the painted surface of the portrait.[4] In this respect, the aim of the devotional image was not so much a representation of the present, but rather a vision of future experience of

[4] See Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994). This influential study examines the role of devotional images between antiquity and the Renaissance, with particular attention to the image's relationship to cultural and theological practices. Belting identifies a relationship between practices in viewing devotional portraits and theological beliefs concerning the vision of God within the text: "In the medieval context the image was the representative or symbol of something that could be experienced only indirectly in the present, namely, the former and future presence of God in the life of humankind. An image shared with its beholder a present in which only a little of the divine activity was visible. At the same time the image reached into the immediate experience of God in past history and likewise ahead to a promised time to come" (Belting 10).

God through the divine likeness conveyed in the portrait. That devotional images anticipate a vision of divine experience surpassing the painted surface establishes a practice of viewing concerned with the implications of visual likenesses, not in terms of similitude but in terms of anticipated or hoped for presence.

There is a model then for appropriating the transcendent vision of devotional images by exploring the role of likeness within the cultural tradition of visual art to which Dante belonged. It is therefore not surprising that in the *Vita Nuova*, a text immersed in the question of likenesses and appearances, that Dante would appropriate existing practices for spiritual viewing and engaging with images in order to fully convey the transformative power of Beatrice's love. The privilege of images to transcend material limitations ultimately presents the poet with a liminal space through which to explore the intersection between the physical and divine causes of his love. Yet turning to visual representation as a vehicle for elevating Dante's experience from terrestrial to celestial also poses a mimetic challenge: as the images correspond to the poet's ascending poetic and spiritual development, at stake is the risk of creating images that compare with "acheiropoetic" art made by God. Just as images present Dante with a vehicle through which to explore the relationship between material and metaphysical likenesses, they also contain a subtle indication of the poet's elevated powers of creation, especially when reflecting a divine presence.

Dante turns to visual art at three distinct moments of the text that correspond to his poetic development. Collectively, these three artistic representations – a mural fresco cycle, a depiction of Dante drawing angels, and the impression of Christ's face on the Veronica veil – indicate a visual ascent from earthly to divine creation, that is, from human created art, to that made by God. As "real" visual representations, albeit through text, these works of art grapple more

directly with the problem of visual likenesses and the transmission of spiritual meaning, given their material form. Given that these images are also inexorably linked to the theological tradition that associates them with the promise of divine experience, these artistic representations are significant in that they prefigure Dante's own vision of God at the end of the *Commedia*.

The aim of this chapter is thus to examine these three examples of visual representation within the *Vita Nuova* in order to situate them in dialogue with the theories of visual transmission from which they emerge, as well as within the narrative of Dante's spiritual and poetic development according to his love for Beatrice in the text. I argue that in turning to visual representations in the *Vita Nuova*, Dante draws on the existing notion of transcendent vision inherited through the practice of meditating upon devotional images in order to give visible and material form to divine likenesses that would otherwise not exist within the physical boundaries of time and space on earth.

I. The "Matera" of Art: Material and divine structures in the Vita Nuova

As Dante's first attempt at self-anthology, written circa 1295, the *Vita Nuova* plays a critical role in establishing his verbal and visual poetics. Composed in the form of a prosimetrum, 31 poems including sonnets, canzoni, and ballate are introduced and followed by vernacular prose exposition, the order of which switches midway through the text, following Beatrice's death.[5] Several scholars have pointed to the poet's declaration midway through the text that he will adopt a nobler theme for his poetry, "a me convene ripigliare *matera nuova* e *più nobile* che la passata", as marking a significant transition away from his amorous poetry of

[5] Besides the *Vita Nuova*, Dante also wrote the *Convivio* in the prosimetrum style. Several scholars suggest that Dante adopted this model based on Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae* (c. 524). See for example, the notes in Richard S. Lansing, *Convivio* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), pp. 241-241. Lansing dates the *Convivio* to circa 1304, since it was begun before the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, which Dante was working on in February 1305.

youth, which represents eroticizing and earthly love, in favor of a new style of poetry invested in "disinterested" language. That is, the aim of praise is no longer to obtain a favor or return from the lady, but rather, finds its end in the language of praise itself. [6] By embedding this intention within his autobiographical text, Dante develops a framework through which to collect and re-represent his poetic corpus prior to the *Commedia*, aligning even his most problematic love poems with his transformative journey of self-discovery and dedication to beatific love. However, this decision not only commits him to developing "matera", or themes that are noble in a moralizing sense, but also those that are "nuova", or new. By juxtaposing "nobile" and "nuova", Dante indicates that there is a higher value to innovative and unprecedented representation, thereby privileging the act of creation.

The creation and composition of the *Vita Nuova* is inexorably linked to the material structure of the text, the choice to compose a prosimetrum providing a visual form to the organization of the text adhering to the division of poems and prose sections. Of the three *canzoni* for example, the middle poem is situated at the center of the narrative and heralds Beatrice's death.[7] There is a symmetrical division in the poems preceding and following this moment, constructed through the accompanying prose glosses that precede the verse in the first half of the text and follow it in the second. For medieval readers, this perfect structural division would correspond to the divine order and symmetry of the universe, illuminating a parallel

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[6] See Patrick Boyde, *Dante's Style in his Lyric Poetry* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1971), especially chapter two, "Aspects of Vocabulary", pp. 77-106; Zygmunt G. Baranskí and Martin McLoughin eds., *Dante the Lyric and Ethical Poet* (New York: Modern Humanities Research Association and Routledge, 2010); Pier Massimo Forni, "A Metamorphosis of Love in Dante and Others," in *MLN*, 134 (2019)

[7] The central position of Beatrice's death in terms of the overall structure of the *Vita Nuova* corresponds to and confirms her central role within the narrative.

between the structure of human art and that of God.[8] At the material and structural level of the text then, and before even entering into the narrative details, there is a certain visual organization to the *Vita Nuova* that guides the reader's interpretation.[9] In its material organization, the visual symmetry of the text imitates divine order, emphasizing the role of visual representation in providing a visible form to invisible formations.

The prose framing devices accompanying the poems within the *Vita Nuova* hold several significant functions concerning the visual and theological structure of the text: on the one hand they provide Dante with the space to "rewrite" his own biography and on the other they guide the interpretation of the text by securing the poems within a clear narrative order.[10] As many of the poems in the *Vita Nuova* were written prior to the text and had already been in circulation, the prose framing fixed their physical position within the *libello* according to the autobiographical narrative, and not according to the order of their composition. The structural placement of the poems draws further attention to the material significance of the text given the uncertainty of manuscript culture in which the poems could be only partially copied by scribes or even copied in the wrong order. The prose glosses thus create a physical and narrative or logical frame that preserves the author's intended visual and textual design for the *libello*, anchoring the order of the poems within the text.

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[8] In the first chapter of *Essay on the Vita Nuova*, Charles Singleton refers to the parallel symmetry between divine and human art through an analogy, writing, "Our human art is grandchild to God's" (Singleton 7). See "The Death of Beatrice," in *Essay on the Vita Nuova* (1949).

[9] The configuration of the text and prose is different in surviving fourteenth century manuscripts of the *Vita Nuova*, with some verse written across the page like prose. There are even different scribal approaches concerning the prose glosses of the text, in the *divisiones* demarking the beginning and end of themes within the poems, which Boccaccio removed from the central text in his two autograph copies of the *Vita Nuova*. For further on the *Vita Nuova's* structure and divisions see Thomas Stillinger, *The Song of Troilus: Lyric Authority in the Medieval Book* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1992).

[10] On the prosimentrum structure of the *Vita Nuova* and the relationship between the prose and text, see Claudio Giunta, *Versi a un destinario. Saggio sulla poesia italiana del Medioevo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002).

The prose sections of the text can be further analyzed and separated in terms of the kind of information they convey. They contain the glosses themselves, or *razos*, which explain the reason for writing the poem based on circumstances the poet had recently experienced. There are also *divisiones* included in the prose section of the text, in which Dante explains verse by verse, when an idea or argument begins and when it closes. As noted by several scholars, the *divisiones* themselves become infrequent beginning in the second half of the text, and in Boccaccio's two autographs of the text he removes the *divisiones* entirely.[11] Nevertheless, the *divisiones* present Dante with additional space to elaborate ideas introduced in the poems they accompany. For example, in *Time and the Crystal*, Robert Durling and Ronald Martinez show that the *divisiones* of chapter 19, addressing the first *canzone* in the *Vita Nuova*, "Donna ch'avete intelletto d'amore", reflect some of the important philosophical concerns of the *Convivio*, a text influenced by Neoplatonic ideals.[12] Durling and Martinez argue that the *divisiones* reveal within Beatrice a pattern of "procession and return" of the soul and intellect from heaven, to earth, and back again. As such, there are repeated references to her limitations as a "cosa mortale", her death and return to heaven symbolic of her mediating of souls, like Dante's, on their own re-unification with the divine spirit. That Dante uses the space of the *divisiones* to further reveal Beatrice's (inherently) divine status reinforces the theological concepts underpinning the text, and emphasizes the significance of the structural design that makes them possible. Despite Boccaccio's opinions on

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[11] See Singleton, *An Essay on the Vita Nuova* (1949), pp. 45-46.

[12] See Durling and Martinez, *Time in the Crystal* (1990), pp. 53-54, and chapter three, "Early Experiments: Vita Nuova 19", pp. 53-70. Durling and Martinez reveal that some of the central Neoplatonic ideas introduced in the *Vita Nuova* are influenced by Boethius' *Consolatio philosophaie*, particularly seen through terms drawn from the poem, "O qui perpetua". Through close examination of terms first introduced by Boethius' and repeated in "Donna ch'avete intelletto d'amore", Durling and Martinez reveal the subtle ways Dante interprets Neoplatonic ideas within the poem. For example, there is an analogous tension between the *intendimento* of those who behold the beloved (understanding), and the *intendimento* of God (purpose or intention) within the poem, subtly introducing a tension between how the poet portrays her versus her intended purpose according to God; See also Bruno Nardi, *Studi di filosofia medievale* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1960).

the *divisiones*, their ability to give a visible and material (written) form to the spiritual ideas governing the poet's relationship to Beatrice makes the *divisiones* an essential contribution to both the visual and textual design of the *Vita Nuova*.

When Dante asserts his intention to take up a "matera nuova e nobile" in the *Vita Nuova* he implies that not only the theme but also the visual structure of the book will be new, prefiguring the stylistic changes he adopts in the *Commedia*. To a degree, the novelty of the text's structure was ensured by Dante's use of prosimetrum in vernacular Italian. Not in popular use among Dante's contemporaries, it may well have been adopted from Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae* a textual influence on several of Dante's works including the *Vita Nuova*.[13] In addition, the relationship between the different parts of the text – the *razos* and the *divisiones* – and their participation in the overall symmetrical structure of the text, creates a contrast between meaning introduced at the level of the structure as well as in the representation of images in the *libello*. In the figural level, the narrative details are reasoned and organized through the lens of Dante's memory and experience; in the structural level, the harmony of the material object reflects cosmological symmetry, lending a divine analogy to the very act of creating the text. This very correlation between human and divine creator is prefigured in the opening lines of the text in which Dante introduces himself as both author and scribe:

> In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria dinanzi a la quale poco si potrebbe leggere, si trova una rubrica la quale dice: *Incipit vita nova*. Sotto la quale rubrica io trovo scritte le

[13] Although it was previously held that Dante wrote the *Vita Nuova* prior to reading and engaging with the *Consolatio Philosophiae*, recent scholarship has established that Boethius' text was also a source for the *libello*. See in particular Durling and Martinez, *Time and the Crystal* (1990). For more on the tradition of prosimetra in Latin see, Peter Dronke, *Verse with Prose from Petronius to Dante* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), and Eleanor, Johnson. *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

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parole le quali è mio intendimento d'assemplare in questo libello; e se non tutte almeno la loro sentenzia. (*Vita Nuova I*)[14]

In that part of the book of my memory before which little could be read, a rubric is found that says: *Incipit vita nova* [Here begins the new life]. Beneath this rubric I find written the words that is my intention to transcribe into this little book: if not all of them, at least their substance.

As cited in the first words of the text, Dante's book is drawn from Dante's memory, composed of the poems and prose, with the text providing a visible form for his recollections. As such, his memory is the original source of the narrative details. However, he is also the scribe who copies the text by transcribing or assembling ("assemplare") the book of memory.[15] The image of his labor is materialized through the reference to the *rubrica*, a structural and visual marker in medieval manuscripts providing a clear form to the layout and drawing attention to the materiality of the text, also serving as a kind of title that defines each section of a manuscript. For medieval readers especially, the *rubrica* would bring to mind the tasks associated with creating a manuscript, from laying out and compiling the folios to the acts of transcribing text and painting illuminated images. Unlike most scribes however, Dante's task is not to faithfully copy the original text, word by word, but only its meaning ("sentenzia"). This assertion subtly implies that the scribe is at liberty to abridge or elaborate the narrative where he deems it appropriate, as long as the intended meaning is preserved. Accordingly, the very act of transcribing becomes a means for imposing a material form, through text, to the poet's otherwise intangible memories. As an innovative scribe, the visual and textual materialization of the poet's

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[14] Citations for the Italian and English editions of the text used in this chapter are taken from the edition translated by Dino S. Cervigni and Edward Vasta, *Vita Nuova* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), except for where indicated as mine.
[15] For more on the relationship between memory and practices of image making in the late medieval period, see Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*: *Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

memories can therefore rival their original form, through the acts of writing, compiling, commenting, leading him to take up the mantle of *auctor*.

Michelangelo Picone in particular has drawn attention to Dante's prefiguration of himself as *auctor* in the opening lines of the *Vita Nuova* by arguing that the initial paragraph of the text reveals three stages of his poetic development leading to him achieving such a status.[16] The poet is first a scribe, copying memories that relate to his love for Beatrice, and second a compiler, who selects and arranges the poems in a visually symmetric order. Finally, he is the commentator whose glosses support the events described in verse and reveal their analogy to divine meaning. There is an emphasis then on the practical aspect of reading, editing, and commenting, that characterizes Dante's development as an author. For Picone, the applied engagement with the stages of textual creation corresponds to both medieval practices of reading and glossing scripture, as well as the works of classical authors.[17] Through the *Vita Nuova*'s opening paragraph featuring the literary self-portrait of Dante as scribe of his own memories, the poet positions himself to become the *auctor* of the overall text, which as Albert Rusell Ascoli has shown, indicates the development of his authorial persona alongside his spiritual and poetic maturation.[18] Given that the overall design and structure of the text is a reflection of

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[16] See in particular Michelangelo Picone, "La teoria della *auctoritas* nell *Vita Nuova,*" in *Tenzone*, 6 (2005), pp. 173-91; see also by the same author, "Strutture poetiche e strutture prosastiche nella *Vita Nuova*," in *MLN*, 92 (1977), pp. 117-129 and "Traditional Genres and Poetic Innovation in Thirteenth Century Italian Lyric Poetry," in *Medieval Lyric: Genres in Historical Content*, ed. William Paden (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

[17] Picone draws on the study of Alastair Minnis in establishing a relationship between Dante's development as *auctor* and contemporary and classical understandings of authorship. See Alistair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); On authorship and self-exegesis in Dante, see Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of the Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); On the medieval *auctor*, see also Giorgio Agamben, "Eros the Mirror," in *Stanzas*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 73-89; Also, Manuele Gragnolati, "Authorship and Performance in Dante's *Vita Nuova*," in *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*, ed. Manuele Gragnolati and Almut Suerbaum (New York: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 124-140.

[18] See Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of the Modern Author* (2008).

cosmological order however, the suggestion of Dante as *auctor* of such divine symmetry approximates his art to the very powers of creation inherent to God.

Related conceptually to the *Vita Nuova*, the *Purgatorio* addresses the tension between human and divine creation, especially as it relates to visual representation in cantos IX-XII, and is the place where Dante elaborates on the meaning of his new "matera". Although the *Commedia* follows the *Vita Nuova* chronologically, considering the contrast between human made and *acheiropoeitic* art in the *Purgatorio* sheds light on the tensions inherent within the role of images in the *libello*, making the *Purgatorio* passages useful to consider in order to appreciate the full development of the ideas concerning materiality and creation that the poet introduces in the *Vita Nuova*. The most widely celebrated images in Dante's literary corpus are the marble reliefs the poet encounters on the terrace of Pride in *canto X* of the *Purgatorio*. Consisting of a series of three reliefs carved in marble, the images portray, in order, the Annunciation, David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant on its return to Jerusalem, and Trajan pausing to dispense justice on behalf of the widow.[19] The reliefs represent lessons in humility for the penitent of that terrace, who are physically contorted under the weight of rocks in punishment for the sin of pride, encouraging them to slowly look up to as they purge the weight carried on their backs.[20] The penitent themselves are bent over in forms resembling caryatids, or sculpted figures

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[19] In the first reliefs the Angel Gabriel appears to be in the act of speaking "Ave" to the Virgin, implying the visual iconography of the Annunciation, while in the second relief David is portrayed dancing while Michal looks disdainfully at him over her shoulder. Her reaction towards David's behavior leads God to make her barren. In the biblical narrative, David has the Arc of the Covenant returned to Jerusalem. During the journey, a driver of the cart carrying the Ark reached out his hand to steady the cart and was struck dead instantaneously. Scholars agree that within the image of the Ark returning to Jerusalem, which symbolized the unification of the tribes of Israel, Dante saw a parallel and preordained unification between the modern church and state, believing the births of David and Aeneas to be contemporaneous. In the final relief, Dante appears to see a widow beg Trajan to enact justice for the life of her slain son. The mercy he is said to have showed her moved Saint Gregory so greatly that he prayed to God to intercede and elevate Trajan, a pagan, to the realm of Heaven.

[20] Significant studies on the reliefs and their relationship to pride, humility, and divine conceit include Teodolinda Barolini, "Re-Presenting What God Presented: The Arachnean Art of Dante's Terrace of

typically located at the top of columns or pillars in architectural structures. In their punishment then, the sinners are sculpture-like themselves, presenting a contrast to the reliefs created by God. Against this intricately carved background, Dante and Virgil contemplate the images surrounding them as poets not just viewing, but also physically and spatially immersed in, art. This *canto* has some of the fewest lines spoken in the entire *Commedia*, the narrative being propelled forward by the power of poet's observation, interpretation, and description of the images on the terrace.

Dante's description of images within these *canti* privileges what the poet hears and how the figures appear to engage with one another, instead of providing a textual description of the composition and design of each relief sculpture. In employing ekphrasis in this way, the text raises a contrast between the poet's observation of the reliefs and the fact that he interprets them through senses other than sight. For example, while observing David dancing before the Ark in *canto X*, the poet notes the instability of his own sense of sight by relying on his sense of smell:

> Dinanzi parea gente; e tutta quanta,
> partita in sette cori, a' due i mie' sensi
> faceva dire l'un: "No," l'altro: "Sì, canta."
> Similmente al fummo de li 'ncesi
> che v'era imaginato, li occhi e 'l naso
> e al sì e al no discordi fensi. [*Inf.*X.58-63]
>
> Before it (the Ark) appeared people; and all of them,
> divided into seven choruses, made one of my two
> senses say: "No," the other: "Yes, they are singing".
> Just so the smoke of the incense imagined there
> made eyes and nose discordant as to yes and no.

Pride," in *Dante Studies*, 105 (1987), pp. 43-62 and Nancy Vickers, "Seeing Is Believing: Gregory, Trajan, and Dante's Art," in *Dante Studies*, 101 (1983), pp. 67-85.

The confusion between the poet's senses of seeing and hearing ("a due i mie' sensi/ faceva dire l'un: 'No', l'altro: 'Sì, canta.'"[21]) that characterizes his use of ekphrasis is augmented by the addition of the sense of smell ("li occhi e il naso/ e al sì e al no discordi fensi"); in adding an further sense to the process of interpreting the reliefs, Dante draws attention to the immersive conditions of viewing God's art that require the engagement of all of the poet's physical senses. That is, seeing God's art is a fully embodied experience, in which divine meaning "speaks" to the poet through the means of smell and the "visibile parlare", or visible speech. The sense of embodiment is increased through the poet's movement in space, the text describing his physical approach toward the images ("I' mossi i miei piè del loco dov' io stava / per avvisar da presso un'altra istoria", *Inf. X.70-71*; "I moved my feet from the place where I was/ standing, so as to see up close another story"). That the poet's embodied experience of the images governs how they are interpreted by readers emphasizes the poet's textual re-creation of what he directly experiences in his present time according to his journey, in contrast with the overarching and eternal meaning of the same images as intended by their creator, God, which might not be fully expressible to readers through textual description. It is no wonder that the poet is fixated on the *acheiropoeitic* images, unable to tear his eyes, or his body away. His ever-present guide, Virgil must remind him to keep moving forward, famously asserting, "Non tener pur ad un loco la mente" (*Inf.X.46*; "Do not fix your mind on one place alone").

It is only in the following *canto* that Dante directly encounters some of the penitents of the first purgatorial terrace, the second of whom is the Italian illustrator, Oderisi da Gubbio (c. 1240-1299). Through a series of comparisons, Oderisi questions the endurance of fame acquired through literary and artistic achievement. While conceptually his query adheres to the theme of

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[21] Italian and English text cited from *Purgatorio*, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling with notes by Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2003).

the terrace, pride, externally it also casts a shadow over the fame achieved by Dante and his fellow creators of art and poems. Accordingly, Oderisi first laments the surpassing of his own art by Franco Bolognese, a painter of miniatures from Bologna ("più ridon le carte/ che pennelleggia Franco Bolognese", *Inf.XI.82-83*), underlining not his technical skill but the glory he has achieved (l'onore è tutto or suo", *Inf.XI.84*).[22] Likewise, Oderisi's subsequently compares the painters Cimabue and Giotto, claiming, "Credette Cimabue ne la pittura/ tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido" (*Inf.X.94-95*; In painting Cimabue thought he held/ the field, and now it's Giotto's the acclaim").[23] The text includes no specific reference to the talent or style of this latter pair of artists, making the grounds of the comparison based on fame; Giotto has seized the "campo" because he has become the more celebrated artist. The framework created through the comparison between the sets of artists presents Dante with the opportunity to suggest that he himself has overtaken the fame held by the two Guidos that precede him, Guido Guinizelli and Guido Cavalcanti ("Così ha tolto l'uno a l'altro Guido/ la Gloria de la lingua, e forse è nato/ chi l'no e l'altro caccerà del nido," *Inf. XI.97-99*; "Just so, one Guido has taken from the other the/ glory of our language, and perhaps he is born who/ will drive them from the nest").[24] Surpassing

[22] Surviving illuminations by both Oderisi da Gubbio and Franco Bolognese can be found in some of the same manuscripts in the Vatican.
[23] Dante's reference to Giotto establishes his first literary appearance, occurring within his lifetime, given that Giotto was alive and actively creating art in 1337, his final project the *Campanile* of Florence. There is, however, an example of Giotto's art in Francesco da Barberino's *Documenti d'amore* (c. 1305), which comments on the fresco cycle painted by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel, with particular attention to the representation of the vice, *Invidia,* or Envy. Although this text predates the composition of the *Purgatorio*, its emphasis is different, focusing on the art rather than the artist. By shifting the focus to the artist, Dante subtly privileges the act of creation.
[24] In their comments to the text, Durling and Martinez note that while these lines foreshadow Dante's future fame and triumph as a poet, they are also said within Purgatory and are thus penitential; they carry the suggestion that at a future point another poet will replace Dante according to the same cycle. They also read the comparison as indicative of Dante's guilt for exiling his friend Cavalcanti, a decision leading to his death. According to this reading, in "driving" Guido from the nest, he poetically "kills" him, overtaking his poetic fame. See Durling and Martinez eds., *Purgatorio* (2003), p. 185-187.

those who preceded him, Dante's poetic art is transcends earthly comparisons in order to confront the only art that is above it, that of God.

Teodolinda Barolini has argued that in describing the marble reliefs of *Purgatorio X* made by God, Dante subtly underlines his own authority as a creator.[25] However, by emphasizing the absolute realism of God's art while contemplating the three images, perceived through his bodily senses, the poet puts himself in the position of having to re-create it poetically, setting up an inevitable comparison between his art and that of God's. Thus Dante's objective to adopt "matera nuova and nobile" as he first asserted in the *Vita Nuova* is realized in the *Purgatorio* by the poet's depiction of unprecedented *acheiropoetic* art. The "matera" is both elevated in subject and status, as art rivaling that of God. Dante foreshadows the elevation of his poetics before crossing through the gate of Purgatory in *Canto IX*. In the second of seven apostrophes to the reader within the cantica, Dante directly addresses the "matera" of his art:

> Lettor, tu vedi ben com'io innalzo
> la mia *matera*, e però con più arte
> non ti meravigliar s'io la rincalzo. (*Purg. IX. 70-72)*[26]
>
> Reader, you see well how I am elevating my
> *matter*, and therefore do not marvel if with more
> art, I bolster it.

Just as in the *Vita Nuova*, the "matera" cited in this canto is a reference to the material composition of Dante's thoughts in all its divisions and forms. In *Purgatorio IX* however, "matera" is multidimensional, referring both to the theme of the elevation of his soul ("io innalzo/ la mia matera"), but also the material elevation of his body through space with the assistance of Saint Lucy who carries him up the purgatorial mountain to the threshold of the

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[25] See Barolini, "Re-Presenting What God Presented: The Arachnean Art of Dante's Terrace of Pride" (1987).
[26] Italian and English translations of the text cited from *Purgatorio*, ed. and trans. Robert Durling with notes by Robert Durling and Ronald Martinez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

realm's main gates. "Matera" thus also refers to the poet's physical embodiment of the act of transcendence. That Dante's apostrophe to the reader occurs at the exact midway point of the canto creates a liminal space in which the narrative and structural aspects of the text require both the poet and the reader to cross the threshold of Purgatory. The transition the poet experiences is therefore both a literal elevation of his body but also of his poem; his body and intellect rise to new heights.

Consequently, what Dante initially introduces as "matera nuova" in the *Vita Nuova*, is more fully developed as "arte" in the *Commedia*, the poet's imitation of *acheiropoeitic* art elevating his poetics in both theme and form. The "arte" refers to the skills and style with which he composes the *Commedia*, underlining the technical and physical labor involved in creating art. [27] By emphasizing skill and labor through the use of "arte" Dante draws attention to the act of creation, foreshadowing the parallel between his elevated art and that of God.[28] The reliefs of the *Purgatorio* are a more sophisticated visual representation than the poet's representations of images in the *Vita Nuova*, the art embodying and thus realizing his commitment to develop

[27] Jennifer Petrie has identified several uses for "arte" throughout the *Commedia*, indicating that its root, "ars", generally refers to practical ability or skill. However, Dante also uses "arte" to refer to intelligence and judgment. In her study she argues that "ultimately, it (arte) points beyond itself to a world of values that give it its dignity, as at its highest reach it follows a beauty which, like Beatrice's 'si trasmoda'" (Petrie 24). That is, artistic creations point to metaphysical meaning that has the capacity to be transformational. For more on the uses of "arte" and the relationship between art and nature see Jennifer Petrie, "Art, *Arte*, Artistry and the Artist," in *Nature and Art in Dante: Literary and Theological Associations* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), pp. 11-24; It is significant to note, however, that he chooses to use "arte" here rather than "ingegno", the term that typically conveys his wit and genius throughout the *Commedia*. Though often interchangeable, "arte" carries more association with manual labor and learned skills, while "ingegno" is aligned with genius and inherent talent. The practice of art making was very much considered a kind of craft or manual labor in the fourteenth century. Artistic practices that drew on the liberal arts like rhetoric, grammar, and music, such as poetry, benefitted from a higher social standing, which excluded non-literary arts such as painting. For more on the social status of art in the early Trecento see Jennifer Petrie "Art, *Arte*, Artistry and the Artists" (2013), p. 20).

[28] Dante's claim is particularly fitting given that *Purgatorio X* raises a tension between Dante and God's art. In their notes on this passage in *Purgatorio IX*, Robert Durling and Ronald Martinez align the poet's confidence with loftier subject matter and images of soaring, especially that of eagles, in the *Commedia* and *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. The loftiest eagle of all is of course, that of the eagle made up of five souls in *Paradiso XX*. See Durling and Martinez (2003), p. 154.

"matera nuova e nobile". While the opening image of the scribe in the *Vita Nuova* prefigures Dante's development as *auctor*, the *Purgatorio* elevates that role to its apex, underlining his (sacrilegious) approximation to divine powers of representation.[29] In reflecting cosmic order through its organization, the visual and material structure of the *Vita Nuova* introduces a framework for considering Dante's development from scribe recounting human experiences to *auctor* capable of reproducing and rivaling divine art. As such, his transformation is mirrored in the ascending order of images introduced in the narrative portion of text, which respond to his spiritual and poetic development. At both the structural and the specific level of the text, Dante turns to visual representation in order to give a visible form to his "matera", the material nature of art embodying both the divine and human intention.

II. Affect and Painting: Expressions of Art and Artifice

Dante's resolution to create "matera nuova" and "nobile" in the *Vita Nuova* is preceded by a series of distressing events in his life that lead him to undergo a spiritual "trasfigurazione", resulting in his new poetics. The first moment in this sequence begins with an encounter between Dante and Beatrice, in which she denies him her greeting ("mi negò lo suo dolcissimo salutare," p. 62). Overcome with grief, he returns to his bedroom to lament this denial, leading to a dream-vision encounter with personified Love.[30] Between the "real" encounter with Beatrice and her appearance in Dante's dream, the poet experiences extreme psychological turmoil, underlining

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[29] Charles Singleton argues that the *Vita Nuova* draws on the idea of God's "Book of Creation", established in the Judeo-Christian traditions. See "The Book of Memory," in *An Essay on the Vita Nuova* (1949), pp. 25-54, especially p. 38.
[30] As a vestige of the preceding Romance and lyric traditions, Love, or Amor, exists the text at the midway point, no longer a necessary interlocutor within the poet's reflections on the appropriate expression for his love for Beatrice.

how his emotions govern his interpretation of his real and imagined appearances of Beatrice.[31] Likewise, he experiences a second upset when he has a psychological collapse at a wedding banquet that Beatrice also attends, leading his beloved, along with other ladies, to mock him. That these ordeals arise from Dante's encounters with Beatrice underlines the power of her appearance, revealing that her image is both the cause of his suffering and the effect of his poetic transformation, given that her presence both physically injures him, and motivates his poetry.

Until this point in the narrative, nearly at the midway point of the text, Dante's actions are motivated by his love for Beatrice, including the moments in which he sees her through appearances in dream visions, and when he actively tries to hide his love for her by writing poetry that feigns love for another woman. However, regardless of social expectations that would require him to conceal his feelings for Beatrice, the *gentilissima* remains the center of his interior and exterior turmoil, her image motivating the poet to develop new discursive formats in order to praise her. His objective is her favor, expressed through a physical gesture such a glance, a smile, or a greeting. To deny such a reward undermines the poet's aim, requiring him to reconsider the relationships between Beatrice's external appearance, his interior desires, and how they are each manifested.

Following the psychological upheaval caused by Beatrice' denied greeting, Dante reflects on his situation and the conflicting emotions he experiences, turning to poetry in order to organize and frame his concerns. He uses the sonnet, "Tutti li miei pensier d'Amore" in order to

[31] Paolo Borsa has examined the *Vita Nuova* through the lens of medieval optic theory, with particular attention to the transmission of sight. In "Immagine e immaginazione: una lettura della *Vita Nuova* he argues that the language Dante employs within the text corresponds to Aristotelian perception of sight, according to which the image of the *donna* enters through the poet's eyes and resides in his mind, generating his love for her. Likewise, Dante first sees Beatrice in his youth and her image subsequently resides in his mind, emphasizing the tension between what he sees and what he imagines internally. See Paolo Borsa, "Immagine e immaginazione: una lettura della *Vita Nuova*," in *Letteratura e Arte*, 16 (2008), pp. 139-157.

underline the contrasts between his desires and his actions, his objectives and the outcome, and his pain and love:

> Tutti li miei penser parlan d'Amore;
> e hanno in lor sì gran varietate,
> ch'altro mi fa voler sua potestate,
> altro folle ragiona il suo valore,
> altro sperando m'apporta dolzore,
> altro pianger mi fa spesse fiate;
> e sol s'accordano in cherer pietate,
> tremando di paura che è nel core.
> **Ond'io non so da qual matera prenda;**
> **e vorrei dire, e non so ch'io mi dica:**
> così mi trovo in amorosa erranza!
> E se con tutti voi fare accordanza,
> convenemi chiamar la mia nemica,
> madonna la Pietà, che mi difenda. (*VN.VI.8-9*)
>
> All my thoughts speak of Love,
> and they have in them such great diversity
> that one makes me desire its power
> another argues its foolish worth,
> another, hopeful, brings me sweetness,
> another makes me often weep;
> and they accord only in craving pity,
> trembling with the fear that is in my heart.
> **Then I know not from which to take my theme,**
> **and wish to speak but know not what to say:**
> so I find myself in amorous wanderings!
> And if I wish to draw all into accord,
> I must call upon my enemy,
> the lady Pity, that she may defend me. (trans. Musa)

According to Dante's own *divisiones*, while the first two sections of this poem outline the drama and conflict within his mind, the last two connect them to the question of appropriate "matera", that is, the most effective theme and structure for achieving the *donna*'s praise. Unlike many of the previous poems in the *libello*, this sonnet does not specifically address the poet's love for Beatrice. Instead it is his personified thoughts who speak, "li miei penser parlan", the emphasis pointing to the diverse effects of love and the emotions they provoke within him internally, ranging from hope to despair ("altro sperando,"/ "altro pianger"). By shifting the focus away

from external actions taking place in the "real space" of the world, Dante privileges the interior space of his thoughts and emotions. Blurring the line between visible and invisible space, these hidden emotions are concretized, from the speaking thoughts to the trembling spirits. In turning inward, Dante seeks to reconcile this opposing range of emotions for himself, which resist "accordanza", or harmony, except when confronted by pity. The psychomachia is left open-ended however, lacking a vehicle through which to externalize this interior battle in order to carry out the transformation he desires.

That Dante seeks a structure through which to represent his "diversi pensieri" is established in the last verses of the sonnet. He tells his audience that he is unsure which emotion to adopt in order to express the conflict he experiences, "Ond'io non so *da* qual matera prenda", subsequently suggesting that there are limitations to his ability to express his emotions through words at all, "e vorrei dire, e non so ch'io mi dica". Indeed, the sonnet "Tutti li miei pensier d'Amore" is itself an unsuccessful effort to represent his emotions through a poetic structure, given that the words have not presented him with the "matera nuova" he desires. He consequently falls to "erranza", both aimless wandering and aimless error, in his pursuit of Beatrice's love.[32] Although Dante ends "Tutti li miei pensier d'Amore" with no evident solution for his representational challenge, in formalizing his objectives, this sonnet does at the very least establish his motivation to discover an appropriate manner through which to harmonize and express his emotions externally.

Following the exposition and sonnet addressing the so-called "battaglia" or battle of his interior thoughts, Dante experiences a new encounter with Beatrice. He describes himself

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[32] In his study, Michael J. Viegnes examines the verb "errare" and its use within the *Vita Nuova*, determining that through this term, Dante gives a concrete spatial significance to the verb 'to wander', expoiting its polysemia. The verb means both *to wander* and *to err*. See Michael J. Viegnes, "Space as Love in the *Vita Nuova*," in *Lectura Dantis 4*, 4(1989), pp. 78-85, in particular page 79.

attending a wedding banquet at the behest of an unnamed friend, who seeks to raise his morale after Dante encloses himself in his room, upset and wrestling with his lack of "matera". Prior to describing the details of the event, Dante tells the reader that his "gentilissima", that is, Beatrice, also attends the banquet, raising the reader's expectations for what this encounter will produce. The gathering is described as a ritual event, a "usanza" or custom that would be familiar to readers who share in the same cultural traditions:

> Secondo *l'usanza* de la sopradetta cittade, convenia che le facessero compagnia nel primo sedere a la mensa che facea ne la magione del suo novello sposo. Si che io, credendomi fare piacere di questo amico, propuosi di stare al servigio de le donne ne la sua compagnia. (*VN.VII.3)*
>
> For according to the custom of the city mentioned above, it was incumbent on them to keep her company the first time she would sit at the dining table in the house of her new bridegroom. Thus I, thinking to please this friend, resolved to serve these ladies in his company.

The contrast between the specific visual memories of the "usanza", or customs, with the vague setting of the "sopradetta citade", Dante amplifies the reader's disorientation and disconnection from concrete space and time, given that they invoke specific traditions of which readers would have knowledge in a vague setting. Although the *Vita Nuova* is framed as autobiographical, concrete details are removed from the narrative, such as the name of the city of Florence, referred to primarily as the "sopradetta cittade", or aforementioned city throughout the text, but never actually cited; likewise, Dante describes himself walking through the city, but never specifies his surroundings. The lack of topographical indications juxtaposed against precise visual and emotional details presented as memories creates a kind of void for the reader, heightening the text's overall oneiric quality. What should be dateable moments and discernable landscapes are only implied through impressions, resulting in ambiguous visual indications, between memory and fiction, which situate the narrative just beyond the reach of concrete space.

By embedding an "usanza" or an intimate yet collective custom embedded in social practice into the ambiguous visual landscape, Dante concretizes his experience for readers who are knowledgeable of this custom, drawing a parallel between the memory of the book and the experience of the readers.

It is worth briefly noting what the experience of a Trecento wedding banquet looked like for Dante's readers in order to underline the stakes for Dante's participation in the banquet, in particular, the risks of public exposure. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has determined that fourteenth century Florentine wedding ceremonies typically consisted of three main components: first, the formal arrangement and mediation of the marriage contract by the bride and bridegroom's families; second, the "ring day" or formal betrothal of the bride and groom in which both parties give consent to the wedding in the presence of families and allies; third, the "public expression" of the marriage, in which the bride was typically escorted to her husband's home by his friends, family, and allies. On arriving at the husband's home, the new couple would typically be given a feast, following which they would be expected to officially consummate their union.[33] Dante specifies that the banquet is the first meal the bride partakes in at her husband's home, "nel primo sedere a la mensa che facea ne la magione del suo novello sposo." By Dante's own account then, he indicates that the banquet he attends is part of the "public expression" of the marriage, a performative exercise designed to ritualize the transfer of the bride's body from her

[33] See Christiane Klapsich-Zuber, "Zacharias or the Ousted Father: Nuptial Rites in Tuscany between Giotto and the Council of Trent," in *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, pp. 178-212, especially pages 183-193. Klapsich-Zuber notes that this tripartite series of steps in the marriage ritual was unique to fourteenth century Florence, showing that the development of banks in the fifteenth century changed and even condensed their order given the new possibilities for families to acquire loans to pay dowries. One consequence of this shift, for example, was that consummation of the marriage, which had previously been dependent on receiving the full dowry ahead of the act, was moved up sooner in the process, sometimes even on ring day, to ensure that dowries that took five to ten years to pay out through loans would not be rescinded.

family's home to her husband's bed. The momentum from the procession to the banquet heightens the anticipation of the final event, the consummation of the marriage.

Against this charged backdrop, Dante places himself in the same space as Beatrice, participating in the same public ritual as she does. The public expression of Dante's love for her is a recurring theme and issue throughout the first half of the *Vita Nuova*. His encounters with her occur in unspecified public spaces, such as the streets of Florence, or in an unnamed church, only identified as the location "ove s'udiano parole de la regina de la gloria" (p. 52), that is, the place where one hears of the life of the Virgin. To disguise his affection, he even goes so far as to adopt two different "screens", or women who allow him to dissimulate his feelings toward Beatrice as far as the public is concerned. The problem with these decoys is revealed when Dante's overenthusiastic praise of the second lady leads to rumors that tarnish his reputation, resulting in the pivotal moment in which Beatrice denies him her greeting. His anxiety regarding the "soverchievole voce", or excessive voices that spread rumors about his behavior, and their association with the trauma of the lost greeting underlines his concern regarding public opinion about his interior emotions. The setting of the wedding banquet, a domestic and secular space, therefore presents even greater risks for exposure, given that Dante is likely surrounded by political allies, family, and friends, unable to shield himself with strangers in a crowd to hide his emotions.

The anticipation of Dante's new encounter with Beatrice proves to be too overwhelming for the poet; he begins to tremble uncontrollably before he is even aware of her presence, with tremors emanating from his heart to the rest of his body, "mi parve sentire uno mirabile tremor incominciare nel mio petto da la sinistra parte e distendersi di subito per tutte le parti del mio corpo" ("I seemed to feel a wonderous tremor commence in my breast's left side and quickly

spread through my body," p. 71). That tremors dwell in the heart is established both in the previously discussed sonnet, "Tutti li miei penser parlan d'Amore", when Dante describes his conflicting emotions trembling within this organ ("tremando di paura che è nel core"), and also through Dante's first encounter with Beatrice in childhood. After seeing her for the first time, he writes,

> In quello punto dico veracemente che lo spirito de la vita, lo quale dimora ne la secretissima camera de lo cuore, cominciò a tremare sì fortemente, che apparia ne li menimi polsi orribilmente. (*VN.I.7*)
>
> At that moment I say truly that the spirit of life, which dwells in the most secret chamber of the heart, began to tremble so strongly that it appeared terrifying in its smallest veins.

Instead of symbolizing a personified spirit to address the effects of love on the soul, the "spirito della vita" refers to spirits as bodily substances that inform his sense perception, in accordance with medieval psychology and philosophy. In this respect, Dante is deeply influenced by Cavalcanti, who drew on natural philosophy to explore the psychological effects of love in his poetry, with particular attention to the "spiriti" or spirits of love. [34] As Giorgio Agamben has shown, Cavalcanti's interest and application of the "spiriti" was not to recreate medical doctrine, but rather to appropriate its function to explain the effects of love.[35] For Cavalcanti, the impressions of things perceived in the world, or *phantasms*, which include his *donna*, merge with the "spiriti", so that love moves like a spirit through the body. However, the relationship between the phantasy, generating desire for the beloved, and the inner "spiriti" belonging to the poet raises the stakes for falling in love: if devastating enough, its effects could be fatal. In drawing on Cavalcanti's application of the "spiriti", Dante's description of the tremors

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[34] Cavalcanti makes light of fellow stilnovists' overuse of "spiriti" as metaphors for discussing the mechanism of love in his sonnet, "Pegli occhi fere un spirit sottile", which uses some version of "spirito", "spiriti", and "spiritelli" in every line, underlining is self-parodic tone.

[35] For a fuller description of Cavalcanti's "pneumo-phantasmology" see Giorgio Agamben, "Spirits of Love," in *Stanzas* (1993), pp. 102-109.

emanating from his heart at the banquet thus conveys the sense of these spirits travelling through his veins and affecting him physically and psychologically. The reaction Dante experiences as he trembles at the wedding banquet is not metaphorical then, but rather representative of a breakdown between his internal and physical faculties, both in his body and in his soul.

Unable to quell the tremors caused by his *spriti*, which sense Beatrice's presence even before the poet sees her, and at risk of publicly exposing his distress, Dante leans against a painting surrounding the wall of the banquet room ("io poggiai la mia persona simulatamente ad una pintura"). The description of the painting is anti-ekphrastic; it is only ever described as being extant, "una pintura", and in terms of its physical location circling the walls, "che circundava questa magione". Despite lacking visual description, contemporary readers of the *Vita Nuova* may have inferred that Dante imagined a mural painting depicting an allegorical or mythological scene celebrating domesticity and the virtues associated with the family of the bridegroom. For example, popular themes for secular fresco cycles in the fourteenth century often included amorous and domestic scenes or featured exemplary figures from myth and history, raising a subtle tension between the wedding festivities occurring in the physical space and their imitation or resemblance to the painted images in the frescoes.[36] The use of illusionary pictorial devices in such fresco cycles, such as the imitation of materials like variegated stone, give the impression of sharing in the same physical space as viewers, heightening the immersive experience of the viewer. Invoking the visual and spatial relationship to artifice implied by the painting at the

[36] In *Painted Palaces*, Anne Dunlop examines the emergence of a new aesthetic category of secular painting in fourteenth and fifteenth century Italy. She suggests that secular wall decoration from this period exhibits, "self-consciousness about its own mimetic qualities," that is, the images consciously imitate different forms of visual media like mosaics and inlaid stone, necessarily engaging with both real and fictive space. See Anne Dunlop, *Painted Palaces: The Rise of Secular Art in Early Renaissance Italy* (University Park, P.A.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), especially pages 8-11 of the *Introduction*, and Chapter Two.

wedding banquet suggests that it invites interpretation, especially given its position as an intermediary between Dante's interior and exterior reaction to Beatrice's presence.

Figure 3. Unknown Artist, Detail: *Lady Playing A Ball Game*, Hall of Knights, Castel Runcolo (Schloss Runkelstein), Bolzano, Italy, c. 14th century. LUNA, University of Chicago Collections, accessed 08/07/2020. Domestic scenes including ball games were depicted in secular mural paintings in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The purpose of Dante's connecting with the painted wall is twofold: first, it is a response to his tremors and thus an indication of weakness, and second, it physically supports him and places him in position to raise his eyes in order to finally behold Beatrice. He gives no indication that he moves from this posture or location in the rest of the passage, suggesting that his experience of viewing Beatrice is entirely facilitated through his proximity to the painted wall. Dante implies the significance of the painted wall through the adverb "simulatamente", a hapax in Dante's corpus, which most scholars agree conveys the sense of concealment:

> Allora dico che io poggiai la mia persona *simulatamente ad una pintura la quale circundava questa magione*; e temendo non altri si fosse accorto del mio tremare, levai li occhi, e mirando le donne, vidi tra loro la gentilissima Beatrice. (*VN.VII.4*)
>
> Then, I say that I rested my body, to disguise my tremor, *on a painting that went round the walls of the house*; and fearing lest one might notice my trembling, I raised my eyes, and beholding the ladies, I saw among them the most gentle Beatrice.

By juxtaposing the adverb "simulatamente", or dissimulation, with the painting, Dante underlines the painting's mediating role between the point of his first tremors, which are internal, to their extension to the rest of his body, making them visible externally to others. The painting itself assumes liminal qualities, physically manifesting the tension between the poet's internal and external struggles, as well as parallel tensions between what is representationally visible and invisible, artificial and real, and concrete and metaphysical. Through the physical contact with the painting, Dante enters into the same liminal space as the painting, embodying the tensions between artifice and experience. Although the subject of the painting is not revealed, the term "simulatamente" suggests that something about the paintings' material condition, that is, the fact that it is a painted and not a plain wall, connects questions or practices of simulation to those of dissimulation.

The adverb "simulatamente" has presented a challenge to critics and translators of the *Vita Nuova*. At stake is understanding why its inclusion is necessary in the text given that Dante could describe himself leaning against the painting at the wedding banquet without doing so "simulatamente", or for that matter, lean against a wall without paintings. Although recent English and Italian editions share the consensus that "simulatamente" means something like "concealment" or "disguise", the differences in the editors' translations and notes slightly alter the relationship between Dante and the painting, shedding light on the ways in which this adverb creates a framework for interpreting Dante's reaction to Beatrice's presence at the wedding

banquet. Understanding Dante's reaction is critical, given that he experiences a so-called "trasfigurazione" just following this passage that motivates his decision to adopt new "matera". It is through this transformation to his body and soul that he establishes the grounds for his new poetics, underlining the significance of this transformational experience within the text.

At its etymological roots, "simulatamente" is related to other words used by Dante to convey a sense of "likeness" or "resemblance" in the *Vita Nuova*, such as "simulacra" (12:3), "simulato" (9:6), "simulava" (32:2), and "similitudine" (29:3).[37] At times, such as when Beatrice herself stands for the number nine ("questo numero fue elle medesima; per similitudine dico"), the meaning communicated is that of surrogacy for the miracle of the numeric sign,[38] while at other times it has the purpose of feigning or faking, such as when Dante is asked to write a poem by Beatrice's male relative about a recently deceased woman other than the *gentilissima*, although in truth he intends for the poem to refer to Beatrice; what has been falsified is not his own appearance, but his true intention ("e simulava sue parole, acciò che paresse che dicesse d'un'altra"). Whether imitating or giving a false impression, the stem, *simulare* consistently refers to appearances in the *Vita Nuova*, especially those that are not what they seem.

"Simulatamente" is present in the earliest extant manuscripts of the *Vita Nuova* dating to the mid-fourteenth century, such as Boccaccio's autograph, MS Chigi LV 176 (17v), and also

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[37] For a fourteenth century use of the term see the commentary to *Inferno XXIII*, by Francesco Buti, written circa 1385-95: "E finge l'autore che l'ipocriti abbiano nell'inferno questa pena, ch'elli sieno in continuo circulare movimento e che vadano lentamente e piangendo, e sieno dipinti di fuori e nella vista stanchi e vinti; e ch'abbino in dosso cappe con cappucci grandissimi in fino alli occhi, dorate di fuori e d'entro di piombo gravissime a portare. E questa pena debitamente risponde a tal peccato: imperò che come nel mondo non puosono fine alli loro inganni; ma sempre andarono d'inganno in inganno; così di là continuamente vadino e non abbino mai riposo: e come ebbino lentezza nel mondo alle virtù et ancor nelli atti di fuori, per mostrarsi ben modesti; l'abbiano di là ancora al lor tormento. E come di qua alcuna volta piansono **simulatamente** per mostrarsi compassivi; così veramente piangono di là per le pene e per li tormenti."

[38] For a foundation on the problem of semiotics that can be applied to this example, see T.L. Short, *Peirce's Theory of Signs*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

MS Chigi. VIII 305, both held at the Vatican Library.[39] That "simulatamente" is extant within these early and frequently cited manuscripts of the *Vita Nuova*, establishes its authority as original to the text.[40] Consequently "simulatamente" is included in the earliest English translations of the *Vita Nuova*, including that of the painter Dante Gabriele Rossetti in 1899, in which he translates the term as "covertly".[41] Andrew Frisardi's 2012 translation of the *Vita Nuova also* preserves the adverb form by using "surreptitiously" in English, that is, to avoid attention.[42] In his notes to the text he justifies this choice, suggesting that Dante's motivation to avoid attention is based on social posturing. Citing the notes in Daniele Mattalia's 1937 edition of the text indicating that it would have been considered socially inappropriate to lean against a tapestry or fresco in the Trecento, Frisardi argues that "*surreptitiously* would express a leaning of oneself in a way so as not to be seen committing a social gaffe" (Frisardi 163).[43] Translating "simulatamente" as "surreptitiously", suggests that he aligns the term with the customs, or the "usanze", expected of Dante's social class and gender. This translation thus places emphasis on the act of leaning as the agent of the concealment, by framing this moment as actively avoiding a "faux pas" rather than as a reaction to Beatrice's anticipated presence.

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[39] This latter manuscript is editorially important, given its use as source for the critical editions of the text established by Michele Barbi both in 1907 and 1932, and also that by Stefano Carrai in 2009. See Jelena Todorović, "Who Read the *Vita Nuova* in the First Half of the Fourteenth Century?," in *Dante Studies*, CXXXI (2013), pp. 197-218, especially pages 202-212. Her study shows that the oldest extant manuscripts containing the *Vita Nuova*, MS Martelli 12 (c. 1301-1320/30, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana), the MS Magliabecchiano VI 143 S (also known as the Strozzi Codex; c. mid 14th century, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze), and MS Chigi L VIII 305 (c. mid 14th century, Vatican Library), include poems by lyric and stilnovist poets, indicating that the *Vita Nuova* was primarily read as a lyric text.
[40] To the best of my knowledge, "simulatamente" is a hapax in Dante's corpus, only ever used as an adverb in the *Vita Nuova*.
[41] See Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. *Vita Nuova*, (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1899).
[42] The translation of the passage is as follows: "Then I had to prop myself, surreptitiously, against one of the pictures that ran around the walls of the house" (p. 17). For the full Frisardi translation, see *Vita Nuova*, ed. Andrew Frisardi (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012).
[43] See Daniele Mattalia, ed. *La Vita Nuova* (Turin: Paravia, 1937), p. 31.

Two recent modern English translations of the *Vita Nuova* include Dino S. Cervigni and Edward Vasta's 1995 publication, as well as Mark Musa's edition of 1973. In the former, Cervigni and Vasta translate "simulatemente" as a verb rather than an adverb, adopting the phrasing, "I say that I rested my body, *to disguise my tremor*, on a painting that went round the walls of the house" (emphasis mine).[44] Unlike Frisardi's translation, Cervigni and Vasta's edition adds an additional modification to this phrase, by adding the noun "tremor", not included in the original Italian. This editorial decision underlines what is being disguised, the tremors, emphasizing not the social expectations involved in the wedding, but Dante's overwhelming emotional reaction. Likewise, Mark Musa's 1973 translation of this passage is significantly altered, both structurally and grammatically: "Then, pretending to act naturally, I leaned for support against a painted surface that extended along the walls of the house".[45] The decision to use the translation, "pretending to act naturally" conveys the same sense of concealment or disguise implied through the previous two translations. The subtle difference in these translations is one of agency, where "act naturally", and "surreptitiously" come across as intentional actions based on social behaviors, while "disguise" is a reaction based on Dante's tremors.

The most recent Italian critical edition of the text suggests that "simulatamente" is associated with the English word "concealment". In the notes to his 2011 edition, Stefano Carrai defines "simulatamente" as aligned with the more modern verb "dissimulare", that is, the concealment of what he calls Dante's "mancamento", or faintness.[46] In interpreting Dante's tremors as dizziness, like fainting, Carrai places emphasis on the poet's physiological reaction to Beatrice's presence rather than on the poet's concern for meeting social expectations. Fainting

[44] For the Cervigni and Vasta translation, see *Vita Nuova* (1995), p. 71.
[45] Mark Musa, ed. *Vita Nuova* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1973), p. 24.
[46] In his note to this section, Stefano Carrai defines "simulatamente" as follows: "simulatamente", cioè per dissimulare il mancamento". (p. 74) See *Vita Nuova*, ed. Stefano Carrai (Milano: BUR Rizzoli, 2011), 74.

also implies an involuntary action rather than a deliberate disguise or attempt to alter his external appearance. Consequently the wall is even more necessary as an agent that physically supports the weight of Dante's body as he reacts spontaneously to being in the same space as Beatrice. Just as in the English translations of this passage, the fact that the wall is painted appears to be arbitrary, given that an involuntary physical reaction like fainting might lead Dante to collapse on whatever object is nearest to him. What emerges as subtly different among these editions and translations is the emphasis on what the concealment or disguise enacted by "simulatamente" refers to: an attempt to adhere to social behavioral norms or a reaction to the physical effects of the tremors. In each edition, the wall is a constant, the vehicle through which Dante supports either acting according to expectations or reacting to Beatrice, its "paintedness" irrelevant. Yet Dante does insist on the "paintedness" of the wall and its relationship to "simulatamente", an aspect that each of these editions and translations tends to gloss over, perhaps producing the very contrast in their interpretations of Dante's relationship to the painted wall.

That the mural painting is never described in terms of its visual content or significance makes it a challenge if not an impossibility to suggest that by insisting on the "paintedness" of the wall, Dante is attempting to create a deliberate parallel between his actions and those of the figures that may be represented in the fresco cycle. In this sense, "simulatamente" does not mean something like an imitation of the painting. Rather, by leaning against a painted wall and not a bare wall, Dante draws attention to the material condition of the painting and its artificiality, implying a relationship between his act of dissimulation and the process of creating or fabricating the paintings. From this perspective, the act of concealing or dissembling his emotional breakdown by means of the painting is juxtaposed against the artifice and illusionary devices through which the painting presumably projects a façade of reality. The painting points

to the ability of art to transcend its very materiality in order to create multiple layers of meaning, a parallel to Dante's transformation caused by his emotional and physical fragmentation, a performance that echoes the illusionistic character of painting.

Immediately following Dante's physical encounter with the painting he finally sees Beatrice, precipitating an even more explicit deterioration of his internal spirits, and his consequent transfiguration. Ostensibly, he still leans against the painted wall when he raises his eyes to view his beloved, "io levai gli occhi, e mirando le donne, vidi tra loro la gentilissima Beatrice" ("I raised my eyes and beholding the ladies, I saw among them the most gentile Beatrice").[47] While looking down, Dante might be permitted to believe that his dissimulation was successful. However in raising his eyes to Beatrice and her companions, he gains an awareness of his own "trasfigurazione", underlining a connection between vision and knowledge. Consequently, this visible and external "trasfigurazione", the first use of this word in the *Vita Nuova*, leads other ladies at the party to mock him, including Beatrice:

> Io dico che molte di queste donne, accorgendosi de la mia trasfigurazione, si cominciaro a maravigliare, e ragionando si gabbavano di me con questa gentilissima. (*VN.VII.7)*
>
> I say that many of these ladies, noting my transfiguration, began to wonder, and talking about it they mocked me to this most gentle one.

Both "trasfigurazione" and "gabbavano" underline Dante's altered appearance, although the former seems slightly more positive than the latter. Scholars including Teodolinda Barolini and Michelangelo Picone have written extensively on the "gabbo" or mockery as a trope emerging from the Occitan tradition, suggesting that its inclusion serves as a turning point and catalyst for the way in which Dante approaches his love for Beatrice between the denied "saluto" and his

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[47] Dante uses similar phrasing in *Canto XXXI* of the *Paradiso* when raising his eyes to see Beatrice enthroned in heaven*:* "li occhi sù levai" (*Par. XXXI.70*).

turn toward praise of her instead.[48] Picone shows, for example, that in the *chansons* of Bernart de Ventadorn the *topos* of the "gabbo" contrasts the faults of the poet with the unattainable perfection of the beloved. In accordance with the tradition of the *topos* then, the "trasfigurazione" ultimately proves too powerful for the poet, leading a friend of his to take him away from the banquet. It is only at this point that Dante steps away from the painting, leading him to reflect on the meaning of his transformation and its consequences for his poetics.

That Dante compares this transformation to a rebirth or regeneration is suggested through his use of "resurressiti", or "resurrected" in the sentences immediately following the moment of the "gabbo", to symbolize both the restoration of his spirits as well as imply a new form for both his physical self and his poetic corpus. By juxtaposing the "trasfigurazione" against this triple resurrection, that of body and soul and lyric production, Dante subtly foreshadows the possibility that death is not necessarily absolute, but can be a transformative and even embodied experience:

> Allora io, riposato alquanto, e *resurressiti li morti spiriti miei*, e li discacciati rivenuti a le loro possessioni, dissi a questo mio amico queste parole: Io tenni li piedi in quella parte de la vita di là da la quale non si puote ire più per intendimento di ritornare" (*VN.VII.8)*
>
> Then having somewhat rested, my dead spirits having resurrected, and the outcasts having returned to their possessions, I said to my friend these words: "I have set my feet in that part of life beyond which one cannot go with the intention of returning".

Dante's final claim in this passage underlines the tension between his human condition and existence in the physical world, particularly through his transformative step ("tenni li piedi") into the "vita di là", or the heavenly world beyond. Notably, his description does not privilege the faculty of sight through a vision or glimpse of Paradise, but describes the movement of his feet,

[48] See Michelangelo Picone, "Modelli e struttura nella *Vita Nuova (*L'episodio del "Gabbio")," in *Pacific Coast Philology*, 13 (1978), pp. 71-77; See also Teodolinda Barolini, Dante's Lyric Poets p. 146 and Dante's Poets, p. 42-43.

reminiscent of his forward motion in *Purgatorio*. That his body transcends the physical plane foreshadows his pilgrimage in the *Commedia*, where his feet lead him across each new threshold.

The confluence between imagery, appearances, emotions, and Dante's transfiguration meets in the sonnet that the poet writes following his experience at the wedding banquet, and after he has returned, once more, to his "camera de le lagrime", or room of tears. The first of three successive sonnets addressing the poet's transformation to different degrees, this initial set of verses in "Con altre donne mia vista gabbate" addresses the results of the "trasfigurazione" most directly, while the other sonnets in the sequence focus on the pain and suffering Dante experiences and the relationship of these emotions to the regeneration process.[49] In the first four verses of the sonnet in particular Dante draws a significant contrast between appearances and his transformation, calling himself a "figura nova" or new figure, a newness that is reinforced at the end of the sonnet to describe his transformation into the figure of someone else, "cangio in figura di'altrui". Dante's appearance, "mia vista" as a "figura nova" is based on his observation of Beatrice's beauty ("quando riguardo la vostra beltate", emphasized by the conjunction "quando", or when:

> Con altre donne **mia vista** gabbate
> e non pensate, donna, onde si mova
> **ch'io vi rassembri sì figura nova**
> **quando riguardo** la vostra beltate. (*VN.VII.11-12,* vv. 1-4)
>
> With the other ladies you deride my looks,
> not thinking, lady, how it comes about
> that you should see me in so strange a look[50]
> when I regard the beauty you possess. (trans. Lansing 2014)

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[49] The sonnet is also unique in that the poet addresses the lady directly, not sending the poet or animated spirits to intercede with her on his behalf. Consequently, the poets implicates Beatrice as a cause of his transformation, which is most evident in the initial four verses. However, this passionate exhortation ends up being one of the last of its kind given that in establishing his new poetics, Dante decides to no longer speak to her ("avvegna che sempre poi tacesse di dire a lei").

[50] I prefer the translation for this line of verse from Cervigni and Vasta's edition: "I resemble a figure so strange". See Cervigni and Vasta (1995), p. 72.

A causal relationship based on semblances emerges in which Dante’s initial appearance triggers the “gabbo” episode, following which Beatrice’s appearance inspires the poet’s new and significant transformation into a “figura altrui”. Beatrice’s appearance is also what motivates Love to take over and “ancide”, or destroy the poet’s spirits, in order to better contemplate her beauty. The implication is that the interior assault has physical consequences that lead the poet to take on the external appearance of someone else:

> Se lo saveste, non poria Pietate
> Tener più contra me l’usata prova,
> ché Amor, quando sì presso a voi mi trova,
> prende baldanza e tanta securate,
> che fere tra’ miei spiriti paurosi,
> e quale ancide, e qual pinge di fore,
> sì che solo remane a vedere vui:
> **ond’io mi cangio in figura di’altrui**,
> ma non sì ch’io non senta bene allore
> li guai de li scacciati tormentosi. (vv. 5-14)
>
> Were you to know this, Pity would not have
> the power to treat me as it’s wont to do,
> for Love, in finding me so close to you,
> becomes so brazen and confident
> he takes my frightened spirits by assault,
> and some he slays and some he drives out,
> so he alone remains to look at you.
> Thus I take on the look of someone else,
> but not so much that I don’t hear full well
> the torment of those spirits he drove out. (trans. Lansing 2014)

That Dante can still hear the “guai” or torment of his spirits, despite his transformation into someone new, emphasizes the fragmentation between his external appearance and interior self. There is a division between what he sees, that is, Beatrice’s appearance, which precipitates his external transfiguration, and what he hears, which connects him to his internal fragmentation. While his external transformation points to his future in foreshadowing the “transhumanar” of *Paradiso*, the cry of the inner “spiriti” ties him to his present in the *Vita Nuova*, requiring him to

address the meaning of his transformation as it relates to his poetic journey. In constructing Dante's transfiguration through a series of external appearances contrasted with the breakdown of the poet's internal spirits, "Con altre donne mia vista gabbate" emphasizes the underlying tension between the what is seen and what is heard, and what is visible and invisible, in influencing both his psychological and poetic development.

Between Beatrice's denied "saluto" and Dante's decision to adopt a new poetics, the poet experiences a significant transformation that affects both his body and soul. The events in between, largely precipitated by his experience at the wedding banquet, narrate the profound physical and psychological changes he endures in the process leading to his transformation. That the transfiguration is facilitated by a series of tensions between internal and external appearances as well as visible and invisible reactions, underlines the fragmentation of the self that Dante experiences and the stakes of the division between his past and future transfigured self. The significant moments that stand out in this transformative process are his collapse against the painted wall that facilitates his internal reactions, including his tremors and the death of his spirits as he views Beatrice, and the "gabbo" mocking the poet's appearance externally. Despite its relationship to the recurring use of imagery, semblances, and figures in this section, the reference to the painted wall has not received significant attention for its role in prefiguring Dante's "trasfigurazione". However, as an object that inherently represents contrasts between reality and artifice given its inseparability from the painted wall, the mural image should be considered alongside the tension of appearances in Dante's transformative process, the adverb "simulatamente", implying a deeper meaning for the image than that of a simple disguising prop. In both dissimulating the poet's internal tremors and facilitating his external physical alteration, the change that leads to the ladies mocking him, the painting subtly calls attention to the artifice

underlying Dante's transformation, that is, the visual and material structure that enable the poet's transfiguration, leading to the development of "nuova matera".

III. Angelic Portraits: Reflections of the Divine in Dante's Art

The second instance of visual representation within the *Vita Nuova* occurs following both the poet's "trasfigurazione" as well as Beatrice's death. In this passage, Dante explores the question of memory and representation, drawing on visual art as a vehicle for expressing his love for Beatrice. This moment is particularly unique in that it includes a singular portrait of Dante as an artist rather than a poet. The image of the poet as artist recalls the image that opens the *libello* of the poet as scribe, both underlining the material composition of the overall text:

> In quello giorno nel quale si compiea l'anno che questa donna era fatta de li cittadini di vita eterna, io mi sedea in parte ne la quale, ricordandomi di lei, disegnava uno angelo sopra certe tavolette. (*VN XXXIV*)
>
> On that day when a year was completed since this lady had become a citizen of life eternal, I was sitting in a place where, thinking of her, I was designing an angel on certain panels.

On the one-year anniversary of Beatrice's death, Dante describes himself designing the figure of an angel on "certe tavolete", or panels, likely made of wood.[51] Given that he uses the verb "designare" to describe his actions, it is unclear whether he refers specifically to drawing or to painting, although the impression he gives is that of absentmindedly doodling while imagining Beatrice; this may point to "designare" referring to drawing, as a practice more closely

[51] In Cennino Cennini's *Libro dell'arte* he provides detailed instructions for preparing panels for painting, suggesting that they should be of a fine-grained and smooth wood, and properly dried and primed. See Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte*. Ed. Gaetano and Carlo Milanesi. Florence: Le Monnier, 1859. URL: https://www.liberliber.it/mediateca/libri/c/cennini/il_libro_dell_arte/pdf/cennini_il_libro_dell_arte.pdf.

associated with “free” sketching. Likewise, it is difficult to discern any stylistic features of the image, since it is only described as portraying an angel, with no mention of its decoration, position, or relationship to surrounding figures. As in the example of the painted wall at the wedding banquet, the particular details of this angelic image – the specifics of its design and style – are unknowable. What is central to this representation of visual art is its ability to convey a meaning that points beyond its semantic content, that is, beyond the surface of the panels, as another ascending image foreshadowing Dante’s eventual beatific vision. As the first representation of visual art in the *Vita Nuova* following the adoption of his new poetics, it is worth considering how this image is situated with respect to the progression of Dante’s contemplation of images with divine implications, especially in terms of how it provides a material support for both the poet’s memory and internal thoughts.

Dante’s drawing of the angel functions as a meditative object, like a private devotional icon that channels his thoughts on a specific image. Notably, Dante imagines Beatrice while depicting the angel (“ricordandomi di lei”), establishing a visual parallel between his memory of her and the angelic image he creates, once again highlighting his own physical activity or movement in connection to his seeing. While the memory is visual, it is also intangible, placing it in contrast with the physical representation of the angel materialized on the panel. Dante adds to the tension between the image and its meaning by telling the onlookers watching him draw that, “Altri era testé meco, però pensava” (“Someone was just now with me, therefore I was in thought”). The use of “meco”, or “with me” suggests Beatrice’s (physical) presence, in spite of her absence and death, illustrating Dante’s desire to give her visibility through his contemplative exercise. The image of the angel acts as an intermediary, interceding between his memories and his imagination, in order to convey the meaning of Beatrice to him in a visible form.

The panel drawing concretizes the analogy between Beatrice and angels, thus raising the fear of idolatry assigned historically to devotional images. Although the drawings portray angels, in his mind Dante associates them with Beatrice, suggesting that his love for his *donna* equates or leads to to his love for God and his divine creations. As Paolo Borsa has argued, the image of the angel prefigures the elevation of the poet's intellect once he reaches *Paradiso*, as an image that reflects the divine content that Dante, at this stage, is not yet able to perceive.[52] However, Beatrice's presence on earth, drawn in the panel, is uniquely angelic, not because she resembles an angel but because she is emblematic of their divine position as intermediaries between humans and the divine and with the power to affect the poet and to provide the possibility of beatitude across physical and metaphysical space. That she resembles an angel enough for the poet to physically draw the divine beings instead of her is literally an illustration of her divine purpose, pictured only in retrospect following her death. Dante emphasizes her divine status by representing her as a citizen of heaven, "questa donna era fatta de li cittadini di vita eterna", the right of citizenship conferring her with divine privilege. Her elevated status is juxtaposed against his physical location: Beatrice inhabits the heavenly realm while Dante is literally seated near to the ground if not on it directly, emphasizing the physical and spiritual distance between them across spatial planes. Dante therefore expands the image of Beatrice and her meaning to include divine authority, in anticipation of her intermediary role and intercession on his behalf in the *Commedia*.

Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the evolution from Lentini's initial portrait of the *donna* to Dante's image of angels, revealing, for example, that in externalizing his feelings

[52] See Paolo Borsa, "L'immagine nel cuore e l'immagine nella mente: Dal Notaro alla *Vita Nuova* attraverso i due Guidi," in *Les deux Guidi: Guinizelli et Cavalcanti: Mourir d'aimer et autres ruptures*, ed. Marina Gagliano, Philippe Guérin, and Raffaella Zanni (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2018), pp. 75-92.

towards Beatrice through a visual representation of an angel, Dante turns away from the more private and traditional explorations images by earlier poets, including Giacomo da Lentini, who portray portraits or images of the beloved carved, imprinted, or painted within the heart. [53] In Lentini's poems, the portrait of the lady is often represented internally, underlining the private frustration and experience of the poet. Such images were direct portraits representing the ladies' likeness, rather than symbolic analogies pictured through the representation of divine beings. This shift from interior to external portrait therefore indicates Dante's contribution to new visual representation within the repertoire of vernacular poetry, based on his transfiguration and adoption of a "nuova matera".

In the *canzonetta*, "Meravigliosamente", Lentini turns to the representation of the painted image of his beloved in order to describe the internal and emotional effects of love.[54] In the first stanza he uses painting in a simile to describe how love has gripped him, body and soul, comparing the artist's work in visual reproduction in parallel to his own efforts to produce a version of his beloved that he carries within his heart. ("Com'om che pone mente,/ in altro exemplo pinge/la simile pintura," vv. 4-6).[55] The emphasis on the representation of the lady's likeness underlines the painting's role in creating a surrogate image for the poet to refer back to and possess. In the following stanza Lentini reaffirms the mimetic role of the portrait and

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[53] Scholars have noted that no direct source in French lyric or Provençal poetry specifically includes the concept of an image painted on the heart, making Lentini's invention a unique and significant contribution to the vernacular imagery in the Italian lyric tradition see in particular, Vincent Moleta, "'Voi le vedete Amor pinto nel viso' (*V.N., XIX, 12)*: The Roots of Dante's Metaphor," in *Dante Studies*, 110 (1992), pp. 57-75.

[54] For a fuller discussion of "Meravigliosamente" as well as Lentini's poetic corpus, see the first chapter of this dissertation.

[55] Italian and English text for "Meravigliosamente" drawn from Giacomo Da Lentini and Gianfranco Contini. *Poeti del Duecento* (Milan: R. Ricciardi, 1995), pp. 45-93, and *The Complete Poetry of Giacomo Da Lentini*, ed. Richard H. Lansing (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

emphasizes its concealment from public view. Here the image is not embedded within a simile, but rather, used to emphasize the likeness ("parete") between the image and the *donna*:

> In cor **p**ar ch'eo vi **p**orti,
> **p**inta como **p**arete,
> e non **p**are di fore. (vv. 10-12)

Lentini uses the verb "parere", or "to appear" three times in these verses, each conveying a slightly different type of visual appearance. In the first example, "par" refers to the image's appearance within the poet's heart, while in the second, "parete" refers to the lady's likeness, the verisimilar representation of her appearance. In the third, while "pare" also refers to an outward physical appearance, specifically that of the poet, the question is not one of likeness but of concealment.[56] The sense is that the image is concealed deep within the poet, not appearing to directly affect his external behavior. The repetition of "p" sounds in the major verbs and adjectives that construct these verses draws additional attention to the contrast between what is painted and what actually appears. Through these competing types of appearances, Lentini further underlines the relationship between the interior emotions and the appearance of the donna in the final verses of the same stanza, underlining the painting's role as a surrogate that mediates between his internal desire and external perception.

The third of the seven stanzas in the "Meravigliosamente" introduces the painted image as a surrogate for the absent *donna* by placing it in contrast with the poet's interior desires. In a significant shift, the poet himself becomes the painter, positioning him to externalize his devotion through the lady's portrait as he laments her absence:

> Avendo gran disio,
> dipinsi una pintura,
> bella, voi simigliante,
> e quando voi non vio,
> guardo 'n quella figura,

[56] For more on this particular *canzone* and Giacomo da Lentini, refer to Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

> e par ch'eo v'aggia avante:
> come quello che crede
> salvarsi per sua fede,
> ancor non veggia inante. (vv. 19-27)

In the middle of the stanza, Lentini notes the lady's absence ("quando voi non vio") and underlines the image's role as a potential substitute ("guardo 'n quella figura"). The image's ability to soothe the poet's despair over the lady's absence is compared through a simile in the final three stanzas to having faith in salvation ("quello che crede/ salvarsi per sua fede") that is, to an image deferred. The last verse of the stanza, "ancor non veggia inante" underlines the experience of viewing salvation ("veggia"), and points to its deferral through the adverb "ancor non", implying that the promised vision of the lady is yet to come.

Examining these verses in comparison to another poem by Lentini, "Madonna, dir vo voglio," Vincent Moleta suggests that the simile in "Meravigliosamente" compares the function of the lady's portrait to the notion of blind faith, insofar as it, "offers a measure of confidence that the object of faith is in fact present through the image, in anticipation of a future reality which will require no vicarious image" (Moleta 65). That is, the goal of the portrait is no longer to represent the image of the lady but an appropriation of faith in order to symbolize the promise of a future salvation. Moleta's reading emerges from the role of Byzantine icons, through which it was believed that contemplating a devotional image of a particular saint would transfer some of that image's virtues onto the beholder through the very act of looking. There is a correlation then between the absence of the *donna* and the invisible promise of salvation, with the image serving as the object that sustains the poet's blind faith in his future divine vision.

However the purpose of Lentini's simile is not to ultimately see his beloved's face at a future point in Heaven, but rather to express his commitment and the intensity of his love to his *donna* even when they are parted. Within the context of the greater *canzone*, this third stanza

represents the poet's ability to reify his beloved ("dipinsi una pittura") even in her absence, in order to satisfy his narcissistic desire to behold her. Like a Pygmalion figure, the poet underlines his ability to artistically portray his lady, and therefore externalize and give form to his longing. In the final verses comparing this longing to faith in salvation, Lentini both underlines the poet's absolute devotion to his *donna*, and suggests a relationship between faith and creation applying the concept of blind faith to his belief that he will again behold his lady. The simile in the third stanza of "Meravigliosamente" contrasts with the first one then, where the former compares the act of representing likeness between poetry and painting, a contrast based on style, while the latter compares the function of painting to externalizing "invisible" desires like hope and faith. In establishing a correlation between internal or abstract emotions and externalization, Lentini's portrait of his *donna* begins to create a precedent for Dante's drawing of an angel while imagining Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*, with the image both underlining her absence and externalizing his desire and his capacity to view her after she has died.

Dante's *canzone*, "La dispietata mente, che pur mira", embellishes on Lentini's image of the beloved's portrait painted on the heart by changing the artist to *Amor*. Although this sonnet is present in some of the same early fourteenth century manuscripts as the *Vita Nuova*, such as Chigi. L. VIII 305, it is not included within the *libello* itself. This *canzone* has been identified as pre-*Stilnovist* given its adoption of themes and language from the poems of the Sicilian school, particularly those of Giacomo da Lentini, especially the notion of obtaining a reward from the lady. Scholars including Teolinda Barolini have identified a recurring theme of absence within this *canzone*, expressed through the poet's overwhelming desire to receive the *donna*'s "salute", or greeting throughout the stanzas.[57] Against this tension between the lady's absence and his

[57] **See Teodolinda Barolini ed., *Dante's Lyric Poetry: Poems of Youth and of the 'Vita Nuova'*, trans. Richard Lansing and Andrew Frisardi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), especially the**

desire to see her, Dante introduces his own interpretation of the lady's painted image that foreshadows his final vision of Beatrice in *Paradiso*:

> E certo la sua doglia più m'incende,
> quand'i' mi penso ben, donna, che vui
> *per man d'Amor là entro pinta sete*: (vv. 20-22)
>
> And more intensely is its pain inflamed
> when I reflect, my lady, that it's you
> inside, who's painted by the hand of Love: (trans. Lansing 2014)

The initial verses in this passage contain the Lentinian trope of the *donna's* image painted within ("là *entro* pinta sete"), although its location on the heart is not specified. Different from Lentini's example, the artist is not an abstract figure, but rather Love personified, possessing a hand ("per man") with which to carry out the painting. The painted image is no longer merely a portrait of the beloved's likeness, but an expression of love itself, crafted by the hands of Amor.

That the painting points beyond its function as a representation of the lady's image in order to convey an abstract concept like love, is also reflected in the following verses. However, at this point Dante charges the image with theological implications. The conjunction "così" sets the comparison in motion, contrasting the image of the *donna* painted by Love with the poet's argument about his own resemblance to God, as a figure made in his likeness and appearance:

> così e voi dovete
> vie maggiormente aver cura di lui;
> ché que' da cui convien che 'l ben s'appari,
> per l'imagine sua ne tien più cari. (vv. 23-26)
>
> And so indeed you must,
> devote to its [heart] wellbeing much greater care.
> For He from Whom we learn about the good,
> holds us more dear because we bear His image. (trans. Lansing 2014)

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chapter on "La dispietata mente che pur mira", pp. 79-86. Barolini notes that the desire to receive the *donna's* "saluto" also a Guinizeillian theme.

The contrast between the two images, that of the lady and that of the poet, is not, however, a comparison between the verisimilar representational powers of God and Amor. Rather, it emphasizes the poet's exhortation to his *donna* to take pity on him since he bears the likeness of God, or that the lady, like God, should love the poet better since he bears love's image. The underlying implication is that because *both* the poet and his donna are made in God's image, which privileges them given this likeness, then the lady, like God, should hold the poet dearer ("così e voi dovete") since furthermore her image, shared with Love, is painted within him. The comparison becomes one of duty, where the *donna*'s duty to the poet resembles that of God's to humans.

The comparison between the duty of the *donna* and of God is suggestive, and has the effect of extending Lentini's original concept of the painted image from a verisimilar representation of the lady that underlines her absence, to a representation with theological implications. By proposing that the lady intercede on the poet's behalf in a divine manner in this *canzone*, Dante anticipates Beatrice's intercession on his behalf in *Inferno* in which she becomes the "donna di virtù, sola per cui/ l'umana spezie eccede ogne contento/ di quel ciel c'ha minor li cerchi sui" (*Inf*. 2.76-78; "lady of power, through whom alone the human/ race rises above all the contents of that heaven whose/ circles are the smallest").[58] In imploring the *donna* of the *canzone* to assume this power, the representation of the *donna* foreshadows the unique and divine power Beatrice wields in the *Commedia*. That Dante's argument pivots on the theme of likeness (*per* l'imagine sua ne tien più cari) also assigns power to the role of visual art as the medium that facilitates the comparison. Dante even returns to the painted image in the final stanzas of *Paradiso*, and to Lentinian influence, when ascending to his final vision of God. In describing

[58] The heaven with the smallest circles referred to is the moon.

the final of three circles he sees within the “vivo lume” or divine light, he perceives the unity of Christ’s human and divine natures in wording that echoes Lentini’s poem “Meravigliosamente”:

> Quella circolazion che sì concetta
> pareva in te come lume reflesso
> da li occhi miei alquanto circunspetta,
> dentro da sé, dal suo colore stesso
> *mi parve pinta de la nostra effige*:
> per che ‘l mio viso in lei tutto era messo. (*Par*. XXXIII.127-132; emphasis mine)
>
> that circulation which seemed in you to be
> generated like reflected light, surveyed by my
> eyes somewhat,
> within itself, in its very own color,
> *seemed to me to be painted with our effigy*, by which my
> sight was all absorbed.

As noted by Barolini, the use of “effige” or effigy is unique, only otherwise appearing two cantos prior in *Paradiso XXXI*. Like other words used by Dante to describe images, including “imagine” and “figura”, “effige” conveys the sense of the representation of a person’s likeness. In the *Paradiso* example, the likeness is determined by the second person female possessive pronoun, “la nostra”, which becomes the neutral “ours” in English. It is the likeness of Dante and his readers, of humans made in the likeness or “effige” of God, reflected in the divine light. That this image is influenced by Dante’s appreciation for the idea of the interior painted image is revealed through the language, the “mi parve pinta de la nostra effige” resembling verses 10-11 of “Meravigliosamente”, “In cor par ch’eo vi porti,/ pinta como parete”. Not only the reuse of the participle “pinta” is significant, also recurring in “La dispietata mente, che pur mira” (“per man d’Amor là entro *pinta* sete”), but also the recycling of the verb “parere”, which in Lentini creates the tension between what appears (“par”) and the representation of likeness (“parete”). It would seem that not only is Lentini’s image of the beloved’s portrait at the root of Dante’s final divine vision, but that through the trope’s merger with the vision of God, it

achieves a final metamorphosis that elevates it to the status of an *acheropoiton*, projecting an image of the beloved no longer created by an artist or by Amor, but by God.

As noted by Moleta and De Robertis, Dante contributes an additional and significant step in the transformation of Lentini's trope between the artists' portrait and the final vision of Christ, through the figure of Amor within the *Vita Nuova*.[59] The association between Amor and painting recurs in the fourth stanza of "Donna ch'avete intelleto d'amore", the first *canzone* of the *Vita Nuova* and significant for its role in establishing Dante's turn towards a new poetics in the second half of the *libello*. That Dante was particularly pleased with this *canzone* is evident not only from its significant location within the *Vita Nuova*, but also in its citation in *Purgatorio XXIV.49-51* when the poet meets Bonagiunta da Lucca, as well as its use as an example in defining the *canzone* genre in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. In "Donne ch'avete intelleto d'amore", Amor is not the painter himself, but represents the expression of love visible in the *donna*'s face:

> voi le vedete Amor pinto nel viso
> là 've non pote alcun mirarla fiso (v. 55-56)
>
> you will see Love depicted in her face,[60]
> on which no one can concentrate (trans. Lansing 2014)

The claim that the Love is painted on the lady's face is framed by the assertion at the beginning of the same stanza, that she is both mortal and uniquely divine:

> Dice di lei Amor: "*Cosa mortale*
> come esser pò sì adorna e sì pura?"
> Poi la reguarda, e fra se stesso giura
> che Dio ne 'ntenda di far *cosa nova*. (vv. 43-46)

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[59] In his own examination of the evolution of Lentini's trope, Paolo Borsa establishes the influence of both Guido Guinizelli and Guido Cavalcanti on Dante's final image. Borsa credits Cavalcanti in particular for developing the representation of the *donna* as abstracted from her physical form as a necessary condition for Dante's image in the *Vita Nuova*. See Borsa, "L'immagine nel cuore e l'immagine nella mente: Dal Notaro alla *Vita Nuova* attraverso i due Guidi" (2018).

[60] Lansing's translation uses the word "look", but I feel that "face" is closer to the original meaning since this is not a question of two gazes meeting, which is what "look" would imply, but rather the poet gazing upon his *donna's* image.

> Love says of her: “How can a mortal thing”
> be so attractive and as well so pure?”
> He looks at her and to himself he swears
> that God intends to make a thing that’s new. (Lansing 2014)

The main juxtaposition in these verses is between the *donna*’s description as both a “cosa mortale” and a “cosa nova”. The implication is that the poet’s lady is uniquely empowered by the divine, although she retains a mortal appearance, therefore existing as something unprecedented, or “nova”. That the tension between her “newness” and mortality are manifested through Love’s painting the lady’s face positions her as an intermediary between heaven and earth, her painted face bearing the expression of her exceptional status. There is no painter, and since Amor is not the artist, the implication is that the image is divine, inherently part of her physical appearance. Furthermore, it is no longer a private internalized image, like Lentini’s original version in “Meravigliosamente” (“In cor par ch’eo vi porti, pinta como parete”), or even Dante’s own earlier adoption of the Sicilian trope in his *canzone* “La dispietata mente che pur mira”, in which the painting, though created by Amor, is still located *within* the poet (“per man d’Amor là entro pinta sete”). Rather, in “Donna ch’avete intelletto d’amore”, Dante externalizes the painted image so that it is visible publicly, to all those who look upon the lady’s face (“*voi le vedete* Amor pinto nel viso”). By moving the painted image from the within the poet’s heart to the lady’s face, Dante modifies its purpose; no longer an image of verisimilar likeness illuminating the poet’s longing, the painting image becomes associated with divine representation, with Beatrice as the canvas for the expressing both mortal and divine causes.

By the time Dante reaches the anniversary of Beatrice’s death and draws the images of angels, he already engaged in the question of human and divine semblances through representations of visual art. A notable difference between the image of Dante’s drawing of the

angels and the preceding images is that the description of the drawing is situated in the prose portion of the text, rather than in verse. As the place in the text where Dante reveals both the "sentenzia", or meaning of the text and rewrites his biography, the prose framing device anchors the *donna*'s image to his memory. Yet in the accompanying sonnet that belongs to this section of the text, Dante obliquely references his drawing, subtly calling his reader's attention to the significance of the image. "Era venuta nella mente mia" exists in a form preceding the *Vita Nuova* that is heavily rewritten when it was included within the *libello*. Cited in the prose section by Dante as a commemorative poem, the sonnet is also unique in that it presents two beginnings. The first beginning includes only a quatrain, invented for the *libello*, creating a unique parallel between the two beginnings to the sonnet:

> *Primo cominciamento*
> Era venuta ne la mente mia
> La gentil donna che per suo valore
> Fu posta da l'altissimo signore
> Nel ciel de l'umiltate, ov'è Maria. (vv. 1-4)

In these initial verses, Dante juxtaposes his contemplation of his *donna* ("Era venuta ne la mia mente"), with her worthiness that positions her in heaven ("che per suo valore/ Fu posta da l'altissimo signore/ nel ciel"). That the quatrain skips abruptly from memory to heaven creates an immediate association between Beatrice's remembered image and her divine status, glossing over the details of her human life or what she represents to him. In contrast, the second beginning of the poem recycles phrasing from the pre-*Vita Nuova* version, with minimal adjustments, which focus on the poet and his actions:

> *Secondo cominciamento*
> Era venuta ne la mente mia
> Quella donna gentil cui piange Amore,
> Entro 'n quell punto che lo suo valore
> Vi trasse a riguardar quel ch'io facia. (vv. 1-4)

That lady came into my memory,
The noble one because of whom Love weeps.
Precisely when the power of her soul
Forced you to see what I was doing then.

Edition prior to the *Vita Nuova*:
Entro quell'ora che lo suo valore
Vi trasse a riguardar quel ch'e'faccea. (vv.3-4)

Rather than the *donna's* memory being associated with heaven, in the original and second versions, her image is loosely tied to specific point in time "entro in quel punto" or "entro in quell'ora", connecting her to earthly experience rather than the a-temporal and infinite space of the heavens. As Barolini has pointed out, the "vi trasse" suggests that this version is addressed to nameless and genderless onlookers ("vi" as the third person plural "you") who are compelled to watch ("vi trasse a riguardar") the poet's unspecified actions ("quel ch'io facia"), given the lady's worthiness ("lo suo valore").[61] The overall contrast when reading the first and second beginnings then is that the invented *primo cominciamento* anticipates and privileges the *donna*'s heavenly role, while the *secondo cominciamento* implicates the origin story that led to her being placed in heaven. On the adjective headings "primo" and "secondo", Barolini comments that, "In fact the labels Primo cominciamento and Secondo cominciamento enact microtextually, as a *mise en abîme*, the macrotextual deceit that governs the entire structure of the Vita Nuova. This deceit is essentially laid bare by the existence of poems in a pre–Vita Nuova redaction" (Barolini 260). There is a sense then that these sonnets reveal the alternatively divine and human aspects of the poet's *donna* on the one hand, and point to the artifice underlying the construction of the "anniversary" scene preceding the sonnets, including the moment in which Dante draws the figure of an angel.

[61] See Dante's Lyric Poets, page 260.

That Dante decides to embed the image of himself drawing within the anniversary scene becomes significant in light of the multiple layers of meaning conveyed through the first and second openings to “Era venuta ne la mente mia”. In all the versions of the sonnet, the prose passage commences with a memory (“ricordando mi di lei”) to justify the narrative inclusion of this scene. Also shared between the verse and prose versions is the reference to Dante being observed while in the midst of his memories. Although the verse version does not specify Dante drawing as the specific action being observed (“quel ch’eo facia”), when juxtaposed with the prose version of the scene, it would make sense that this is an oblique reference to the poet’s image of himself drawing the angel; that is, the onlookers watch him draw. That the first version of “Era venuta ne la mente mia” circulated before Dante wrote the *Vita Nuova* with nearly identical phrasing to the second version (“quel ch’e’ facea” instead of “quel ch’eo facia”), suggests that what appears ambiguous in the sonnet when divorced from the *libello* acquires greater clarity and meaning in the later prose construction. In other words, Dante makes the decision to clarify the ambiguity expressed in the sonnet by portraying himself drawing the image of the angel. That he should choose to fill in the meaning in this way, by turning to visual art, emphasizes the image of the angel and Dante’s depiction of himself as an artist, a connection that thus assumes greater importance in the repertoire of Dante’s art in the *Vita Nuova*.

There is an ascending order of images starting from Lentini’s first portrait of his beloved painted within his heart, painted by a human artist in “Meravigliosamente”, to Love as artist in Dante’s “La dispietata mente che pur mira”, to painting as an externalized symbol of God’s grace in “Donne ch’avete intelletto amore”. Similar to Dante’s use of the act of painting in “Donna ch’avete intelletto d’amore”, the image of the angel externalizes Dante’s emotions and desires, its public visibility underlined by the group of onlookers observing Dante while in the process of

drawing. It follows that the next image in the sequence before the vision of God in *Paradiso*, would be that of the angel Dante draws in the *Vita Nuova*, as one more version of the painted portrait that prefigures his vision of both Beatrice and God in the *Commedia*. Affirming love as the motivation for his poetic and artistic creations in *Purgatorio XXIV*, he tells his interlocutor, Bonagiunta da Lucca, "I' mi son un che quando/ Amore mi spira, noto, e a quel modo,/ ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando" (*Purg. XXIV.52-54*; "I in myself am one who, when / Love breathes within me, take note, and to that / measure which he dictates within, I go signifying"). Drawing the angel while imagining Beatrice on the anniversary of her death, her very moment of transcendence to the heavenly realm, Dante anticipates her divine status and her role as a divine intermediary, signified through the material image he seems to absentmindedly draw.

III. Conclusion: Visions Beyond the Veil

Near the end of the *Vita Nuova* Dante observes pilgrims passing through the streets below him, making their way to see the Veil of Veronica, referred to not by name but through description as, "quella benedetta imagine la quale Iesu Cristo lasciò a noi per essemplo de la sua bellissima figura" (*VN.XXIX.1*; […] that blessed image that Jesus Christ left to us as a likeness of his most beautiful countance.)[62] A *sudarium* (sweat cloth), the veil is believed to bear an impression of Christ's image imprinted into cloth material, held to his face by Saint Veronica in order to wipe away sweat and blood during the crucifixion.[63] As such it exists as a true and authentic *acheiropoieton*, an image portraying Christ's human likeness by means of divine creation, not shaped by human hands. That the image is considered a "vera icona" (true icon)

[62] See Frisardi ed., *Vita Nuova* (2012), p. 55.
[63] As Hans Belting has shown, there are several origin stories associated with the Veil of Veronica, including similar contemporary images that acquired their own degree of fame. The popularity and fame of the Veil of Veronica outranked all the other acheropoietic images following its emergence circa 1200 in Rome. See Belting, "The 'Holy Face': Legends and Images in Competition," in *Likeness and Presence*, (1994), p. 208-224.

emerges from its status as a miraculous image, a vehicle of divine representation; in bearing the imprint of Christ's face, or that part of him visible on earth, it also represents that divine part of him that is eternal, only perceivable in heaven. Indeed, when describing the veil, Dante introduces it in terms of reflecting the divine semblance of God that Beatrice is privileged to view after her death ("la quale (the image of Christ's face), vede la mia donna gloriosamente", *VN.XXIX.1*).[64] As the third and final visual representation within the text, the image of the veil thus fully realizes the ongoing tensions raised through likeness, simultaneously embodying Christ's human and divine nature.

At this late stage of the text, the poet, like the pilgrims, remains in a state of deep contemplation longing for an impossible image: one that is no longer visible on earth. Crossing through the center of the city ("passavano per una via la quale è quasi mezzo de la cittade ove nacque e vivette e morio la gentilissima donna"; some pilgrims passed through a street that is like the middle of the city where was born, lived, and died the most gentle lady"), the pilgrims are physically separated in time and space from the divine image they seek, unaware that Beatrice, for whom Dante and the city grieve, is herself an analogy for Christ. In parallel to the poet's spiritual and poetic development, motivated by the stages of his love for Beatrice, the pilgrims are also propelled forward in their journey by the power of appearances.[65] As Paolo Borsa has argued, Dante's desire motivates him to attempt to reconstruct the image of Beatrice he carries within him.[66] Likewise, the pilgrims seek an external representation of an inaccessible

[64] The term "gloriosamente" is used to introduce Beatrice in the opening of the text, foreshadowing both her death and her miraculous status to medieval readers.

[65] In considering the relationship between the poet and the pilgrims, Michelangelo Picone divides the scene with the Veronica Veil into three stages: in the first, the poet externally views the pilgrims traveling to see the veil, reminding him of his own desire to behold the likeness of Beatrice; this leads to the second stage in which the poet internalizes his observation of the pilgrims within his soul, revealing the analogy between their shared objective to view a divine semblance; third, the analogy between the poet and pilgrim has the effect of removing Dante's love for Beatrice from its localized Florentine sphere, making the desire to view her likeness a universal objective, just like the common goal to see the Veronica Veil. See Michelangelo Picone, "Peregrinus amoris: la metafora finale," in *Vita Nuova e tradizione romanza* (Padova: Liviana Editrice, 1979), pp. 129-192.

[66] Between the drawing of angels and the Veil of Veronica, Dante turns his attention to another screen woman, the *donna pietosa*, which Borsa underlines as part of his failed attempt to give his mental of image of Beatrice a visible, external shape. See Borsa, "L'immagine nel cuore e l'immagine nella mente:

image, their journey the physical manifestation of their devotion. For both Dante and the pilgrims, there is a paradox that emerges in the desire to behold a material object in order to see beyond it. Through their common goal to set eyes on a divine likeness, the pilgrims' journey foreshadows Dante's own pilgrimage through hell and purgatory in order to view not a semblance, but the actual face of God, in the *Paradiso*.[67]

By establishing the role of the Veil of Veronica in representing the materialization of an otherwise inaccessible divine appearance, Dante begins to more definitively assert the parallel between his own art and that of God. As an "essemplo", the veil represents a visual model, a likeness that prefigures Dante's vision of God and underlines the tension between material copies and original images inherent to divine representation. The veil is the ultimate copy because it is unmitigated by human hands, its very creation an act of divine intervention. Yet it remains a relic that can be physically touched and seen, the proof of its miraculous nature embedded in its very materiality; it embodies the likeness of Christ, just as it represents his absence, making the invisible visible for human eyes. For Dante, for whom the love and loss of Beatrice defines the development of his poetics of absence in the *Vita Nuova*, the Veil of Veronica becomes the ideal visual analogy for representing the divine likeness of his *donna*, who is herself an analogy for Christ. In achieving *aicheropoietic* status, Beatrice's likeness will not only lead Dante to the "vera icona", but will facilitate his vision of God.

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del Notaro alla *Vita Nuova* attraverso i due Guidi" (2018), p. 90-91. Justin Steinberg also points to the role of appearances invoked through the representations of screen women and the Veil of Veronica. He argues that Dante organizes these images in an ascending order leading to the final image of Beatrice picture in heaven. See Justin Steinberg, "Dante Estravagante, Petrarca Disperso, and the Spectre of the Other Woman," in *Petrarch and Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Theodore J. Cachey Jr. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), pp. 263-289, especially pages 277-278.

[67] The Veil of Veronica also appears briefly in *Paradiso XXXI.103-106*. In this context Dante again refers to the experience of a pilgrim, specifically from Croatia, drawing a comparison once again between the pilgrim's journey toward divine contemplation and his own experience.

Through the model of the Veil of Veronica, the ascension of visual representations in the *Vita Nuova* reaches its apex, positioning Dante to create images that approach the status God's own art in the *Commedia* such as the carvings in the terrace of the prideful in the *Purgatorio X* and the eagle composed of heavenly souls in *Paradiso XX*. At stake is the hierarchy between human and divine intellect, and the consequence of creating art that approximates *acheropoietic* meaning. As indirectly asked in *Purgatorio X,* what is the cost of achieving fame, fleeting as it is on earth, and how can this cost be circumvented if not through creating the enduring, eternal art of God? The *Vita Nuova* marks Dante's first attempt to address these questions by turning to visual representation in order to reflect divine order and meaning at both the structural and figural level of the text. Underpinning this endeavor is Dante's poetic and spiritual development according to the life and loss of Beatrice. That the symmetry of the prose and verse sections of the text is a reflection of divine order imposes an underlying comparison between divine and human powers of representation in terms of the *Vita Nuova*'s material structure. The resemblance between cosmological order and the organization of the text, and by extension Dante's life, lends itself to considering the role of likenesses in enabling the poet to represent the inherent divinity of Beatrice.

Figure 4. Unknown Artist, Saint Veronica, Église Notre-Dame, Haute-Normandie, France, c. 1311-1313. LUNA, University of Chicago Collections, accessed 08/07/2020.

The multi-faceted nature of semblances ultimately enables Dante to explore the dynamics between his internal emotions and external reactions through the support of the painted wall, and the contrast between memory and contemplation through the materialization of Beatrice's divine

status in Dante's drawing of angels. The Veil of Veronica elevates the concretization of these invisible substances to include divine immanence. It is through visual representation, albeit through poetic depictions, that Dante explores the possibilities for conveying invisible substances, from the emotional and psychological effects of love to divine likenesses in a material form. In turning to visual art in order to materialize the analogy between the human and divine causes motivating Dante's poetic and spiritual development, the *Vita Nuova* thus enables the poet to explore the dynamics between absence and presence, being and transcendence, and material and spiritual likeness. Transforming from scribe to *auctor*, Dante is positioned to create art that rivals that of God, an objective realized in the *Commedia*.

Chapter Three: Painting Without Precedent in the *Decameron*

In the fifth canto of the *Amorosa Visione*, Boccaccio portrays himself as a fictional narrator contemplating a fresco cycle depicting a central image of the allegory of wisdom, *Sapienza*, surrounded by the great luminaries of antiquity, from poets, to mathematicians, to philosophers.[1] Pictured among these celebrated figures is Dante, shown receiving the laurel crown from *Sapienza* while celebrated by the muses. This striking image has caught readers' attention for its juxtaposition of Dante, a historical contemporary of Boccaccio, with the poets and philosophers of antiquity. Though he is not the only historical figure mentioned within the greater poem, he is the only one privileged to be painted within this first fresco cycle, illuminating his significance early in the text. More striking, however, is the fact that Dante's is also the only portrait the poet-narrator does not recognize on his own.[2] On learning the identity of the portrait the poet-narrator praises his predecessor's enduring fame, echoing Dante's own

[1] The *Amorosa Visione* is a narrative poem comprised of 50 cantos written in *terza rima*, with the exception of three sonnets that open the text. Each letter of the sonnet corresponds to the first letter of each tercet in the cantos, creating a complex acrostic within the poem. An allegorical dream narrative, Boccaccio portrays himself as protagonist, ostensibly seeking moral and spiritual enlightenment with the help of an unnamed female guide. Although the path to morality is made available the poet-narrator at several points, he ignores the advice of his guide and insists on entering a castle containing a room with four fresco cycles, each featuring a different allegory, beginning with *Sapienza*, and followed by *Gloria* (Glory/Fame), *Richezza* (Wealth), and Amor (Love). One additional room contains the fresco of *Fortuna* (Fortune), whose warnings are still ignored by the poet-narrator. The ekphrastic descriptions of these paintings govern the unfolding of the narrative, raising several tensions between visual and verbal representation throughout the text. For scholarship on the use of visual art in the *Amorosa Visione* see Juan Pablo Gil-Osle, "Chatty Paintings, Twisted Memories, and Other Oddities in Boccaccio's *Amorosa Visione*," in *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 38 (2010), pp. 89-104; see also, Jonathan Usher, "Mural Morality in Tableaux Vivants (*Amorosa Visione*)," in *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg, and Janet Levarie Smarr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 119-132; Also, Sylvia Huot, "Poetic Ambiguity and Reader Response in Boccaccio's *Amorosa Visione*," in *Modern Philology*, 83:2 (1985), p. 109-122; Janet Levarie Smarr, "Boccaccio and the Choice of Hercules," in *Modern Language Notes*, 92 (1977), p. 146-152.

[2] The genre of portraiture did not emerge until the 1430s, which would also make the idea of such a portrait unique. There is some precedent for a portrait of Dante however, supposedly painted by Giotto in the Bargello just before his death in 1337. For more on the portrait of Dante, see E.H. Gombrich, "Giotto's Portrait of Dante?" in *The Burlington Magazine*, 121:917 (1979), pp. 471-481. For more on the emergence of portraiture in the fifteenth century, see Patricia Simmons, "Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," in *History Workshop*, 25 (1988), pp. 4-30.

account of artistic and literary celebrity in *Purgatorio XI*.[3] Unable to tear himself away from Dante's portrait, the poet-narrator's guide finally asks him a critical question: "Che più miri? Forse credi/ renderli col mirar le morte posse?" (Why do you keep gazing? Do you think perhaps you can give him back his dead powers by staring? *Amorosa Visione VI.23-24*).[4]

The guide's question subverts the typical exchange between an image and a viewer: rather than the flow of interpretation moving outward from the painting's surface to meet the observer's gaze, the implication is that the viewer can invest the image with some kind of power through contemplation, perhaps even the power to raise the dead. However, even in this dream vision where paintings appear to move, breathe, and speak among themselves, resurrection is unachievable. The poet-narrator may contemplate the fresco cycles but he remains separated from the figures within, given the temporal, spatial, and physical boundaries of the two-dimensional surface. And yet, Boccaccio *does* resurrect Dante in this canto, even as his fictional counterpart's guide challenges this possibility; the *Amorosa Visione* is written in *terza rima*, the verse form conceived by Dante, therefore resurrecting the poet, to a degree, through his own tongue. After all, his "morte posse", or dead powers refer to his talents as a poet and intellectual, implied through the poet-narrator's description of Dante that precedes the guide's question. By picturing Dante receiving the poet's laurel and referring to him as the "signor di ogni sapere", or the "lord of all knowing", the poet-narrator uses both image and text to establish poetry and intellect as the two principle qualities that contribute to his enduring fame. Restoring Dante's

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[3] In canto XI, Dante asserts that the painter Giotto has eclipsed the fame of Cimabue just as one Guido has eclipsed another in writing (Guido Cavalcanti taking over the fame of Guido Guinizelli), and implying that perhaps someone new has been born that has eclipsed both of them (himself). See *Inferno XI 94-99* and Chapter 2 of this dissertation.
[4] Italian and English citations taken from *Amorosa Visione*, ed. and trans. Robert Hollander, Timothy Hampton, Margherita Frankel (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1986). Originally composed between 1342 and 1343, Boccaccio returned to the text to revise it circa 1355-60. For more on the textual origins of the *Amorosa Visione* see the *Introduction* written by Vittore Branca in the same edition, pp. ix-xxviii.

"dead powers" then, is not a question of resurrecting the poet, but rather, of shedding a light on his potential successor who is able to resuscitate these powers, or Boccaccio himself.

The guide's challenge to restore Dante's dead powers through contemplation underlines a central problem Boccaccio grapples with in both the *Amorosa Visione* and in the *Decameron*, namely, the complex rivalry between visual and textual representation explored through the depiction of otherwise invisible or immaterial concepts, like emotions and desires. That is, how does visual art materialize and thus expose inherent traits like intelligence, moral character, or generosity, that is, those things which are immaterial and unseen? In representing abstract concepts with unprecedented iconography, Boccaccio examines the privilege of visual art to give a visible form to the unseen, coveting what he perceives as the creative freedom artists possess. As he laments in the *Introduction* to the Fourth Day and in the *Author's Conclusion*, he does not share in the same creative privilege as artists do and rather, has to defend his work against detractors for the use of potentially scandalous themes. That Boccaccio's concern regarding the censorship of his work is framed through a comparison between the representational powers of art and text underlines how each medium engages with the limits and expectations imposed by society. In the post-plague world where normal expectations are upended and new social order established, turning to visual representation enables Boccaccio to reflect on and even critique long-held beliefs concerning the behavior, status, and knowledge of those possessing power. Through the lens of visual art and through the words of unexpected protagonists such as women and painters, Boccaccio is able to call into question the authority of traditional expectations that would limit his own representational powers, thus rasing a tension between visual and verbal representation that underpins the text.

This chapter examines Boccaccio's turn to visual representation in the *Decameron* in order to explore the ways in which art subtly critiques social expectations by giving visible form to otherwise invisible things like behaviors, desires, and moral failings. I argue that in appropriating the ability of art to reify, or give a visible form to the immaterial themes and issues that he critiques within the *Decameron*, Boccaccio also investigates the tension between visual and textual representation in terms of each medium's freedom and capacity to depict unprecedented and innovative themes. It is through reifying these immaterial behaviors and themes as art objects, that is, giving them a concrete form through visual representation, that Boccaccio is able to consider them in terms of their economic and social value, and as objects to be exchanged, coveted, or used to subvert expectations. That art exercises more creative freedom than text is a consequence of its rising economic value in the late middle ages, a relationship that Boccaccio makes central in the novellas featuring penniless artists. The question of economic stability is thus a motivating factor in Boccaccio's examination of the relationship between art and society and the ability to expose the character flaws in those holding the most power and currency in Florence. Visual art serves two main purposes within the text then: it is first and foremost a lens through which to expose contradictions between the protagonists' social status and behaviors, and second, it is a means for considering the limits and possibilities available to textual representation when appropriating the techniques and freedoms inherent to art.

I. Art and Conduct: Picturing Society in the Trecento

The *Decameron* presents an account of ten Florentine youths, seven women and three men, who escape the devastation of the plague by removing themselves to the hills outside of the city. They pass the time by telling stories: ten stories per day over ten days, with the exception of

the Sabbath, with one member of the *brigata* serving as the arbiter over each day's theme. At the start of each new day of storytelling an introduction that serves as a framing device sheds light on the *brigata*'s experiences in between story telling. Significant narrative details for the novellas are drawn from the *brigata's* recent history, a decision that blurs the line between reality and fiction within the text. The members of the *brigata* themselves exist contemporaneously to the immediate readers of the *Decameron*, sharing in their distress and suffering caused by the effects of the plague. As contemporaries then, the stories they tell largely draw on the readers' collective memories, invoking the names and accounts of historical figures who lived only decades earlier, and would be therefore familiar. Within the *Decameron* there is thus the frame world that reflects the experiences of the readers as well as the worlds of the novellas that exist at different points in historical time.

The intersection between the immediate experience and recent memory of the *brigata* invites the reader to enter into the narrative through lens of their shared history. In this sense, the experiences of the *brigata* present a verisimilar reflection of the readers' world that invokes the social and political conditions familiar to them, especially when engaging with the novellas based in Florence and neighboring cities, or considering the *brigata*'s experiences in the countryside.[5] The framing device imposes a structural arrangement that unifies the overall

[5] On the much-discussed question of verisimilitude in the *Decameron*, see especially the chapters by Erich Auerbach, "Frate Alberto," in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. William R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), and Albert Ascoli, "Boccaccio's Auerbach: Holding the Mirror Up to Mimesis," in *A Local Habitation and A Name: Imagining Histories in the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), pp. 60-79. Auerbach's nuanced reading novella 4.2 of the *Decameron* shed light on the incredible realistic detail Boccaccio employs in order to convey a sense of verisimilitude to the reader, developed based on Dante's own figural realism in the *Divina Commedia*. On the difference between the two, he finds that the structure and moralizing aims of the *Commedia* make it possible for tragic and real experiences to be ordered and interpreted cohesively, versus the fragmented conditions he observes in Boccaccio's novellas based on the competing and thus contrasting levels of speech and objectives employed by the characters in the novella. Ascoli's reading of the *Introduction* to Day Four broadens Auerbach's reading by examining the role of the Decameron's frame structure in contributing to the verisimilar representation. Underlining the division

collection, despite the great variation in the contents of each novella. At the structural level of the text then, the framing device connects the themes and questions raised in the novellas to reality outside of the text, by reducing the distance between artifice and art. As such, Boccaccio uses the framing device as both a textual and visual marker to establish a familiar world for the reader by introducing it as a point from which to pivot between the fictional representation of their world and their actual present reality.

Drawing on the reader's proximity to the cultural and social practices of the text's main narrators has the effect of creating an additional space in which to explore the representation of particularly scandalous or infamous protagonists within the novellas. The transgressions of problematic characters are understood not only at the surface level of the narrative, that is in terms of their actions within the plot, but also in light of their participation in the same cultural and social environment of the reader. However, while exaggerating behaviors like avarice or gullibility is seemingly harmless in the case of fictional characters, by amplifying some of the worst characteristics of known historical figures, Boccaccio's novellas cross from the space of fiction into that of social commentary. For the attentive reader then, there are potential issues to reflect on beyond the generally entertaining aspects of the text that concern the intersection between power, love, avarice, or the other exaggerated attributes of the protagonists. Such questions include what it means to be courteous in a world increasingly governed by the rising merchant classes, or how to discern the value of skill, knowledge, and labor between traditional and emerging professions? And more significantly, what does it look like to define social decorum in a society in the process of regenerating itself? In turning to visual art in designated

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between style and narrative structure in the text, he points to the range of representational possibilities Boccaccio creates – from low to high, comic to tragic – and foreground the reality of what he calls a "reality of different narrative perspectives" of the frame (Ascoli 385).

novellas, the exaggeration of problematic characteristics in protagonists is further amplified, given that art can concretize the negative portrayal in a material, enduring form. Through art's ability to give a visible and recognizable model to the subtle critiques that may go unnoticed or fully understood through verbal description, it becomes a valuable tool for challenging the limits of representation in order provide a fuller account of the changing political and social dynamics within society, both those that are obvious and those that are less perceptible.

In novella I.8 of the *Decameron*, miserly Genoese nobleman Erminio Grimaldi challenges Florentine courtier Guiglielmo Borsiere to suggest a theme without iconographic precedent for a painting on the walls of his lavish new home ("cosa alcuna che mai più stata veduta"). Borsiere first responds to this challenge by proposing an image based on a universal experience, the representation of sneezes. His second suggestion is to paint *cortesia*, or courtesy/courtliness, a quality that Grimaldi notably lacks. This latter proposal has an immediate impact on Grimaldi, leading him to convert and change his miserly ways in order to adopt more generous habits. However, despite his successful conversion, both suggestions present a mimetic challenge; while the former is a physiological action, the latter is composed of attitudes and behaviors. Although both sneezes and *cortesia* meet the criteria for an image without iconographic precedent, they also resist typical conventions for visual representation given that they are both things exercised through practice and experience rather than objects that can be imitated from nature in a work of art. What is the relationship then between representation and experience? These questions point to an underlying concern regarding the ethics of representation within this novella: namely, to what end does Boccaccio explore how non-mimetic themes like courtesy and knowledge are materialized through representation in visual art?

The novella opens with a significant digression on the lost art of courtesy by the day's narrator, Lauretta. After briefly introducing her protagonists, Grimaldi and Borsiere, she laments what she perceives as the loss of courteous behavior between her historical time and theirs.[6] She emphasizes the temporal gap between them by adopting the language of fables or fairytales to construct an idyllic but vague moment in the past when the art of *cortesia* was still exercised, using phrasing like "fu adunque in Genova", or once upon a time, to create this effect.[7] She tells her listeners that "a que' tempi", that is, at a time that is familiar to them but firmly in the past, the role of the courtiers was to make peace and keep alliances, whereas in their present day, courtiers spend most of their time spreading rumors about one another. By introducing this

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[6] Neither Guiglielmo Borsiere, nor Erminio Grimaldi are based on specific historical figures. Vittore Branca notes in his comments on the *Decameron* that the Grimaldi surname belonged to a powerful Genoese family in the fourteenth century, members of which did carry the name Erminio. Guilglielmo Borsiere on the other hand, appears to be an invention of Dante's perhaps loosely based on a historical counterpart, but unclear. Dante introduces Borsiere in Canto XVI of the *Inferno* as a newly arrived Florentine in the third ring of the seventh circle of Hell, that of the sodomites. Although Borsiere does not interact with the poet himself, he is referenced by another inhabitant of the circle, Iacopo Rusticucci, who tells Dante that Borsiere recently arrived among them and conveyed to them that Florence had lost all courtesy ("cortesia e valor di' se dimora/ ne la nostra città sì come suole,/ o se del tutto se n'è gita fora", Inf. 16.67-69). Rusticucci begs Dante to tell him if Borsiere's assessment is correct. In his 1373 gloss on the *Commedia*, Benvenuto da Imola describes Borsiere as a Florentine purse maker, as his name borsa (purse) suggests, who later became a courtier. Boccaccio's *Esposizioni* on *Inferno* 16 also glosses over Borsiere's inclusion in this canto, describing him as a praiseworthy courtier ("di laudevole maniera"), whose role was to create treatises and marriage alliances ("trattar paci tra grandi e gentili uomini, trattar matrimoni e parentadi"), and to encourage people through the telling of tales ("con piacevoli e oneste novelle recreare gli animi de' faticati e confortargli alle cose onorevoli"). This description aligns with Lauretta's depiction of the lost arts of the courtier in the *Decameron*. For more on the historical references and backrounds of Borsiere and Grimaldi, see Vittore Branca, *Decameron*, p. 936; See also Victoria Kirkham, "The Tale of Guiglielmo Borsiere", in *The Decameron: The First Day in Perspective*, ed. Elissa Weaver, pp. 184-187; See also Kristina Olson *Courtesy Lost: Dante, Boccaccio, and the Literature of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

[7] Victoria Kirkham calls attention to Boccaccio's employment of fairytale tropes in "The Tale of Guiglielmo Borsiere" (For example, she shows that through the repeated use of rhyming exaggerations (pass**ava** la richezza; di richezza ogni altro avanz**ava**; soperchi**ava**) to describe Grimaldi, which turn him into a kind of fairytale-esqe villain, like an Ebenezer Scrooge.

temporal gap through the voice of Lauretta, who stands in for the Florentine noble classes, Boccaccio veils his own critique of contemporary courtly behavior and their abuse of language.[8]

Lauretta's description of courtly behaviors underlines how courtiers wield power through speech and language. The main tasks she defines for them are making peace ("trattar paci"), arranging alliances and marriages ("trattar matrimonii, parentadi, e amistà"), and stimulating the courts with "pleasant and clever words" ("con belli moti e leggiadri ricreare gli animi"). She discloses that they only used harsh language to rebuke the ways of the wicked, "sì come padre" ("the way fathers do"). The emphasis on what courtiers say and do for others, from arranging treaties to entertaining people, also depicts them as service-oriented. By Lauretta's definition then, the art of *cortesia* is exercised through carefully selected words that shape transactions and exchanges for the benefit of society. In contrast to these idyllic times, Lauretta accuses contemporary courtiers of abusing their positions and misusing language to attack one other. She laments that they have warped the role of language to such a degree that courtiers are praised based on whose conduct and speech is the most problematic ("e colui è più caro e con premii grandissimi essaltato, che più abominevoli parole dice o fa atti"), emphasizing the inappropriateness of the words that are spoken amongst them, or the "abominevoli parole". In critiquing the courtier's behavior with an emphasis on their misuse of language, Lauretta's digression highlights the power of words to sway behavior and to create or undermine society, foreshadowing the power of representation in her story.

Returning to her tale, Lauretta tells her listeners that Borsiere visits Genoa and is received along with other nobles at the extravagant new home built by Grimaldi, who, despite his stinginess, still follows certain social customs like welcoming foreign envoys to his city.

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[8] Boccaccio's critique of courtly culture corresponds to a trope within early modern literature of criticizing expectations and decorum at court.

However, he uses the gathering as an opportunity to challenge Borsiere. Although both men belong to the noble class, Borsiere is known for his courtly behavior, while Grimaldi is known for his miserliness, meaning that a challenge between them would raise the question of how one should practice the art of the courtier. It is from this perspective, and in an attempt to undermine Borsiere's behaviors, practices, and knowledge, that Grimaldi asks him to recommend a painting without iconographic precedent for his new home. However his request raises a mimetic challenge: how does one represent something never before seen, that is also based on knowledge and experience? Borsiere's reply meets this challenge with an equally problematic visual suggestion by proposing an action as the theme of the image rather than an object. The sneeze, for example, is an action that is experienced through a physiological motion from its start to its completion, which therefore resists individual iconographic interpretation; it is understood through having past experience of sneezing rather than acquiring knowledge of it through observing its image or reading about its effects in a text. By suggesting the theme of sneezing for the painting, Borsiere underlines the difficulty posed when attempting to represent an experience through art.[9] This is especially true for an experience as common as sneezing, which every person can identify as a concept verbally, but no one can provide a universally recognized iconography for visually.

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[9] The first painter to represent a figure experiencing an instantaneous moment of physical reaction independent from reason is the sixteenth century Italian painter, Sofonisba Anguissola, in a drawing titled, "Fanciullo morso da un gambero", or "Young boy bitten by a crab". In the image, the young boy's face is contorted, with his brows pinched, and his hand outstretched, apparently in recoil from the bite. This image is the subject of Flavio Carolli's book, *Storia della fisiognomia: Arte e psicologia da Leonardo a Freud*, in which he proposes that Anguissola's image is the first to attempt to represent a spontaneous physical reaction. The historical distance between the image and *Decameron's* example through Borsiere proposing to paint a sneeze, makes Boccaccio's suggestion an even more unique and unprecedented visual representation. See Flavio Caroli, *Storia Della Fisiognomica: Arte E Psicologia Da Leonardo a Freud* (Milano: Electa, 2004), especially pages 56-57.

Yet the effort to represent experience is emphasized by Grimaldi himself. His request challenges the value of Borsiere's world experience and knowledge by requiring that the image be based on all the things he has already seen and heard in the world, *"*voi che avete *vedute* e *udite* molte cose" (*Dec.* I.8, p. 76, italics mine).[10] The challenge is raised by suggestion of comparison between Grimald and Borsiere's lived experiences. Borsiere's response, "messer, cosa che non fosse mai stata veduta non vi crederei io sapere insegnare, se ciò non fosser già *starnuti* o cose a quegli simiglianti"[11], meets Grimaldi's challenge by introducing "starnuti", or sneezes, as a plural noun, that is, as a thing or object that can in fact be pictured. However, it is rare to refer to sneezing as a noun rather than as a verb. It is even harder to picture what a representation of sneezes, as a noun, would look like. Would it be an image post-sneeze? Or one mid-sneeze with a handkerchief held up to one's nose? By defining sneezes as a thing and not an action, Borsiere hints at the transformational power of art. Through materializing the experience of sneezing by providing it with a visible shape or structure, Borsiere effectively transforms its very nature from an action to a thing.

Borsiere's second response to Grimaldi, "Fateci dipingere la cortesia", presents a mimetic challenge to readers or artists endeavoring to conceptualize this image, given the difficulty of visualizing a social behavior or virtue such as courtesy. Unlike a sneeze, which falls under the category of bodily experience, and therefore something understood with or without a visual referent, *cortesia* is associated with the rich intertextual and visual history of medieval allegorical representation, in which abstract concepts like morals and values are conceived through both images and texts. However, because of the inherent challenge in representing an action or set of behaviors through universally recognized visual devices, Borsiere's suggestion

[10] English Translation: "You who have *seen* and *heard* many things," emphasis mine.
[11] English Translation: "Sir, I do not think I would be able to suggest something never before seen, if not for sneezes, or things of a similar kind."

raises a problem for viewers and readers alike: what does *cortesia* look like? Although some visual examples exist both in text and image through the representation of *Courtoisie* in the *Roman de la Rose*, the virtue, if it can be called that, of courtesy is not codified. That is, the meaning of courtesy evolves and changes according to social norms, unlike the more enduring and established virtues associated with specific visual symbols, like Justice with her scales. In raising the suggestion to paint *Cortesia* then, Borsiere raises a rivalry between visual and verbal representation in order to consider which medium more effectively creates a shift in Grimaldi's behavior.

Boccaccio both acknowledges and challenges the existence of "power" in art and literature that affects audiences, by assigning the "parola", or word, specific powers at two points towards the end of the novella. First, the narrator, Lauretta, describes Grimaldi's reaction to hearing the world *cortesia* by drawing attention to the transformation he experiences: "Come messere Erminio udì questa *parola*, così *subitamente* il prese una vergogna tale, che *ella ebbe forza di fargli mutare animo* quasi tutto in contrario a quell che infino a quella ora aveva avuto" (*Decameron* 76).[12] The feminine pronoun towards the middle of the sentence, "ella", aligns the *parola* with the "forza di fargli mutare animo", or the power to transform his soul. Thus it is the word, or *parola*, that has transformational powers and not the image. This power is reaffirmed by Lauretta as she leaves readers with one final thought at the end of the text, emphasizing that, "E da questo dì innanzi, di tanta *virtù fu la parola* da Guiglielmo detta, [Grimaldi] fu il più liberale e più grazioso gentile uomo […]" (*Decameron* 76), which once again assigns unparalleled value to the "power" of the word by emphasizing that it was spoken, *detta*, by Borsiere, not depicted. In her final statement in the novella, Lauretta therefore leaves her audience with two central

[12] English translation: "When Messer Erminio heard this, he was so overcome with shame *by the power of that word*, that *his character completely changed* from what it had been until that moment", emphasis mine.

concepts concerning the role of words: first, that words are in possession of a particular power (*forza* or *virtù*), and second, that this power is transformational. This further implies that the power of the *parola* carries more value than the power of visual art, given that it is the word *cortesia* that motivates Grimaldi's conversion and not the painted image, which in fact, is never completed within the novella.

Despite the apparent alignment between power and words, Lauretta also raises the question of the power of images to challenge that of words and text at the close of this novella. She reveals that the painting of *cortesia* will be completed and is in fact necessary in order to fully complete Grimaldi's transformation. In Grimaldi's last statement to Borsiere, he promises that his painting will be representative of his experience: "io la ci farò dipignere in maniera che mai né voi né altri con ragione mi potrà più dire che io non l'abbia veduta e conosciuta" (*Decameron* 76).[13] In describing what visual art has the power to demonstrate to viewers, an emphasis is placed on the relationship between seeing, *veduta,* and knowing, *conosciuta.* This relationship is dependent on the future painting of *cortesia*, given Grimaldi's statement that it is precisely *through* the evidence of the painting that people will be able to say that he has seen, and therefore experienced *cortesia*. So "maniera" matters in terms of the content and composition of the work, as well as meaning given that Grimaldi himself asserts that the "maniera" of the painting will make visible the awareness of his transformation to viewers. Consequently the painting will hold great powers of meaning and transformation, given its potential to communicate the thing "mai più stata veduta", that is, never before seen: the effects of *cortesia* on Grimaldi before and after his transformation, and the ability to convey the experience of *cortesia* in all its meanings.

[13] English translation: "I shall have painted there in such a way that neither you nor anyone else will ever have occasion to accuse me of not ever *observing* or *knowing* it again", emphasis mine.

The painting of *cortesia* is never provided with a detailed description in the text, despite the powerful influence it exerts. The image is only ever described in terms of its possibility and its effects, meaning that its elusiveness and lack of presence create more possibilities for interpretation.[14] Nevertheless, some visual and literary precedents indicate how Boccaccio may have envisioned a representation of *cortesia*, were he to describe or even draw one himself. One of the more recognized medieval examples comes from the thirteenth century French poem, the *Roman de la Rose*. In the first part of this poem, written by Guillaume de Lorris, the figure of *Cortoisie* is introduced as one of the allegorical figures the protagonist meets in his dream vision, on his quest to find the Rose.[15] She first appears to the protagonist within the garden of Deduit, inviting him to participate in the *carole* sung and danced to by the other inhabitants of the garden. After observing and describing in visual detail some of her companions, like *Richesse, Franchise, and Largesse,* the protagonist offers a description of *Cortoisie*. The only brunette in the garden, she has a pleasing face, but is otherwise described solely in terms of her behavior. This description stands out in comparison to

Figure 5. *Courtoisie* in *Conversation with the Lover*, *Roman de la Rose*, University of Chicago Library MS 1380, c. 1365. Image courtesy of the Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University. Accessed 08/05/2020.

[14] Boccaccio does employ other types of ekphrasis elsewhere, especially in the *Amorosa Visione* in his descriptions of paintings.
[15] The first part of the *Roman de la Rose* written by Guillaume de Lorris was written circa 1230. The poem was completed about in the late thirteen century by Jean de Meun, who added an additional 17,500 lines to the text addressing the philosophy of love.

those of her companions who are described with much greater physical detail, from their eyes, to their smiles, to the details on their dresses. In contrast to the description of the other inhabitants of the garden then, the protagonist's description of *Cortoisie* underlines her conduct towards others and her manner of speech, the same values reiterated by Lauretta in her description of the courtier at the start of her novella.

Cortoisie is described in the *Roman de la Rose* as a figure who excels at moderation.[16] She is described mostly through the negation "ne", in terms of what she is not rather than what she is, emphasizing the self-imposed limitations that characterize her behavior. For example, she is described as neither too haughty nor too imprudent ("qui **n**'iere orguilleuse **ne** fole"), and later as neither too irritable nor foolish ("Ele **ne** fu nice **n'**ombrage"), which is contrasted with what she actually is: wise and shrewd without excess of elegant words ("Mes sage et antre"). She is also unlike the others; it is "ainz que **nule**", or before anyone else, that she invites the protagonist to join her and the others in the garden.

> Apres se tenoit cortoisie
> Qui mout estoit de touz prisie
> Qui n'iere orguilleuse ne fole.
> C'est cele qui a la querole,
> La sue merci, m'apela
> Ainz que nule quant je ving la.
> Ele ne fu nice n'ombrage,
> Mes sage et antre, sanz outrage,
> Des biaus respons et des biaus diz;
> N'onc nus ne fu par li laidiz,
> Ne ne porta autrui rancune. (vv. 1226-1236)

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[16] In the context of the *Roman de la Rose*, Cortoise may also be compared to Lorris' "Reson" or Reason, where she is also described in terms of the negation "ne" and her limitations, representing the control she exerts:

> El ne fu joine ne chanue,
> ne fu trop haute ne trop basse,
> ne fu trop grelle ne trop crasse. (vv. 2962-64),

Citations taken from Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, and Armand Strubel, ed., *Le Roman de la Rose* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2012).

> Then came Courtesy, who was greatly appreciated by all. She was not haughty and nor lacking in sense. She is the one who called me to the carole – for which she should be thanked – before anyone else when I arrived there. She was neither irritable nor foolish, but wise and shrewd, without excess of elegant words and elegant response; no one was ever maligned by her, and no one held resentments against her. (Translation mine)

As the last verses of her behavioral description show, no one could hold anger against her given that she never commits slander ("n'once nus ne fu li laidiz"). This suggests that her main weapon of choice, should she wield one, would be words. On the contrary, her words and responses are provided "sanz outrage", or without excess or rudeness. *Cortoisie*'s central qualities then, are her moderate behavior, established by the negations used to describe her, and her elegant and appropriate use of language that maintains her friendships with others. She is also a good ambassador, given that she is the first to invite the protagonist into the garden. In practice and through speech, *Cortoisie* exercises the same courteous behavior for which Borsiere is praised. It would seem that Grimaldi needed only to look to the *Roman de la Rose* to find the model for his painting. Yet, there is nothing about her description, apart from her brown hair, that is visually specific; she is praised for her actions and words, attributes which, like Grimaldi's painting, resist visual representation.

The depiction of *Cortoisie* and her companions in the garden is contrasted with the ekphrastic description of vices painted and carved in relief on the outside of the garden wall. The ten images circling the wall include representations of well-known vices like Envy and Avarice, Grimaldi's vice, the latter of which carries a purse that she clutches tightly ("Avarice en sa main tenoit/ Une borse qu'ele reponoit,/ En quell creoit si durement/ Qu'el demorast trop longuement/ Ançois c'on en poïst riens traire." 226-30). Avarice's identity is discernible through the visual symbol of the purse, which conveys the gravity of her sins to the viewer, strengthened by the physical description that depicts her as thin, sickly, and poorly clothed, highlighting the

appearance of her privation. It is also likely that her name is written above her head, as is the case for the first vice in the cycle, Hate, given that in many manuscripts of the *Roman de la Rose* the vices are labeled in rubrics. Avarice is followed by Envy, whose anger is physically manifested in her crossed eyes, and who is described as taking pleasure in defaming others. This latter trait in particular stands in contrast with the behaviors of *Cortoisie*, who is described as never speaking badly of anyone. Separated by the wall, the sculpted attributes like vices or uncourtliness (poverty or old age) and the courtly allegorical personifications represent contrasting behaviors that are clarified by recognizing their opposition to one another. The protagonist understands all he needs to know about both sets of figures by observing them in sequence to one another, as he advances on his quest. That his relationship to the static vices is based in contemplation while he physically engages and interacts with the virtues within the garden points to a further tension between learning through sight versus through experience, with the latter propelling the protagonist forward on his quest.

The representation of contrasting virtues and vices was also an established theme in fourteenth century painting. The most celebrated example in Italy is likely the register of virtues and vices in the Arena Chapel, painted between 1303 and 1305 by Giotto.[17] The allegorical figures represented include the virtues *Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, Justice, Faith, Charity, and Hope*. On the lateral wall facing the virtues, the vices *Stupidity*, *Inconstancy, Wrath, Injustice, Idolatry, Envy, and Despair* are depicted in order.[18] Like the images on the wall of the

[17] Although there is no documentary evidence for Giotto's work at the church, it is believed that he completed the fresco cycles between 1303, when a ceremony was held to bless the church's construction, and 1305, when the church was consecrated.

[18] The allegorical figures in the Arena Chapel are mostly consistent with the typical range of virtues and vices cited in various medieval sources, however scholars have noted that *Avarice*, traditionally included among lists of vices, is absent from this group. This is notably the vice that is closest to accusations made against Enrico Scrovegni and his father, Rinaldo, who is punished as a usurer in *Inferno XVII*, the canto after the reference to Guiglielmo Borsiere.

garden in the *Roman de la Rose,* the figures are understood through accompanying visual symbols like the scales of justice, and are complemented by a *titulus,* or an inscription, that names the image. The seven vices and virtues are located at the lowest register of the fresco cycles, at the viewer's eye level, and are notably the only images in the entire cycle painted in monochrome. The decision to paint the allegories in monochrome, which resembles variegated stone, is unique, as is the choice to paint the allegories alongside narrative cycles from the New and Old Testament.

Figure 6. (a) Giotto, Interior of the Arena Chapel (left), and (b) detail of *Invidia* (right), Padua, Italy, c. 1304-1306. Cosette Bruhns, 2016 (Personal Images).

Multiple scholars have suggested that the virtues and vices are as essential to the overall visual project as other stylistic techniques, such as lighting, depth, and composition, which heighten the viewer's sense of emotional investment in the dramas playing out within the

narrative cycle. Andrew Ladis for example, has shown that Giotto's representation of virtues and vices prompts a reading of the narrative that is built on a method of comparison and contrast. In describing the function of the virtues and vices, Ladis suggests that they are similar to, "[…] an *imago agens*, an image that acts, an arresting image that stimulates the building of a chain, or *catena*, of figures and meanings in the mind as an essential act of meditation." (Ladis 76).[19] According to Ladis then, the role of the virtues and vices is to produce a succession of readings of the greater narrative cycle, initiated through contemplation. Because a linear reading of the narrative cycle is not required of the images, the virtues and vices act as agents of meaning, motivating viewers to read the images they are drawn to through the lens of the vice or virtue before them.[20] This is a departure from function of the allegories in the *Roman de la Rose*, which must be introduced sequentially, given the limitations of text.[21] Separated from one another by the garden gate, they can only be contrasted to one another by going back and rereading the descriptions in order to compare their meanings. As images that partake in the same visual field despite their stylistic differences, the virtues and vices in the Arena Chapel transcend the modular framework of the narrative cycle, thereby inviting the viewer to juxtapose them against multiple scenes and generate multiple meanings.

The disparities between physical limitations in textual and visual representation in terms of the depiction of allegories reflects an underlying tension concerning the role of visual

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[19] Ladis has also drawn attention to how the necessarily comparative reading initiated by the presence of the virtues and vices aligns with late medieval practices of memory, rhetoric, and meditation by engaging the cognitive principles of similarity, analogy, and contrariety. See Ladis, *Giotto's O* (2008), p. 17. For more on medieval memory and the crafting of images see Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*: *Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[20] The vice Wrath, for example, and the image of Caiaphas closely resemble one another, underscoring the relationship between the monochrome images and the narrative cycle.

[21] While this formal limitation in terms of the vices' order exists at the textual level, at the visual level alternative approaches are possible using the margins or other visual structures available to manuscript pages.

representation in the novella featuring Borsiere and Grimaldi. At stake is the relationship between varying modes of representation and reception, and specifically as they pertain to the conditions for Grimaldi's conversion. Evidence from illustrations of the novella in the earliest manuscripts of the *Decameron* suggest readers' familiarity with this tension, given that the images decidedly assign the power of conversion to the image of *Cortesia*, further undermining Lauretta's statement that the power belongs to the word in the text at the end of the novella. Victoria Kirkham has shown that early illustrators of the *Decameron* depicted *cortesia* as a female gendered allegorical virtue, depicted within a psychomachia by standing over and thus conquering Avarice, or marked by visual symbols such as chalices and pails of coins, aligning her with other virtues like Charity. No longer just a thought or word, her image is sometimes unfurled from a cloth or a scroll held by Borsiere in these images, as if he came prepared for his encounter with Grimaldi. As Kirkham argues of these early illustrations,

> "The power of the word ('la virtù della parola') in Guiglielmo's advice, 'Have Courtesy painted there', has been transposed by the artists into the power of the picture. What Guigielmo displays is a 'sign' capable of converting its beholder, a miracle-working image". (Kirkham 190)

By electing to represent *cortesia* as an image Grimaldi reacts to rather than a word, these early illustrations both acknowledge and perpetuate the transformational power wielded by a visual sign. They ultimately reveal that the *Decameron*'s earliest artistic interpreters responded to the tension between visual and verbal representation within the text by turning to visual art to bring into being the power of Grimaldi's words.

Figure 7. Guiglielmo Borsiere is depicted holding a scroll in the panel on the left, while he unfurls the image containing the portrait of Cortesia on the right. MS 5070, 32r., c. 1401-1500. © Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Bibliothèque Arsenal, accessed 08/05/2020.

The complex and intersecting textual and visual traditions for representing allegories show how Boccaccio's version of *Cortesia* in the *Decameron* grapples with the same limitations and possibilities for representing experience through text and art. Lauretta's description of the art of courtesy echoes the behaviors established for *Cortoisie* in the *Roman de la Rose*; Borsiere

practices this art through his clever suggestion to paint *cortesia*, wittily but gently reproaching Grimaldi for his miserly ways. Through Lauretta's exaggeration of their characteristics, Borsiere as exceedingly courteous and eloquent and Grimaldi as especially miserly, Borsiere's virtue is contrasted with Grimaldi's vice. Ultimately the text questions the expectations for the way *cortesia* should be practiced, with Borsiere himself serving as a model. The reader needs only to compare Borsiere's actions – what he does and says – to Lauretta's digression at the start of the novella to fully comprehend the art of *cortesia*, so that by the time Borsiere suggests the image it is visible in in the mind's eye of the reader. Like Grimaldi, the reader's understanding of what *cortesia* means is conveyed instantly, once the word has been pronounced – the narrator's description of courteous behavior that before may have seemed like a digression at the start of the novella comes perfectly into focus through the single word, "cortesia", even without the completed painting, given that the reader has formed an image of its meaning in their mind's eye based on their own experience and knowledge of social expectations.

As an image without clear iconographic precedent, the image of *cortesia* can embrace multiple and even conflicting modes of representation. It is by presenting the art of *cortesia* to the reader as a set of behaviors that is, reifying the experience through an image, that Boccaccio underlines the tension between visual and verbal representation in the novella. In visually concretizing Borsiere's experience and knowledge through an image, Boccaccio appropriates the ability of images to transmit immediate knowledge, so that Grimaldi's transformation is instantaneous rather than unfolding over time in a linear manner. The image invoked of *Cortesia* is only the first in a series of visual representations in the *Decameron* that demonstrate how Boccaccio explores the representational power of images, and what can be achieved through the

reification of unconventional themes like behaviors, feelings, and even hierarchies of artistic labor and knowledge.

II. Art and Desire: Visual Misinterpretation and Manipulation

The efficacy of images is explored in several novellas at the center of the *Decameron*. Beginning with the *Introduction* to Day Four, Boccaccio questions the relationship between the image and the viewer by raising the issues of misinterpretation and idolatry as potential consequences of looking at images. The *Introduction* frames these issues as a question of efficacy: that is, what is the consequence of misreading them? Boccaccio explores these questions by emphasizing the reception and contemplation of the image more than the image itself. The protagonists in these novellas respond intensely to what they observe but not necessarily in the most appropriate way, underlining the potential for images to produce misinterpretations. In the *Introduction* to Day Four for example, a young boy conflates his attraction to women with painted angels, and in novella 4.2 Madonna Lisetta misidentifies a priest for the painted image of the Angel Gabriel, ultimately committing adultery with him. In novella 5.1, Cimone's intellect is awoken through contemplation of a beautiful girl, yet his continuing violent behavior suggests that his transformation is insufficient to truly change his nature. Through Cimone Boccaccio thus presents competing facets of love; love is both ennobling, given that Cimone's intellect is moved through the beauty of the girl, however his desire to possess her, even violently, reveals that love is also a destructive force when motivated by lust. Although the plots of these novellas are different, they are linked conceptually, each exploring the same issue: the (in)effectiveness of images to transform or convert the beholder in an edifying way.

The *Introduction* to Day Four of the *Decameron* includes an intervention by Boccaccio as an authorial voice, revealing the multiple layers of mediation at work between him, the members of the *brigata*, and the worlds of the novellas. Boccaccio addresses his intervention to the ladies to whom he has dedicated the entire work, portrayed as a defense against detractors who may find his stories too salacious. Taking the form of a partial novella inserted within a larger discourse, the stated purpose of this half-story is to argue that natural desires are more powerful than the limits imposed by social expectations or learned morals, especially where love is concerned. And since love is an endeavor worthy of poets, including those that came before him like Guido Cavalcanti, Cino da Pistoia, and Dante, even at an advanced age, then he should not be faulted for the tenor of his novellas. However, in naming his *stilnovist* predecessors, Boccaccio also reveals one of the tropes on which he builds his defense: the conflation of sacred and profane love. By framing the misinterpretation of divine and earthly love through a painted image, Boccaccio inserts a tension between tangible and immaterial appearances within this novella, subtly undermining the edifying power of images and their moralizing influence over viewers.

In this story-within-a-story, he tells the tale of a rich Florentine man named Filippo Balducci who, following the death of his much beloved wife, gives away his worldly possessions and takes his infant son to live in the wilderness outside of Florence. He is described as making only a few trips to Florence over the years when in need of supplies, and never with his son. Rather, he has intentionally kept his son away from "alcuna temporal cosa", or any worldly affairs, so that his only instruction is in holy matters. On reaching old age however, Balducci agrees to take his son into the city in order to introduce him to the places and people he collects resources from, assuring himself that his son's upbringing will dissuade him from any

temptations the city could possibly offer ("Il valente uomo, pensando che già questo suo figliuolo era grande e era sì abituato al servigio di Dio, che malaevolmente le cose del mondo a sé il dovrebbono omai poter trarre, seco stesso disse: Costui dice bene.").[22] However, Balducci neglects to account for nature and for his son's natural instincts, which surface after passing a group of young women. After a failed attempt to convince his son that these women are actually an evil thing known as "papere", or ducks, Balducci must concede that nature is a stronger pull than he had anticipated.

Balducci's son is described as overwhelmed by the "newness" of everything he sees in the city. His first impressions give shape to the city by noting the architectural landscape, or, "i palagi, le case, le chiese e tutte l'altre cose delle quali tutta la città piena si vede," that distinguish Florence from other cities. The sights are so unprecedented that the boy must ask his father what each thing is called as they encounter it. The action of naming things juxtaposes the boy's visual impressions with labels that produce meaning. Taking his father at his word, the boy believes that the objects and their meaning should be in alignment. However, his instincts tell him something is wrong when his father tries to assign false meaning to a group of women that pass before them. In order to minimize the risks posed by his son's attraction to the women, Balducci deliberately decides to call the women by a false name. Instead, he tells his son, "Elle si chiamano papere" – they are called ducks. However the young man perceives that this definition is lacking. He raises his confusion by drawing on his senses: "Io non so che *voi vi dite*, né perché queste sieno mala cosa: quanto è, *a me non è ancora paruta vedere alcuna così bella* né così

[22] English translation: "The worthy man, realizing that this son of his was now grown up and was alredy so used to serving God that only with great difficulty could the things of this world have any effect on him, said to himself, 'He is right.'"

piacevole come queste sono."[23] That is, he does not understand his father's words, but he does recognize the pleasure he receives from contemplating the women, a beautiful sight he has never before beheld. He does not care how the women behave, whether they are evil or otherwise as he father suggests, but only cares about how they look. In doing so, he begins to resist the truth of the meaning emanating from the words his father speaks, relying instead on his sight to address his suspicions and lack of knowledge.

Paintings of angels are ultimately what enable Balducci's son to determine his natural preference for the women. Following his father's assertion that the "papere" are evil, the son defends his conviction by comparing their beauty to the angels he has seen painted in the city during their daytrip. He describes the women as even more beautiful than the painted angels, using the plural, establishing that he has seen multiples images of angels throughout Florence ("Elle son più belle *che gli agnoli dipinti* che coi m'avete più volte mostrati"). The language of his comparison contains an echo of the "never before seen" quality raised in novella 1.8: "a me non è ancora paruta *vedere alcuna cosi* bella.[24] Specifically, the negation "non" before "vedere alcuna" bears a resemblance to Grimaldi's original request for a painting, "cosa alcuna che mai più stata veduta", or without iconographic precedent, placing emphasis on the ways in which viewing things previously unseen creates new experience. Although the women are not images in the sense that the painted angels are, at a conceptual level, he evaluates them as like objects that can be contrasted with one another since he has no prior knowledge of either. The comparison then between the women and the angels enables the young man to rely on his powers of sight in order to define his attraction. He has never seen ducks before, but the word "papere" has no

[23] English translation: "I do not understand what you are saying or why they are evil. As far as I know, I have never seen anything more beautiful or pleasing than they."
[24] "As far as I know I have never seen anything more beautiful than they. They are more beautiful than the painted angels which you have pointed out to me so many times."

meaningful effect since it produces no visual referent; the angels and the women however, give visible shape to his natural desires.

The comparison between the beauty of the Florentine ladies and the painted angels recalls the juxtaposition of a real thing, women, with angelic beings in *stilnovist* poetry. Visually the depiction of invisible beings, like angels, enters into the question of limits of representation; while frequently appearing in paintings, angels are not actually of this world, presenting a challenge to their corporeal representation, a convention invented by painters. Additionally, beyond the established male Archangels like Michael or Gabriel who are conventionally identified by specific symbols or placed within known biblical narratives, painted angels typically lacked defining features that would identify them as either male or female. The choice to compare the beauty of the ladies to that of the ambiguously gendered painted angels suggests yet another way in which Boccaccio turns to painting in order to subvert the representation of social norms. The ambiguity of the angels' meaning is emphasized by the contradiction between their overwhelming presence, but lack of description; the boy clearly sees enough painted angels throughout the city for him to single them out as noteworthy, but does not describe them in specific enough terms for anyone to understand if he is referring to a specific angel type. In the case of this novella, the absence of the painting, or its elusiveness, relies on the reader to supply a general series of qualities typically associated with angels in order to create an image of the comparison in their mind. The "paintedness" of the angels is necessary in order to invoke the angels' conventional iconography for the reader, who could then understand the boy's perspective as if an image of the Florentine women and the angels were held up next to each other, side by side.

The effect of the women and the angels on the boy is another important consideration

underpinning this semi-novella, given that his conflation of women and angels leads him to quite literally fall into the trap that *stilnovist* poets like Guido Guinizelli attempt to defend themselves against. Although he was raised away from images of angels, the boy is presumably familiar with their description and activities in the bible, given that his education is entirely scriptural. Ostensibly, he should know better than to contemplate angels in terms of their attractiveness, yet they are the first image that comes to mind when he attempts to define his feelings of desire. The conflation between angels and women implicitly conveys the threat of idolatry, or the possibility that can these divine images be falsely interpreted and their meaning corrupted. In the *stilnovist* tradition, the conflation is first established at the end of Guido Guinizelli's poem, "Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore", in which the poet imagines himself questioned by God and accused of idolatry. At the end of this poem, the poet defends himself by arguing that his lady's resemblance to an angel led him astray, implying that his error was the fault of nature rather than his own.[25]

In the fourteenth century, the tension between veneration and idolatry was predominantly manifested in two categories of images: narrative images containing multiple figures referred to as stories (*historia)*, and icons (*imago*), based on the traditional Christian idea of *likeness* between the image and the figure it represents in a spiritual or physical sense.[26] Images of icons in particular were dominant in the late thirteenth century and became the subject of many theological discourses on the power as well as the dangers of visual misinterpretation, the fear being that someone might mistakenly idolize the image rather than the being itself. Nevertheless, some images of icons acquired so much power that they were considered "miracle working" images that had the ability to heal or provide mercy to observers, depending on their location and

[25] For more on this poem see chapter one of this dissertation, see Chapter One, in particular page 63.
[26] See Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Jean Wirth, *L'image à l'Epoque Gothique* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2008); and Peter Bakody, *Images within Images in Italian Painting (1250-1350): Reality and Reflexivity* (Surrey, U.K and Burlington, V.T.: Ashgate, 2015).

their subject. One such miracle-working image, the *Orsanmichele Madonna*, is the subject of Cavalcanti's treatment of the trope of angelic misinterpretation. This image was likely known to Boccaccio and his readers during this time given its central location in Florence near Piazza della Signoria.[27] Cavalcanti himself is the protagonist in novella VI.X, briefly crossing into the space inhabited by the members of the *brigata* by passing through the graveyard of Santa Maria Novella, a space adjacent to the church where the storytelling part of the *Decameron* both begins and ends. As Ronald Martinez has shown, Cavalcanti's poem, *Una figura della mia donna*, challenges theological conventions for religious veneration by implying the viewer's erotic idealization of the image.[28] In misappropriating the power of the miracle-working image of the Madonna, the poem conflates the erotic interpretation of images of the Virgin with the ennobling power they should produce. As Martinez argues, Guinizelli escapes judgment through a misappropriated application of *imago*, or the theological notion of resemblance, by using the excuse that his lady resembled an angel, leading to his confusion.

Beyond the poetic tradition developed by Guinizelli and Cavalcanti, there is also a visual precedent set by early fourteenth century painters that invests images of religious icons with earthly powers. One example includes Simone Martini's *Maestà* (c. 1315, restored by the artist 1321) in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena. C.J. Campbell has shown that there are several historical and pictorial indications that point to the Virgin's role as a divine arbitrator for the city of Siena. Her important role in political governance is underlined by her location in the seat of the city's

[27] The Church of Saint Michael, known as Orsanmichele, was said to be the home of a now-lost image of the seated Virgin with Child, located on one of the loggia pilasters. In about July 1292, the image was reported to work miracles, including exorcising demons, leading it to quickly become a site of prayer and congregation in the city. Although it was used as a grain market in the late thirteenth century, it was also associated with a nearby Franciscan order, as well as with the Cavalcanti family, who lived just down the road from the church. For more on this image and its workings see Ronald L. Martinez, "Cavalcanti's Orsanmichele Sonnet and the Spectre of Idolatry Haunting the Stilnuovo," in *Exemplaria* 15.2 (2003), pp. 145-170.

[28] See Martinez, "Una figura della donna mia" and the Specter of Idolatry Haunting the Stilnovo" (2013).

civic power, the Palazzo Pubblico, rather than in a church.[29] She is depicted with accompanying text, written in vernacular terza rima, addressing *her* people with the phrasing, "diletti miei", or "my beloved ones", demonstrating her position as both a divine and political intermediary for the people.[30] Although Martini's painting follows traditional pictorial conventions for a *sedes sapientiae*, or Mary with the Christ child on her knee, which is incidentally the same iconography for the miracle-working image at Orsanmichele, her purpose as an icon is magnified through her political role.

In Boccaccio's partial novella, the boy's resistance to the power of the painted angels questions the ability of divine representation to edify the viewer. Instead of engaging with the divine aspect of the angelic beings, he transgresses moral boundaries by bringing them into the colloquial conversation, transposing them from their lofty frames to the streets of Florence. His interest in the women remains superficial, based on their external beauty and not on any potential merit or virtue they might possess. In fact, his only thought is of coveting one of the women as property to care for ("fate che no ice ne meniamo una cola sù di queste papere"), demonstrating that his intentions are neither edifying nor moralizing. The comparison of women to angels attempts to subvert the hierarchy between divine and human appearances, by striking down angels from their privileged, miracle-working position in order to include them in the everyday, mundane representation of things in the world.

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[29] It is worth noting that Siena adopted the Virgin as the patron of their city following their belief that she guided their victory against the Florentine's at Montaperti in 1260.

[30] Several scholars have noticed the unique application of *terza rima*, would have been extremely new in 1315. For more on these verses and the question of their adaptation between 1315 and the 1321 restoration, see C.J. Campbell, *The Commonwealth of Nature: Art and the Poetic Comune in the Age of Dante* (University Park, P.A.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), especially chapter two, "Municipal Verse, Vernacular Poetry, and Simone Martini's Maestà", pp. 61-95; see also by the same author, "The Lady in the Council Chamber: Diplomacy and Poetry in Sime Martini's *Maestà,*" in *Word and Image*, 14 (1998), pp. 371-82.

Problematic resemblances are further explored in the second novella of the fourth day. In this story, Frate Alberto, turns to visual art as a way to convince Madonna Lisetta that his body is possessed by the Archangel Gabriel, so that he can pursue a sexual relationship with her. The underlying premise of his ruse is that the Archangel Gabriel desires to sleep with Madonna Lisetta and has communicated this to Frate Alberto. However, Gabriel is unable to appear to the lady in his angelic form because her human vision could not sustain the sight, so he must adopt the physical body of a human, whose soul will be transported to heaven while Gabriel is on earth. To simplify the situation, the priest has offered his own body to the angel so that the latter might come to Madonna Lisetta in the form of Frate Alberto. The gullible woman falls for this suggestion, telling the priest that the form of the angel does not matter. What does matter to her however, is that the angel break off his apparent relationship with the Virgin, which she suspects after seeing them together in so many paintings, in which, "in ogni luogo che ella il vedeva le stave ginocchione innanzi" (everywhere she saw him he was on his knees next to the virgin). The relationship between the paintings of the Archangel and his impossible corporeal appearance, align this novella with the thematic questions posed in the introduction to Day Four; Madonna Lisetta, like the son of Balducci before her, ignores the edifying nature of divine images by lusting after the angel Gabriel.

Boccaccio conjures the visual *tableau* found in fourteenth century paintings of the *Annunciation* by essentially restaging painted iconography through the actions and movements of Madonna Lisetta and Frate Alberto. The "angel" enters the lady's bedroom through her home, establishing a coherent architectural setting through which he must pass through a door or portico to enter her room. The specific iconography incorporating a coherent architectural complex and the angel entering through a door frame or portico emerged only at the start of the

fourteenth century, mostly through the work of Giotto and Ambrogio Lorenzetti, thereby establishing Boccaccio's familiarity with contemporary painting conventions.[31] In fact, his acute awareness of iconography and the popularity of *Annunciation* images makes it possible to suggest that the mere mention of one or two details traditionally found in iconography of the *Annunciation* were designed precisely to evoke the readers' knowledge of this scene, and to risk their falling for the priest's ruse with Madonna Lisetta. Boccaccio describes the encounter leading to their tryst in the following passage as follows:

> Come questa cosa così gianca vide, gli s'inginocchio innanzi, e l'agnolo la benedisse e levolla in piè e fecele segno che a letto s'andasse; il che ella, volonterosa d'ubidire, fece pretamente, e l'agnolo apresso con la sua divota si coricò. (*Decameron* IV.2, 309)
>
> When she saw this white object [the priest in disguise] approaching, she threw herself on her knees in front of him, and the angel blessed her and raised her to her feet, and made a sign for her to go into bed; and she, most anxious to obey, did so immediately, and the angel lay down alongside his most devout worshipper.

The vision of the "angel" meets the lady's expectations for how the angel should look and appear, according to the precedent set by conventions for images of the Annunciation, while the reader's attention is drawn to the *tableau* created by the lady's falling to her knees in the angel's presence.[32] Although Madonna Lisetta might not perceive herself as part of this tableau, her reference to the angel in paintings earlier in the novella sets up the readers' expectations, which are met when she participates in the iconography of the scene by kneeling.[33] The reversal of

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[31] For more on fourteenth century iconography of the Annunciation see David M. Robb, "The Iconography of the Annunciation in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Art Bulletin*, 18:4 (1936), pp. 480-526; Ann Van Dijk, "The Angelic Salutation in Early Byzantine and Medieval Annunciation Imagery," in *Art Bulletin*, 81:3 (1999), pp. 420-36; John R. Spencer, "Spatial Imagery of the Annunciation in Fifteenth Century Florence," in *Art Bulletin*, 37:4 (1955), pp. 273-280; Laura Jacobus, "Giotto's Annunciation in the Arena Chapel, Padua," in *Art Bulletin*, 81:1 (1999), pp. 93-107.

[32] There is kind of a double idolatry at work here: Madonna Lisetta mistakes a painting for an object she can lust after and a priest for an angel.

[33] The image of the Madonna kneeling or sitting only become part of the iconography of the Annunciation following the circulation of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* in the early fourteenth century.

conventional iconography underlines the deception within the scene. The notion of the painting is therefore central to facilitating her misguided understanding of the angel's appearance at two registers, that of the novella and that of the reader.

Figure 8. Lippo Memmi and Simone Martini, Detail: Annunciation (Central Panel of Sant'Ansano Altarpiece with Saint Maxima and Saint Ansanus), c. 1333. © Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. LUNA, University of Chicago Collections, accessed 08/07/2020.

Boccaccio foregrounds the success of the ruse by drawing the reader's attention to paintings of the Archangel Gabriel in the novella and by having Madonna Lisetta emphasize that she always lights a candle for him whenever she sees a painting of him in church. In the original Italian, the term "dipinto" is used to describe representations of the angel that the lady refers to in this citation, leaving no question that she is referring to pictorial representations such as those found in panels or fresco cycles throughout churches in Florence. The narrator, Pampinea, writes of Madonna Lisetta's reaction to learning that the Angel has feelings for her that, "allora disse

che molto le piaceva se l'agnolo Gabriello l'amava, per ciò che ella amava ben lui, né era mai che una candela d'un mattapan non gli accendesse davanti dove dipinto il vedea" ("it pleased her very much that the Angel Gabriel was in love with her, for she loved him as well, and never failed to light a cheap candle in his honor whenever she found a painting of him in church"). Her reaction shows that she relies on painted images of the angel as a way of describing her reciprocal feelings. That is, she views the images idolatrously, as a physical representation she can engage with beyond the boundaries that should only convey the angel's likeness.

Madonna Lisetta's misguided desire complicates the very purpose of the images: she should be lighting a candle to convey her devotion for the Virgin and her role in bringing Christ into the world, not to communicate to the angel that she covets him. The act of paying to light a candle in front of the image also raises the problem with commodifying religious art. The candles Madonna Lisetta lights are worth only a "mattapan", a cheap Venetian coin, and imply that divine love can be purchased, and bought cheaply at that.[34] By extension, the transaction suggests that devotion and even salvation can be negotiated for a monetary price, and not only through metaphysical deeds like prayer and penitence. Madonna Lisetta's misguided actions distort the purpose of the *Annunciation* image; instead of inspiring devotion as a divine image it inspires carnal thoughts.

The representations of angels themselves pose a mimetic challenge, given their divine status. While iconographic conventions for angels exist in the fourteenth century, these are also stylistic decisions that give shape to an unseen being, that is, something not existing in the natural world. As Frate Alberto himself points out to Madonna Lisetta, in their true form angels cannot be physically touched, "egli è agnolo e venendo in forma d'agnolo voi nol potreste

[34] See Vittore Branca's notes in the *Decameron*, p. 1007. He describes it as a Venetian coin that carries tan equivalent value of four Florentine *soldi*, in circulation between 1193 and the fifteenth century.

toccare" ("he is an angel and you would not be able to touch him in the form of an angel"). In underlining the intangible nature of angels, Frate Alberto seeks to illustrate their abstract and incomprehensible nature, implying that their abstract nature makes their appearance inconsistent and malleable. As such, Frate Alberto explains to Madonna Lisetta that angels can appropriate the body of humans, appearing in different forms, and thus acquiring the ability to be physically touched.[35] Frate Alberto speaks from a position of theological authority, using his position and status to enforce biblical doctrine according to his purpose, and strengthening his suggestion that angels can appear in whatever form or body they choose, even possessing his own body.

That the priests body becomes a "segnale" or sign of the angel's divine presence is emphasized following Madonna Lisetta's sexual encounter with the Archangel. She tells the friar, "'Non vel dich'io?.' disse la donna "il vostro corpo stette tutta note in braccio mio con l'agnol Gabriello; e se voi non mi credete, guateretevi sotto la poppa manca là dove io diedi un grandissimo bascio all'agnolo.'" (*Decameron* IV.II, 355),[36] drawing a contrast between what is visibly seen, the "bascio", or bite, and the friar's apparent lack of knowledge and memory of the experience of the encounter ("se voi non mi credete"). Through the evidence of the "bascio" or bite on the "angel's" body then, the lady visibly marks what should be a diaphanous being, so that the friar himself becomes the image of the Archangel, transgressing the boundaries that should exist between a corporeal and divine being. In taking advantage of cultural beliefs concerning the appearances of angels, the priest manipulates their moralizing presence to achieve his profane desires.

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[35] In this respect the friar's description of the appearance or physical substance of angels follows the model of Catholic theology, according to which angels become visible to humans through the condensation of air.

[36] English Translation: "But did I not tell you" replied the lady. "Your body spent the entire night in my arms with the Angel Gabriel inside it, and if you do not believe me, look under your left nipple, where I gave the angel such a passionate bite that he will carry its mark for many a day!".

Both Frate Alberto and Madonna Lisetta engage inappropriately with the representations of divine beings, the images literally embodying the dangers of idolatry through their actions. Their misstep does not go unpunished, however. Madonna Lisetta's family learns of her affair and catches the lovers in the act; the lady is scorned by her family while the priest suffers a worse fate. On hearing the family approaching he escapes through her bedroom window, reversing the iconography of his appearance to the lady. The ruse begins to unravel further through the contradiction that the priest has flown away, yet left his wings behind: "quivi avendo lasciate l'ali, se n'era volato". Eventually caught and publicly unveiled for his fraudulent and impious behavior, the narrator finally produces a moralizing message correcting the improper use of images in her final comment:

> Così costui, tenuto buono e male adoperando, non essendo creduto, ardì di farsi l'agnolo Gabriello, e di questo in uom salvatico convertito, a lungo andare, come meritato avea, vituperato senza pro pianse i peccati commessi. Così piaccia a Dio che a tutti gli altri possa intervenire. (*Decameron* IV.2, 359)
>
> So it was that a man who was thought to be good and who acted evilly, not recognized for what he really was, dared to turn himself into the Angel Gabriel, and instead was turned into a wild man, and, in the end, was cursed at by all as he deserved to be and made to lament in vain for the sins he had committed. May it please God that the same thing happen to all others like him!

There are two significant juxtapositions revealed in this conclusion: first, the contrast between "tenuto buono" and "male adoperando", or the fact that it was taken for granted that Frate Alberto acted morally, while in reality he behaved badly. Second, there is an important contrast between the verb "ardì", signaling the priests *desire* to both appear as the angel and to possess the lady, and the adjective "convertito", underlining the unmasking of his true intentions. The conversion that is implied between his desires and his final disgraced appearance highlights the negative transformation he undergoes based on his inappropriate engagement with images.

Frate Alberto's conversion is nothing like the one experienced by Erminio Grimaldi in novella 1.8, whose transformation is for the better. Rather, the final image of Frate Alberto is an externalized visualization of his corrupt behavior; the base desires that were kept hidden are materialized in order to transform him into a "uom selvatico", or a wild man. If the power of images is in conversion through contemplation of divine themes, then both Madonna Lisetta and Frate Alberto have failed in this endeavor. That they fail at all raises questions concerning the spiritual efficacy of images, and shifts the power of visual influence away from the subject represented within the images, instead placing it on the viewers' interpretation. That is, no matter what theme is represented in an image, it still has the potential to be misinterpreted. By dismantling the edifying potential of images in this novella, as well as in the semi-novella of the *Introduction,* Boccaccio points to a weakness in the convention that images are meant to convey edifying and moralizing knowledge; that is, even images of divine subjects do not always or necessarily succeed in lifting their viewers' minds toward God. The potential for interpretive failure is the same as that cited in the *Introduction* to Day Four: if viewers have the potential to misread images and conflate profane and sacred love, then are they truly efficacious? What are the consequences if images lead to a failed conversion?

The theme of conversion through contemplation also underpins novella 5.1, a tale that likewise grapples with illicit love. Unlike the novellas on Day Four however, there are no angels or divine beings involved. Although 5.1 is a rather lengthy novella, the plot is straightforward: the Adonic and wealthy Cimone has so little intelligence that he is considered dumb and sent to live in the countryside so as not to embarrass his family. On an excursion he observes a beautiful woman sleeping; through contemplating her he is ennobled, acquiring intellect, strength, and bravery worthy of his social station. He stops at nothing until one day he possesses this woman,

Efigenia, eventually marrying her and living “lungamente contento nella sua terra”, or happily ever after. Objectively, it appears as though this is one example in which contemplation of a beautiful appearance leads to a genuine conversion. However, the method with which Cimone carries out his pursuit of Efigenia raises the question of whether this is truly a conversion of character for the better, or whether his newfound intelligence amplifies the brutality that already make up his character.

This novella is conceptually linked with the themes of failed conversion through contemplation in the novellas of Day Four previously discussed. As Julia Cozzarelli has shown in her essay, “Love and Destruction in the *Decameron*: Cimone and Calandrino”, Cimone does not apply any of his acquired wisdom in his violent pursuit of his beloved. She argues that, “ultimately, the tale can be seen as a demonstration of Cimone’s failure to ‘truly’ be ennobled by love […]” (Cozzarelli 344).[37] That is, the wisdom he acquires through contemplating Efigenia fails to truly change his character. Instead, he adopts an obsessive and even animalistic pursuit of Efigenia that suggests that his intentions are motivated by lust. And given that his lust is stirred through contemplating her, this novella can be viewed as participating in the dialogue on the efficacy of images or appearances and their power of transformation.

Cimone is introduced in terms that align him with animals, which serves to exaggerate his inhumanity in the reader’s mind from the start of the novella. The attempts to educate him through normal means, such as a tutor, are futile:

> “Né per fatica di maestro né per lusinga o battitura del padre o ingegno d’ingegno d’alcuno altro gli s’era potuto metter nel capo né lettera né costume alcuno, anzi con la voce grossa e deforme e con modi più convenienti a bestia che a uomo quasi per ischerno da tutti era chiamato Cimone, il che nela lor lingua sonava quanto nella nostra ‘bestione’.” (*Decameron* V.I, 423)

[37] See Julia Cozzarelli, “Love and Destruction in the Decameron: Cimone and Calandrino,” in *Forum Italicum*, 38.2 (2004), pp. 348-363.

> Neither his tutor's efforts nor the entreaties and beatings of his father nor the stratagems of anyone else succeeded in putting the slightest bit of learning or good manners into his head – on the contrary, it left him even more coarsely inarticulate and with manners more suitable to a beast than a man – he was contemptuously called Cimone by everyone, which in their language, sounded something like 'numbskull' in ours."

This initial description shows that Cimone begins the novella lacking the main quality that would define him as human: the power of speech. Instead, the efforts to educate him are described as having an adverse effect, so that his speech is "grossa e deforme", that is, unintelligible. And his behavior is so animal-like that he is given a nickname that aligns him with beasts rather than humans. Consequently he is sent away, unable to adapt to the requirements of society.[38] If there is anyone who needs to receive the benefits of a miracle-working image, it is Cimone.

Cimone's life is changed when walking through the woods, he notices a young beautiful woman, Efigenia, asleep in a meadow. He encounters her in an idyllic and hidden Eden-like setting; he proceeds to intensely observe her from head to toe, from her golden hair to the shape of her nose, mouth, neck, arms, and even her breasts. The narrator, Panfilo, calls attention to Efigenia's novel beauty, describing it as so unprecedented that it was as if Cimone had never before seen a woman. Unsurprisingly, this resurrects the question of conflation between divine and sacred love. The narrator confirms that this tension lies behind Cimone's response. He describes Cimone as possessing of some sense, or, "pur di sentimento", so that even though Efigenia's beauty is such that he almost believes it to be divine, he perceives that she is a human woman ("che egli giudicava le divine cose essere di più reverenza degne che le mundane, e per

[38] Cimone's banishment to the countryside raises the question of the *brigata's* own stay in the Florentine hills. The question raised is whether knowledge can be obtained outside of the structure and conditions of the city, that is, out of the norm. For more on the parallels between the countryside in this novella and the experience of the *brigata*, see especially Giuseppe Mazzotta, "The Marginality of Literature," in *The World At Play in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 47-74.

questo si ritneva, aspettando che da se medesima svegliasse”).[39] Although her goddess-like presence once again raises the specter of idolatry, ultimately her corporeality makes her attainable, and she becomes the object of Cimone’s single-minded pursuit.

The narrator, Panfilo, hints at the danger awoken through Cimone’s newly acquired intellect when he first introduces Efigenia. She is described as scared of Panfilo when she realizes he has been observing her sleep, and attempts to resist his offer to accompany her home. However, now awake, Cimone can finally see into her eyes, the one part of her that had been denied to him while she slept, and this sight only reinforces his obsession (“ma come gli occhi di lei vide aperti, così in quegli fiso cominciò a guardare, seco stesso paendogli che da quegli una sovità si movesse la quale il riempiesse di piacere mai da lui non provato”).[40] That he should experience an unprecedented sense of pleasure from the sight of her eyes, “piacere mai da lui non provato,” privileges the role of sight in motivating Cimone’s actions. Already emotionally stimulated by Efigenia’s appearance, when Cimone meets her gaze his mind is moved as well, leading to his subsequent intellectual development. In this respect the scene restages the trope established in the late Duecento poetic traditions of the lady’s gaze as an arrow emanating from her eyes in order to pierce the poet. As such, Cimone’s heart, which had been impenetrable until the moment in which he gazed at Efigenia, resisted any type of intellectual molding, “nel quale niuna dottrina era potuta entrare” (“in which no doctrine could enter”). What does finally pierce his heart is like an arrow of Love, emerging from Efigenia’s eyes to transform Cimone in mind and body.

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[39] English translation: “And since he thought she was more beautiful than any other woman he had ever seen, he felt she might be some goddess; but he possessed enough good sense to know that godlike things should be regarded with more respect than those of this world, and so he hesitated, waiting for her to awaken by herself.” (p. 369).

[40] English translation: [Cimone] “began to gaze into her eyes, which were now open, and he seemed to sense such a sweetness coming from them that he was filled with a pleasure he had never before experienced.” (p. 369)

Panfilo needs only to recall verses from Giacomo da Lentini's poem, "Amor è un desio che ven da core" to find a model for how love is generated from the eyes to the heart. The final two tercets of Lentini's poem *Amor è un desio che ven da core*, illustrate the way Boccaccio turns to tropes of the lyric poets to demonstrate how the vision of Efigenia alters Cimone:

> ché li occhi rapresenta[n] a lo core
> d'onni cosa che veden bono e rio
> com'è formata natural[e]mente;11
> e lo cor, che di zo è concepitore,
> imagina, e [li] piace quel desio:
> e questo amore regna fra la gente.[41]
>
> This is because the eyes represent to the hear everything that they see, good or bad, in it natural appearance, and the heart, which conceives this image, depicts internally the object, and likes that desire. This kind of love reigns over people. (Translation E. Lombardi 2012)

This love not only rules over people generally ("questo amore regna"), but affects Cimone intensely. Analogous to the workings of love in the poem, Cimone's sight is fixed on the appearance of Efigenia. Through his contemplation, her image is imprinted on his heart, which could not previously be ennobled, so he is consequently *pleased* by her appearance. Panfilo draws attention to the transformative effects of love by emphasizing the newness of the pleasure he feels when finally able to look into Efigenia's eyes. In doing so, he also sheds light on the tension between sight, or contemplation, and appearances. Although Efigenia may not be a painted image, Cimone's careful observation of her and his transformation that follows aligns her representation with the same kinds of expectations established for images of the divine: she is given a tangible form and she has edifying powers.

In the short span of four years following his encounter with Efigenia, Cimone is reinvented as a new man. His process of transformation is threefold: first he imitates the clothing

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[41] See Giacomo Da Lentini and Gianfranco Contini, *Poeti del Duecento* (Milan: R. Ricciardi, 1995), pp. 45-93.

and style of his brothers ("di vestimenti e d'ogni altra cosa ornato come i fratelli di lui"), followed by adopting the manners of worthy young men ("udendo i modi, quali a' gentili uomini si convenieno"). His final step in elevating himself is by refining his speech, the very quality that defined him as sub- human at the start of the novella. Panfilo describes Cimone as developing a mastery of speech that extends itself to a mastery of music. Appearances are still central to his transformation: it is through imitating what he sees and hears that he is remade into a gentleman, a transformation that finally takes hold given his desire to possess Efigenia. It would appear then, that his conversion is successful; he is an embodiment of the ennobling effects of love. And yet his transformation is also introduced in terms of its potential to lead to extremes, reminding the reader that there is a possibility for his conversion to fail.

Dismissing Cimone's brutish behavior, including going to war and killing all who oppose him, as a condition of youth, Cimone's father provides him with the finanacial means to carry out his pursuit of Efigenia. His father's support enables Cimone to challenge Pasimunda, a nobleman from Rhodes to whom Efigenia is betrothed, in order to retrieve her. Efigenia's desires and wishes have no part in this drama. Rather, she becomes even more like an image, insofar as she is referred to as an object or ornament that can be acquired for the right bargain or through force. Cimone asserts his claim over her arguing that,

> Giovani uomini, né vaghezza di preda né odio che io abbia cotra di voi mi fece partir di Cipri a dovervi in mezzo mare con armata mano assalire. Quel che mi mosse è a me grandissima cosa a avere acquistata e a voi è assai leggiera a concederlami con pace: e ciò è Efigeni, da me sopra ogni altra cosa amata, la quale non potendo io avere dal padre di lei come amico e con pace, da coi come nemico e con l'armi m'ha costretto amore a acquistarla. (*Decameron* V.1, 427)

> Young men, neither desire for spoils nor hatred for you made me leave Cyprus armed in order to attack you here on the high seas. What moved me is something the acquisition of which I value most highly and which is something you cold easily and peacefully concede me: Efigenia, whom I love more than anything else, and whom, since I could not

> obtain her from her father as a friend and in peace, Love has forced me to acquire from you as an enemy and with my weapons.

In this passage, Cimone describes his motivation for challenging Pasimunda and his men as driven by his desire to acquire Efigenia, precisely as if she were an object. His attempt to barter for her with her father is also based on acquisition ("non potendo io avere dal padre"), never a question of courting the lady, as his new and good manners should have taught him. Moreover, his actions are not his own, but can be blamed on Love, which has driven him to violence in order to acquire his prize. By Cimone's own admission then, the ennobling effects of love have not led him to pursue Efigenia from the perspective of chaste or sacred devotion; rather, his transformation has exaggerated his already violent, beast-like nature, and facilitated his ability to achieve his misguided objective.

The events of the novella become bloodier and more brutal with each of Cimone's efforts to pursue Efigenia, illustrating his violent nature. He acquires Efigenia, he loses her, and he once again goes after her, culminating in a fierce battle that he definitively wins, finally claiming her as his prize. Following one of her abductions Efigenia is described as cursing Cimone's passion for her, faulting his misguided love as the cause of so much violence. However, her desires are completely omitted from the end of the novella, once again signaling her resemblance to an object. In the final line of the novella, Cimone and his friend, Lisimaco, are depicted living happily ever after with their wives Efigenia and Cassandra, as if the women were commodities or new ornaments. Boccaccio writes, "Cimone con Efigenia lieto si tornò in Cipri e Lisimaco similmente con Cassandra ritornò in Rodi; e ciascun lietamente con la sua visse lungamente contento nella sua terra"[42] (P. 434). The singular adjective "contento" places emphasis on

[42] English translation: "Cimone returned to Cyprus with Efigenia and Lisimaco returned with Cassandra to Rhodes; and each lived happy every after with his lady in his own homeland." (p. 378).

Cimone and Lisimaco's respective happiness with their brides, not the collective happiness of all four of the individuals. Efigenia is ultimately commodified, her role is that of a pretty object Cimone can hang on a wall as evidence of his victory, like a celebratory painting or statue.

Although images are not directly cited within novella 5.1, Boccaccio draws on theories of vision to explain how external things in the world become images within the internal faculties. In drawing on theories of vision, the novella featuring Cimone's ennoblement is linked conceptually, to the novellas of Day Four in terms of limitation in their ability to truly edify the beholder. For example, while Cimone appears transformed following his encounter with Efigenia, the brutality displayed in his drive to possess her shows that his underlying animalistic nature has not truly transformed. For Cimone, Madonna Lisetta, and the young son of Balducci then, there is a paradox in the fact that their actions and desires are motivated through their vision of images, yet the images, which should be ennobling, ultimately fail in their ability to effect any real spiritual or moralizing transformation in the viewers. Sustained engagement with an image transforms each of these protagonists, although not in a manner that is moralizing. Rather, their failure to interpret these images in a way that facilitates their conversion to knowledge of higher things points to a limitation in the ability of art to necessarily foster spiritual or moral elevation.

III. Painting Like Snails: Art, Labor, and Knowledge of Artists

In the second half of the *Decameron*, Boccaccio introduces the real-life painters Calandrino, Bruno, and Buffalmacco. Based on fourteenth century Florentine painter, Giovanozzo, or Nozzo di Perino, Calandrino was active in Florence about 1301 according to a notarized document from that year, while Bruno is based on the painter Bruno di Giovanni d'Olivieri, known as a minor

painter of rooms, or "dipintore di camere".[43] More is known about the figure of Buffalmacco, based on the painter Bonamico di Buffalmacco, recognized for paintings throughout Tuscany and Umbria, and for contributing frescos to the Duomo in Arezzo and to the Badia Chapel in Florence. He is most notably and recently recognized as the painter of *The Triumph of Death* (c. 1338-1341) fresco cycle, at the Camposanto in Pisa.[44] Appearing across five novellas on Days Eight and Nine in some combination consisting of at least two if not all three of the artists, they recur more frequently than any other figures in the collection. Sometimes referred to as the "Calandrino cycle", this series of novellas has received widespread attention for Boccaccio's exploitation of the painters' association with the illusionary arts and visual representation in general.[45] Within these novellas Calandrino in particular succumbs to multiple schemes based on his misreading of visual representations, giving the impression that the genre of the painterly

[43] Calandrino is generally considered a "pregiottesque" painter, his only known painting is recorded in Franco Sacchetti's *Trecentonovelle*. Although the subject of the painting is not clear, it is said to represent figures painted in contemporary Trecento clothing. He is thought to be a student of Andrea Tafi, and believed to have died about 1318. For more on Calandrino see the notes to Branca's edition of the *Decameron*, p. 1102. See also D.E. Colnaghi, *A Dictionary of Florentine Painters from the 13th to 17th centuries* (London, 1928), p. 68; For more on Bruno see Branca, *Decameron*, p. 1102.
[44] Still extant, the fresco was badly damaged in 1944, but restored to the Camposanto in 2018. Importantly, the painting was completed about ten years prior to Boccaccio writing the *Decameron* and received widespread attention at the time. Also a student of Andrea Tafi, Buffalmacco is believed to have lived on via Cocomero like Cimabue and Giotto, and is thought to have lived between 1262 and 1340 (according to Vasari). For more on Buffalmacco see Branca, *Decameron*, p. 1108; see also Luciano Bellosi, *Buffalmacco e il trionfo della morte*, a cura di Roberto Bartolini (Milano: Abscondita, 1974).
[45] See for example Paul F. Watson, "The Cement of Fiction: Giovanni Boccaccio and the Painters of Florence," in *MLN*, 99:1 (1984), pp. 43-64; Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), especially p. 58-60.

Figure 9. Buonamico Buffalmacco, *The Triumph of Death*, Camposanto, Pisa, Italy, c. 1338-1341. LUNA, University of Chicago Repository, accessed 08/07/2020.

trick is a common theme, like an inside joke.[46] Bruno and Buffalmacco on the other hand, employ their artistic talents to stage elaborate games tricking Calandrino as well as other members of society. While three of the five novellas in the cycle contain references to paintings, two do not, raising the question of whether the artists' respective behaviors are a consequence of their professional occupation.[47] That is, if they are responsible for painting representations of

[46] For more see Mazzotta, "Games of Laughter," in *The World At Play in the Decameron* (1986), pp. 186-212.

[47] Even with the direct absence of paintings, Bruno and Buffalmacco stage their tricks to resemble a visual *tableau*. For example, on day VIII.6, Bruno and Buffalmacco stage a *tableau* that points to Calandrino's guilt in the theft of his own pig, by tampering with his wine and causing him to double-over, leading everyone who can *see* him to believe in his guilt. In fact, Bruno and Buffalmacco are responsible for stealing the pig, and although there is no explicit reference to painting in this *novella*, their skill at

nature, then are they by nature inclined to always misguide people, like Bruno and Buffalmacco, or misread people, like Calandrino?

The tension between representation and interpretation that underpins the main drama of the "Calandrino cycle" enables Boccaccio to situate the questions raised in previous novellas concerning the role of images, their commodification, and their misappropriation, within the specific context of Trecento Florentine society. Not only are Calandrino, Bruno, and Buffalmacco based on historical painters with extant works known to the *Decameron*'s immediate audience, the members of *brigata* also confirm their temporal proximity to the artists within their narration. In the introduction to novella VIII.3 for example, Elissa opens her tale by sharing with her companions that the events are recent, "Nella nostra città, la quale sempre di varie maniere e di nuove genti è stata abondevole, fu, *ancora non è gran tempo*, un dipintore chiamato Calandrino".[48] By localizing the question of the ethics of representation to a specifically Florentine context with historically recognizable characters, Boccaccio can broaden the discussion to implicate the intersection of art, politics, labor, and society outside of the world of the *Decameron*, collapsing some of the distance between reality and fiction within the text. Connecting these themes to a specifically Florentine context also serves to reintegrate the members of the *brigata* back into their reality as their escape in the hills comes to a close and they near the end of their days of storytelling.

Although the novellas featuring the painters do not immediately succeed one another, the protagonists and narrators refer to events occurring within respective novellas of the cycle, creating a sense of continuity that propels the narrative forward in time. Through the "Calandrino

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staging an illusion that appears to be real, convinces all the participants who are invited to view and witness their farce. For more on the notion of verisimilar staging in the *Decameron*, see Justin Steinberg, "Mimesis on Trial," in *Representations*, 139.1 (2017), pp. 118-145.

[48] English translation: "Not long ago in our city, which has always abounded in unusual customs and strange people, there was a painter called Calandrino…" p. 565.

cycle", the reader has a distinct impression that time is passing within the world of the *brigata*, by moving chronologically from one story about Calandrino to the next. Each of the five novellas in the "Calandrino cycle" maintains a distinct plot that is independent from the others in the series with Day Eight containing the two novellas in the cycle that engage most directly with the rivalries between image and text, and seeing and believing. In novella VIII.3, Calandrino is taken in by the magical properties of the heliotrope stone, which render its bearer invisible; in novella VIII.6 Buffalmacco and Bruno trick Calandrino by staging the theft of his pig; although they have stolen it themselves, they visually implicate him of making a false accusation about the pig's disappearance in the presence of neighboring farmers; and in novella VIII.9 Bruno and Buffalmacco trick the doctor Messer Simone into thinking they belong to a special supper club, taking advantage of his desire to join the club in order to profit off of him financially. This latter novella is the only one in which Calandrino does not make an appearance. He returns however in novella IX.3, in which Bruno and Buffalmacco with the help of Messer Simone trick him into thinking he is pregnant, and in novella IX.5, where, on a painting job at a countryside villa, Bruno and Buffalmacco lead him to believe that the mistress of their patron's son is in love with him.

Collectively, the novellas do not convey any consistent rules about the function or meaning of images. Rather, they demonstrate different kinds of interactions with images by people of differing social classes and professions, making it possible to begin to categorize a range of responses to images based on knowledge, profession, and social status. For example, Calandrino and Messer Simone are both tricked by Bruno and Buffalmacco, but they are gullible in different ways. The schemes carried out on Calandrino, also a painter by profession, are based on distorting his sense of sight, while Messer Simone, a doctor, falls victim to his vanity and

pride as a man of letters. Observing the tension between knowledge and labor within these novellas has prompted Paul Watson to suggest that viewed jointly, the novellas of the Calandrino cycle represent a hierarchy of artistic expertise, one based on the level of natural genius of each artist and how it influences their approach to their craft, rather than the actual subject of their artistic creations.[49] Taking into consideration novella VI.5, featuring Giotto as master of rhetoric, Watson argues that Giotto represents the end of the spectrum with the highest genius, while Calandrino is at the other end, lacking the basic skills of perception. Bruno and Buffalmacco sit somewhere in the middle given their talent for invention, despite the fact that they apply their skills toward baser goals like tricks that deceive others. By discerning between the different levels of labor and skill involved in the process of artistic creation, Boccaccio expands the question of the ethics of representation from the effects of misreading images to include hierarchies of visual interpretation.

Like the implied image of *Cortesia* in novella I.8 and the paintings of angels in Day Four, the images in the "Calandrino cycle" continue to emphasize representations of unprecedented and unique themes, such as a painted psychomachia between cats and mice in novella VIII.9.[50] As in the earlier tales, the paintings on Days Eight and Nine are mostly referred to in passing without an accompanying visual description, emphasizing how the images are a vehicle for examining the dynamics between representation and interpretation more than a study of the images themselves. That is, characters are depicted looking at and laboring on unspecified paintings, or paintings depict a general theme, but there is no sustained ekphrastic description of

[49] See Paul F. Watson, "The Cement of Fiction: Giovanni Boccaccio and the Painters of Florence" (1984).
[50] Although this image is not entirely unprecedented, it is certainly unusual. In Victoria Kirkham's essay, "Painters at Play on the Judgment Day (*Decameron* VIII.9)," in *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 14 (1983-84), pp. 256-77, reprinted in *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction* (Florence: Olschki, 1993), pp. 215-35, she shows that a fourteenth century painting depicting a battle between cats and mice is the subject of a fresco cycle in Germany. While there is some evidence that this was an available if rare theme for a wall painting in the late middle ages, the scarcity of extant images of this theme also point to its uniqueness.

the composition and stylistic qualities of an image.[51] However, Boccaccio also introduces extant paintings alongside fictional ones in the "Calandrino cycle", adding an additional level of visual meaning to these images since they can actually be experienced by the *Decameron*'s audience. For example, in novella VIII.3 Calandrino is depicted contemplating paintings and reliefs of the newly completed tabernacle in San Giovanni, while in novella VIII.9, there is a passing reference to a painting of a three-headed Lucifer on the wall of the Ospedale San Gallo, and another to an image of God the Father in Passignano.[52] By introducing real paintings in the *Decameron*, Boccaccio raises a tension between his art and the visual artists, more directly contrasting the powers of visual and verbal representation as well as artifice and reality within the text.

The first novella in the "Calandrino cycle," VIII.3 directly introduces underlying tensions between textual and visual art through exploring how visual representations can up-end established beliefs and knowledge about the world. The potential of art to invent new realities increases its value as a tool of artifice, with more or less effectiveness depending on the skill of the artist. Given that the narrative unfolds between artists and a trickster skilled in the verbal arts , the question of intellect, skill, and ability across both images and text becomes central to understanding the role of deception in the "Calandrino cycle" novellas. As such, Calandrino is

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[51] The slightest exception to this rule is a brief ekphrastic moment in novella VIII.9, in which attention is drawn to the tails on the mice in the psychomachia. However, they are only referred to as having tails, nothing else is said about their composition within the painting, or the size or shape of their bodies.

[52] Documentary evidence refers to an image of a three headed Lucifer, borrowing imagery from Dante's depiction in the *Inferno*, painted on the external wall of the Ospedale San Gallo in Florence. It was lost in the sixteenth century after the building was torn down. Less is known about the image of God the Father in Passignano although just as Boccaccio suggests within the text, it was placed high about a door within a church. Unfortunately no definitive description of Lippo Benivieni's work for the San Giovanni baptistery is available although according to Vittore Branca, records for the Arte di Calimala guild, the guild of merchants and cloth finishers, indicate that it was commissioned and completed circa 1313. All three of these images have been lost to time, however historical records exist showing that they were extant during the time in which Boccaccio wrote the *Decameron*. For notes on these images see Vittore Branca's comments to the *Decameron*, pp. 1121-1129. For more on the tabernacle see Norman Land, "Calandrino as Viewer," in *Notes in the History of Art*, 23:4 (2004), p. 1-6, Kirkham, "Painters at Play" (1983-84), and Watson, "The Cement of Fiction" (1984).

first described in terms of his level of intelligence through the narrator Elisa's first description of him as a "uom semplice e di nuovi costumi", or a simpleton. His "nuovi costumi" also raise the issue of his social status, defining him as part of the new class of craftsmen and merchants in the changing social and political landscape of fourteenth century Florence following the plague.[53] Calandrino's intelligence and artistic profession is contrasted with the introduction of Maso del Saggio, described as intelligent and fortunate, of "grandissima piacevolezza in alcuna cosa che far voleva, astuto e avvenevole", or marvelously skilled and brilliant in his every endeavor.[54] The tension between levels of knowledge, skill, class, and labor produces a contrast between the gullibility of Calandrino, an artist, on the one hand, and Maso on the other, pitting verbal and visual representation against one another.

The contrast between the visual and verbal arts also physically sets up the drama of the novella. The narrator first introduces Calandrino in the midst of deeply contemplating the recently completed tabernacle by Lippo Benevieni in the baptistery of San Giovanni.[55] He is described as, "attento", or actively "a riguardare le dipinture e gl'intagi del tabernaculo il quale è sopra l'altare della detta chiesa, non molto tempo davanti postovi" (staring at paintings and the bas-reliefs of the tabernacle which had been built recently over the altar of that church).[56] His

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[53] In contrast, Bruno and Buffalmacco who also appear in this novella are introduced as "uomini sollazzevoli" or shrewd characters, who spend time with Calandrino precisely so they can play tricks on him. Already two levels of intelligence are introduced for members of the same working class: Calandrino's simplemindedness leads him to be easily tricked while Bruno and Buffalmacco's wits enable them to carry out the tricks.

[54] Maso makes a subsequent appearance in novella VIII.5 when the narrator of that novella, Filostrato is reminded of an additional story featuring him. In this novella he orchestrates a prank along with two friends that literally unseats a judge, by removing his pants during a court session in order to undermine the judicial procedure.

[55] The tabernacle is no longer fully extent, and is only partially visible. See W.R. Valentiner, "Tino da Camaiano in Florence," in *Art Quarterly*, 17 (1954), pp. 116-134 (119).

[56] Paul Watson and Norman Land have argued that Boccaccio was familiar with fourteenth century painting practice that would require painters to learn by closely observing their peers' and masters' works. The idea then is that Calandrino would not be sitting in quiet self-reflection, but rather, would be staring attentively ("stare attento a riguardar") at his colleague's recently completed fresco cycle. They have also

attentive contemplation of the images on the tabernacle, even though they are not described, implies two potential kinds of edification he can achieve through this endeavor: as a painter, he can learn something from observing new work by one of his peers, and as an individual, he can contemplate the divine images in order to ennoble himself towards a higher purpose. By calling attention to his contemplation of the tabernacle, the narrator invites the reader to enter for a moment into the same physical and visual space of the novella, picturing the experience of sitting in contemplation in the baptistery. By engaging multiple senses, this immerses the reader within the novella. Millicent Marcus has drawn attention to the relationship between Calandrino's profession as a painter and his engagement with his faculty of sight through his observation of the pictorial cycle and sculptures in San Giovanni in order to examine the uses of the verb *vedere* and within the tale. She notes that,

> Although Boccaccio uses *vedere* to signify seeing, seeming, and understanding in separate and distinct contexts, Calandrino insists on combining all three meanings so that sense impressions immediately become the stuff of understanding without any intervening acts of judgment or discrimination. Calandrino thus collapses the gradations of medieval psychology into one, homogeneous level, equating the sensitive and intellective faculties which should be ordered in a strict hierarchy of importance (Marcus 87).

Marcus' emphasis on Calandrino's profession as a device for facilitating his gullability within the *novella* underlines the way in which Boccaccio engages medieval practices of viewership to illustrate the relationship between sight and knowledge within this *novella*. The reader is further drawn into the drama through the brief nod to the common knowledge shared with the members of the *brigata* that the tabernacle was only recently completed, an event that the reader may even recall from memory. The immersive visual and imaginative excursion in this description is

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both argued that Calandrino is observing recently completed paintings by Lippo di Benivieni, which only exist in fragmentation. See Watson, "The Cement of Fiction" (1984), p. 46, and Norman Land, "Calandrino as Viewer," in *Notes in the History of Art*, 23:4 (2004), p. 1-6.

interrupted by Maso's verbal intervention that follows, designed to trick Calandrino's senses, including sight and hearing.

The narrator describes two motives driving Maso to trick Calandrino: on the one hand, to play a joke on him, or "fargli alcuna beffa", and on the other, to lead him to believe in something unprecedented, "fargli credere alcuna nuova cosa".[57] Yet the conditions for the ruse to be a success must be precise. Happening upon Calandrino observing the images of the tabernacle, Maso discerns that the *space* and the *timing* to achieve his goals are appropriate ("pensò essergli dato luogo e tempo"). Elissa's narration frames Maso's logic as straightforward: it implies that to believe something unprecedented ("alcuna nuova cosa") it is ideal to already be *looking* at something unprecedented, such as a new series of images in a place of divine contemplation. The tabernacle, although not described in terms of its decoration, is situated within a specific location in the baptistery above the altar, and described as recently installed, therefore providing a new, unprecedented experience for Calandrino. Moreover, the altar is the space of miracles, the site of the Eucharist, and the place where the divine spirit enters the physical world for a moment.[58] The implication is that for Calandrino to be in the right place and time for Maso's ruse to succeed, that is, to lead him to believe in "alcuna nuova cosa", he must already be open to the possibility of miracles and unprecedented visions.

Taking up with Bruno and Buffalmacco within earshot of Calandrino, Maso begins to describe the powers of various magical stones. The tricksters deliberately ignore Calandrino

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[57] Maso's interest in playing a trick on Caladrino is purely because he is able to and knows that Calandrino is easily fooled; this is not an attempt to ennoble Calandrino's by "teaching him a lesson", but rather an opportunity to outweigh the powers of contemplation with his tale.

[58] As noted by Mazzotta, the tabernacle is the very site where "the invisible Godhead is given sacramental visibility", underlining the tension between invisibility and visibility that characterize this novella. Cennino Cennini, who considers himself a third generation disciple of Giotto, recommends to fellow painters in the *Libro dell'Arte* that they should observe the painting and artworks of masters in order to develop their skills, which resembles what Calandrino does in observing the tabernacle at the start of the novella. See Mazzotta, "Games of Laughter," in *The World At Play in the Decameron* (1986).

("faccendo vista de non vederlo"), engaging his sense of hearing alongside his sense of sight, which has already been activated through his contemplation of the tabernacle. Intrigued by the discussion between the men, Calandrino asks if any such magical stones can be found near Florence, to which Maso replies that they are typically located in a fantastical land called Bengodi, with mountains made of grated Parmesan cheese, a stream of dry white wine, and an abundance of magic stones. However at least one type, the heliotrope stone, with the powers to turn the bearer invisible, can be found in the nearby Mugnone valley.[59] Maso only describes the stone briefly, as a non-descript black rock of various sizes. Calandrino falls for Maso's tale and makes up his mind to search for the heliotrope stone. He pretends he has other errands to run in order to take his leave of him, practicing a socially acceptable form of deceit.

At this point in the novella Maso exits the narrative, his objective achieved. He set out to convince Calandrino of something unprecedented, the "nuova cosa", and he succeeds. Any doubts Calandrino might have raised are suspended by looking at Maso's face. The narrator emphasizes that because Calandrino is a simpleton, perceiving Maso to keep a straight face ("veggendo Maso dir queste parole con un viso fermo e senza ridere"), convinces him that every word about Bengodi is true.[60] Sight comes to have a significant role here, as the process through which Calandrino believes in the unseen, both the unprecedented images on the tabernacle and the imaginary land of Bengodi. And yet, his sight clearly misleads him. Calandrino relies on his

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[59] For a detailed discussion on the history and literary precedent for the heliotrope stone see Ronald Martinez, "Calandrino and the Powers of the Stone: Belief and the Progress of *Ingegno* in *Decameron* VIII.3," in *Heliotropia*, 1:1 (2003), pp. 1-32.

[60] Maso del Saggio is mentioned in passing in the tenth novella on Day Six of the *Decameron* by the protagonist, Frate Cipolla. In inventing a story to describe how he came into possession of a false relic, Frate Alberto mentions observing Maso "cracking nuts" and selling the husks, thus associating Maso with mercantilism and trade. That Frate Cipolla references Maso to the crowd he preaches to indicates that Maso's name carries some authority that legitimizes the priest's story. By transposing Maso to Day Eight then, Elissa invokes the same legitimacy, created through the reader's familiarity with the character from the prior novella.

sense of sight to discern the truth in Maso's tale just as he supposedly turned to the images in the tabernacle to convey true higher meaning, but his senses ultimately let him down, both those of hearing and sight, the latter a problem for a man who makes his living as a painter. The image of the divine that should ennoble him and strengthen his resolve against baser interests, such as "get rich quick" schemes, falters in light of the marvelous tale spun by Maso's words.

The juxtaposition between Calandrino's observation of unprecedented images in the tabernacle and Maso's verbal account of the magic powers of the stone introduces a significant tension between the powers of visual and verbal representation. The delivery of Maso's story is verbal although he makes a point of relying on Calandrino's observation of images in the tabernacle to support his scheme ("pensò essergli dato luogo e tempo alla sua intenzione"; "he decided that this was the right time and place to put his plan into action"). The heliotrope, as part of this scheme, is a rhetorical device designed to encourage Calandrino's desires to acquire wealth through the powers of the stone; ironically the nonexistent stone wields the power of invisibility, its true power only in the suggestion of its existence.[61] However, for the stone to be truly convincing, it needs a material form. For Calandrino, the stone represents an object with inherent powers, not requiring further embellishment or art to perform its function. As such, it is an object that can be more easily monetized and sold than a painting, which requires hours of labor. This realization motivates Calandrino to search for the stone so that he can give up his profession in order to liberate himself from the manual labor of painting. It would seem that the verbal description of the stone's powers governs Calandrino's desires more than the visual images on the tabernacle before him; given the choice between the divine images and the magical story, Calandrino succumbs to the experience described by Maso.

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[61] For more on the rhetorical power of the heliotrope stone, see Martinez, "Calandrino and the Powers of the Stone: Belief and the Progress of *Ingegno* in *Decameron* VIII.3" (2003).

In the second half of the novella, Bruno and Buffalmacco lead Calandrino to believe that he has found the heliotrope stone by pretending that they no longer see him. Even the guards at the city gate of Florence are complicit in the ruse, convinced by Bruno and Buffalmacco to act as if Calandrino is unseen. Just like the first *tableau* in San Giovanni, staged through Maso taking advantage of Calandrino's observation of the newly created art, the timing of Calandrino's return to the city is an essential part of the staging; by returning to the city at evening hours, Bruno and Buffalmacco ensure that most citizens are at home and that Calandrino is positioned to walk through the city without encountering anyone.[62] In this sense, Calandrino is led to believe that he experiences a transformation – from corporeal to invisible – even though it is only a perceived transformation and not a real one. The illusion of his invisibility is only interrupted when he arrives home and his wife, Monna Tessa, who is unaware of the scheme, addresses him directly, demonstrating that she does in fact see him. With brutishness reminiscent of Cimone, Calandrino beats his wife mercilessly until Bruno and Buffalmacco show up and convince him that it is his own fault that the powers of the stone wore off because it is common knowledge that women can cause everything to lose power ("di queste cose niuna colpa aver la donna ma egli, che sapeva che le femine facevano perdere le vertù alle cose"). Although the magic of the stones "wears off", Calandrino does not lose his faith in their power. Rather, he is led to believe that being in the wrong place (at home) at the wrong time (with his wife) undoes the power of the heliotrope.

Calandrino is motivated to undertake his search of the heliotrope through the combinated efforts of the images in the tabernacle, which engage his powers of sight, and Maso's verbal description of the stone and its powers. He is further impacted through his desire to increase his financial wealth, setting him apart from the more "serious" desire to acquire fame based on his

[62] For more on the legal and representational ramifications of seeing and being seen in this novella, see Justin Steinberg, "The Artist and the Police" (*forthcoming 2020*).

talent and art. Instead, Calandrino's desires are rooted in his attempt to eliminate the physical labor that characterizes his profession. When attempting to convince Bruno and Buffalmacco to accompany him on the hunt for the heliotrope stone, Calandrino argues that finding the stones would change their life and status, "cosi potremo arricchire subitamente, senza avere tutto dì a schiccherare le mura a modo che fa la lumaca" ("we can get rich quick and not spend the whole day laboring on the walls like snails"[63]). The association between his goal to get rich, "arrichire" and his labor, "schiccherare", indicates that his own profession is instable and not economically profitable. Thus, the act of contemplation does not edify Calandrino, nor does it teach him anything practical in terms of his craft, revealing the limits of the images' influence despite their moral and spiritual and artistic significance. As soon as presented with the opportunity, Caladrino turns his attention to the material value of objects in order to better commodify his desires, just as a painting would commodify his labor through the sale of the final object.

Ultimately, the desire for money and the depreciated value of his labor are as much at the root of Calandrino's gullibility as his misinterpretation of the tabernacle images. That the images fail to ennoble him presents an opportunity to examine how his professional skills and level of knowledge contribute to his demise and relationship to other artists. The underlying issue of financial precarity motivates both Calandrino's missteps as well as Bruno and Buffalmacco's schemes, which are primarily generated through their desire to get free meals and accommodation from whoever they are take advantage of. Their poverty is therefore a central motivation for their actions in the novellas in which they are featured, underlining the

[63] My translation.

relationship between labor, finances, and the representation of art, an issue deeply important to Boccaccio himself.[64]

In the single novella of the "Calandrino cycle" in which Caladrino himself is absent, novella VIII.9, the painters Bruno and Buffalmacco employ their artistic talents and labor to profit financially from the naïveté of doctor Messer Simone. Belonging to the same Florentine labor guild, the doctor and the painters are neighbors, all inhabitants of the via del Cocomero, an established artists' quarter in the fourteenth century where Giotto also lived and maintained a studio. Noticing the calm and content demeanor of the artists, Messer Simone approaches them in order to understand how they sustain their seemingly rich and entertaining lifestyle despite their poor salaries and poverty. Explaining Simone's motivations, the narrator explains that the doctor is unable to reconcile their poverty with their happiness: "udendo da tutti costoro essere poveri uomini e dipintori, gli entrò nel capo non dover potere essere che essi dovessero così lietamente vivere della lor povertà."[65] Introducing the desire for wealth, entertainment, and worldly riches as driving both Messer Simone and the artists' actions in the novella sets up a juxtaposition between their professional skills and knowledge that underpins their interactions throughout the novella.[66] Bruno even addresses Simone using the formal honorific "Maestro", which distinguishes them socially, even though it is truly the painters who masterfully manipulate the beliefs of the doctor.

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[64] Boccaccio had extremely limited financial means following his father's loss of wealth through the collapse of the Bardi bank in the mid-fourteenth century. Petrarch infamously left a coat to Boccaccio within his will, not his prized *Madonna* by Giotto, further implicating Boccaccio's financial distress. See Theodor E. Mommsen, *Petrarch's Testament* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957).

[65] English translation: "when he heard everyone say that these two men were painters and that they were poor, he took it into his head that it was impossible to be so poor and lead so happy a life". (p. 620)

[66] Shayne Legassie in particular has examined the relationship between Boccaccio's portrayal of the labor of art in the *Decameron* and how it aligns with assumptions about artists' role as artisans or their reputation as tricksters in fourteenth century Florence. See his essay, "The Lies of the Painters: Artisan Trickery and the Labor of Painting in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Sacchetti's *Trecentonovelle*," in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 43:3 (2013), pp. 487-519.

The astute painters realize the opportunity at hand to have some fun with the doctor in order to benefit financially, by inventing a tale about an extraordinary club they belong to in which they regularly dine, party, and sleep with the queens of Europe.[67] By dangling the prospect of joining this enticing secret club in front of the doctor, they manage to get several dinners from him, dropping hints about the club now and then to keep him interested. Bruno in particular ingratiates himself with the doctor by painting several images within his home, as a fabricated exchange of labor to thank him for his generosity. The success of their scheme relies on their ability to successfully commodify the desired experience of the doctor, by "selling" the idea of the secret club to him through a ingratiating themselves to him through the images Bruno paints. Just as in the case of previous images in the *Decameron*, Boccaccio introduces Bruno's paintings as a way to reflect on and critique Messer Simone's problematic conduct in order to expose his moral shortcomings.

Bruno eventually paints four images for Messer Simone, even enlisting the doctor's labor in order to complete his work by having him hold a lamp up to the wall where he is painting mouse tails. As noted in recent scholarship, this is surely a staged activity designed by Bruno to belittle the knowledge and skill of the doctor who benefits from a higher social stand than he does, although they belong to the same labor guild.[68] The four paintings are described as follows:

> Acciò che ingrate non paresse di questo onor fattogli dal medico, glia veva dipinta nella sala sua la Quaresima e uno *agnusdei* all'entrar della camera e sopra l'uscio della via uno orinale, acciò che color che avessero del suo consiglio bisogno il sapessero riconoscer dagli altri; e in una sua loggetta gli aveva dipinta la battaglia de' topi e delle gate, la quale troppo bella cosa pareva al medico […]. (*Decameron* VIII.9, 711)
>
> In order not to seem ungrateful for all of the hospitality the doctor showed him, he painted a Lenten mural in his dining room, a Lamb of God over the entrance to his

[67] The names of all of the so-called "queens" are jokes in themselves. The English translations of some of these names include, the Lady of Barbarnicals, the Queen of Basks, the Empress Orabitch, the Changeacrap of Noway, and the Countess of Latrine.
[68] See Legassi, "Lies of the Artists" (2013) and Kirkham, "Painters at Play" (1983-84).

bedroom, and a urinal over the front door to the shop, so that people who needed his help could tell his house from the others; and in one of his loggias, he painted for him the battle between the mice and the cats, which according to the doctor was too beautiful for words […].

The description of the images is brief, providing only a description in terms of their content and location within Messer Simone's home. Like other images mentioned in the *Decameron*, the visual details that would convey the full sense of the image's narrative like its composition, use of color, and style, is irrelevant for Bruno's paintings. In turning to visual representation, Boccaccio does not seek to ekphrastically describe the images, but rather seeks to employ them for their ability to materially represent the qualities Messer Simone should aspire to.

The subject of the paintings themselves, indicated by their thematic description, provides another perspective on the way in which the images provide a material reflection of behaviors and vices with little to no iconographic precedent. In this respect the images are like non-mimetic portraits that reflect not the sitter himself but rather his moral failings, through the visual and material concretization of his defects. Of the paintings by Buffalmacco, the *agnusdei*, or the Lamb of God, is perhaps the most

Figure 10. *Medieval Game Piece Featuring a Cat and Mouse*, German, North Rhine Westphalia, c. 12th century, walrus ivory. © British Museum. London, England. LUNA, Univeristy of Chicago Collections, accessed 08/07/2020.

recognized despite its various iconographic variations. In the Christian tradition it is considered a representation of Christ, symbolizing his sacrifice on behalf of humankind in order to remove their sins from the world.[69] Placed above the entrance to the Messer Simone's bedroom, this image fails to influence his actions, as he continues to live according to his baser desires. The most unique example from the group is the allegorical personification of Lent, which like the image of *Cortesia*, is not associated with specific visual motif. As an image conveying the experience of fasting however, it is hard to imagine her representation being particularly pleasing, given that physical indications for deprivation would likely make her visually appear gaunt and skeletal.[70] The purpose of an image of Lent placed in the doctor's dining room is also unclear, except perhaps to encourage moral cleansing of the soul. The meaning of the painting makes significantly more sense when juxtaposed against its patron, Messer Simone, a man whose generosity is motivated by avarice rather than piety, and who is therefore in need of a cleansing fast. Just as miserly Grimaldi lacked the presence of *cortesia* in his life, the image of Lent makes visible the traits Messer Simone lacks.

As noted by several scholars, the images represented within this novella function as mini "beffas" or jokes that ironically shed light on the ways in which Messer Simone is intellectually and morally deficient.[71] The *agnusdei* indicates his false piety and the battle between cats and mice makes light of the battle of the wits between Bruno and the doctor themselves; the representation of Lent underlines his insincere generosity, and the urinal is a graphic symbol of one of the fundamental but less glamorous aspects of medieval medical practices. In the midst of

[69] Despite the *agnusdei*'s association with Christ's sacrifice and the crucifixion, it is actually John the Baptist that describes Christ as the lamb of God in John 1:29 and again in John 1:36.
[70] In Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 1559 painting, *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent*, the allegorical figure of Lent is portrayed as a gaunt nun seated in the right foreground of image.
[71] See especially Kirkham, "Painters at Play" (1983-84), and Justin Steinberg, "The Artist and the Police" (*forthcoming 2020*).

the overall trick being played on the doctor, Bruno is able to turn to his own skills as a painter in order to pull off a series of visual pranks that the doctor is too naïve to understand, Messer Simone even remarking that the beauty of the images is unprecedented. Each of these images then, serves as a vehicle for representing one of Messer Simone's behavioral or professional faults and indirectly critiques his trade and his knowledge. As tools designed to facilitate Bruno's overall objective to get more money and resources from the doctor, the images become vehicles of exchange, commodifying Messer Simone's worst qualities at his expense.

In satirically critiquing the doctor, Bruno's paintings also fail to teach him anything moralizing that might give him a chance of reaching heaven rather than falling into the depths of hell. Messer Simone's misguided appreciation of the images despite their subtle critique of his motivations and desires reveals a gap between their meaning and his interpretation. In one final blow to the doctor's integrity, the artists even paint bruises on their bodies as proof that they were punished for the doctor failing to arrive at the club; that they should be able to fool a doctor in his own practice with their "petti loro tutti dipinti", or painted bruised chests, alerts the reader that expectations for the order of knowledge and practice is being challenged. By pitting the creative knowledge and talents of the artists against the book-learned intellect of the doctor, the novella subverts social norms concerning knowledge, representation, and labor in order to point to the doctor's idiocy for the reader's entertainment.

VII. Conclusion: Between Practice and Style

The ability of images to shed light on the complex relationships between visual and textual representation is directly addressed in the *Author's Conclusion* to the *Decameron* following the end of the storytelling part of the text. Speaking in an authorial voice, Boccaccio defends the

themes within his anthology by making a case for artistic license, which he perceives to be a privilege of visual art denied to writers given social norms and expectations for appropriate decorum. He argues that just as certain words carry multiple meanings, so too can images convey multiple meanings. He directly compares the tool of his trade, the pen, to the brush of the artist, arguing that,

> Sanza che alla mia penna non dee essere meno d'autorità conceduta che sia al pennello del dipintore, il quale senza alcuna riprensione, o almen giusta, lasciamo stare che egli fa Cristo maschio e Eva femina, e a Lui medsimo, che volle per la salute della umana generazione sopra la croce morire, quando con un chiovo e quando con due i piè gli conficca in quella. (*Decameron*, "Conclusione dell'Autore" 910)
>
> Moreover, my pen should be granted no less freedom than the brush of a painter who, without incurring censure or, at least any which is justified, depicts Saint Michael wounding the serpent with a sword or a lance and Saint George slaying the dragon wherever he pleases, not to the mention the fact that he shows Christ as a man and Eve as a woman, and nails to the cross, sometimes with one nail, sometimes with two, the feet of Him who wished to die there for the salvation of mankind.

The examples Boccaccio turns to in this passage raise conflicts between gender (the combination of Christ and Eve), and conflicts that conflate veneration with sexual idealization (the penetrating act of Saint George), that subversion of conventional themes (the use of multiple nails going against theological decisions on the iconography for images of Christ on the cross), and that indicate artistic license (Saint Michael's sword or lance).[72] By drawing on examples with unstable iconography, Boccaccio shows how artists can escape censure when making subtle changes to conventional expectations. Finally, the explorations into failed edification and the concretization of behaviors and desires through visual representation are contextualized within a broader epistemological and theological framework underpinning the text. In exploring the complex rivalry and collaboration between visual and textual representations, Boccaccio seeks

[72] See in particular Paul Watson, "The Cement of Fiction" (1978), p. 62-63. Watson shows that the question of the correct number of nail meant to be represented in paintings of the *Crucifixion* was a source of debate in thirteenth century religious circles.

the artistic freedom to subvert normative expectations concerning narrative representations of society through text, and the privilege to give visible form, to immaterial phenomena, including experiences of a more delicate nature.

Echoing Maso's strategy in novella VIII.3, Boccaccio defends his own right to artistic license by underlining that the *place* and *time* of his stories make them permissible, since after all they address themes not meant for church. In parallel, the *brigata* begins and ends their journey at the church of Santa Maria Novella, situated at the very margins of the city in the mid-fourteenth century, given its recent inclusion within the city walls. [73] Aligning himself with the members of the *brigata*, Boccaccio further blurs the line between his voice and the *brigata*'s, deflecting onto them the blame for salacious themes. However, deflecting the blame also turns the question of appropriateness back on the reader by raising the issue of interpretation. If artistic license gives Boccaccio freedom to innocently represent themes with ambiguous morality, and they are interpreted incorrectly, then does the fault belong to the creator or the reader? By emphasizing that the interpretation is left up to the audience, Boccaccio provides a defense for the autonomy of words, justifying his ability to write about certain situations in ambiguous terms, because after all, it is not his fault, nor the fault of the words, if they are misinterpreted by audiences. Like Calandrino, it is up to the audience to not be fooled by representations.

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[73] The church of Santa Maria Novella came into the possession of Dominican friars in 1221, at which point "novella" was added to its previous name, Santa Maria delle Virgine, under which guise it had been known previously as a ninth century church. "Novella" therefore indicated the new life of the church following its expansion under the Dominicans. The church remained under construction from about the mid thirteenth century until it was consecrated in 1420. This means that when it was visited by the *Decameron's brigata* in 1348, it was not yet complete and sparsely decorated.[73] Boccaccio unfortunately does not provide detailed descriptions of the church, except to mention that the *brigata* used it as their point of departure when exiting and returning to the city in the introduction Day I and in the Conclusion to Day X, or briefly make reference to the "newly constructed" tombs outside of the church in the trick played by Bruno and Buffalmacco on the doctor in Day VIII.9. Nevertheless, Santa Maria Novella's role at the start and conclusion of the *Decameron* makes it a significant intermediary within the world of the text. This is confirmed by Boccaccio at the very end of the *Decameron* when in the *Author's Conclusion* he underlines that his stories were *not* told in a church, where stories require a "proper frame of mind and suitable words". Indeed, the stories are told in the hill of Florence, and not in Santa Maria Novella.

Boccaccio's turn to visual art in the *Decameron* emphasizes both his intimate knowledge of contemporary Trecento visual conventions and artists, as well as his interest in using art to explore the inherent tensions between the visual and verbal representation. In drawing on art in order to provide a visual and material form to invisible forces like behaviors and desires within the text, Boccaccio examines how art creates new possibilities for considering the relationship between art, literature, and society. From the relationship between *cortesia* and social behaviors, to the realization of inappropriate desires through angels, and the dichotomy between medical and practical knowledge, the images Boccaccio turns to in the Decameron permit him to shed light on contradictions in society, without risk of censorship. Responding to shifting social, political, and economic conditions created by the plague, his his turn to visual art in the *Decameron* illuminates a series of questions concerning exchange and reification underpinning the use of visual art within the text.

Coda: Painting for Posterity: Literary Portraits in Petrarch

In a 1362 letter to Francesco Bruni, Petrarch describes a failed attempt to capture his likeness in a painting.[1] The portrait in question is a new commission requested by Petrarch's friend, Pandolfo Malatesta, who seeks an updated image of the poet to replace an earlier version painted some years earlier at the start of their friendship.[2] The original portrait, which Malatesta says never satisfied him, has become outdated, no longer resembling the poet given that he has aged. To achieve the new portrait then, Malatesta turns to a "truly great artist", an unnamed contemporary master whose talents could approximate those of Zeuxis, Protogenes, Parrhasius, and Apelles, the great painters of antiquity famed for painting in a naturalistic style.[3] However, despite the artist's skill, he fails to complete the portrait to Malatesta's satisfaction. Petrarch explains that he does not know why it failed, or provide the criteria that Malatesta sought out, except to suggest that perhaps the artist tried too hard. He tells Bruni that nevertheless, Malatesta took the finished painting home and cherished it merely because it "bore his name". But if Malatesta's personal memory and knowledge of Petrarch can be evoked through the poet's name

[1] *Seniles,* I.6.
[2] For the English translation cited above, see Francesco Petrarca, and Aldo S. Bernardo trans., *Letters of Old Age: Rerum Senilium Libri, 1-18* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).
[3] Petrarch also discusses Apelles in a separate letter in the *Familiar Letters* (II.5,17), reviving tropes used by Pliny to compare the skill, talent, and physical appearance of painters in his *Natural History*. Boccaccio too adopts this model, appropriating the theme of the "ugly artist" for the fifth novella on Day 6 of the *Decameron*, featuring the artist Giotto. Although Petrarch cites all four of the ancient painters in his letter to Francesco Bruni, he does not name the contemporary artist working on his portrait. In the translation of this letter by A.S. Bernardo (1992) proposes that this contemporary artist is Simone Martini, a painter who makes other appearances in Petrarch's literary corpus and was known to have painted at least two images for the poet. However as Nicholas Mann and Ernest Wilkins have shown, Simone Martini died in 1344 and Petrarch did not meet Malatesta until 1356, making Martini's involvement in either of the two portraits. Mann has suggested that Altichiero da Verona, the founder of the Veronese school, is a more likely source for the artist. See Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson, ed., *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), especially the chapter by Mann, "Petrarch and Portraits", pp. 15-20; See also Ernest Wilkins, *Petrarch's Eight Years in Milan: (1353-1361)* (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1958).

alone, then what is the function of a portrait? And as a visual representation of Petrarch's likeness, what does it mean to convey that is different from reading his works, which also presumably bear his name?

In turning to images in this anecdote, Petrarch reveals several insights into the tension between seeing, making, and interpreting images in the late Trecento, specifically the problem of representing a true likeness in a portrait. Through the reference to the painters of antiquity, the letter affirms that portraits should be verisimilar representations of the sitter; this is also why Malatesta requests an updated portrait to reflect Petrarch's present likeness. However it is ultimately not the completed image that fulfills Malatesta's desire, but rather the title it bears, that is, Petrarch's name. Significantly, Petrarch tells Bruni that Malatesta requested the original image before they had even met, his motivation being his awareness of Petrarch's fame. Malatesta thus commissioned a clandestine portrait that would convey "on a panel, the longed-for face of an unknown man." Yet by the time the second portrait is commissioned, Malatesta and Petrarch know each other well, changing the conditions through which Malatesta would see and recognize the poet's likeness in a visual representation. For the final painting to be lacking in some way then, even though it was supposedly to be painted by the Zeuxis or Apelles of Petrarch's day, suggests that there is something related to Malatesta's personal familiarity with the poet and his literary corpus that the image fails to reproduce, that is, some quality or trait that exceeds the capacity of a verisimilar representation, but can be invoked through his name.

The digression into Malatesta's portraits is introduced in the context of the poet critiquing Bruni's overenthusiastic praise concerning Petrarch's abilities; thus the failure of the portrait also signifies a futile attempt to represent the poet according to Malatesta's personal image of him, rather than portray his true (humble) self. Accordingly, Petrarch closes the letter by exhorting

Bruni to remember his name, if not his face. What then does his name represent that a portrait cannot, that is, what specific aspect of his "likeness" is lacking if not intimate familiarity with the poet's merits and scholarly production? More than his contemporaries, including Boccaccio, Petrarch investigates the function of portraits in his literary corpus, and not just his own image, but also the image of saints, or of his beloved Laura in terms of their ability to capture an awareness beyond a verisimilar likeness. Adopting some of the approaches and imagery developed by the poets preceding him, including the image of the beloved as an approximation to divinity developed through Dante and the lyric poets, Petrarch explores the relationship between image and interpretation in his work, raising the question of the unauthorized representation of the self. As a coda to the previous discussions on visual representation in the work of medieval Italian authors, this conclusion seeks to contextualize Petrarch's turn to literary portraiture within the series of questions and tensions concerning these authors' employment of images as a means for conveying non-mimetic concepts like experience or emotion. In this final discussion I would like to suggest that Petrarch's adaptation of the issues with images and resemblances and interpretation indicates his concern for controlling his image for posterity, and more broadly, the way in which portraits construct an independent persona, especially considering Petrarch's noted physical control over the dissemination and the formation of his texts, to be expanded further in a future study.

I. An "Air" of Likeness, Imitations to Resemblances

One of Petrarch's strongest statements on visual resemblances is found in a letter to Boccaccio dated 1366 in the *Familiar Letters* (*XXIII, 19)*. Although the poet's objective is to share suggestions concerning the role of imitation, or *imitatio*, as it applies to writing, he turns to

an example of painting to underline his points, indicating conceptual tensions between the two mediums. He advises Boccaccio that,

> The imitator must take care that what he writes is similar to its model but not identical; the resemblance must not be that of a picture (*imago*) to its subject, where the greater the resemblance is, the more the artist is praised, but that of a son to his father. Here there is often a great divergence in particular features, and yet a certain suggestion which makes the likeness (*similitudinem*) – what our painters call an 'air' (*quem pictores nostril aerem vocant*) – most noticeable about the face and eyes. Seeing the son's face we are reminded of the father's, even though, if it came to measurements, the features would all be different. There is something subtle (*quid occultum*) which creates this effect.

Drawing on Seneca, Petrarch suggests that an "air" of physical resemblance creates an effect that invokes the impression of the original image of the person or thing being copied without reproducing it perfectly, through the example of the familial resemblance between the father and son.[4] In the context of the rest of the letter, in which Petrarch discusses the stylistic maturation of the work of his scribe and secretary, Giovanni Malpaghini, the example of father-son resemblance suggests that although one model for learning is through imitation, the copy, like the son, should retain some personal style of its own.[5] In this sense, the letter warns against the danger of too much similitude, reminding Boccaccio that the relationship between father and son is *not* analogous to the resemblance of an artistic representation to its model. In distinguishing between different models of "likeness" then, Petrarch's letter outlines a theory of imitation that differentiates between copies and resemblances, where copies are mimetic imitations of natural objects, and resemblances are "airs", or aspects that hint at the original source while retaining some unique aspects.

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[4] Petrarch draws on both Seneca and Macrobius to elaborate his thoughts on imitation in various letters, especially *I.8, XXII.2, and XXIII.19.*

[5] Copying the masters in order to mature in style is the same advice Cennino Cennini gives to artists in Chapter 14 of the *Libro dell'arte*. He recommends copying the work of only one master at a time in order to learn that master's style well so that overtime it will be assimilated within the artist's personal style.

Although Petrarch seemingly dismisses paintings as vehicles for creating copies in this letter ("the greater the resemblance is, the more the artist is praised"), the distinctions between copies and resemblances are suggestive for considering how the poet approaches portraits in his various texts.[6] At the surface level, portraits are copies, not resemblances, designed to capture the subject's true likeness, and thus present more than just an "air" of similarity. Yet Petrarch returns to the theme of failed portraits throughout his literary corpus, calling into question their very ability to successfully copy the more meaningful aspects of a person's likeness. That is, Petrarch does not seem to take issue with the technical achievement of the portraits he describes (they remain copies) but rather considers the ways in which the portraits fail to communicate some sense of likeness that is not visual; his interest lies instead in the possibility of a resemblance that recalls a unique "air" about the subject based on personality, behavior, and knowledge. For instance, in the example of the objection to his portrait in the letter to Francesco Bruni, the poet does not specify that Malatesta's disappointment is due to a

Figure 11. Andrea del Castagno, *Petrarch*, c. 1450. © Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, accessed 08/07/2020.

[6] As Michael Baxandall has shown, Petrarch's understanding of the relationship between nature and representation is conditioned by his reading of Pliny.

question of imitation or that the image does not represent Petrarch's likeness physically. Rather, the implication is that the image does not represent the poet as Malatesta has come to know him, through his friendship and intellect, whereas Petrarch's name encompasses every aspect of him and provide a fuller picture of his beliefs and literary works. The failure of the portrait then is in its inability to resemble the person Malatesta knows, and not necessarily a fault with its physical imitation of the poet's appearance, revealing that the notion of "likeness" has multiple meanings according to Petrarch's view of images; they can be copies but they can still lack a resemblance or "air" that conveys a meaning that is not merely reproduced or copied visually.

In yet another example of a portrait that appears to be valued separately from its pictorial similitude, in a 1359 letter to Neri Morando, Petrarch describes the efforts of blacksmith from Bergamo (Enrico di Capra) who in great admiration for the poet, attempted to recreate his likeness in various objects throughout his home.[7] Given his profession as a blacksmith, the implication is that the portraits will be imprinted into some material, likely a metal object, displaying the poet's bust (*signum*), name (*nomen*), and image (*imaginem*), throughout his house. Petrarch describes that through the blacksmith's enthusiasm for his work, a friendship was formed that inscribed the poet's image more profoundly on the blacksmith's heart ("sed in pectore altius insculptm habere"), evoking the idealized image of the beloved imprinted on the heart that appears in the poetry of Giacomo da Lentini and is subsequently appropriated by Dante.[8] Petrarch explains to Morando that over time, the blacksmith became highly educated, presumably through the influence of the portraits of the poet in his home. However, it is not the copies of Petrarch's likeness that ultimately affect the blacksmith. As Linda Aleci has shown, the

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[7] See Familiares XVII

[8] See Chapter One of this dissertation, especially the section on Giacomo da Lentini's "Mervigliosamente", and also Chapter Two, the section on Dante's drawing of an angel to commemorate Beatrice's death in the *Vita Nuova*.

letter does not contain language suggesting that the blacksmith's edification is related to the verisimilar quality of the portraits.[9] Rather, she suggests that the portraits mediate a sense of Petrarch's intellect and wisdom, motivating a process of self-reflection and transformation in the blacksmith "based on seemingly empathetic identification with the poet" (Aleci 70). Effectively, it is not Petrarch's verisimilar image that influences the blacksmith's transformation, but rather, the reminder of the poet's intellect and talent, mediated through the portraits, that influence the blacksmith.

Likewise, in yet another letter Petrarch places value in the emotional connection to a portrait by arguing that it is better to have a portrait of an ugly friend than of a handsome enemy, arguing that what is most important in a portrait is the emotion that it invokes for the viewer in recognizing an intimate relationship to the sitter.[10] Like the blacksmith's portraits of the poet, the type of portrait Petrarch proposes through the example of the ugly friend indicates that the value of a portrait lies not in its ability to represent likeness or to convey beauty, but in its ability to remind the viewer of their intimate knowledge and experience of the subject. For Petrarch then, portraits seem to provide the poet with a liminal space in which to consider a subject's true character; more specifically, through turning to portraits, Petrarch reveals an interest in the complex question of representing a non-mimetic quality or trait, or even an "air" of the subject that the viewer has experienced through a visual medium, such as intellect. That is, Petrarch's interest in portraits indicates his exploration in the ways in which portraits convey not just a "copy" or accurate physical likeness of the subject, but rather depict a fuller picture of the sitter's virtues and merits, thereby slightly anticipating the established social function of portraits that

[9] See Linda Klinger Aleci, "Images of Identity: Italian Portrait Collections of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," in *The Image of the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, (1998), pp. 69.
[10] See *Familiares* 17 (letter to Guido Sette on Trecento sculpture as inferior to Trecento painting); *Fam. XVI 11*; *Fam. 23,19; Fam; 19.8*.

aim to emphasize the subject's virtues better qualities that emerges in the early fifteenth century.[11]

Petrarch also considers the liminal role of portraits, namely their position between copy and resemblance, in the *Canzoniere*, or *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, particularly through sonnets 77 and 78, or those referring to a portrait of Laura in the poet's possession, painted by the Sienese painter, Simone Martini, in Avignon around 1335.[12] Read together, the two sonnets on the portrait narrate Petrarch's view of the image's ability to convey Laura's likeness, and communicate his love for Laura through a Neoplatonic lens. The Neoplatonic frame is most evident in the middle two stanzas of sonnet 77, where the poet underlines the inability of mortal eyes to perceive ideals on earth:

> Ma certo il mio Simon fu in paradiso,
> Onde questa gentil donna si parte:
> Ivi la vide, e la ritrasse in carte
> Per far fede qua giù del suo bel viso.
>
> L'opra fu ben di quelle che nel cielo
> si ponno imaginar, non qui tra noi,
> ove le membra fanno a l'alma velo. (vv. 5-11)[13]
>
> But, surely, my Simone was in heaven
> (From whence this noble lady comes); there he
> Saw her, and on some paper traced her out,
> With her fair visage faith on earth to spread.

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[11] In "Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance portraiture," Patricia Simmons argues that prior to 1440, the history of profile portraits was predominantly male, with women only making appearances in altarpieces and donor portraits, portrayed in the act of praying for divine intercession. Simmons notes that mercantile Florence's participation in this performative act of social visibility stands out historically; she suggests that this is due to Florence's unique preoccupation with what she calls a "display culture", in which the visual language conveying a family's social status was a fundamental part of the culture of the city. See Patricia Simmons, "Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance portraiture," in *History Workshop*, 25 (1988), pp. 4-30.

[12] Laura's portrait, if it ever existed, would have been painted between 1335-36 when Simone Martini arrived in Avignon, with Petrarch's sonnets composed shortly thereafter in 1336 or 1337. Martini is responsible for several important paintings in Siena in particular, including the *Maestà* in the Palazzo Pubblico, discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

[13] Italian text from the *Canzoniere* cited from Francesco Petrarca, and Paola Vecchi Galli ed., *Canzoniere* (Milan: BUR Classici, 2012).

This work, assuredly, was one of those
Conceivable in heaven, but not here
Among us, where the body veils the soul.[14]

In order to capture her likeness on paper, the painter, as if in a kind of trance or ecstasy, is required to view Laura in heaven; Only visible in heaven, she represents an ideal image, transposed through text. That Simone Martini is uniquely positioned to achieve the image is suggested in the sonnet's opening stanza, which claims that not even the ancient master artist Polyclitus could carry out the portrait ("con […]/ mill'anni, non vedrian la miro part/ de la beltà che m'have il cor conquiso", vv, 3-4). It is the contemporary painter, who Petrarch knows intimately, who is able to make the transcendent journey to trace Laura's face and bring it down to earth so it becomes visible to mortals.[15] At no point, however, does the poem provide details of Laura's physical attributes, the function of the portrait resting on its ability to make an ideal form visible. In this respect, the question of how to provide a visible form to a transcendent being underpins the poem, suggesting that an exact copy of Laura's face is not the sole purpose of the portrait.

The second sonnet continues the narrative begun in sonnet 78, emphasizing Laura's status as an ideal form by calling her not by name but referring to her as an "alto concetto"

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[14] English text cited from James Wyatt Cook trans., *Petrarch's Songbook: Rerum Vulgarium Fragmentum* (Bingham, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1995).

[15] Significantly, Petrarch uses the term "ritrarre" to describe Simone Martini's act of depicting Laura's face ("ivi la vide, e la *ritrasse* in carte"), a term which refers to both drawing or painting in an active sense, as well as tracing, which is a more passive act. In their respective turns to visual art, both Dante and Boccaccio overwhelmingly use the verbs "disegnare" or "dipingere" when referring to art in progress in the *Vita Nuova, Commedia* and the *Decameron*. However, in *Inferno* 4.145 Dante uses "ritrarre" in his description of the philosophers and intellectuals in limbo to express his inability to describe them because his words fall short ("Io non posso ritrar di tutti a pieno,/ però che sì mi caccia il lungo tema/ che molte volte al fatto il dir vien meno"). It is noticeable then that at a moment of verbal and textual inexpressibility, Petrarch resurrects this specific term to communicate Simone Martini's failed attempt to convey the Laura's virtues in his painting.

(“Quanto giunse a Simon l’alto concetto”, vv. 1). Significantly, rather than describe the portrait in terms of what it shows, Petrarch describes it in terms of its lost potential, that is what it could have provided him emotionally and spiritually, emphasized through the use of a conditional clause (“s’avesse dato [Simone] a l’opera gentil/ colla figura voce ed intellect,/ di sospir’ molti mi sgombrava il petto”, vv. 3-5). Petrarch thus expresses disappointment that although the portrait is “life-like” it ultimately does not bring him the same satisfaction achieved by Pygmalion when Galatea came to life (“Pigmalion, quanto lodar ti dei/ de l’imagine tua, se mille volte,/ n’aveste quell ch’i’ sol una vorrei” (vv.12-14). Although the portrait conveys Laura’s likeness, it ultimately lacks the ability to deliver the promised peace (“promettendomi pace ne l’aspetto”) that Petrarch longs for. Instead, the portrait serves as a reminder of the original model, Laura, who remains inaccessible to the poet. Since the poet cannot experience the idealized form of the painting, it thus becomes his burden, if he chooses to keep the painting, to distinguish between the Laura’s merits and virtues, attributes that resist visual representation, rather than fixate on immoral or earthly corruptions such as physical beauty through gazing at her face.[16]

The question of an image creating a liminal space through which to explore a tension between an ideal form and a material image is also posed by sonnet 16 in the *Canzoniere*, “Movesi il Vecchierel”. Through a comparative structure, Petrarch uses the parallel of a “vecchierel”, or old pilgrim”, traveling to Rome in order to behold the face of Christ through the Veronica Veil, to frame his own desire to behold a glimpse of his *donna*’s face in the appearance of others (“così, lasso, talor vo cercand’io,/ donna, quanto è possibile, in altrui/ la disiata vostra forma vera” (vv. 12-14). That is, while the “vecchierel” seeks the ideal face of divinity, the poet searches for the ideal archetype, “forma vera”, or “true image”, of his beloved. As Enrico Fenzi

[16] The question of whether the portrait is meant to edify Petrarch and inspire him to higher virtues, or whether it was commissioned and kept in order to fulfill erotic desires, is a main point of debate in the *Secretum*, book III.

has shown, it is not that the poet seeks a physical approximation to Laura's beauty in the faces of other women, but rather the "forma vera", the true image, or ideal form that represents eternal beauty and perfection, not found on earth.[17] The Veronica Veil thus symbolizes both a religious and a philosophical ideal as a visual model for conveying an absent and spiritual presence through a physical and material form.[18] Whether or not the poet is successful in his search for his *donna*'s ideal form is never revealed before the poem comes to a close, although sonnets 77 and 78 might be read as an epilogue to the poet's exploration of ideal images begun in sonnet 16. If read collectively, the function of portraits in all three is to discern between a physical likeness, or copy of Laura, and an "air" or ineffable quality that signifies her status as an "alto concetto". In turning to portraits, Petrarch seeks a model through which to capture Laura's eternal ideal form that will illustrate her meaning for posterity.

Through the portrait of Laura, Petrarch explores the tension between an original image and its copy, and the potential of a material object to convey an ideal form. As discussed in previous chapters in this dissertation, the model Petrarch adopts has precedence in Dante's *Vita Nuova* and in the lyric poets before him, underlining the poet's relationship to the earlier poetic traditions. However Petrarch adds a new dimension to his interpretation of the visual representation of the idealized *donna* by extending the tension between physical appearance and ideal meaning to his own portraits. In assessing the effectiveness of his own portraits in the letters to Francesco Bruni and Neri Morandi, the poet emphasizes the capacity of the images to represent his merits, not his physical likeness. For Petrarch, where Malatesta's image fails is in its inability to transmit the idealized image he maintains of the poet that expresses his intellect, whereas the blacksmith's image is a "success", so-to-speak, because the meaning communicated

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[17] See Enrico Fenzi, "Note Petrarchesche *R.V.F.* XVI: *Movesi il vecchierel*," in *Italianistica: Rivista di Letteratura Italiana*, 25:1 (1996), pp. 43-62.
[18] The Veronica Veil is discussed further in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

is that of Petrarch's genius, consequently elevating the blacksmith's own knowledge. In both examples, just as in the image of Laura in the *Canzoniere*, Petrarch is less concerned with the mimetic quality of the portraits, and evaluates them instead on their ability to represent an "air" or a likeness that conveys ideal and enduring qualities related to the subject. Unlike his literary corpus, which is organized according to his editorial decisions and will presumably retain the form he chooses in perpetuity, his examination of visual portraits reveals their instability and their ability to convey multiple levels of meaning out of his control. In examining portraits of himself then, Petrarch indicates, it would seem, an interest in the ways in which portraits succeed or fail in communicating an enduring representation of his legacy through the lasting impressions on earth. Although this is not an exhaustive study of Petrarch's literary portraits, I believe that Petrarch's interest in portraiture suggests that he is uniquely interested in the relationship between his visual representation and his legacy, and at the very least, that he participates in the same explorations as Dante and Boccaccio into the ways in which images represent non-mimetic meaning, a capacity that introduces opportunities for considering the relationship between vision and knowledge through their texts.

II. Conclusion: Visual Legacies

Midway through a letter to Petrarch's nephew, Francesco da Brossano, following the poet's death, Boccaccio reflects on the appropriate style for a monument to Petrarch, specifically considering how it will resonate with broad categories of viewers.[19] In his reflection, he

[19] See vol. 5 for the full letter. The passage on Petrarch's sepulcher reads:

> Lodo poi che a lui (Petrarca) innalzi un sepolcro, ché lo meritano la magnificenza del suo splendore e l'eccellenza delle opera sue. Tuttavia è abbastanza credibile che al cospetto degli eruditi sarà di piccolo momento, ché le virtù del sepolto, non gli ornamenti dei cadaveri, sono riguardati da loro, presso i quali fece sé finora più chiaro dello stesso sole con molti volumi. Ma

maintains that the design of the monument must reflect and equal the greatness of Petrarch's works ("Lodo poi che a lui (Petrarca) innalzi un sepolcro, ché lo meritano la magnificenza del suo splendore e l'eccellenza delle opera sue.") Yet, rather than describe the dimensions or decorations of the hypothetical monument in detail, Boccaccio draws attention to the kind of knowledge it will convey to audiences about Petrarch and his legacy by pointing to two kinds of viewers: the intellects, who will ignore the decorations since their primary concern is with the poet's virtue, and the uneducated, who will be rebuked by its presence because they will be reminded of their ignorance of the poet's life and work. Boccaccio argues that paintings and sculptures serve as books for this latter group, thus implying that these are the bearers of knowledge that is transmitted narratively. Boccaccio concludes this passage of the letter by suggesting that the rebuke felt by the ignorant viewers should inspire them to carry out research in order to understand the merits of the person memorialized in stone, and in doing so these viewers will in fact contribute to the glory of Petrarch's legacy.

> sarà d'ammonimento agli ignoranti, in quanto i libri di costoro sono le sculture e le pitture, e causa oltre a ciò di ricercare qual mai grand'uomo giaccia in esso, quali i suoi meriti, quale la sua gloria, e mentre si darà risposta a costoro, senza dubbio alquanto si allargherà la gloria del valentissimo vecchio. Ma mi piace riportare una cosa alla tua memoria. Più onorevolmente giacciono gli uomini illustri in sepolcro ignorato che in uno meno bello, se conosciuto.

Translation (mine): A sepulcher should be built in his honor that is worthy of the magnificence of his splendor and the excellence of his works. Nevertheless, it is possible it will be of little consequence in the presence of the erudite, since it is the virtue of the buried, not the ornaments of the cadaver, that they regard, and by which he has made himself burn brighter than the sun with many volumes. But it will be a rebuke to the ignorant, for whom sculptures and paintings serve as books, and therefore present a reason to research what great man lies there, what his merits are, his glory, and while they are answering these, without a doubt it will expand the glory of that most valiant man. But I would like to restore an idea to your memory: More honorably lie illustrious men in ignored tombs than in one that is less beautiful, if [they are] known.

The central problem motivating Boccaccio's concern for the funerary monument is the relationship between vision and knowledge, or visual language as an effective mode of discourse; at stake are the potentially surface level and incorrect assumptions made about Petrarch and his work by uneducated viewers, and the question of how a visual representation of the poet's likeness can convey awareness of his scholarship and merits through its material presence. Boccaccio's concerns echo Petrarch's own endeavors to control his legacy and the dissemination of his voice through careful control over his texts and textual exchanges, as well as his own explorations of visual meaning throughout his literary corpus.[20] Ultimately, the letter to Francesco da Brossano voices a problem that neither Boccaccio nor Petrarch are fully prepared to resolve, that is, without textual clarification, can visual representations of a specific person, communicate unique information about an individual's merits and intellect? The model of a portrait, either painted or carved in stone, presents both writers with an opportunity to reflect on these questions by considering the public experience of viewing these images and the kind of knowledge different kinds of viewers bring with them. Ultimately, the underlying concern is the same as the one shared with the other images discussed in this dissertation, from representations of the beloved, to spiritual beings, to behaviors: how do images effectively provide a visible form to immaterial phenomena, and what social, moral, and religious implications emerge from transgressing material boundaries to convey these non-mimetic ideals in an image?

The structure of this dissertation has followed the chronological development of the representation of visual art in medieval Italian literature of the Trecento. In beginning this study with Giacomo da Lentini, traditionally considered the earliest poet in the Italian literary canon,

[20] Petrarch references visual art throughout his literary corpus, and is known to have possessed a panel of the Madonna by Giotto, which he left to Francesco da Carrara in his testament. Echoing Boccaccio's description of two categories of viewers, the intellectuals and the ignorant, Petrarch describes the panel through stating that the panel can only be understood by the intelligent. See Theodor E. Mommsen, *Petrarch's Testament* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957).

and the first to represent visual media like paintings in his poetry, I traced the evolution of the representation of visual art in subsequent medieval literature. It is through Lentini that the association between visual art and the representation of experience, expressed through the portrait of the beloved, is established. Following Lentini, my second chapter turns to Dante's *Vita Nuova*, examining how Dante appropriates and reinterprets the image of the beloved, rendering not only a portrait in absence, but a reflection of divinity according to his spiritual and ethical schema, setting in motion use of images and acheiropoietic art in the *Commedia*. In turning next to the representation of art in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, my project has examined how the same recurring images introduced by Lentini and Dante are subverted in order to question the ethical and moral significance of cultural practices in light of changing social conditions and secular concerns in the late Trecento. By turning to Petrarch in the coda of this dissertation, I examined his use of visual representation to construct his literary portrait and define his reputation for posterity, so that the image represents his true genius and intellectual likeness to readers.

This dissertation has argued that by turning to visual art, medieval Italian poets explored the possibilities for representing immaterial phenomena through the textual representation of an image, exploiting tensions between artificial, naturalistic, and divine representation in order to convey meaning that is experienced rather than narrated to readers. I have shown that by examining representations of visual art in medieval Italian literature through the lens of cultural practices for making, seeing, and interpreting art in the Trecento, medieval Italian poets employ textual representations of images, even when lacking a detailed description of its content, in order to challenge traditional boundaries for representing experience in a material form. My project has adopted a chronological approach in order to trace the intervisual and textual

relationships between medieval Italian poets, through both recurring images and innovative ones, while also considering the correlation between visual representation in the texts and developments in visual art in late medieval Italy. By shedding light on the ways in which medieval poets turned to practices for making, viewing, and engaging with art in order to challenge the limits for representing the visible and invisible world, my dissertation has demonstrated the presence of an intervisual and textual dialogue between medieval Italian poets concerning the role of visual representation within their texts.

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