

## **‘Facce a parlar pronte’: Speaking Women in *Vita nuova* 18-19 and Occitan Songbook Vatican Latin 3207 (H)**

As the editors of this volume observe, the “*facce a parlar pronte*,” the faces ready to speak, recognized by the Pilgrim in *Paradiso* 3.16, represent one of many instances where women talk in Dante’s *Commedia*. In *Paradiso* 3, this volume’s point of departure, Dante stages a community of women speaking on ethical issues. This was not, however, his first attempt to do so. Dante’s *Vita nuova* (hence: *VN*) also contains small-scale attempts to represent women as speakers on ethics and conduct. Teodolinda Barolini sees Dante’s use of women interlocutors as a literary innovation, culminating in the figure of *Beatrice Loquax* (“Notes” 363). This essay aims to contextualize Dante’s innovation within the broader literary landscape of the *Duecento*. I argue that Dante’s deployment of gender in articulating his “sweet new style”—both in “*Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore*” (“Ladies who have intelligence of love”) and his use of women speakers in *VN* 18—reflects a deep synthesis of medieval lyric traditions in the *lingua del sì* and the *lenga d’oc*, and the Italian book culture that transmitted them.

Both the initial reception and the *Vita nuova*’s subsequent framing of “*Donne ch’avete*” (“Ladies who have”) reflect visual and textual representations of speaking women found in anthologies of Occitan verse produced in Italy during Dante’s lifetime. Vatican Latin 3207 (hence: Vat. lat. 3207) is one such anthology. In this manuscript, the exchange of *coblas* between two speaking women, Iseuz and Almucs, provides one example of women in the Occitan tradition discussing the ethical implications of speech. This exchange literalizes the metaphor of text-as-woman, found in the *congedo* of Dante’s “*Donne ch’avete*”.<sup>1</sup> The *mise-en-scène* of *VN* 18, where “*Donne ch’avete*” appears, also parallels the *mise-en-page* of Vat. lat. 3207. *VN* 18 stages a group of Florentine women debating the ethical merit of Dante’s poetry, echoing the compilation of Vat. lat. 3207, which brings together a group of *trobairitz* (the Occitan term for a woman poet, or poets) to create a collection of noble women who speak on love, a group of Dante’s ideal (women) readers.

I suggest that Dante uses gendered conventions similar to those that shape the representation of speaking women in Vat. lat. 3207, to stage the revelation of his new poetics in the *Vita nuova*. This poetic innovation rests on Dante’s new interpretation of *fin’amor*, or courtly love. Any brief definition of the ideology and rules of engagement for

this courtly game inevitably fails to capture its many tensions but, for the purposes of this essay, the reciprocal, transactional nature of *fin'amor* proves important. As Teodolinda Barolini states, a lover — who, in lyric, is often male—expects a reward, a *guerdon* or *guiderdone*, from the beloved, which might range from a sign of acknowledgment to, as is often implied, sexual favours (“Lyric Past” 14). The existence of these almost contractual expectations means that it is possible for one party to fail to exhibit the behaviour of a courtly lover, who is ideally discreet, loyal, and, crucially, willing to grant the *guerdon*. As I will demonstrate, the concept of failure, or “faillmen,” and the blame that arises as a consequence, are invoked in Vat. lat. 3207 by men and women speakers. The women speakers depicted as poets, or *trobairitz*, in Vat. lat. 3207 evaluate individual conduct to establish who is at fault in a specific relationship, while the manuscript’s *florilegium* leverages the term “faillmen” against aristocratic women writ large, portraying them as subjects of blame as well as objects of praise, as the lyric tradition often positions them.

In *VN* 18, Dante places the rhetoric of blame in the mouths of women, echoing the way the *trobairitz* of Vat. lat. 3207 use the same concept. In the narrative gloss of *VN* 18, it is Dante’s shame at his own culpability in desiring a greeting that spurs him to write “Donne ch’avete”. While Dante uses this moment in the *Vita nuova* to mark his own poetic originality, freeing himself from the courtly *guerdon*, the imagery of speaking women found in “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore”, “Ben aggia l’amoroso et dolce chore” (“Blessed be that love-filled and sweet heart”)—the response to Dante’s *canzone* found in Vatican Latin 3793—, and the subsequent reframing of “Donne ch’avete” in *VN* 18-19, all echo the representation of speaking women found in the Occitan tradition as received in Italy, specifically within Vat. lat. 3207.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to Boethius’s *De consolatione philosophiae*, Occitan anthologies and their prose biographies — which appear to have first emerged in anthologies made in Italy — are considered models for the *Vita nuova*’s *prosimetrum* form. As Manuele Gagnolati observes, the performative nature of this text allows Dante to create “an author through language” (128), by becoming, in Michelangelo Picone’s terms, *scriptor*, *compiler* and *commentator* (“Teoria” 173-191; *Percorsi* 225-226). Examining Vat. lat. 3207, an Occitan songbook compiled in or around Padua between 1275-1300 (Careri xvii), reveals that Dante’s *libello*, or little book, is indebted to the Occitan tradition in its treatment of gender, as well as form. I view the *canzone*

“Donne ch’avete” and the *mise-en-scene* of VN 18 as participating in a broader literary trend of using speaking women to vocalize rhetorical and ethical problems, one that can be seen in the moralizing tradition of Guittone, but also in Occitan manuscripts from the Veneto, specifically Vat. lat. 3207.

While it remains impossible to determine whether Dante knew Vat. lat. 3207, scholars such as Jelena Todorović have already established its importance as a precedent for the *Vita nuova*. Vat. lat. 3207’s extended *razo* commentaries, which often gloss lyric texts by inserting them into a narrative, function as “mini” *prosimetra* (Todorović 114) and the manuscript contains a version of the “eaten heart” *razo* of Guilhem de Cabestanh, a narrative referenced in VN 3. My analysis of Vat. lat. 3207 focuses specifically on the “collection” of texts attributed to *trobairitz* that bookend the manuscript’s florilegium. Vat. lat. 3207 contains the highest number of *trobairitz* of any extant manuscript, with seven named voices who speak as women.<sup>3</sup> In particular, I focus on the exchange of *coblas tensonadas* between two noblewomen, Iseuz de Capion and Almucs de Castelnuou, “Domna N’Almucs, si’us plages” (“Lady Almucs, if it please you” P-C: 20.2/253.1), found only in Vat. lat. 3207 on f.45v and f.46r. These *trobairitz* texts adjoin 3207’s *florilegium* that runs from ff.47v-49r and excerpts the incipits and exordial stanzas of lyrics to create a guide for the would-be lover to seduce or coerce his beloved through verse. The glossing of Occitan lyric in *florilegia* seems to have been particularly prominent in the Italian peninsula and Vat. lat. 3207 contains the oldest extant example of the practice (Kay 73-74).<sup>4</sup> The position of the *trobairitz* texts, adjacent to the florilegium, invites the reader to consider these speaking women in relation to its glossing of lyric texts. Reading this manuscript, with its gendered lyric glosses and numerous representations of speaking women, alongside Dante’s texts provides an opportunity to recontextualize the poet’s own deployment of gender in his *canzone* “Donne ch’avete” and the reframing it receives in his *libello*.

“Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore” provides the *raison d’être* of VN 18. Within the context of the *Vita nuova*, the *canzone* “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore” inaugurates a new poetics, which Dante ostensibly alludes to later as the “dolce stil novo” (*Purg.* 24.57).<sup>5</sup> This new poetry has a new ethics: it does not demand reciprocation from the beloved, effectuating what Barolini calls a “theologizing of the troubadour *guerdon*” (“Lyric Past” 23). As Mira Mocan argues, the *canzone* uses the idea of the “intellect of love” to creatively

synthesize elements of affective mysticism, found in the writings of William of Saint-Thierry and Richard of Saint Victor (Mocan 93-94). In doing so, Dante produces a text that dialogues with the Occitan tradition's transposition of mystical rhetoric into lyric, only to go beyond existing models by evading the contractual structure of *fin'amor*, emphasizing instead the "calore dell'*affectus*" ("the warmth of mystical affect"; Mocan 83) and aspiring to the "perfetta fusione fra amante e amato" ("perfect fusion between lover and beloved"; Mocan 86) found in this Latinate tradition. For Stefano Carrai, the *canzone* as it appears in the *Vita nuova* not only contains a prefiguration of Beatrice's death, but inaugurates a "parabola" visible in the *libello's canzoni*, from the euphoric annunciation of Dante's new style to the elegiac "Donna pietosa di novella etate" ("A lady compassionate and young"; *VN* 23.17) to the funeral lament of "Li occhi dolenti per pietà del core" ("The eyes grieving for the heart's pity"; *VN* 31.8) (Carrai 71, 91).

This doctrinal *canzone*, with its scholastically inflected understanding of love, was likely intended for a predominantly male readership (and is frequently read in dialogue with Guido Cavalcanti's "Donna me prega"). Despite the homosocial network amongst which the text would have originally circulated, both the *canzone* itself and the prose that introduces it in the *Vita nuova* present the poem as responding to or addressing women who are "readers," understood in the broadest sense as recipients and addressees of texts, as outlined by Elena Lombardi (3).

To address a *canzone* to an audience of women was not, in itself, an innovation: Alison Cornish has argued that in Cavalcanti's own doctrinal *canzone*, "Donna me prega," a woman is presented as the Aristotelian "efficient cause" of the *canzone's* composition (171). As Pirovano and Grimaldi note, the *congedo* of Chiaro Davanzati's "Da che mi conven fare" ("Since I must do") addresses a group of women, suggesting they discuss the *canzone* amongst themselves and that they "blame" ("biasmate"; line100) his beloved for her "great falseness" ("gran falsitate"; line101) (Alighieri, 2015 408; Davanzati 80). Pirovano and Grimaldi observe that Dante's innovation is to apostrophize an audience of women — plural — in the incipit of the poem, making them the "fulcrum" of the text (Alighieri, 2015, 408). In *Imagining the Women Reader in the Age of Dante*, Elena Lombardi reads the final stanza, or *congedo*, of "Donne ch'avete" as offering a particularly unusual configuration of women, as it stages a personified *canzone*, gendered feminine, which is sent to speak to other women:

'FACCE A PARLAR PRONTE'

Canzone, io so che tu girai parlando  
a donne assai, quand'io t'avrò avanzata.  
Or t'ammonisco, perch'io t'ho allevata  
per figliuola d'Amor giovane e piana,  
che là ove giungi tu diche pregando:  
'Insegnatemi gir, ch'io son mandata  
a quella di cui loda io so' adornata'.  
E se non vuoi andar sí come vana,  
non restare ove sia gente villana:  
ingegnati, se puoi, d'esser palese  
solo con donne o con omo cortese,  
che ti merranno là per via tostana.  
Tu troverai Amor con esso lei;  
raccomandami a lui come tu dei.

[Canzone, I know that you will go forth speaking to many ladies, after I will have released you. I now admonish you, since I have nurtured you as a daughter of Love young and forthright, that where you arrive you say, beseeching: 'Teach me the way, for I am sent to her with whose praise I am adorned.'" And if you wish not to go like a useless thing, do not remain where folk are villainous: strive, if you can, to open yourself only to ladies or to men of courtly ways, who will guide you there by the speedier way. You will find Love abiding with her; commend me to him as you should.]

("Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore" 57-70)<sup>6</sup>

In her reading of the *congedo*, Lombardi focusses on the use of metaphors of circulation, for instance "girai parlando" ("go forth speaking"; 57), that evoke the notion of the text moving and talking, which Lombardi contrasts with the typical image of the silent courtly Lady (94-95). The *canzone*-as-daughter appears far more strictly feminized, however, than the silent *dompna*, who, as Sarah Kay reminds us, always escapes strict gender binaries by embodying the conventionally masculine qualities of *senhoratge* (Kay, *Subjectivity* 86). Yet, despite marking the *canzone* itself with youthful, feminine naïveté, Dante makes clear that the *canzone's* women readers remain

associated with the conventional qualities of the *dompna*. In *VN* 19, Dante asserts that he addresses his text to “coloro che sono gentile e che non sono pure femine” (“those who are gentle and not just women”; *VN* 19.1). Although his addressees may be the women residents of urban Florence and therefore not of the court, Dante sets his woman readers apart from others of their gender, evoking the figure of the “Courtly Lady”.

In gendering both text and reader as female, Lombardi claims “Donne ch’avete” participates in an important shift between the Occitan tradition and the Italian tradition:

In the Italian tradition, where music and performance are minimized, and lyric becomes more written, other patterns of envoy are rejected in favor of the personification of the song. [...] the woman as *canzone*. (91)

According to Lombardi, casting the text as female signals its vulnerability, both to scribal interference and to Bad Readers, who threaten the text and its poet, much like the Occitan *lausengier*. This feminine mobility dramatizes textual instability and the anxieties of both oral circulation and manuscript production (92). In this sense, the *canzone*-as-woman “describes a primal state of circulation, fresh out of the author’s pen” (92).

Lombardi reads the personification of text as woman as defining the *congedo*, dramatizing the process of reading by framing sender, text, and recipient as individual, human agents. While such prosopopoeia may be characteristic of the *canzone* in the *lingua del sì*, texts in the *lenga d’oc* frequently literalize this metaphor, using woman as the conduit for dialogue between a lover and a beloved. The exchange of *coblas tensonadas* between Iseuz de Capion and Almucs de Castelnou provides one example of this structure, as the *razo* introducing the first *cobla* from Iseuz demonstrates:

N’iseutz de capion si preget madompna almucs de castelnou  
qela p[er]dones an gigo de tornen qera sos cavailers . et avia  
faich vas ella gran faillimen . e non sen pentia ni no[n]  
demandava perdon. (Vat. lat. 3207, f.45v)

[Lady Iseuz de Capion beseeched Lady Almucs de Castelnou to forgive Gigo de Tornen, who was her knight and had

*'FACCE A PARLAR PRONTE'*

committed a great fault against her without repenting of it or asking forgiveness for it.]<sup>7</sup>

The *razos* establishes this exchange of *coblas tensonadas* as functioning much like a *partimen*, in that it begins by outlining a problem to be solved: Gigo has not apologized for the wrong he has committed against his beloved. Should Almucs forgive him or not?

In her *cobla*, Iseuz pleads the case for Almucs to show mercy to Gigo (or, Gui), who now “q[u]ier perdon humilmen” [“humbly asks forgiveness”] (line 7; P-C: 20.2/253.1; Bec 124) through the words of Iseuz. The *razo* preceding Almucs’ reply states:

E ma do[m]pna n’almucs la cals volia ben an gigo d[e] torno  
si era mout dolenta car el no[n] demandava p[er]don del  
fallime[n]. (Vat. lat. 3207, f.45v)

[And my Lady Almucs who cared for Sir Gigo de Tornen was greatly pained because he did not ask for forgiveness for the fault.]<sup>8</sup>

Almucs’ *cobla*, “Domna N’Almucs, si’us plages”, engages with the question of ethical behavior in *fin’amor* by outlining under what circumstances it would be right to forgive Gigo:

Dompna Niseuz si eu saubes  
Qel se pentis del engagn  
Qel a fait vas mi ta[n] gra[n]  
Ben fora dreichz qeu nagues  
merces mas a mi nos taing  
Pos qe del tort no sa fraing  
Nis pentir del faillime[n]  
Qe naia mais chausimen  
Mas si vos faitz lui pentir  
Leu podes mi convertir.

(11-20, P-C: 20.2/253.1)

[Lady Iseuz, if I knew that he regretted the deception so great he committed toward me, indeed it would be right that I should have mercy. But he doesn’t belong to me, since he does not address his wrong nor repent of it, so

that I no longer find joy in him; but if you make him repent, you could happily persuade me.]<sup>9</sup>

Here, naming particularizes the ethical question of blame. Through the use of the *razo* texts to name all the participants in the debate, the lexis of moral and religious culpability “pentis,” (“repent”; 17), “merces,” (“mercy”; 15), “dreichz,” (“right”; 14) which permeates Occitan lyric is taken from the abstracted realm of the courtly *canso* and drawn into the highly specific scenario of one particular woman asking for an apology from one particular man. Almucs makes it clear that if Gigo had made amends for his errors, it would only be right (i.e., it would be her ethical duty) to grant him forgiveness. Yet, as the *razo* and then Almucs herself makes clear (16-17), he has not done so. This exchange contains traits Barolini associates with both the “courtly” and “moralizing approach to women” (“Notes” 363) in the *lingua del sì*: Almucs functions as the courtly “arbiter” of Gigo’s behavior but she must also consider how she herself should ethically respond to the situation. While these *coblas* would hardly pass the Bechdel test, as a *trobairitz*, Almucs clearly is a “user of poetry” in her “own right”, reflecting what Barolini terms the “moralizing” approach, which positions women as “arbiters of themselves” (“Notes” 363).

At the end of the exchange, Almucs positions not Gigo himself but Iseuz as the agent of her former-lover’s redemption; she can convince both Gigo to make his apology and Almucs to accept it, as Elizabeth Wilson Poe observes (19-20; Poe 154). This positioning of a woman as the fulcrum of communication between two lovers recalls the widely circulated *tenso* by Giraut de Bornelh “S’ie’us quier conselh, bela’ amia Alamanda” (“If I ask your advice lovely friend Alamanda” P-C: 12a.1/242.69), where Giraut asks Alamanda for help in persuading his beloved to forgive him. Pistoleta also uses this conceit in “Bona domna, un conseill vos deman” (“Good Lady, I’m requesting some advice”, P-C: 372.4) and, as Poe has noted, Azalais d’Altier’s *salutz d’amor* “Tantas salutz et tants amors” (“So many greetings, so much love” P-C: 42a) stages an intervention for a male lover in a manner very similar to Iseuz (Poe 151, 155).<sup>10</sup> Iseuz, as the go-between, plays the role of the text: she is the vehicle for persuasion, for language. A similar image of two women involved in a persuasive poetic exchange appears as a metaphor in Dante’s “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore.” Lombardi reads the *congedo* of the *canzone* as emphasizing the text’s metaphorical transformation



into a speaking woman, a “Figliuola d’Amor” (“daughter of Love”; 60), who addresses the beloved, “quella di cui loda io so’ adornata” (“her with whose praise I am adorned”; 64). While in “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore” the feminine personification of the *canzone* becomes the agent of persuasion, Iseuz embodies this image, as a literal speaking woman and fulcrum of communication.

Before it was encased in the prose of the *Vita nuova*, “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore” circulated independently, and the women to whom the *canzone* is addressed were not so precisely defined.<sup>11</sup> The *canzone* was taken as an invitation to dialogue by the composer of “Ben aggia l’amoroso et dolce chore (“Blessed be that love-filled and sweet heart”), who responds in the voice of the same “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore” addressed by Dante. The many Occitanisms in “Ben aggia” (“Blessed be”) lead Grimaldi to categorize its poet as from the Guittonian old guard (Alighieri, 2015, 424). Both Grimaldi and Steinberg suggest the *canzone* was likely penned before Dante used “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore” as the inauguration of a new poetics in the *Vita nuova*; in fact, Steinberg argues that this early reading of the text may have influenced Dante’s later reframing of the *canzone* (Alighieri, 2015, 423; Steinberg 82). Regardless of whether the text influenced Dante’s reframing of “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore”, the poet of “Ben aggia”, known simply as the “Amico di Dante” after the rubric in Vatican Latin 3793 (hence: Vat. lat. 3793), places Dante’s *canzone* in dialogue with an Occitan trend for using speaking women as poetic messengers.

As Justin Steinberg notes, “Ben aggia” participates in Vat. lat. 3793’s interest in debate genres between men and women, as evidence by the manuscript’s compilation of numerous *contrast*i and *tenzoni fittizie*, including two *tenzoni fittizie* by Guittone (69). Vat. lat. 3207 shares this interest in dialogue, compiling a large number of “parodic *tenzos*”, as the fourteenth-century, Lombard-made anthologies **G** and **Q** would later do (Burgwinkle 256, 261).<sup>12</sup> “Ben aggia” marks itself as in dialogue with “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore” by replicating the text’s meter and rhyme-scheme. Such formal imitations, or *contrafacta*, in the feminine-voice were common in Occitan tradition and Iseuz and Almucs’ exchange provides one example, as Elizabeth Wilson Poe has suggested that their text is a *contrafactum* of “Anc enemies qu’eu agues” (P-C: 457.3; Poe 154) by Uc de Saint Circ, the troubadour known as the compiler/composer of troubadour *vidas* (Meneghetti 245; Burgwinkle 259).<sup>13</sup>

“Ben aggia” stages the same kind of intercession on the behalf of the beloved as found in “Domna N’Almucs” (“Lady Almucs”). The final lines (11-14) of the first stanza outline the pleas for mercy that will be made by the women speakers:

sicché di noi chatuna il dritto istile  
 terrà, preghando ongnora dolçemente  
 lei chui s’è dato, quando fia cho noi  
 ch’abbia merçé di lui chogli atti suoi.

(“Ben aggia” 11-14)

[Because of this, each one of us, maintaining the proper style, will always, whenever she is among us, sweetly beseech the lady to whom he is pledged that she may show mercy to him with her acts].<sup>14</sup>

As Steinberg observes, within the *Vita nuova* itself, Dante would correct his previous self-serving desire to possess his beloved by addressing Beatrice as “Nostra donna” (“our lady”) instead of “donna mia” (“my lady”; Steinberg 89). In “Ben aggia,” however, the women speakers position themselves as the fulcrum of communication between the lover and the (de-theologized) beloved. Just as in the Occitan exchanges that use women as go-betweens and intercessors for their beloved, the women speakers of “Ben aggia” take on the role that an *envoi/congedo* might otherwise fulfil in a *canso/canzone*, expanding that conceit to occupy the entire text. To borrow a formulation of Lombardi’s, if, in the *congedo* of “Donne ch’avete,” the text speaks as a woman, in “Ben aggia” and the Occitan texts that inform it, women speak as text (78).

In *VN* 18, Dante restages the moment of initial composition and circulation of “Donne ch’avete,” allowing the *canzone* to become, as Justin Steinberg notes, “a turning point in the poet’s career as well as a crucial point of self-definition” (Steinberg 61). Scholars frequently consider gender a device that signals the singularity of Dante’s poetic innovation. Steinberg reads the “female audience of the *Vita nuova*” as “crucial” in demonstrating Dante’s “shift from an individualistic, ego-driven poetry” (88). Gorni reads the presence of women in this episode as signaling the poet’s unique understanding of Love, playing on “L’intuizione femminile piú sottile, il riconoscimento quasi profetico di un amore *novissimo*” (“the subtlest feminine intuition,

the almost prophetic recognition of an extremely new kind of love” (Alighieri, 1996, 256; qtd. in Alighieri, 2015, 154). I suggest, however, that while his formulation of a new praise-style may be unprecedented, Dante’s deployment of gender in the *mise-en-scene* of this episode is not entirely unparalleled.

*VN* 18 begins with Dante walking by a group of women on the streets of Florence. One of the women in the group, sometimes referred to as the “Florentine Muse” (Barolini, *Poets* 43), questions Dante in her “molto leggiadro parlare” [“graceful way of speaking”] (*VN* 18.2) and asks him what he gets out of loving Beatrice, when he cannot bear to be in her presence (*VN* 18.3). This prompts Dante’s assertion that his beatitude lies not in the reciprocation of love but in the “parole che lodano la donna mia” [“words that praise my lady”] (*VN* 18.6). Dante’s interlocutor questions this: “Se tu ne dicessi vero, quelle parole che tu n’hai dette in notificando la tua condizione, avrestú operate con altro intendimento” [“If you were speaking the truth to us, those words you have said to us in making known your condition you would have used with another purpose”] (*VN* 18.7). Shamed, the Dante of the prose narrative asks himself: “Poi che è tanta beatitudine in quelle parole che lodano la mia donna, perché altro parlare è stato lo mio?” [“Since so much beatitude lies in those words that praise my lady, why have other words been mine?”] (*VN* 18.9). The suggestion of an unethical rhetorical deception on Dante’s part is what prompts him to redress his ethical and poetic failings by authoring the *canzone* “Donne ch’avete.”

*VN* 18 centers around a group of women, sometimes known as the *coro femminile*, the “feminine chorus,” implying that they speak as one voice through the figure of the so-called “Florentine Muse.”<sup>15</sup> Unlike the allegorical Muses or Boethius’ Lady Philosophy, the woman who speaks to Dante and her companions is embedded within the chronology of the prose narrative, recognizing Dante from previous social occasions, appearing in the context of the Florentine cityscape. The critical homogenization of the women as a “chorus” emphasizes Dante’s depiction of them as a group but minimizes the words they exchange with each other. On first encountering them, Dante introduces the reader to these “certe donne, le quali adunate s’erano diletlandosi l’una ne la compagnia dell’altra” [“certain ladies who had gathered to enjoy each other’s company”] (*VN* 18.1). Dante relates that once he had answered their first question “queste donne cominciaro a parlare tra loro” [“these ladies began conversing amongst themselves”] (*VN* 18.5). They discuss his response, their

words and sighs comparable to rain mixed with snow (*VN* 18.5), before asking Dante, through the Florentine Muse, from where he derives his “beatitudine” [“beatitude”] (*VN* 18.6). The staging of this group allows Dante to briefly represent, if not report, a conversation between women about Dante’s conduct as a lover and poet.

Like the women of *VN* 18, Iseuz and Almucs debate the conduct of a lover amidst a group of speaking women. Vat. lat. 3207 groups *trobairitz* texts around the manuscript’s *florilegium* and creates what John H. Marshall describes as “une petite collection d’oeuvres de *trobairitz*” [“a small collection of *trobairitz* works”] (Marshall 403). The “collection” begins with the anonymous *cobla* “Deus sal la terra el pa” [“God save the land and the [country/palace]”] (P-C: 461.81), possibly taken from a larger text which no longer survives in its entirety (Bec 112). The author of the text is not given in a rubric, nor does the language of the text reveal the gender of the speaker, but the miniature accompanying the text depicts a woman religious, implying that she is the speaker of the text. Below is a *razo* attributing the following *cobla*, possibly part of a *salutz d’amors*, to Na Tibors, who the *razo* describes as a Lady from Provence, “for maistra” [“well-educated”], “cortesa” [“courtly”], “Mout tesmuda e mout obedida” [“greatly feared and much obeyed”] (Bec 109). At the end of the *florilegium*, on f.49v, we find the only *trobairitz canso* of the manuscript, the Comtessa de Dia’s “Ab joi et ab joven m’apais” (P-C: 46.1). This effectively creates a cluster of women speaking about love, in which Iseuz and Almucs address each other.

These *trobairitz* texts (and only *trobairitz* texts) are accompanied by miniatures showing the speakers as noblewomen (Jullian 7; Rieger 391). It is in this compilatory feature that the echoes between Vat. lat. 3207 and *VN* 18-19 resound: by creating this “collection” of white, wealthy and/or noble speaking women, who are “users of poetry in their own right” (Barolini “Notes” 363), Vat. lat. 3207 effectively presents a selection of “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore”, a group of readers for Dante’s *canzone*, as resembling those described in *VN* 19, their illuminated faces ready to speak. The women of Florence *mises en scène* in *VN* 18, in essence, mirror the *trobairitz mises en page* in Vat. lat. 3207.

If the compilation of Vat. lat. 3207 demonstrates the extent to which the *mis-en-scène* of *VN* 18 imitates representations of speaking women found in the book-culture of the late thirteenth century, the manuscript’s *florilegium* demonstrates Dante’s ethical innovation.

*'FACCE A PARLAR PRONTE'*

Dante posits an ethical problem in *VN* 18, namely an expectation of reward, or *guerdon*, from his beloved, and then frames it as an aesthetic one that centers around his poetics. Barolini describes the *Vita nuova* as a text where “aesthetic praxis is viewed as a function of ethical commitment” and sees “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore” [“Ladies who have intelligence of love”] as the prime example of this connection between poetics and ethics (*Poets* 42). Vat. lat. 3207’s *florilegium*, which runs from ff.47v-49r, presents a conventional understanding of the object of *fin’amor*: the *dompnas* favor and the *guerdon*. Yet, in certain respects, it echoes Dante’s own thoughts on love, for instance, that *fin’amor* rests on individual merit rather than merit bestowed by material wealth (f.48v):

Qestas coblas deuen mandar li paubre amador alas gentils ricas domnas. Qant los an tetengutz p[er]servidor. mostran com lo paubres amics grazir plus honors qel rics ecom finamors no[n] garda ricors. mas valor. e bontat e cortesia . e bella captene[n]sa. (Vat. lat. 3207, f.48v)

[These stanzas the poor lover must send to the noble, rich lady. When they have taken them as a servant, they show how the poor lover pleases with more honor than the rich man, and how *fin’amors* does not take account of wealth but worth and generosity and courtesy and fine manners].<sup>16</sup>

This rubric echoes the sentiments of Dante’s *canzone* “Le dolci rime d’amor ch’i’ solia” (“The tender rhymes of love” *Convivio* IV), in which the poet decries those who associate nobility with wealth, and the sonnet that follows “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore” in *VN* 20.3, “Amore e’l cor gentil sono una cosa” (“Love and the gentle heart are one thing”).<sup>17</sup>

Yet, Vat. lat. 3207’s *florilegium* does not project an egalitarian or pro-feminine understanding of *fin’amor*, despite the number of women represented elsewhere in the manuscript. As Kay observes (*Parrots* 417 n.24), Vat. lat. 3207’s *florilegium* proves highly “antifeminist,” introducing its excerpts with rubrics such as: “Aqesta cobla repre[n] las dompnas q[ue] no uolen los ualenz fins amics” (“this stanza reproaches Ladies who do not want worthy, fine lovers” f.48r); “Aestas coblas son bonas ad home qes iratz co[n] sua dompna a la desauentura [et] al tort dela” (“these stanzas are good for the man who is angry with his lady, at the hardship she causes and her wrongs”

f.48v). The following commentary on f.49r glosses extracts from a *canso* by Folquet de Marselha

Aqesta coblas mostran qe las grans autas do[m]pnas no creson poder fallir. E si mostra co[m] lo faillmen d[e] la dompna es maier qe cel de la bassa. Qaisi con il es grans de ricor aissi es grans lo faillimens. e si co[m] ella ual pauc es pauc la faillida. e qi p[er]dona la pena lo blasme no po p[er]donar.

(P-C:155,16; Careri, 315):

[These *coblas* show that great, high Ladies do not believe that they can be at fault. And it shows how the faults of the [high-born] Lady is greater than that of the low-born one. That in this way, as great as is his wealth, so is his failing equally as large. And just as she is worth little, so is her failing. And whosoever pardons the hurt, cannot pardon the blame].<sup>18</sup>

This gloss defines the stakes of *fin'amor* as gendered and differing by social rank. It leverages Folquet's lines against aristocratic women and implies that a whole social category of women has failed to live up to the ideals of *fin'amor* by breaking its transactional framework, namely by withholding the *guerdon* that a lover (particularly the compiler of Vat. lat. 3207), feels he deserves. Book-ending a *florilegium* focused on the seduction of women with *trobairitz* texts only re-enforces the connection between Iseuz and Almuc's debate, so concerned with ethical responsibility for questionable behavior, and the ethical burden that the compiler confers upon noble women. The *florilegium* reminds us that noblewomen have a stake in the ethics of *fin'amor* because they are not only subjects of praise but also of blame, constructed from the misogynistic structure of *fin'amor*. Vat. lat. 3207's *florilegium* establishes a paradoxical ethical burden for them: noblewomen, like the manuscript's *trobairitz*, or the addressees of Dante's *canzone*, are expected to have an increased "understanding" of love because of their rank. Yet, precisely because of this rank, they belong to the very category of women the compiler sees as likely to fail in perceiving their own flaws and, therefore, in granting the *guerdon*. In failing to grant the expected reward, these women supposedly break the transactional conventions of *fin'amor*.

This moment in the *florilegium* throws Dante's innovation in VN 18 into sharp relief. In "Donne ch'avete", Dante dramatizes the

same fantasy of the unfailing Lady, who does not fall short of the expectations of *fin'amor* in failing to grant the *guerdon*, by translating Beatrice into a woman "disiata in sommo cielo," ("desired in highest heaven"; "Donne ch'avete" line 29). Hence, for Barolini, the *canzone* marks Dante's emancipation from Cavalcantian poetics and the "total emancipation from the Provençal *guerdon*" (*Poets* 42). By adopting his new praise style, through his "poetics of sublimation" (Barolini *Poets* 43), Dante suggests that to see the beloved as "failing" reflects not an error in her conduct, but a failure of poetic practice.

Figures of speaking women both articulate and question the structures of *fin'amor* and its ethical burdens, be it Almucs defending her right to an apology, or the Florentine Muse questioning Dante's own ethics in *VN* 18. Both the compilation of Vat. lat. 3207 and the staging of *VN* 18 situate these speaking women within larger groups, exchanging words with other women. Dante puts the rhetoric of blame in the mouth of a speaking woman to denounce his ethics as a poet and lover, such that shame (*VN* 18.8) then becomes the productive emotion behind his love poetry. Almucs, too, shames her own beloved through her words to be transmitted by Iseuz. This makes speaking women convenient vehicles for reflection and innovation in medieval poetic discourse — an opportunity that the author of "Ben aggia" may have failed to appreciate, but one that Dante seized upon when redefining "Donne ch'avete" in the prose of *VN* 18.

Considering Vatican Latin 3207 alongside the *canzone* "Donne ch'avete" suggests that gendered conventions and aesthetic expectations surrounding speaking women circulated in the book cultures of medieval Italy, shaping the way readers encountered both Occitan and Italian texts. The echoes of the conventions used to represent speaking women in Vat. lat. 3207 within the *Vita nuova* demonstrate the impact of these gendered aesthetics in both traditions. This reminds us that Dante was not alone in representing "ladies who have understanding of love," as the Florentine women of *VN* 18 and the illuminated miniatures of the *trobairitz* in Vat. lat. 3207 look back at us from the page with "facce a parlar pronte," faces ready to speak.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Coblas* are units of verse equivalent to stanzas, and are frequently exchanged in poetic dialogue, when they are known as *coblas tensonadas*. To view 3207 online, see Works Cited.

<sup>2</sup> All Italian citations from the *Vita nuova* and associated lyrics are taken from 2015 edition by Pirovano and Grimaldi. All English translations from the *Vita nuova* are taken from the 1995 edition by Dino S. Cervigni and Edward Vasta (Alighieri 1995). Italian edition and English translation of “Ben aggia” are taken from Steinberg (2007).

<sup>3</sup> Alamanda, f. 37v, Almucs de Castelnou, f.45v (miniature on f.46r), Comtessa de Dia, f.49v, Iseuz de Capion, f.45v, Lombarda, f.43v, Maria de Ventadorn, f.53r (plus “Dieus sal la terra e.l pais”, which remains unattributed but appears in the *trobairitz* section of the manuscript next to a miniature depicting a woman), Tibors, f.45r, plus fragments of a *canso* (P-C:43,1) by Azalais de Porcairages that appear, without attribution, on f.46r and f.57r, giving a total of eight *trobairitz* texts. Additionally, Caudairenga appears as a *trobairitz* in the *razo* of Raimon de Miraval, 20r.

<sup>4</sup> The following songbooks contain florilegia: **Cm**, **Dc**, **Fa**, **G**, **H**, **J**, **N**, **P**, **Q**, and **T**. Only **J** was not made in Italy (Kay 75). These sigla refer to sections of the following manuscripts: **Cm** = Castagnolo Minore, Archivio Parrocchiale; **Dc** = Modena, Biblioteca Estense α, R.4.4; **Fa** = Rome, Vatican Chigi L.IV.106; **G** = Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana R 71 sup.; **H** = Rome, Vatican Latin 3207; **J** = Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Conv. Sopp. F.IV.776; **N** = New York, Pierpont Morgan 819; **P** = Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana XLI.42; **Q** = Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana 2909; **T** = Paris, BnF fonds français 15211.

<sup>5</sup> Bonagiunta’s speech at *Purg.* 24.55-57 has been edited and interpreted differently. While in *Dante’s Poets* Barolini (85) reads line 57 as “di qua dal dolce stil novo ch’i’ odo!”, following the Petrocchi edition, Federico Sanguineti, in his 2001 critical edition of the *Commedia* (Alighieri, *Comedia* 321) gives: “di qua dal dolce stil! e il novo ch’io odo!”, thereby breaking apart the notion of the “stilnovo”, a term that does not appear in other manuscripts of the time and did not draw much attention from early commentators. For a summary of this debate and other textual variants see Cipollone (105-109).

<sup>6</sup> For Italian, see Alighieri, 2015, 420-421; for English translation, see Alighieri, 1995, 85.

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all transcriptions and translation of quoted Vat. lat. 3207 passages in this study are my own. For critical edition including French translation, see: Bec, 121.

<sup>8</sup> Transcription and translation my own. See Bec, 121 for critical edition including French translation.

<sup>9</sup> Transcription and translation my own. See Bec, 124 for critical edition including French translation.

<sup>10</sup> For editions and English translations see Bruckner, Sherpard and White 37-41, 48-52, 112-115.

<sup>11</sup> The *Vita nuova* itself makes several references to contemporary practices of circulating poetry. Dante recounts in *VN* 3 that recipients of “A ciascun alma presa” (“To every captive soul”, translation my own) offered some infelicitous interpretations, perhaps the most well-known of which is Dante da Maiano’s “Di ciò che sei stato dimandatore” (“Regarding what you asked about”, Maiano 57, translation my own). Steinberg’s argument implies that, in “Ben aggia”, Dante once



## 'FACCE A PARLAR PRONTE'

again faced a respondent who offered a misguided interpretation of his work—this time, a canzone, rather than a sonnet. “Donne ch’avete” appears to have had a wide circulation as independent text, outside the *Vita nuova*, including in Bologna where, as Steinberg notes, in 1293, a notary named Pietro Allegranza included stanzas of “Donne ch’avete” in his notarial register, or *memoriale* (now designed *Mem.* 82, Steinberg 18).

<sup>12</sup> This trend applies to *trobairitz* texts too: Bossy and Jones have argued the compilation of *trobairitz* texts in the Venetian manuscript N (Pierpont Morgan 819) reflects the compilers reading “the female *canso* through the lens of the *tenso*” (273).

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of the debate on the authorship of the *vidas* and *razos* of the see Todorović, 112.

<sup>14</sup> For Italian transcription and English translation, see Steinberg 73, 75.

<sup>15</sup> For the term “Florentine Muse”, see: Barolini, *Poets*, 43; Donato Pirovano and Marco Grimaldi use the term “coro femminile” in their 2015 edition (Alighieri, 2015, 153).

<sup>16</sup> Transcription and translation my own. For critical edition, see: Careri, 293-318.

<sup>17</sup> “Riprovando ‘l giudicio falso e vile | di quei che voglion che di gentilezza | sia principio ricchezza” (lines 15-17), “Le dolci rime d’amor ch’i’ solia”, (Alighieri 216; *Convivio* IV).

<sup>18</sup> Transcription and translation my own. For critical edition, see: Careri, 315.

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