Inwardness in Dante's *Vita Nuova*: The Body of Beatrice

Interioridade na *Vida Nova* de Dante: O Corpo de Beatriz

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Abstract: This essay investigates the historical, cultural, and literary genealogy of inwardness, challenging the Bloomian perspective that William Shakespeare invented the subjectivity. Instead, it posits that inwardness emerged as an ongoing process beginning in the Middle Ages or earlier, with Shakespeare's achievement lying in the deepening of its mimesis within the dramatic genre. By synthesizing the historical analyses of Ariès and Duby regarding the rise of privacy and individuality, the study traces the evolution of the subjectivity of allurement and the Christian ascetic rejection of the body as foundational moments of inner space. The core of the discussion centers on Robert Pogue Harrison's reading of Dante Alighieri's *Vita Nuova*. It explores the blind spot in Dante's 'marvellous vision,' arguing that the presence of the *nuda* (naked) Beatrice, partially veiled by a crimson cloth, represents the first instance in Western literature where sexual desire is projected into literary creation. Through this poetic potentiality, Dante transforms repressed corporeal desire into an aesthetic order. Furthermore, drawing on Erich Auerbach's theories, the essay demonstrates how Dante and later authors like Augustine and Montaigne reshaped language and genre, utilizing silences, syntactic ruptures, and self-analysis, to represent the 'homo interior.' Ultimately, the work situates Shakespeare not as a solitary innovator, but as a peak in a long literary tradition of representing the complexities of the human psyche, from Dante's work to the projected anxieties of characters in Shakespeare.
Keywords: Inwardness; Dante Alighieri; *Vita Nuova*; Beatrice; Mimesis; Shakespeare.

Resumo: Este ensaio investiga a genealogia histórica, cultural e literária da interioridade, desafiando a perspectiva bloomiana de que William Shakespeare inventou a subjetividade. Em vez disso, postula que a interioridade emergiu como um processo contínuo que teve início na Idade Média ou até mesmo antes, sendo a conquista de Shakespeare o aprofundamento de sua mimese dentro do gênero dramático. Sintetizando as análises históricas de Ariès e Duby sobre a ascensão da privacidade e da individualidade, o estudo traça a evolução da subjetividade da sedução e a rejeição ascética cristã do corpo como momentos fundamentais do espaço interior. O cerne da discussão centra-se na leitura que Robert Pogue Harrison faz da *Vita Nuova* de Dante Alighieri. Explora o ponto cego na "visão maravilhosa" de Dante, argumentando que a presença da nua Beatriz, parcialmente velada por um pano carmesim, representa o primeiro exemplo na literatura ocidental em que o desejo sexual é projetado na criação literária. Por meio dessa potencialidade poética, Dante transforma o desejo corpóreo reprimido em uma ordem estética. Além disso, baseando-se nas teorias de Auerbach, o ensaio demonstra como Dante e autores posteriores, como Agostinho e Montaigne, remodelaram a linguagem e o gênero, utilizando silêncios, rupturas sintáticas e autoanálise para representar o "homo interior". Em última análise, o ensaio situa Shakespeare não como uma obra de inovação isolada, mas como um ápice em uma longa tradição literária de representação das complexidades da psique humana, desde a obra de Dante até as ansiedades projetadas dos personagens em Shakespeare.
Palavras-chave: Interioridade; Dante Alighieri; Vita Nuova; Beatriz; Mimese; Shakespeare.

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This essay presents some historical, cultural, and literary elements which are useful in understanding the emergence of inwardness from the Middle Ages onwards. It discussed that Shakespeare did not invent inwardness by himself as Bloom and Fineman propose in their works. Like Dante, Augustine, and Montaigne, he introduced a mimesis of inwardness specifically in the *drama* and that was his greatest achievement in literature. These authors depicted inward feelings, sensations, thoughts, and anxieties in their work. Shakespeare developed the mimesis of inwardness in an on-going process of the development of inwardness, which probably started in the Middle Ages.

The origines of inwardness did not occur in the Renaissance Age, but somehow beforehand. Shakespeare introduced in his drama a mimesis of inwardness, just as other authors introduced mimetic devices in their works. For example, Montaigne created an innovating literary form in his **Essays**; beforehand, Augustine's painstaking work, which analysed his innermost feelings in his **Confessions**, is one of the first moments of the emergence of inwardness; similarly Dante represented a desiring self in his **Vita Nuova** for the first time. Shakespeare's authenticity is indeed to deepen the mimesis of inwardness and its quality in the drama, overcoming his coevals, such as Marlowe, Webster and Kyd. It is worth demonstrating here that when Shakespeare started to write, inwardness was an on-going development in literary works. It is noteworthy to place Shakespeare's innovating mimesis of inwardness in the drama against the former development of literary history.

In Shakespeare, Montaigne, Augustine and Dante language and the mimetical devices swerve from the previous literary tradition. They changed language and the structure of the genre, because of an intrinsic necessity in the representation of inwardness, an inner space of feelings, thoughts, ideas, and anxiety. The language and structure of the poem, essay, confession and drama were reshaped to represent inwardness. In order to capture the remoter dimensions, these artists had to develop new stylistic devices: silences, non-said, a rather floating style, and syntactic ruptures in their litterary forms. The mimesis

of inwardness needed new literary forms which were able to convey the imagistic constellations, inward floatations of feelings, emotions, ideas, thoughts of the self.

Hence, this chapter presents some ideas which demonstrate that the notion of inwardness had its origins in the Middle Ages or even beforehand,[1] mainly the revealing details by Ariès's and Duby's **History of Private Life**.[2] They demonstrate that there emerged a social and cultural development of individuality and inwardness in that age. After that, Harrison's reading of Dante's **Vita Nuova**, in his revealing book **The Body of Beatrice** demonstrates the representation of the poet's inward desires in the 'blind spot', projected first in the body of Beatrice and then in Dante's literary creation. Then, Montaigne's essays wherein he presents his proposal of self-investigation and self-analysis as an innovation in his **Essays** is useful to place inwardness in a broader context in the Renaissance.

1. The Emergence of Self from the Middle Ages onwards

Phillipe Ariès and Georges Duby, in their classical work **History of Private Life II: Revelations of the Medieval World** (2009),[3] state that inwardness has its origins in late Middle Ages. Ariès and Duby analyse the emergence of the first images of inwardness in cultural forms of expression, such as autobiographies, chronicles, travel narratives, books of prayers, as well as in Dante's and Petrarch's poetry. Thus, there emerged fictions of inwardness, which concentrated on the inner contemplation of the self. Such emergence was caused by the consciousness of the self as an individual whose identity could be delimitted by loneliness and seclusion from society. (Ariès & Duby, 2009, p. 388). Such contemplation was enabled by lonely reading, seclusion, dreaming and ascetic wanderings. For example, the representation of an oneirical world in literary forms enabled the mimesis of mental dimensions through an 'unfolded self' who sought for love, adventure, and divine discovery. The fictionalised representation of the self created the emergence of a 'subjectivity of the allurement' which inaugurated the 'delimitation of the territory of the individual' in late Middle Ages (2009, p. 388). Such texts obsessively insisted on time, the

[1] The purpose here is not to analyse inwardness from both ancient Greek and Roman literature, but to highlight the emergence of this phenomenon in the Middle Ages, which will be important to Shakespeare's configuration the mimesis of inwardness in the drama.

[2] Trevelyan also studied some cultural and sociological assumptions which may have influenced the emergence of inwardness in England. In fact, he studies the emergence of privacy in architectural changes to ever-increasing inner comfortable spaces in spaces of smaller rooms, which allowed people's intimacy and privacy. This is taken as the starting point of many changes, such as privacy, intimacy, and later on inwardness. See Trevelyan's **English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries: Chaucer to Queen Victoria** (1942).

[3] The quotations here are taken from Brazilian edition by Ariès and Duby's work, **História da Vida Privada 2: Da Europa Feudal à Renascença**, 2009. This exposition on the development of inwardness in the Mediaeval Ages is based on their work.

'perception of a lost time', in a sort of mourning such lost time (2009, p. 388). There was an effort to insist on recuperating the lost memory, the lost time, the lost paradise.

As a result, the individual could determine his own destiny and way of living for the first time. The individual of fictions as the young lovers and wandering knights were carried by their desires and went away to a long journey among forests and landscapes. Thus, they could bend over themselves and unfold their inward feelings, emotions, thoughts, unquietness, and suffering. Such seclusion and contemplation were only possible in a state of enclosure and absorption seeking for an inward state of dreaming and distancing. (2009, p. 389). Therefore, writing allowed the emergence of the self which exposed painful and exalted confessions of the inner self.

However, such representation of the 'self pretentiously unique' is in fact a rather universal 'self' (2009, p. 390). This self is constituted by repeated and pre-established images and *leitmotifs*, through which the individual could only represent an abstract and imaginary idea of the self in poetry and narrative. The poetical and narrative self was in the 'eternal regress' to his natural origins and was obsessively allured by his own representation. (2009, p. 390). In the same sense, literary imagery was obsessed about the search for a lost identity, which needed to be discovered and scrutinised. It was artificially masked only to be seen in the scrutinising game of identity. (2009, p. 396).

In addition to that, there was an intense feeling and desire of seeking for loneliness during the Middle Ages. The primitive Christians sought for seclusion in the desert as a way of achieving divinity and purety of soul. Consequently, they rejected the body, its feelings, passions and emotions. The anchorite attitude of leaving the city to live secluded in the desert was perceived as an astonishing gesture whereby they could define the self as a private site. Thus, the primitive Christianity and its ascesis was an ur-flourishing of the representation and theatricalisation of inwardness. Living beyond the limits of the city and of the known limits of the land was a way of creating a civilisation in the desert.[4] Monastic and ascetic life was one of the first moments of the acknowledgment of an inner space which needed to be forcely suppressed. Once the ascetics denied the body, sexual life, pleasure and desire, they impinged on their body and mind sufferance, punishment, abstention of food and drink, and sought for contemplation, especially inner contemplation in the absolute silence of the night (2009, p. 532). Thus, such denial and abstention meant the rejection of an inner space, which was said to be pervaded by evil feelings, thoughts and desires, and threatened to dominate the individual and purity of the soul. The rejection

[4] For that see, see Peter Brown, in his work **Le renoncement à la chair** (1995).

of such feelings was an obsessive reaction to the percepton of an enigmatic inward life poping up in the body.

Likewise, Peter Brown[5] argues that, in the primitive Christianity, the renouncement of corporeal and material pleasure was intensively practiced by ascetic monks and anchorites from the 2th century C. E. onwards.[6] Such renouncement is due to the search for the purification of body and soul as a mystic form to achieve divinity. The rejection of pleasures as well as of the body was caused by the ever-growing consciousness that the self was a sexual being, who kept alive the sexual phantasm, exposing the 'rebel' zones of the human being (1995, p. 285). They privileged the soul as a locus of rationality and sanctity, but repudiated the body as the locus of evilness and sin. Therefore, the isolation of monks signaled, through this denegation of the body, the inward negative dimensions, which could not be controlled. The rejection of these inward dimensions and the seeking for the divinity through inner contemplation was therefore a social reaction to the perceptiveness of inwardness.

Ariès and Duby argue that the 'invention of the subject' came about in the Middle Ages, especifically in the 14th and 15th centuries. According to them,

> The private writing or the writing about the private introduces unquestionably, as the evidences increase, a deep mutation in the attitude of the individuals regarding the familial and social groups which they belong to: a concern about conveying, at least describing experienced phenomena which former generations silenced about. (2009, p. 553).

Although there came out these first embryoes of inwardness during the Middle Ages, writing about the self was limitted to a small sum of people. It seems that inwardness was rather perceived in social attitudes. Moreover, 'the individual defines himself by contrast', or by the separation and rupture from the circles of the social life, such as family, community, and professional domains (Ariès & Duby, 2009, p. 554) . The self's own consciousness enabled the 'radical questioning of the order'; thus, those who were outside society, such as the mad in the romances, the uproarers, the hermits, caused astonishment and anxieties in other people's view due to their assumed awkward attitude of seclusion and loneliness. In that sense, Auerbach (2007a)[7] also enhances the emergence of inwardness frorm the Middle Ages onwards. He states that

[5] See Brown's work **Le renoncement à la chair** (The Renouncement of the Flesh, 1995).
[6] For that issue, Ariès and Duby, **History of Private Life II: Revelations of the Medieval World,** (2009) also present the ascetic and monastic life as a way of spiritual evolution. See details about the anchorites on pp. 534-536.
[7] See Erich Auerbach's **Dante: Poet of the Secular World**, 2007a.

> whole groups of people who had hitherto lived in silent obscurity, began to achieve self-awareness, to emerge into the light of day and display their individual gestures; the long buried ancient tradition regarding the portrayal of outward and inner happening had reawakened (2007a, p. 83-84).

Even though the mimesis of an inward space was current in late Middle Ages, a former author had represented inward feelings, ideas, thouhgts and anxieties beforehand: Saint Augustine introduced a mimesis of an inward space of the self in his **Confessions** (2008). J. M. Coetzee has written a beautiful essay called *Autobiography and Confession* (1992).[8] Such essay analyses the issue of confession of inward feelings in Augustine, Dostoevski and Tolstoi. According to Coetzee, Augustine reveals his innermost desire when he and his friends stole some pears. What moves such act is not the need of eating pears, because they fed them to hogs later on. Rather, his feeling was the shame of being shameless. What he wanted to confess was something more than the transgression, it was 'something which lies behind the theft'. Even though he tried to analyse his inward feelings, there was something which would be completely occluded to introspection. In Coetzee's words, 'the truth about the self that will bring an end to the quest for the source within the self for that-which-is-wrong, he affirms, will remain inaccessible to introspection.' (1992, p. 252). What Coetzee perceives in autobiography and confession is the endless attempt to find out the '*truth'* about the self. He enhances that Augustine perceived in his confession that when we try analyse ourselves, there is something which evades and cannot be grasped and written down. That is what Philosophy, arts and Psychoanalysis have tried to pin down and represent: the overcoming sense of endlessness. Augustine perceived that there are some inward mysterious forces which cannot be controlled, analysed and discoursively grasped in introspection. Therefore, Augustine presented an attempt to represent the inward dimensions in his **Confessions**. He exposed his feelings, desires, vanity, and inward dispositions of the mind, but he could not make a shape of the endless anxiety which lurks behind his phantasms. In the same sense that the Renaissace age would make a distinction between outwardness and inwardness, Augustine was aware of the distinction between inward and outward dimensions of the self. That is what he called the *homo interior* and the *homo exterior*. Thus, the argument of Shakespeare's authencity of the creation and discovering of inwardness by himself is debased when we look closer to the emergence of the self and the representation of an inward space in the writings in the Middle Ages and especially in Augustine's work.

[8] See Coetzee's interviews with David Attwell and essays in **Doubling the Point**: essays and interviews, 1992. The purpose here is not to analyse Augustine's work, but to present some details which show the mimesis of inwardness in his **Confessions**.

2. Inwardness and Occluded Desires in Dante's Work: The body of Beatrice

As Augustine represented inner feelings in his **Confessions**, Dante is another author who represented inward dimensions in his work. In that sense, Harrison's argument evidences that Dante represented his unconfessed desiring feelings in his **Vita Nuova**. Just as Augustine could not grasp his feelings in his endless analysis, Dante could not see what was behind the 'blind spot' in his dream in the **Vita Nuova**. Thus, by these examples, one in autobiography and other in prose and poetry, it is evident that inwardness was an ever-growing perceptiveness of the individual whose consciousness about obscure zone was achieved throughout the centuries.

Robert Pogue Harrison has written a ground-breaking book about Dante's **Vita Nuova**, named **The Body of Beatrice** (1988). His painstaking study tries to disentail the reading of Dante's first work from his greatest work, **The Divine Comedy**. Critics normally read the **Vita Nuova** as a merely preface, introduction or even an appendix to **The Divine Comedy**. Thus, they simply projected the mystical and theological analysis from the **Comedy** in Dante's **Vita Nuova**. What Harrison proves is that the *libello* has its own aesthetic and poetic meaning independent from **The Divine Comedy**. He demonstrates the representation of (sexual) desire for the first time, in Western Literature, a desire which is projected onto Dante's literary creation.

Harrison analyses a 'blind spot' in Dante's experience in his 'marvellous vision' of his dream. Dante's 'marvellous vision' comes about in the 3rd chapter of his **Vita Nuova**. He is on the street and sees Beatrice 'dressed in the whitest of white', remembering his first vision of the lady when he was a nine-year-old boy. Then he goes to his room, which he also recalls as 'the most secret chamber of the heart' (Harrison, 1988, p. 147) and there 'a sweet sleep overcame' him. (Dante, 2001, p. 10). Then, in 'a flame-coloured nebula' he saw the presence of a 'lord of fearful aspect' who said many things, but which the poet understood just a few words, such as '*Ego dominus tuus*: I am your lord.' (2001, p. 10).[9] This lord 'held a figure sleeping in his arms', who he identifies as Beatrice, the 'lady of the greeting'. (2001, p. 10-11). Most revealingly, she is 'naked except that it seemed to me to be covered lightly with a crimson cloth' (2001, p. 10-11). The lord, whom he identifies later as Love, Amor, is holding the poet's heart completely in fire. Then he makes the lady eat his

[9] See the entire description of this scene: 'And thinking of her a sweet sleep overcame me, in which a marvellous vision appeared to me: so that it seemed I saw in my room a flame-coloured nebula, in the midst of which I discerned the shape of a lord of fearful aspect to those who gazed on him: and he appeared to me with such joy, so much joy within himself, that it was a miraculous thing: and in his speech he said many things, of which I understood only a few: among them I understood this: '*Ego dominus tuus*: I am your lord." (2001, p. 10). **The New Life** of Dante Alighieri, Translated by A.S.Kline, 2001.

heart, which she did 'hesitantly' (2001, p. 11).[10] After that, the lord seems to change his joyful mood to a completely sorrowful aspect and thus he weeps bitterly. Finally, Beatrice and the lord vanish unexplainably in the sky.

For Harrison, many critics and even Dante's contemporary poets attempted to interpret this oneiric configuration and its secret. This visionary dream, this marvellous vision hides the mystery about this real woman. For Harrison she is not the 'divine agent or angel', nor the 'Christ figure', nor the 'number nine' (1988, p. 18). For him, Dante sees something in this figure, which cannot be merely explained as 'poetic hyperbole, phantasmal perception, or even mystical delirium' (1988, p. 18). Harrison interrogates the nature of Beatrice and sees that she is not an allegorical, theological or mystic figure, but, above all, her presence enhances her as a woman, whom is adored by Dante and is transformed in his poetry in a 'posthumous mummification in paradise'. (1988, p. 18). For Harrison, although some critics tried to see the dream as the foretelling of her death or as the prefiguring of Dante's journey into hell, purgatory and paradise, the deeper meaning of this dream remains completely concealed.

In vain have many critics tried to explain Dante's experience. For instance, Auerbach's (2007a)[11] analysis of Dante's first experience in **The Vita Nuova** fails to figure out what is at stake in Dante's first work. However, he focuses on philosophical and subjective experience:

> there was a falling away from Beatrice, a misdirected love, a striving for illusory treasures. Neither the biographical clues at our disposal nor the works that can be situated with some degree of certainty between the last poems of the **Vita Nuova** and the generally accepted date of his journey to the Other World, gives any exact idea. […] the best we can do is to accept Dante's error as a fact, even though we cannot discover its traces in Dante's life and work. (2007a, p. 70-71).

Auerbach does not see this 'blind spot' in Dante's work, just as many other critics could not. He merely assumes that there are some biographical details which cannot be accessed and which could explain Dante's 'error'. Even Dante acknowledges the failure to see the vision's true meaning. His coeval poets Petrarch and Guido Cavalcanti could not grasp the true meaning of the scene as well.

Harrison wisely states that there is a 'blind spot' which 'lurks at the heart of this

[10] 'It seemed to me he held a figure sleeping in his arms, naked except that it seemed to me to be covered lightly with a crimson cloth: gazing at it very intently I realised it was the lady of the greeting, she who had deigned to greet me before that day. And in one of *his* hands it seemed to me that he held something completely on fire, and he seemed to say to me these words: '*Vide cor tuum*: Look upon your heart. And when he had stood for a while, he seemed to wake her who slept: and by his art was so forceful that he made her eat the thing that burned in her hand, which she ate hesitantly.' (2001, p. 10-11).

[11] See his book **Dante Poet of the Secular World**, 2007a.

visionary experience', which was always there (1988, p. 21). Beatrice in this visionary dream 'gives herself to perception through a phenomenal guise that reveals and at the same time conceals her nature' (1988, p. 22). The source of this blindness lies in the problematic recognition created by just one word in the text, which appears just once in the 3rd chapter: naked (*nuda*): she was 'naked except that it seemed to me to be covered lightly with a crimson cloth' (Dante, 2001, p. 10-11). For Harrison, 'were it not for that one word in the prose, *nuda*, we could never quite be sure of Beatrice's womanhood, her corporeal facticity, as it were.' (1988, p. 22). Thus, her corporeality makes her a concrete figure rather than a merely phantasmatic projection of mystical and theological allegories, as some critics suppose.

Elsewhere in **Vita Nuova** she appears only dressed and 'above all *as* her dress' (1988, p. 22). In the memory of a nine-year-old boy the image of her dress is deeply engraved, and nine years later, when he is 'at the threshold of manhood' (1988, p. 23), he perceives her once again only by her attire. In Harrison's opinion, even granting the claims of color symbolism, one must wonder about the psycho-logic that causes the young man's perception to stop once again at the chromatic surface of Beatrice's clothing. (1988, p. 23). He asks whether Beatrice is simply a shrouded phantasm drifting through the merely symbolic space of a poetic imagination' or 'a real woman walking on the street' (1988, p. 23). The 'marvellous vision' proves Beatrice's womanhood through her 'corporeal density' revealed not by the crimson dress, but by the body which is veiled by the dress.

In a deeper level, Harrison thinks that 'the body of Beatrice is the "repressed" element in Dante's field of vision' (1988, p. 23). He indicts that no one needs much psychoanalysis or psychology to state that the dream and the 'marvellous vision' entail 'a sexual awakening' (1988, p. 23). This vision, engraved in the nine-year-old boy's memory, is awakened in the eighteen-year-old young man's psyche. Then, what remains for Harrison is to ask 'why the psychic pulsations that produce the dream [...] assume this specific and highly charged symbolic configuration?' (1988, p. 23). He sums up such conundrum revealing the ambivalent meaning of her crimson cloth:

> While it prohibits a view of her naked body, it also allows Dante to recognize the body as a body without violating a code of courtesy to which he was socially and ideologically bound. The cloth, then, acts as a censor, or as a prohibition, but at the same time it acts as the very opposite of this. Insofar as it guards the presence of the naked body by veiling it, the cloth grants Dante the permission to look at the body and to see without seeing, so to speak. (1988, p. 23).

Thus, the body of Beatrice becomes, at the same time, a site of prohibition and

desire which cannot be described and praised overtly, just idealised through mystical and idealistic frameworks. After this vision, Dante starts to reflect upon the body, creating thus the first poem on his beloved Beatrice. However, in the sonnett she figures no longer as naked, but only through the presence of a cloth.[12] For Harrison, this is the 'genesis of the figure of Beatrice – her poetic potentiality' (1988, p. 24). The presence of the crimson cloth 'becomes genetic', it means, it is the genesis of Dante's poetry. For him, 'Beatrice means an inaccessible corporeal density made accessible figurally and poetically, or, more broadly speaking, phenomenally' only by this cloth. (1988, p. 24). Consequently, Dante can only praise and love Beatrice through poetic pontentiality. He instantly projects his desire – his sexual desire in this sexual awakening – on the body of Beatrice; then through thinking, pondering and imagination he drives such desire to poetic creation. Obsessively, he seeks for materialising poetically his desire in poetry, because the body of Beatrice is just made accessible 'in its figurative re-presentation' and in the cloth that veils it (1988, p. 24). That is his painstaking search through his literary carreer and his painstaking pilgrimage throughout *Hell*, *Purgatory*, and *Heaven*.

Moreover, Dante's 'role of authority' is to manipulate 'the scene of desire'. He creates in this scene a personification genetically engendered by the crimson cloth. His heart, 'fraught with phallic symbolism' is eaten by Beatrice due to his lord's order (1988, p. 24). The lord's role in Dante's dream 'is ultimately to guard the cloth's concealment of Beatrice's body and to ensure a wholly figurative transaction of desire' between Dante and her body (1988, p. 24-25). The lord, who seems a very powerful figure, holds, in one of his hands, the body of Beatrice, veiled in the crimson cloth, and, in his other hand, he holds Dante's heart, which is the 'flaming emblem of passion' in the scene. (1998, p. 25). The projection of his desire on the cloth and her idealising figure, distanced by the lord, is linked to a reversal in the scene. In Harrison's opinion,

> The reversal whereby the erotic or even phallic fire of the heart is consumed by Beatrice figures as a dubious consummation of desire brought on by the lord, for instead of a consummation we have a momentous incorporation of the heart in the withdrawing body of Beatrice. (1988, p. 25)

It is as if Beatrice captures Dante's heart and desire in a way that the only possibility of recovering it lies in Dante's possession of her body. Thus Beatrice becomes an idealistic

[12] 'To every captive soul and gentle heart / into whose sight this present speech may come, / so that they might write its meaning for me, / greetings, in their lord's name, who is Love. // Already a third of the hours were almost past / of the time when all the stars were shining, / when Amor suddenly appeared to me / whose memory fills me with terror. // Joyfully Amor seemed to me to hold / my heart in his hand, and held in his arms / my lady wrapped in a cloth sleeping. // Then he woke her, and that burning heart / he fed to her reverently, she fearing, / afterwards he went not to be seen weeping.' (Dante, 2001, p. 13)

female figure whom Dante seeks for representing in his art. However, 'his active desire gets reduced to a passive impotence and castrated by the overdetermined circumstance. The flaming object tropologically condenses the raw urgency of desire' (Harrison,1988, p. 25). Also, Harrison suggests that the flaming object means a 'sinister fragmentation', since the extraction of his heart and Beatrice's eating it figure simultaneously as 'a literal dismemberment, a figurative castration' (1988, p. 25). Such dismemberment or figurative castration makes him a passive lover who cannot achieve his beloved object any more. The metaphor of the dead heart suggesting 'the castrated phallus' (1988, p. 25) conveys the symbolic meaning that his desire must be punished by castration and impotence. Thus, the crimson cloth figures as a symbol of 'censorship, disclosure, and figuration' of Dante's desire. (1988, p. 26). The crimson cloth remains as a symbol which represents and condenses both the expropriation and apropriation of the body of Beatrice, the permission and denial of Dante's unconfessed sexuality and sexual desire. The metaphoric field of the poetic desire is atomised in the crimson cloth, which metonimically substitutes the body of Beatrice and enables the poet's desire. Moreover, such desire would imaginatively be achieved in a distant afterlife, after Beatrice's death, who, most contradictorily, even there remained untouched by the poet. Then, the body of Beatrice is the 'undisclosed substance of revelation' and its accessibility is only permitted through the veiling cloth, which leads Dante to his 'new life [Vita Nuova] to the aesthetic order [...] to the quest for a revelation through the poetic enterprise'. (1988, p. 28). The blind spot – the concealed body of Beatrice – in that scene, potentialises, through the withdrawal of her body, the inspiration of Dante as a lover to his poetic creation.

However, Dante's first work fails to represent her body and his desire. His failure is conveyed by Dante's attitude of being silent until he can 'speak of Beatrice more worthily'. (2001, p. 80). Such failure reveals Dante's incapability of seeing and confessing 'the true meaning of his 'marvellous vision' in the dream (1988, p. 30). If the dream and its 'marvellous vision' is the starting point of his literary creation, he cannot re-present the meaning of such revelation and postpone it to his next work, his **Divine Comedy**. The first stimulus in the dream scene makes Dante more and more distant from the body of Beatrice: 'never again, not even in paradise, will Dante be so near to Beatrice' (1988, p. 30). Consequently, only the crimson cloth remains as a locus of idealisation of a vision whose meaning was not possible to be grasped. Thus, 'the distance of a veil that holds him off from her naked presence gradually becomes the vast expanse of a cosmos that the poet will traverse in an inexorable venture of representation.' (1988, p. 30). His desire is driven to

poetic creation as an attempt to fulfil and depict such desire.

Therefore, it is inferable from Harrison's analysis that Dante represents his inward desire, conceals and transforms it into poetic mimesis. He represents in this scene a fully desiring self, as well as his feelings, emotions, suffering, ideas and anxieties. Dante represents a desiring sexual and sensual inwardness in his work, even though it is obsessively veiled by the crimson cloth and then by poetic and imagetic figuration. His poetic undertaking will figuratively hide and repress his innermost uncofessed sexual and sensual desire for Beatrice in his poetry. His poetic creation will veil such desire in metaphors, images, silences and anxieties.

However, in terms of literary creation Harrison is not the first critic to note Dante's innovation in literature. Auerbach wrote a beautiful analysis of Dante's works in his book **Dante Poet of the Secular World** (2007a).[13] Auerbach points out that Dante was one of the first to represent the human inwardness in human historicity and fate. For Auerbach, Dante in his **Comedy** 'transforms Being into experience; he makes the world *come into being* by exporing it.' (2007a, p. 94). Every character in *Hell* or *Purgatorio* acts according to his feelings and desires. Human Being is always the result of their feelings, actions, ideas, convictions and anxieties. Dante's achievement is to represent human inwardness in a new literary form. According to Auerbach (2007a), 'for Dante, as for the earlier poets, the primary factor was an inward striving for form, and such a striving was already present in high degree when he found both a confirmation and a model in the poems of Virgil and other Latin writers' (2007a, p. 53). Dante creates a new form of language, syntax and twists which enables him to represent inwardness through action. For Auerbach, Dante 'discovered the European representation (Gestalt) of man' and that makes him the father of modern literature (2007a, p. 174). Auerbach points that man in Dante's work is no longer a remote hero, but a man with human traits. For Auerbach, Dante represents

> Man, not as a remote legendary, not as an abstract or anecdotal representative of an ethical type, but man as we know him in his living historical reality, the concrete individual in his unity and wholesome; and in that he has been followed by all subsequent portrayers of man, regardless of whether they treated a historical or mythical or a religious subject. (2007a, p. 174-175)

Though Augustine represented his inner feelings in his work, Dante's representation of the human being is a rather humanised self in his characters, acting and suffering the consequences of his actions. In Dante, 'the empirical person, the individual

[13] It is quite strange, however, why Harrison did not quote Erich Auerbach's work, first published in 1961 in the United States.

with his inner life, could become an object of mimesis.' (2007a, p. 179). This argument by Auerbach enhances that Beatrice just as other figures in his **Comedy** are not represented as a mere evasive figure. The lifelikeness of his works makes Beatrice seem a woman, as any character in the **Comedy** figures as a human being. The renewing literary form enabled the mimesis of inwardness in his poetry.

Likewise, centuries later Shakespeare will represent, in the drama, rather humanised figures such as Hamlet, Viola, Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Shylock, Lear, Cleopatra, and many other in his dramas. Especially in **The Merchant of Venice**, Shylock wil project his innermost feelings in material things, such as his ducats and his 'turquoise', the ring he was given by his bereaved wife Leah, which Jessica will dispisingly sell for a monkey. As soon as he discovers that Jessica sold his ring, he will uncontrollably rage on the streets for his loss and he will claim his lost ring, wherein he projected his affection regarding his wife. Shakespeare innovated his drama with the mimesis of inwardness, just as he deepened the representations of psychic inner workings such as what Psychoanalysis will name projections, desires, anxieties, and conscience.

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