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The Way to God as the Way to Love in Dante Alighieri's “La Vita Nuova”

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The article is devoted to the study of the early works of Dante Alighieri Vita Nuova («New Life»). Vita Nuova is regarded as representant of a new cultural space of the Renaissance, more precisely, as the product of that stands on the border of the ideological principles of the culture of Middle Ages and the Renaissance culture. Vita Nuova – complex literary and philosophical work that surpasses framework of a love story and tells the story of the transformation of sensual love in the spiritual.

Keywords: Dante Alighieri, Vita Nuova, Renaissance, literary genres, Beatrice, sensual love, spiritual love, the way to God.

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The greatest work of the world literature is Dante Alighieri's poem “The Divine Comedy”, his most famous piece of art. However, “The Divine Comedy” proceeds “La Vita Nuova” (Alighieri 1985), a literary evidence of his “noble love” to Beatrice. “La Vita Nuova” was written in 1294, its finished version was published in Rome in 1513. This work is original and complex in its genre. There is still no clear definition of this text's genre in the world literature. The author's idea obviously manifests itself in poly-genre nature of “La Vita Nuova”. To understand this idea one should come to know its genre specifics. Prosimetrum, a combination of both prose and verse, is the basis of this text. Prior to “La Vita Nuova” there existed a certain prosimetrum tradition. This style was peculiar

for Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius's treatise “Consolation of Philosophy” (Boethius 1990) which was well known to educated people of the Middle ages and influenced Western European literature of this period in many formal and plot lines. Combination of poetry and prose fragments reflects the great author's thinking process, proves his skill, knowledge and ability to create in different literary forms.

Another source of prosimetrum was obviously Provençal lyric poetry in which poems are explained through the troubadours' biographical details and other stories. However, it is known that prose fragments of Provençal lyric poetry developed later than the poems themselves (Golenishchev-Kutuzov 1971; Poeziia trubadurov 1995). Similarly, poems in “La Vita Nuova” were

written at the time other than that of its prosaic fragments. According to most researchers, poetic works were created by Dante from 1283 to 1292, prose ones – from 1292 to 1294. Dante's poetic forms in "La Vita Nuova" are very diverse. These are a stanza, four canzoni, and 25 sonnets. The Provençal poets' influence on Dante is probably felt in both cultivation of the Beautiful Lady and combination of mystic and secular rituals. Like Provençal lyric poets, Dante was a master of the border. He equally belonged to both the great Outlook of the Middle Ages (He studied under Franciscan monks, had good knowledge of scholastic tradition, Aristotle's philosophy) and new thinking of the Renaissance.

The first five sonnets in "La Vita Nuova" are similar to Provençal poems in presence of a choir and a traditional plot in which the Beautiful Lady eats the heart of a troubadour who is in love with her. This plot is associated with the poet Guillem de Cabestany. The legend of eating the lover's heart and the Beautiful Lady's suicide after she had learned about her terrible meal is a sign, marker indicating a relation of deep and passionate mutual love.

There is neither a choir nor addressing to the readers in the canzone and the next four sonnets. The main thing here is a dialogue, struggle of Love and Death. The greatest woe of the Universe is Beatrice's death; Love and Death are both present. Like Provençal troubadours, Dante recounts the reasons for creation of the sonnets or canzone, clarifies the shades of meaning to the readers in his prose fragments. He wants the readers, listeners to know not only the outward life, but, in a greater degree, the inner life, its content, and its course. His own inner integrity is very important for Dante. He embodies it in complex genre polyphony. "La Vita Nuova" is not a collection of poems and prose fragments. This is a complete work with the poetic forms connected to each other through prose.

Inner integrity is manifested in the unity of the characters. They are involved in various external and internal events but remain unchanged. A. Valognes believes that prose fragments perform two functions: a) instrumentality (when prose fragments clarify poetic ones); 2) dynamism (when prose episodes create a plot, the author's course of history) (Vallone 1971). Both aspects are present in the prose elements of "La Vita Nuova". Narrative novels are often transformed into a confessional essay where Vita Nuova is the life of the soul, its twists and turns through the external plot of a biographical line.

Special attention should be paid to the prose chapters in which Dante does auto-hermeneutic analysis, expands and explains the meanings of his poems. These chapters are not linked to the general plot outline. Why does Dante include them in "La Vita Nuova"? Dante probably wants to say that poetry is an integral part of his soul's life; that a poet and a thinker are inseparable. Dante-philosopher and Dante-poet are one and the same person; his inner life is holistic and poetry is inherent to it. G. Boccaccio had a good reason to say that within his lifetime some people called Dante a poet, other ones – a theologian, the others – a philosopher (Boccaccio 2012). Identity of thinking and poetry was obvious for Dante since poets cannot write "without reason", without clear understanding of the meaning of their writings.

It is "La Vita Nuova" which establishes the capacity of the Italian grass-roots language to be the language of thinkers and poets to the extent Golden Latin is. Love is a true creator of a literary national language when the poet wished to make his feelings clear for his Sweetheart. "The Divine Comedy" is also written in the name of Love, in the name of fulfilling the promise given to Beatrice by Dante in "La Vita Nuova". The promise was to write about Beatrice the way that no one and never will ever be able to do. Poetic

thinking and Love are inseparable. The choice of the Italian vernacular language to be the language of "La Vita Nuova" is a part of the author's plot, an element of an integral literary composition.

These are not only Love and Death but also Love and War which are a single whole. A confessional feature becomes evident in "La Vita Nuova" when Dante speaks of himself in the first person, narrates about the events that took place in his real life and even more about their trace in the life of his soul. He writes about his meeting with Beatrice, the death of his father who was Dante's friend, Beatrice's death, the poet's passion for another lady... Yet, he mentions neither his name nor the place of the events. He is extremely laconic in the descriptions of the circumstances of one or another event. The only evidence of time is associated with Beatrice who belongs to "the thirteenth generation of the Christians", lives in the 13th century A.D. A person of border is present in this documentary duality again: whereas anonymity and universality of a literary work are the qualities of the culture of the Middle Ages, the first-person narration and description of some real events are signs of the author's personality of the Renaissance epoch. However, "La Vita Nuova" is a more medieval work of art. Absolutization of a personal origin, continuity of cosmos and a man's fate here weigh upon the intimate details of the poet's life.

Many researchers note that while describing dreams, visions, and personal experiences in "La Vita Nuova" Dante uses a few definitions expressed by the adjectives. The interpreters believe this to be no coincidence: Dante describes the reality of visions in a laconic language and, at the same time, he lacks earthly human words to dwell upon the experiences. Heavenly events have no earthly means of expression.

The Renaissance faces the birth and vigorous growth of the literary form associated with the description of the Catholic saints' visions. It is in

Dante's heavenly visions where Beatrice lives and affection for her is experienced. Holy visions are associated with Jesus and sacred persons. Dante contemplates Amor and Beatrice. According to his anticipations, the meeting with Beatrice will be experienced as a sacred ecstasy not only in the past or present but also in the future.

"La Vita Nuova" is full of images and quotations from the Old and New Testaments. In the Book of Exodus the words "Ego sum Dominus Deus tuus" are associated with Jehovah's appearance to Moses. In "La Vita Nuova" Amor appears to the poet with these words. There are signs and shocks of Apocalypse in Dante's work. He reacts to Beatrice's vision with "Hosanna in excelsis" words just as the people of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus's entry into the city. Heaven and Earth are connected through Love to the Beautiful Lady. Dante's poetry is sacred. Its content is the following: intense spiritual life, the Bible comes to life, and sacred history is transformed through the loving poet-philosopher (whereas Holy Writ begins with the fall of men through the seduction of Eve, "La Vita Nuova" begins with Dante's meeting with Beatrice when Amor tells Dante about Beatrice as salvation of his eternal soul. "La Vita Nuova" continues Holy Writ in a symmetric response action. Sandro Botticelli properly understood this and drew God, Dante and Beatrice in a circle in his illustrations to "The Divine Comedy" (Danilova 1989).

B. Terracini (*Terracini 1951*), an Italian scholar studying Dante's creative work, characterized the style of "La Vita Nuova" as "smooth, rather slow, and most importantly, coherent". Dante reaches these coherence and wholeness through the repetition, a poetic device he often uses both in poetry and prose fragments. Sometimes the same prose fragment is repeated in a poetic one. Repetitions are often associated with self-awareness: Dante wants to explain to the listener and the reader what the verses will be

about (chapters XIII, XXXIV). In these chapters mediation and internal struggle are caused by the visions, and the repetitions are of an intensifying, suggestive meaning.

In cases when Dante writes that in his sonnets he wishes to express his state (chapter XLI) his poems are linked with a psychological aspect of prose. They intensify and develop self-awareness. At the same time transition from inner reflection and self-withdrawal to communication with people helps to establish harmony with the outside world.

Sometimes poetry is directly associated with the scheme of the plot of "La Vita Nuova". When Beatrice refused to the poet in a bow, Amor appeared to him once again, explained the cause of this disgrace and advised to write Donna the verses that would manifest great love to her. Dante follows this advice. The ballad is a continuation of the plot line. It becomes clear for the reader that the poet really followed Amor's advice as well as what he wanted to say in these verses.

Thus, an element of the plot line is the canzone "O ye who turn your steps along Love's way". It is the end of the conversation between the poet and the ladies who asked what the happiness of his love was. This question sparked the poet's thoughts about the nature of his feelings as well as doubts on whether he will be able to express his state in his poems. Yet the "desire to tell" wins. In a prose fragment Dante dwells on the strength of his feelings in his inner monologue, in secret, whereas in the poems he speaks of it openly, aloud.

So, we have a work of art that is an ensemble of poems, prose, commentary, stories, confession, diary, psychological novel, as well as visions, poetic and philosophical treatises. Universalism of the poet-thinker's personality fully manifests itself in it. At the same time this universalism has its individual and unique features. What stands

for the choice of prosimetrum genre? Dante creates a synthetic work in which he integrates poetry and prose similar to the way the masters of the late Middle Ages put painting and sculpture together while colouring the statues. This synthetical character is a sign of the Middle Ages, the boundaries of which are overrun by "La Vita Nuova".

The poet calls his creation "the book of my memory". In the medieval literature the books combine poetry and prose. "The memory book" is not a mere metaphor. This expression should be understood in the allegorical context of the book peculiar for the literature of the Middle Ages ("the book of the heart", "the book of the spirit"), the context rooting to biblical images of "the book of life". The poet-thinker mentions the word "memory" in light of the traditional religious expression about "sweet memory of Jesus", i.e. the continuous concentration of imagination on the name of Jesus, his passions. This concentration should lead to spiritual enlightenment. "La Vita Nuova" is built on frequent usage of the conjunction "and": "And I thought... and I saw...", etc. The language is reminiscent of that of the Holy Writ with its text preceded and connected with this conjunction. Jaufre Rudel, a Provençal lyric poet, says that love is not associated with a feeling but with *mneme* (memory). Then "The book of memory" is "The Book of Love".

Time and space in "La Vita Nuova" are conventionally nominated. These are "City", "the thirteenth generation of the Christians", etc. They also introduce *chronotopos* similar to a biblical one. Beatrice's presence in "the city" makes it reasonable to presume that Florence of the XIII century is meant here. Yet, the specifics of the city are not important for Dante. What is important is the fact that Beatrice lived here. Beatrice was a center of his Universe and stayed there forever.

Many literary critics underestimate the role of Beatrice, although it is she who is a driving force of "La Vita Nuova". This work of art already contains something that will sound like "The Divine Comedy":

"Look at us well, for we, indeed, are, we, indeed, are Beatrice!"

(Purgatorio, XXX, 73)

In "La Vita Nuova" Dante dwelt on his real meeting with little Bice Portinari, a Florentine Folco Portinari's daughter. Beatrice is a real historical person. The following details of her life are known: Beatrice di Folco di Ricovero Portinari (1266-1290) was married to Simone dei Bardi, she had children, and she died at the age of 25. Her contemporaries mention her beauty and noble character. For Dante she was a divine creation, "who was called Beatrice by many who knew not what to call her". The name "Beatrice" means "full of grace", and in the canzone of Chapter XIX she is called "the hope of those in bliss". Eidos of bliss is hidden in her name. This name is her earthly one, its meaning being not quite clear to people calling her by this name. Her inwardness is gracious, her name is no coincidence. She fits her name. Dante uses the epithet *gloriosa*, the epithet being permanently assigned to the Virgin (similar to scarlet garments, the Virgin's attributes, which were also attributed to Beatrice in "La Vita Nuova"). She does not thrill to trembling but favourably effects the poet's soul. Taking the advantage of gender uncertainty in the vernacular language of the XIII century, Dante replaces "saluto" (a bow) with "salute" ("a bow" and "salvation"). This word renders the idea of Beatrice giving the hope for salvation to everybody she bows to.

Dante calls Beatrice "my bliss", "my gentle lady", "a beautiful soul which is a source of happiness" (beato, anima bella, chi te vede). Bliss is something that can neither be undone nor

disappear. Bliss falls upon all those contemplating Beatrice: "whom she regards is gentle made".

Goodness is a heavenly, divine feature. So, Beatrice reverts back to herself, her significance and idea when rising to God. Dante writes about this "divine power" in his essay "Convivio" ("The Banquet"): "And thus is defined this our good gift, which descends into us in like manner from the Supreme and Spiritual Power, as virtue into a precious stone from a most noble celestial body" (IV, XX, 10) (Alighieri, <http://lib.ru/POEZIQ/DANTE/pir01.txt>).

In the canzone "Ladies that have intelligence of Love" Beatrice's beauty is a container for the qualities, dignifying and administering to God and, thus, saving a sinful man:

Yet hath God given her for greater grace,

That who hath spoke with her cannot end ill
(XIX, canzone 1) (Alighieri 1985).

She brings universal spiritual self-perfecting. Dante speaks of it as of the way to blessing: "...the progress of ... life ... from bad to good, and from good to better, and from better to best" (Alighieri, <http://lib.ru/POEZIQ/DANTE/pir01.txt>).

Beatrice belongs to the transcendental world. Dante claims this truth as something immutable. Whereas Guinizelli does not go beyond the exchange of words between himself and God, Dante tells the dialogue between the angel, the saints and the Divine mercy:

An angel crieth in the mind divine,

And saith: "O Sire, on earth is to be seen

A miracle in action, that proceeds

From out a soul which far as here doth shine.

Heaven, which hath not any other effect

Save want of he, demands her of its Lord...

...And thus speaks God, who of my lady

thinks:

"O my elect, now suffer ye in peace

That, while it pleaseth me..."

The lines below sound prophetic:

"... your hope abide

There, where is one who dreads the loss of her:

And who shall say in hell to the foredoomed:

'I have beheld the hope of those in bliss'."

These lines are usually associated with the idea of "The Divine Comedy". R.I. Khlodovskii, Dante Alighieri's creative work researcher, argues that these Dante's words assure that after death he will be in hell where he puts himself, the reason being "some basic modesty" (Khlodovskii, 1979). This statement is not entirely consistent with the logic of "La Vita Nuova". In its denouement Dante says he will be contemplating Beatrice that is unlikely to take place in hell. Thus, "La Vita Nuova" is actually related to "La Divina Commedia" via "the word about the blessed Beatrice".

The name of Beatrice – "bliss" – means that she is the crown of all his aspirations: Dante writes that God set two goals for a man. These are the bliss of this life, i.e. the opportunity to show his virtue, and the bliss of eternal life, i.e. contemplation of the face of God. It is not accidentally that Beatrice is called "the Noble". Dante puts the nobility, i.e. disposition to all virtues, on the first place. In "The Banquet" he writes: "This word "Nobility" expresses in all things perfection of their nature" (IV, XVI, 4) (Alighieri, <http://lib.ru/POEZIQ/DANTE/pir01.txt>). Therefore, Beatrice has a divine nature.

Speaking of epithets describing Beatrice, we cannot but remember the episode about Dante's meeting with Primavera and Beatrice. People called Beatrice an angel, not a woman. Prior to this episode Dante called her "a miracle". Now the poet compares Beatrice with God: comparing Giovanna with St. John the Baptist who gave way to Jesus Christ, he proclaims Beatrice to be personified Love. In Holy Writ Love is God. When the poet proves that Beatrice was the

Trinity, he deifies her as the Absolute. In his treatise "De institutione arithmetica libri duo" Boethius notes that any number consists of odd and even, the elements opposite to each other. These heterogeneous elements are in harmony in an integer number. Giving the example of Philolaus's statement, Boethius explains the significance of the number "three", a root of Beatrice and the Trinity:

"Everything undoubtedly consists of these two – of finite and infinite nature – similar to the number that is made up of one and two... And thus it runs – everything consists of opposites and is united in a sort of harmony. For harmony is the unity of plenty and agreement of those in dissonance" (Boethius, <http://early-music.narod.ru/biblioteka/estetika-mages-renais/estetika-mages-renais-09.htm>. Дата обращения 08.01. 2015). One may notice that Aristotle's doctrine of harmony as combination of heterogeneous elements and Platonism with its doctrine that a similar one attracts a similar one join in the organic whole in Dante's work. If the number "three" consists of "one" and "two", that is harmony according to Aristotle, and it is also the root of the Trinity and Beatrice, according to Plato's doctrine, then Beatrice is a world harmony. It is she for whom the anthem "Hosanna in excelsis..." is sung, the fact regarded inadmissible by the Council of Trent. By this Dante Alighieri shows a true Renaissance idea of the identity of man and God. Before Dante's works there existed a tradition of presenting Ladies as angels. However, previously there wasn't such a convergence of images of Donna and Christ. Dante canonizes Beatrice, although in reality only the highest spiritual dignitaries had the right on it. Beatrice's death shakes the cosmos and stormy acts of God.

Beatrice's deification was probably due to the influence of the Franciscan tradition, as the Franciscans tried to resemble St. Francis of Assisi to Jesus Christ. This caused the denunciation

of the Catholic Church. Dante obviously knew about these attempts. The Franciscans brought their righteous women closer to the image of the Virgin Mary, canonizing them. Two nuns from the d'Este family enjoyed great popularity among the Franciscans: Beatrice I (died in 1226) and Beatrice II (1231-1264). According to their hagiographies, these virgins were born "to manifest a miracle". Their lives are governed with the numbers 3 and 9, too (for example, 9 years, preceding the service, are mentioned, etc.). The researchers note the parallels of "La Vita Nuova" with the Franciscan hagiographic literature: "Clothed with humility" ("The Life of St. Margaret" – "benignly vested with humility" (Beatrice, "La Vita Nuova", XXVI); "The whole heavenly court of the blessed, waiting for the coming of your soul, urged me to expedite your exodus from this world" (Jesus Christ's words to St. Margaret) – "Heaven, which hath not any other defect / Save want of her, demands her of its Lord, / And every Saint doth for this favour beg" ("La Vita Nuova", XIX).

Beatrice is an earthly woman. Yet, "human nobility ... excels that of the angels", says Dante in "The Banquet" (Alighieri, <http://lib.ru/POEZIQ/DANTE/pir01.txt>). This idea is repeated in "La Vita Nuova" (poem, Chapter XXXIII):

My gentle lady, who from us is gone
 Unto the world deserving of her worth;
 And then, in scorn of this life, making
 moan,

As though the grieving soul itself they
 were,

Abandoned by its welfare upon earth
 (Alighieri, <http://lib.ru/POEZIQ/DANTE/pir01.txt>).

Beatrice contemplates the beauty of God on a par with the angels.

It should be admitted that the core of "La Vita Nuova" is Love, Dante's Love for Beatrice. According to Nikolai Kuzanskii, "La Vita Nuova"

is about "the ultimate goal of all beauty", Love, which is Beatrice herself. Love is the path to the good, heaven, God. "The ennobled Soul, – argues the poet, – proceeds in due order along a single path, employing each of its powers in its time and season, or even as they are all ordained to the final production of the perfect fruit" ("The Banquet", IV, XXIV, 8) (Ibid.).

The hero evidently travels the way of his Love in three stages – from sensual love to spiritual flame and rebirth into love for the beautiful. "Sensual love" does not imply physical passion. The spiritual dominates in it. Earthly love involves reciprocity (this is what shows a loving soul's "self-interest"):

Beauty in lady sage doth then appear
 Which pleaseth so eyes, that in the heart
 Desire for the pleasing thing hath birth;
 And sometimes it so long abideth there,
 It makes Love's spirit wide awake to start:
 The like in lady doth a man of worth
 (La Vita Nuova, XIX) (Alighieri, <http://lib.ru/POEZIQ/DANTE/pir01.txt>).

Both Beatrice's death and Dante's love appear before the world as the events of universal, cosmic significance:

I say that when I think upon her worth,
 So sweet doth Love make himself feel to
 me,
 That if I then should lose not hardihood,
 Speaking, I should enamour all mankind.
 (La Vita Nuova, XIX) (Ibid.).

Donna is beautiful. This is stated with a greater force not due to the description of her beauty but awesome reverent feeling of those looking at her:

Whence he is blessed who hath seen her
 erewhile.
 (La Vita Nuova, XIX, sonnet 1) (Ibid.).

A year after Donna's death Dante recalls her and thinks of an angel, i.e. remembering her earthly beauty, he speaks of heavenly beauty

peculiar to Beatrice (a lovely spirit in a lovely form). Plato's dialogue "Phaedrus" runs: "... when he sees the beauty of earth, is transported with the recollection of the true beauty; he would like to fly away, but he cannot; he is like a bird fluttering and looking upward and careless of the world below... And I have shown this of all inspirations to be the noblest and highest and the offspring of the highest to him who has or shares in it, and that he who loves the beautiful is called a lover because he partakes of it" (Plato, http://odinblago.ru/platon_4/fedr).

On his way to the Divine Love Dante is constantly in struggle with himself. This mystical feature – the war – manifested itself in the battle of spiritual love and sensual love. Dante writes that his different ideas began "to fight and try him": one idea convinced him of the goodness of Love's reign, "as it rejects the desire of the faithful to her from all the harm", the other one argues the opposite – love brings not blessings but sufferings. However, Dante's another mystical idea won this "battle". It is the Beautiful. Love to spiritual divine beauty took over love to an earthly body:

O happy human race,
if love guides your souls
As heaven is guided!
(Boethius)

Thus, love to Beatrice leads the poet-philosopher to the Kingdom of God. This is what Vita Nuova is. It is New Life.

Vita Nuova means "new", "renewed", "young". The Latin word *nova* has many meanings: alternation of periods of life; one's renewal in his love to the lady, and finally, a spiritual rebirth in its religious understanding, that is in the meaning of the Apostle Paul's words: "If Anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5: 17). This renewal takes place in "La Vita Nuova" in stages – from earthly life to heavenly contemplation.

The climax of a complex semantic construct of "La Vita Nuova" is Chapter XIII: Dante's vision about Beatrice's death integrates all the symbolism of the first part of the book. It is here where the idea of the unity of love and death reaches its climax: Beatrice must die to get a heavenly bliss. The Renaissance code is introduced in contrast to this medieval code: a former Dante must "die" to be spiritually reborn. According to Marsilio Ficino, "each lover, moving away from himself, approaches the other and, dying in himself, rises in the other" (Ficino, <http://www.platonizm.ru/content/marsilio-ficino-kommentarij-na-pir-platona>). This resurrection as spiritual rebirth is New Life, Vita Nuova.

The fact that Donna is dying must not interfere with the path of Love: "Now you are afraid of losing your beauty, suffer from the lost one... There is none of these spiritual unrests in heaven" (Lorenzo Valla) (Valla, http://korolev.msk.ru/books/TOR/doc/Vozrozhdenie_Valla_Sochineniya_Ob_istinnom_i_lozhnom_blage_i_dr.txt). "You should refrain from love to earthly beauty if you want to have this heavenly beauty... I'm telling you this not to keep you from the contemplation of your own beauty and the beauty of the others in order to be honoured with seeing the angels after... But I replace contemplation of women with the angels" [Ibid.]. "Let us climb up the stairs, which at the lowermost step have the shadow of sensual beauty, to ... of the world, a mean betwixt heavenly and earthly things" (Castiglione B., "The Book of the Courtier") (Castiglione 2002). This is what the poet-philosopher Dante Alighieri says long before the thinkers of the High Renaissance. This is his way to the Beautiful, the way through Beatrice to her spiritual beauty inseparable from the universal Beauty and God.

The beginning of Dante's attraction to Donna of Compassion reminds of the lines of

the Holy Writ "Let this cup pass from me". The spirit of Beatrice averts him from this love which leads to lust although it arose from the feelings of empathy. Dante rejects this love as weakness; he has drunk his bowl of fate, going against his principles. Love to Beatrice is the most beautiful, it wins. Thus, the poet's divine nature wins out over his human one. As it will be clear in "The Divine Comedy" Dante went the right way, avoiding the temptation. This is mentioned by Beatrice:

These looks sometime upheld him; for I show'd

My youthful eyes, and led him by their light
In upright walking. Soon as I had reach'd

The threshold of my second age, and chang'e

My mortal for immortal, then he left me,

And gave himself to others. When from flesh

To spirit I had risen, and increase
Of beauty and of virtue circled me,

I was less dear to him, and valued less.

His steps were turn'd into deceitful way,
Following false images of good,

No promise perfect.

Dante's "first friend", Guido Cavalcanti, sent him amazing lines in reply to his sonnet "To every captive soul...":

Thou sawest, it seems to me, all things availing,

And every joy that ever good man feeleth.

Thou wast in proof of that lord valorous

Who through sheer honour lords it o'er the world.

Thou livest in a place where baseness dieth,

And holdest reason in the piteous mind;

So gently move the people in this sleep

That the heart bears it 'thout the feel of grief.

Love bore away the heart, because in his sight

Was Death grown clamorous for one thou lovest,

Love fed her with thy heart in dread of this,

Then, when it seemed to thee he left in sadness,

A dear dream was it which was there completed

Seeing it contrary came conquering (Cavalcanti, <http://www.dante.velchel.ru/index.php?cnt=5&rhime=11>).

The poet speaks about an amazing plot – Dante's dream in which Love came to him, carrying sleeping Beatrice in one hand and Dante's burning heart in the other hand. He tells how Amor convinced Beatrice to taste Dante's heart.

Giving his work the title of "Incipit Vita Nova", Dante used the word *nova* in all its polysemy. In the Middle Ages, this "nova" also meant "strange", "extravagant", "wonderful". We can conclude that Dante referred to neither "wonderful" nor "strange" but to spiritual renewal. However, I think here there are both "strange" and "wonderful", the story of the creation of man and the story of his fall. According to the Holy Writ Adam named his wife "Eve", the name meaning "life". Eve ate a fruit from the tree of knowledge and gave it to Adam. In "La Vita Nuova" the process is directly opposite: the biblical story is turned as in the reverse shooting. Amor, Love provoked Beatrice to eat Dante's heart, just as the serpent provoked Eve to eat a fruit from the tree of knowledge. In the Bible Adam disobeyed God for the good of Eve, she seduced him. The fall took place. Eve dragged Adam down. On the contrary, Beatrice raises Dante high in Paradise. The Bible speaks of the fruit eaten. It was desirable to the eye. In "La Vita Nuova" it is a spiritual heart that is eaten. Dante's heart is described not as a physical organ but as something burning with the fire of love. Beatrice tasted Dante's spirit. Eve sought

to be equal to God, Beatrice was eager to merge with God. One woman brought a man down from God; the other raised him up to God. The first one is Eve, the second one is Beatrice.

Dante, who knew the Holy Writ, loved the texts associated with David and Solomon most of all. The Parabels, Chapter 12 runs: "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband; and as rottenness in his bones is one causing shame". Beatrice leads Dante to God through the path of love. He reaches the Kingdom of God while alive. This is a very important moment characteristic of the Renaissance period. This rebirth is the crown of human life. Whereas "Eve" means "life", Beatrice is a New Life, a New Eve, newborn Eve leading a man to God.

Beatrice mysteriously eats Dante's heart in her dream. In courtly lyric poetry the motif of eating a lover's heart is well-known after the tragic story of Guillem de Cabestany. In this story the lady ate Guillaume's heart without knowing what she was doing. After she had learnt this she killed herself. Beatrice ate a spiritual heart and died (at first in her dream, then in reality). Yet Beatrice died in order to rise and cause Dante live forever when ascended from flesh to spirit. Beatrice's death is a cultural code of the Middle Ages. It is through death that the spirit is released. Grace eat the heart, it should no longer lust after.

Amor in "La Vita Nuova" is a new driving force (the old adversary was the biblical serpent). It is Amor who encourages Beatrice to eat Dante's heart. Amor has the appearance of an angel: white clothes, he is terrible to look at. This fear suggests that Amor could bring wonderful love or unrequited passion and anguish. Dante's heart is in Amor's hands. Solomon's Parables run: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord..." and "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts" (Chapter XXI). Amor here is a tempter, on the contrary. He does

not avert from God but directs the way to God. It is no wonder he appears in pilgrim's clothes before Dante. Love is a journey of the spirit to God. A man "rolls" himself back to God.

Every work of art is a portrait of the artist, this principle being characteristic to the Renaissance in the highest degree. Viacheslav Ivanov wrote: "Dante created his world in his own image and likeness, and thus presented one of the most beautiful images of a man" (Ivanov 1996). Dante Alighieri is a poet and thinker, who lived and worked on the boundary of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. As a "thinker of the border" he belongs to both spaces separated by this boundary. As a creator-demiurge of his worlds he is entirely a Renaissance man. He is the author and protagonist of "La Vita Nuova". Dante was fully aware of being a new demiurge. In "The Divine Comedy" he writes:

... As now my notes to thee,
that understand'st them not,
such to you mortals is Eternal Justice.

In his childhood Dante remembered the legend that his family comes from the Roman clan of the Eliseis who took part in the foundation of the city of Florence. Thus, he got the spirit of a demiurge from his ancestors. In his works he defends the Roman Empire and glorifies it. The main evidence of the eligibility of the Roman Empire in Dante's eyes is the fact that the right of the Roman emperors to dispose of the people's earthly fates was recognized by Jesus Christ, who wished to be born under Emperor Augustus. Dante believes Augustus century to be the Golden age. It is true that the God-man is born in the course of this very epoch. Marsilio Ficino will also call his epoch the Golden age, as he believed that a new God-manhood is born.

Emperor Augustus united many peoples, Roman law spread to the whole world, population census was carried out, and the Son of God himself wished to write himself a man. Adam's original

sin was punished through Jesus Christ. In the treatise "Monarchy" Dante wrote: "... And if the Roman Empire did not exist by Right, the sin of Adam was not punished in Christ. This, however, is false" (II, XII, 1) (Alighieri 1999). These theological theories infuriated Pope Boniface VIII. Yet, they perfectly described Dante's proud attitude towards himself as a creator like God. D. Boccaccio wrote about Dante that if he had not met the enemy, he would have been a God on the Earth with his genius and power of consistent persistence (*Istoriia vsemirnoi literatury* 1985, p. 24).

Dante Alighieri expresses himself as a Renaissance creator by filling the schemes of the medieval universe with his senses and operating with them as he wishes to. However, the spirit of self-expression, which the Renaissance is so glorious with, is no less inherent in him. "La Vita Nuova" is the life of his spirit. Three persons manifest themselves in Dante. These are the stages of love at the same time. The first person experiences sensual love. Having known perfect love, he turns into a man of soul, then a man of spirit.

"A human is something... complicated... he is a soul... If we ask what kind of soul is the beginning of those life-giving energies producing ... animals, we will have to answer that this is done not by a vegetable soul but a different, much more energetic and enduring one that produces living beings. It is such a soul that imprints its image in the body. It forms... the image of a man, like an artist creates an inferior human while painting a portrait of an already formed person... This is not the first, supreme man. He is not spiritual, but sensual... A perfect man is above this... with a more divine soul... It is this human Plato refers to, defining him as a soul that makes use of the body. By this he wants to say that such person's soul is more divine, it dominates the one that directly uses the body...

A person who is in spirit is the very first in existence and the most perfect in essence..." (Plotin, "Enneads", VII) (Plotin 1994, p. 46).

Plotin writes that sometimes one person acts in us, but potentially we have all three inside. In the opening chapters of "La Vita Nuova" there is only one, sensual person inside Dante:

My face the color of my heart displays,
Which, fainting, nay chance support doth seek;

And as I tremble in my drunken daze,
"Die! Die!" the very stones appear to shriek
(XV, sonnet 1) (Alighieri 1985).

At the end of "La Vita Nuova" Dante makes a promise to tell about Beatrice what has not been yet said about any woman. The matter concerns "The Divine Comedy". Yet, he fulfills the promise in "La Vita Nuova" already: Dante-character and Dante-writer are identified in one heroic impulse. Dante lives his life in "La Vita Nuova". But what is his life? What does he do it for?

Dante remembered the words of Brunetto Latini, his friend: "Fame gives a wise man the second life". When Dante promises to glorify Donna Beatrice, he gives her the second life, and this reflects his artistic self-esteem. It is "La Vita Nuova" already in which he glorified Beatrice and reported that no more was said about any other lady. The former tradition of representing a lady as an angel is transformed into representing the image of a woman, leading to God. A new Eve, the Goodness, is not a newborn sinner but the embodied redemption. Dante, like God-the demiurge, re-creates the story of the fall, makes one step back to God. This becomes possible only with Beatrice's help. He writes about it directly in "The Divine Comedy": "... the same Lady who was leading me to God" (Paradise, XVIII) (Ibid.).

Many researchers believe that Dante was fully devoted to his native city, and it is true. However, when Florence did wrong, no matter

how much he loved his homeland, Dante puts pride and dignity before all else. He writes about it in his "Letters": "A man's spirit is great and vast... His true homeland covers the whole world... What! shall I not everywhere enjoy the light of the sun and stars? and may I not seek and contemplate, in every corner of the earth...?" (XII, 5-9). In "La Vita Nuova" he does not mention the name of the city. The fact that it may be Florence can be inferred from the fact of Beatrice's living there. But even contrary to himself he longs to go there, to the place where Beatrice lived, died and is buried. Florence for him is Beatrice's city...

"La Vita Nuova" is a completely autonomous literary-philosophical work. However, it is concerned with "The Divine Comedy" through the images of Dante – Beatrice.

In "La Vita Nuova" it is not Beatrice who is exalted by Dante, but his love to her. Beatrice is not exactly a New Eve yet, it is the beginning of her divine path, her new christening. Dante, a philosopher-poet, seeks to contemplate only her but not the Absolute. He writes about it himself. Adam still longs for Eve but spiritually. He takes the path of self-improvement, promises to labour,

"disciplines his spirit", according to Salvador Dali, in order to contemplate Beatrice-the Grace.

In "The Divine Comedy" Beatrice leads him to God, and there Dante, who is captured by the contemplation of Empyrean, "forgets" about her. In "La Vita Nuova" he longs for her, Beatrice, just as Adam longs for Eve. Recognition of a human's sinful weakness is a feature of the medieval culture. Yet, it is also the principle of the Renaissance: Beatrice leads the poet to God. This is the first step on this long path.

Some researchers believe that "La Vita Nuova" is a "simple" love story (Elina 1971). It would be wrong to simplify the meaning and significance of "La Vita Nuova". Vita Nuova is a search for the absolute, a search for salvation. The Renaissance was such an epoch, the epoch of soul's revival in search for God. And Dante Alighieri was the best to say about it in his "La Vita Nuova":

For ye weep not the while ye forward go
 Along the middle of the mourning town;
 Seeming as persons who have nothing
 known
 Concerning the sad burden of her woe.

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Путь к Богу как путь Любви в Vita Nuova Данте Алигьери

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Статья посвящена исследованию раннего произведения Данте Алигьери Vita Nuova («Новая жизнь»). Vita Nuova рассматривается как репрезентант нового культурного пространства Ренессанса, точнее, как произведение, стоящее на границе идейных принципов культуры Средних веков и культуры Ренессанса. Vita Nuova – сложное литературно-философское произведение, которое превосходит рамки любовной истории и рассказывает о преображении чувственной любви в духовную.

Ключевые слова: Данте Алигьери, Vita Nuova, Ренессанс, литературные жанры, Беатриче, земная любовь, духовная любовь, путь к Богу.

Научная специальность: 24.00.00 – культурология.
