

DANTE'S BEATRICE AS A THREAT TO MASCULINITY

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ABSTRACT

Through the course of Dante's poetic creation, Beatrice proves to be a steady source of inspiration for major aspects of his work. The poet's devotion to portraying Beatrice in such a glorified manner is justified by the lasting impact she left on him in life. By dedicating a majority of his publications to her, Dante expressed the sincerity of his intense feelings for Beatrice to his readers and brought a sentiment of authentic credibility to her characterization in the poems. It is these considerations that qualify Beatrice as perhaps the most significant Dante figure, making her stand out amongst the many other characters he writes. A tried endeavor for many Dante scholars has been determining Beatrice's true purpose in the plotlines of the poet's pieces. Upon my own analysis of Beatrice's ultimate role in Dante's poems it became evident that she not only redefines gender norms, but operates as a mode of exposing the fragility of what constitutes a male and the weakness of idealized male performance. Beatrice's character enacts a tangible threat to the established concept of masculinity in effect during Dante's era.

INTRODUCTION

Being that Beatrice is such a widely discussed figure of Dante's poetry, there exists a significant range of approaches to the critical conversation surrounding her character. A balance of shared ideas mixed with original theories pertaining to Beatrice's role are in circulation within the realm of Dante scholars. Jacoff, for instance, seems to stand more separate from other scholars in her insistence that Beatrice plays a variety of roles which depend upon the context at any given point in the poetry. In other words, this scholar believes that Beatrice cannot be deemed allegorical or reduced to any one specific correlative, but instead her different purposes combine for an overall meaning of general importance in Dante's work. This take is certainly emblematic of the scholar's commendation for how versatile Beatrice is as a character.

A particular common theme of discourse is detectable through the publications of Lewis, Parker, and Black, who deliberate about how the historical background of Beatrice in Dante's lifetime influenced his characterization of her and inspired his poetics. These critics claim that the personal feelings Dante held towards Beatrice translate into the development of his plots, and that conversations between the poet and Beatrice represent moments of his self-awareness. They suggest that thinking about these interactions psychoanalytically allows for readers to gain insight about the ethical values and philosophies the poet held. Some scholars examine Beatrice through comparisons to other literary events in an attempt to better understand her actions within the poetry. Brownlee, for instance, considers the parallels between departures in *The Divine Comedy* and in Virgil's *Ainead* to reveal how Beatrice acts as an instrument of Dante's salvation.

Following this trend of Beatrice as a means for religious redemption, scholars such as Kim, Holmes, Iannucci, and Aleksander contend that analogies can be drawn between her character and Christ. Kim points out instances in which Beatrice reenacts biblical events by embodying Mary, mother of Christ. Holmes argues that Beatrice bears a resemblance to Sapientia, who is a female-gendered version of Christ, and that this qualifies her as a pawn in an ethical choice posed by the Dante so that her reappearances throughout the *Commedia* represent returns to a theological lifestyle for the poet. Iannucci explains how the advent of Beatrice is comparable to the advent of Christ, but also maintains that in spite of how her actions are intended to replicate Christ she is still a feminine being whom Dante celebrates in his writing. Aleksander works to articulate how Beatrice moves the Pilgrim towards spirituality

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throughout the *Commedia*. While those scholars' most connectable ideas are in their association of Beatrice with Christ, their constant acknowledgement of Beatrice's feminine energy being upheld despite her resemblance to a godly being is also a significant aspect of their logic.

This component of Kim, Holmes, Iannucci, and Aleksander's collective findings leads into the gender conversation surrounding Beatrice's character, which scholars such as Kirkpatrick and Potter take part in. Kirkpatrick claims that Beatrice poses a problem for feminist critics, and that she is more humanist than either male or female. He goes on to say that her character allows Dante to play around with new perspectives on the relationship between men and women. A supporting point Kirkpatrick draws from Dante's work is that the selflessness which the poet regards the ideal woman with through Beatrice's character is a particularly notable factor in the development of Dante's ideas regarding gendered interactions. In another contribution to the conversation of Beatrice's impact on the establishment of gender, Potter writes that Dante's poetry is an attempt to free himself from Beatrice's feminine power over him in real life. This scholar also believes that the use of vulgar language in Beatrice's dialogue brings a sense of dignity and nobility to the poetry, and therefore indicates that the work is addressed to a male audience. The effect she describes is a diminishment of Beatrice's irrational feminine power through the device of typically masculine traits.

Scholars have brought the aforementioned views on Beatrice's character to the table, so I will be discussing my unique findings in regard to her role for the sake of adding a new theory to the mix. Building specifically off the already existing rhetoric surrounding Beatrice's place in the gender narrative, I contend that she functions as a means of revealing the delicate nature of the structured masculine form implemented by societal gender standards. Her character embodies a direct threat to masculinity itself via her conduct and the ensuing effects her behavior has on male figures. In my argument, I aim to combine my insight as an admirer of Dante's work with my research beyond the text to articulate the manner in which Beatrice achieved her status as a force to reckon with for the establishment of masculinity. This objective will be achieved through deconstruction of instances within Dante's poetry pertaining to Beatrice's mannerisms and physicality.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To preface my argument, a foundational understanding of the historical background surrounding Beatrice and the status of gender roles at the time of Dante's writing is required. In order to grasp a sense of the motivating factors behind Dante's consistent poetic idolization of Beatrice, it is necessary to have a basic comprehension of her literal existence in the reality of his life. A young Dante experienced love at first sight upon seeing Beatrice, and his strong adoration for her did not falter throughout the rest of his lifetime. He upheld his love even after her premature death, and found himself in a deep depression at the loss of his dream woman. Once a fundamental appreciation of how Dante felt towards the Beatrice he knew in his actual life is acknowledged, we can safely assume that the way he wrote her gender performance as a character is in alignment with the type of gender act he most admires. Knowing how highly Dante thinks of Beatrice is a key element of recognizing the fact that the poet would choose to characterize her gender behavior in a way he most approves of. It is also important to consider how deviated our current perception of roles and expectations is from the outlook on gender performance that reigned during Dante's time. Our modern approach to gender might alter how the poem is perceived by a present-day audience. Having a cemented set of ideologies about how males and females are anticipated to behave in accordance with today's standards should be actively avoided, as it might change the effectiveness of Dante's suggestions about the topic of gender performance.

Prior to delving into the bulk of this essay's argument, readers should know that the teachings of the Church dictated what was acceptable versus what was unacceptable in terms of gender conduct during Dante's time. The Church held the beliefs that women should be accommodating to the mainstream male gaze in terms of both behavior and physicality. Being that the general population lived by the rule of the Church during his lifetime, the way Dante writes of Beatrice's demeanor as a woman is considerably radical and progressive. All of this background information must be kept in mind while examining the work of Dante, since putting ourselves in his shoes is the only method of fully recognizing the significance of his words.

Beatrice makes Dante question everything he has been led by societal standards to believe about gender and attraction. This is evident through his fixation with her, regardless of how she epitomizes the antithesis of what a stereotypical female would be during his time. The gender roles surrounding Beatrice's emergence in the plot can be best understood through a comparison of her behavior to that of other admired female characters. For instance, when Francesca is introduced in Canto V of *Inferno*, the way she treats Dante sets the standard for what feminine expectations would have been at the time of the poem's publication. Her etiquette is particularly representative of conventional femininity. Upon seeing him, Francesca calls out, "'O living creature, gracious and so kind,'" (*Inferno*, V:88) The inherent whimsical qualities of her speech is indicative of traits we associate with femininity today. Dante's acknowledgement of her attractiveness after hearing her speak suggests that these same attributes were considered to be in alignment with the idealized female gender performance during his era. The way she refers to him in such an elevated way conveys an aura of respect she immediately bestows upon Dante. Francesca puts herself in a position of subordination at Dante's presence by dubbing him so gracious and kind, thus automatically categorizing herself as the devotee and non-dominant figure of their interaction. This allows readers a foundational understanding of the way that women habitually deduced themselves to be lesser than and in reverence of men during Dante's time, and the Pilgrim's positive reaction to this behavior exemplifies the admiration women would get for fulfilling that role.

To further confirm the expectations of optimal feminine behavior during Dante's lifetime, it is helpful to examine the poet's encounter with Matelda. In Canto XXVIII of *Purgatorio*, he is taken in her beauty and describes "her virgin modesty / enjoining her to look with downcast eyes," (*Purgatorio*, XXVIII:56-57) It is the following line in which Dante recounts that physical act as having satisfied his desire, which hints to the reader that this type of submissive body language in women was idealized. The mode in which Matelda is able to attract Dante by presenting herself as visually meek and passive reveals the standards of bodily female gender performance in effect. How she looks down and is self-effacing in his vicinity is an unmistakable commentary on the power structure that society enforced between men and women, in which males felt validated by female subjugation. This claim is proven through the pleasure that the Pilgrim experiences as a direct result of witnessing her mannerisms at play. Through analysis of Matelda's physical conduct and the immediate impact it has on her male observer, readers can get a sense of the female gender role that society approved of when the poem was written.

Francesca's characterization aided in defining the anticipated gender behavior for women at the time of Dante's publications, and Matelda's appearance provides insight on the physical aspects of womanhood that were idolized in this period. Combined, the female characters in *The Divine Comedy* allow present-day readers to gain a comprehensive understanding of what the gender expectations of the time were. Dante's audience can confidently assert based on evidence from the text that women were culturally anticipated to be submissive and to build up the egos of men around them. Once this knowledge of the settled gender performativity guidelines of Dante's era is perceived, it becomes possible to recognize how Beatrice deviates from the norm. In contrast to how the other women in the poems perform in accordance with their assigned gender roles, Beatrice challenges these pre-established expectations through her non-conventionally feminine actions.

BEATRICE'S BEHAVIOR

Beatrice's character seems to behave in an exact opposite manner to that of her female counterparts in *The Divine Comedy*. Where other women are submissive and aim to flatter men by putting them in the position of power, Beatrice is domineering and omniscient. In Canto IV of *Paradiso* when Dante is questioning himself and uncertain of what to do, Beatrice comes up with solutions by taking over and speaking for him. The poet feels indebted to her for this act of service and reflects that her words, "laid both of [his] doubts to rest." (*Paradiso*, IV:117) By solving the dilemma, Beatrice embodies the masculine role of being in charge and Dante is designated as the more compliant individual as he lets her fix the issue at hand. In other words, Beatrice challenges the anticipated code of subservient conduct laid out for her as a female by stepping confidently into the assumed male role in the situation. This proves to be a recurring theme throughout her appearances in *The Divine Comedy*. In Canto VII of *Paradiso*, Dante poses many questions to which he is struggling with. He openly admits that, "not long did Beatrice let [him]

suffer," (*Paradiso*, VII:16) By giving complete clarification to his wonderings, Beatrice is once again the leader in times of trouble and Dante sits back in amazement of her ability to produce solutions. Her compulsion to take control is an expression of masculinity that defies the established female norm of being protected by, and thus beholden to, men. This pattern of behavior continues in Canto XXIII of *Paradiso*, when Beatrice announces events and tells Dante what to do. Dante refers to her as his "loving guide" (*Paradiso*, XXIII:34), and in his state of confused fear she demands, "'Open your eyes, look straight into my face!'" (*Paradiso*, XXIII:46) Thinking back on how other female characters in the poems are described in their shy politeness around men, this scene places Beatrice at odds with her anticipated gender performance as she barks orders at the male Pilgrim. Similarly to the way she challenges the intended helpless demeanor of a woman in Canto XXIII, Beatrice proves her ability to regulate a given scenario in Canto XXVII of *Paradiso*. Enduring a concerning lack of understanding regarding his surroundings, Dante turns to Beatrice for help. She instructs him, "'Lower your sight, / look down and see how far you have revolved.'" (*Paradiso*, XXVII:77-78) In her explanation of the functions of the sphere the pair finds themselves in, Beatrice embraces a leadership role over Dante. The poet explains how he is transfixed by her gaze, which is interesting when considered in comparison to how women like Matelda in the poem avoid making eye contact with men. The tables have seemingly turned here when it comes to gender performance, since Dante is the one deeply intimidated by Beatrice's stare and Beatrice is in power as the all-knowing guide he esteems despite the fact that she is a woman.

While every scene with Beatrice certainly adds to the case of her resistance to adhere with the gender narrative, perhaps the most contributing scene of all in the effort to prove this notion is her grand entrance in Canto 30 of *Purgatorio*. The reasoning behind my insistence of it being the most contributory occurrence is due to how unequivocal Beatrice is in her blatant disregard for fulfilling a feminine gender role. Right from the point of her arrival, Beatrice demands that all attention be directed to her by shouting, "'Yes, look at me! Yes, I am Beatrice!'" (*Purgatorio*, XXX:73) This request alone is shocking for readers who understand the polite and shy qualities of the idealized women within Dante's poetry, and she forces them to abandon their assumptions that a woman would never order a man to obey her. Based on the interactions between Dante and other women in the poems, the audience automatically thinks that female characters will be compliant in the presence of male characters and avoid confrontation. Feminine submissiveness is clearly a typical trait of positive nature, based on how well-received women with these qualities are in Dante's poetry. Beatrice, however, opposes this feminine gender expectation and urges that the male Pilgrim looks at her. She goes on to speak in a rather stern manner to Dante, rebuking him for wasting his talents and wandering from the path he should be following. Beatrice reminds him of his failure by stating that, "'had he allowed his gifts / to bloom, he would have reaped abundantly,'" (*Purgatorio*, XXX:116-117) but that his metaphorical soil was something he "'left untilled, its bad seeds flourishing.'" (*Purgatorio*, XXX:120) A woman reprimanding a man is an act of major disrespect towards the imbalanced and male-ruled power system in gender roles, yet Beatrice takes it even further by reiterating that Dante sank to such low depths without displaying any signs of mercy towards his feelings or regret for her harshness. Beatrice challenges gender expectations in an overt way through her command for everyone to concentrate all their focus on her, and her eagerness to admonish a man when given the chance.

DANTE AND FLUIDITY OF GENDER

Dante characterizes Beatrice as so masculine in her disposition, yet is consistently and completely enamored by her. This speaks volumes on the poet's perception of gender as fluid, and signifies to readers that he is open minded about the concept. One of the many instances where this is discernible occurs in Canto XXXI of *Purgatorio*, when Dante looks into Beatrice's eyes and feels an overpowering desire and deep passion. He details how, "a thousand yearning flames of [his] desire / held [his] eyes fixed upon [her] brilliant eyes," (*Purgatorio*, XXXI:118-119) all the while Beatrice's gaze is trained upon a griffin. Beatrice is defying gender norms here by facing a fearful beast and staring it down using the generally masculine trait of bravery, and Dante is in wonderment of her. Through this example, the audience gets a sense of how infatuated Dante is with the idea of not aligning with anticipated gender behavior. This premise can be based on the Pilgrim's observation of Beatrice acting against her gender

role and his heavy affection towards her that derives straight from it. Another indisputably recognizable case of this takes place in Canto XXIII of *Paradiso*, when Beatrice has just explained the surrounding setting and ordered Dante to behold it. Readers can note with ease how her behavior is more masculine than feminine here, since she is in the all-knowing position of power and authority to demand Dante do what she instructs. Immediately after she directs him to take in the setting, the Pilgrim discloses, "I saw her face aflame with so much light, / her eyes so bright with holy happiness, / that I shall have to leave it undescribed." (*Paradiso*, XXIII:22-24) Essentially, the Pilgrim is so captivated by her societally non-feminine actions that he declines to find the words to describe the esteem he holds for her. Through this effect that Beatrice's attitude has on Dante, it is clear that the poet does not think it is necessary to adhere to gender roles and in fact is obsessed with her rebellious and different nature as a woman who lives in contrast to what their culture promotes. Beatrice being masculine in her performance and acting against the gender expectations for her as a woman is almost always promptly followed by the poet venerating her. This says a lot about how Dante feels towards complying with gender norms; the poet himself is most likely questioning what is masculine versus what is feminine through his writing of Beatrice's character and the feelings it evokes for him. A vital aspect of this determination to keep in mind is that the ideas Dante experiments with are very progressive and unexpected for his time in terms of gender role guidelines.

Since the concept of gender as a fluid subject was so forward-thinking at the time that Dante wrote *The Divine Comedy*, the poet did not have the language to articulate his thoughts on it. Beatrice is a vessel through which readers can gather sentiments that Dante struggled to communicate in a direct manner. The poet achieves this by relating her to male figures, because he would be taking away from his points about gender performance if he were to liken her to female figures. This is detectable in many instances within Canto XXX of *Purgatorio*, the first being when Dante cites, "*Benedictus qui venus!*" (*Purgatorio*, XXX:19) Here, Dante is referencing a quote from the bible that translates to "Blessed is He who cometh." The poet shifted from third to second person point of view for the sake of reciting this line in a matter that was appropriate to the context of the Canto, yet left *Benedictus* in its masculine form. This is notable because the line is applied to Beatrice as a precedent to her appearance, so the poet is maintaining the quote's original allusion to Christ despite her being female. His attention to detail with adjusting the perspective makes it safe to assume that keeping the masculine form was a conscious choice made by Dante, intended to allow him a means for conveying the intense masculinity of Beatrice's character traits. The practice of comparing her to a male figure is once again applied later in the Canto when Dante writes that Beatrice is acting "just as an admiral," (*Purgatorio*, XXX:58) in an attempt to align her with a militant being. This decision to correlate her role to that of a position which only men would hold at the time of this publication is the poet's way of conveying his thoughts about how gender can be fluid in performance. Dante uses the female character of Beatrice to represent this notion in a way that words would not permit him to in his lifetime. To further express this impression in Canto XXX, Virgil becomes the "mother" in comparison to Beatrice because she is so much more paternal and masculine than him in character. Dante turns to Virgil "with all the confidence / that makes a child run to its mother's arms, / when he is frightened or needs comforting," (*Purgatorio*, XXX: 43-45) making the gender roles opposite of what they are supposed to be according to cultural principles since the men in this scene are described as sensitive and therefore feminine in her presence. When Beatrice is around, this effect is almost always implemented. Dante's technique of expressing his ideas in a coherent way to confront the language limitations he faces is to build Beatrice up as the most macho and dominant person in any given scene, thus masculinating her but still preserving the fact that she is a woman. The result of this strategy is communication of the belief that gender performance is a decision people make regarding their way of conducting themselves, instead of a set of naturally-given traits they have no control over.

The same effort by the poet is salient in Canto IV of *Paradiso*, when Dante compares Beatrice's actions to those which a well-respected man would take. He states, "Then Beatrice did what Daniel did / when he appeased Nebuchadnezzar's wrath / that drove him to such unjust cruelty." (*Paradiso*, IV:13-15) By drawing parallels between Beatrice's behavior and that of a heroic male biblical figure, Dante touches down on the way that women can enact stereotypically masculine accomplishments. Without the language to candidly say it, the poet uses a comparison to this male figure to suggest that Beatrice and

her actions should be acknowledged with the same level of respect and awe that people worship holy masculine personalities with.

FRAGILITY OF MASCULINITY

Not only does Beatrice redefine gender norms in the forenamed ways, but she also operates as a mode of exposing the fragility of masculinity and the weakness of the idealized male performance. A particularly conspicuous instance of this is in Canto XXX of *Purgatorio*, when she has just harshly reprimanded Dante. The Pilgrim's instant reaction to being scolded by her is detailed through his admission, "I lowered my head and looked down at the stream, / but, filled with shame at my reflection there, / I quickly fixed my eyes upon the grass." (*Purgatorio*, XXX:76-78) Dante is evidently deeply ashamed of himself and cannot stand to even look at his own face in the reflection as a result of being rebuked by Beatrice. His reaction to being criticized by a woman is indicative of the feeling that he has been stripped of his masculine pride that comes with being a man, a sensitivity that was brought on by the actions of Beatrice alone. Any and all attempts for Dante to uphold his masculinity are immediately given up with shame at the point of witnessing a woman behaving in a manly way. In this token, Beatrice accomplishes exposure of the fragility of masculinity with ease through her modification and loosening of the strict boundaries enforced by societal gender norms. When she behaves like a man would typically be expected to, the surrounding male figures feel violated and deprived of their societally-assigned obligation to be the ones acting in such a manner.

Directly following the Pilgrim's remorse and shame brought on by Beatrice, he declares, "I was the guilty child facing his mother, / abject before her harshness: harsh, indeed, / is unripe pity not yet merciful." (*Purgatorio*, XXX:79-81) By comparing Beatrice to a mother and himself to a child, Dante is revealing the way that she strips him of his masculinity by diminishing his existence down to that of a prepubescent boy lacking the sexual maturity that defines a man. The poet most likely chooses to use the term mother instead of father in this particular occurrence because he must still acknowledge that Beatrice is a female and has feminine attributes in order to express the message that women can be a threat to masculinity. Dante would be taking away from his point of Beatrice and women in general being able to override established masculine qualities and behaviors if he were to categorize her as a father and given her only male characteristics. In order to prove gender as fluid, the poet had to uphold the underlying fact that Beatrice is still feminine and has the qualities of a mother to show that women can emasculate men. In this way, Beatrice's genetic femininity actually destructs Dante's natural masculinity. By classifying her as a mother and the outcome of this being himself as a child, the poet conveys the notion that Beatrice makes his sense of manliness weaker and less effective.

Beatrice's character continues to enact a tangible threat to masculinity in her encounters with Dante during Canto XXXII of *Purgatorio*. In her typical fashion of acting in opposition to societally feminine norms, Beatrice takes charge and makes orders for the male Pilgrim to follow. Dante reacts with the confession, "Thus Beatrice. I obediently, / devoutly, at the feet of her commands, / gave mind and eye to satisfying her." (*Purgatorio*, XXXII:106-108) It is apparent through this recountal that the Pilgrim eagerly obeys all Beatrice's commands, so the way she behaves causes him to disregard his own societally expected role as a male. By carrying out stereotypically male deeds, Beatrice causes Dante to lose his culturally-given impulse to regulate situations and he finds himself in the submissive position that is typically reserved for women.

BEATRICE TAKES CONTROL

Continuing on in the plotline of Canto XXXII in *Purgatorio*, the climax takes place when an attack on Beatrice's chariot occurs. Instead of behaving under the circumstances in a way that society would anticipate her to as a woman, Beatrice dominates the situation and takes control. As Dante watches the scene of the bird and fox assault unfold before him, he writes, "My lady made it turn and run away, / as fast as its weak skin and bones could go, / accusing it of foul abominations." (*Purgatorio*, XXXII:121-123) To analyze this occurrence, readers must identify the masculinity of Beatrice's inclination to fend off

attacking animals. As previously established in Dante's poetry, society had developed the narrative that men are supposed to protect women in times of danger. Beatrice has no regard for this societal expectation to be fearful and let a man handle the arising situation, and this effectively deprives Dante of his male role. On account of her lack of hesitation to take action, Beatrice fulfills the duty of fending off the predators and Dante is robbed of his identity as the masculine figure. Beatrice functions as a threat to masculinity by forcing Dante to go from his gender-expected brave position as a man to the feminine-associated passive role through her conduct.

The damaging effects on masculinity that Beatrice's character inflicts extend into Canto IV of *Paradiso*. Right after Beatrice has solved the dilemma Dante is met with by speaking for him and governing the situation, the Pilgrim recalls, "Then Beatrice looked at me, her eyes / sparkling with love and burning so divine, / my strength of sight surrendered to her power - / with eyes cast down, I was about to faint." (*Paradiso*, IV:139-142) There is a lot to unpack in this quotation, and an adequate starting point is the context surrounding it. Before analyzing the content of the statement, readers must remember that it directly follows the male figure Dante being overridden and aided by the female figure Beatrice. This is already an example of how Beatrice depletes any sense of masculine authority that Dante may possess, further emphasized through the phrase "surrendered to her power". The next aspect to consider is the term "eyes cast down". This can be comprehended as an allusion to the feminine body language that Dante writes about in Matelda's characterization. The Pilgrim is showing physical signs of meek and passive energy in the presence of the masculine-behaved figure that is Beatrice. This proves how the way she carries herself with an attitude that does not align to her own feminine expectations takes away from Dante's potential to fulfill his male role, by forcing him into the female position. The final component of this excerpt to examine is Dante's faintness. The Pilgrim is literally stunned by Beatrice, thus she halts any possible displays of machismo he could perform. Fainting is associated with being weak and impressionable, which are societally feminine characteristics that Dante possesses as a consequence of Beatrice's masculine gender performance. The impact of Beatrice challenging gender norms through her domineering style of actions throws Dante off his entire game. The influence of her gender-fluid approach to behavior shows how fragile the idea of masculinity is, since all it takes to intimidate the male character of Dante is a woman who does not act the way she is assumed to. Beatrice does not simply deplete the Pilgrim's outward projection of masculine traits, but actually makes him start acting in ways that are stereotypically feminine. Her ability to reverse the gender narrative by rebelling against her assigned role is what qualifies Beatrice as a threat to what their society defined as masculinity.

CONCLUSION

Beatrice is evidently an influential character in the course of *The Divine Comedy*. Her refusal to conform with the institution of gender expectations during the era of the poem's publication left an impact on the plot and the figures within it. Scholars have debated extensively over the various theories of her ultimate role in the poems, but I believe that it most pertains to Dante's efforts to articulate a progressive perspective on the gender narrative. Many analytical steps in terms of her presence in *The Divine Comedy* are necessary measures in reaching this discovery, a process that is detailed in my explanation. Patience in studying her actions and their effects, however, proves to be a worthwhile effort that yields an appreciation of the mind and work of Dante. To wrap my argument up into a cohesive summary, I contend that Beatrice's character performs a threat to the established concept of masculinity in effect during Dante's era as evidenced by her ability to flip the assigned roles of men and women and the impact of this maneuver on the men she encounters.

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