

GUIDO GUINIZZELLI



PIVOTAL POET
OF MEDIEVAL
ITALIAN LITERATURE
BY
PETER LUCIA

Guido Guinizzelli:

Pivotal Poet of Medieval Italian Literature

By

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As ever, dedicated to Angela De Vito-Lucia

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Introduction

Guido Guinizzelli di Magnano was born about 1230 in Bologna and died in Monselice in 1276. His importance in Italian literature is that his small body of poems (only about twenty) represents the link between two styles: that of the so-called “Sicilian School,” which represents the official origin of Italian literature (to which one adds a nod to the various poets of central Italy and the still older French troubadours), and that of the Dolce Stil Nuovo (the “Sweet New Style”), which gave Italy its first truly elevated poetry. Actually, among his twenty poems only a few award him his singular position: they caught the eye of Dante, the movement’s most distinguished representative, who was inspired by Guinizzelli’s exulted use of the common tongue (the vernacular or *Il volgare*) in service of an advanced spiritualization of Love—and his application a kind of scientific rationale to the workings of it all. As Guinizzelli was born in the town of Europe’s oldest university, and was a jurist by profession, his tendencies toward logical and intellectual thought were surely present in his life. Thus, he is still considered the father of the Dolce Stil Nuovo and therefore the herald of better things to come.

But elevated thought was not always present in Guinizzelli’s work. Since he is commonly known (especially in English translation) only through a few of his fine Stil Nuovo poems, anyone who reads solely from popular

anthologies will be largely unaware of the less mature, less refined side of his work. This is the side of the overblown sentiments, the lightning bolts—the earth shaking underfoot and the “lethal” misery of unrequited love—all of which is found in the older love poetry (and which can be chuckle-worthy to modern sensibilities). His dated and derivative work, which draws from the lesser aspects of the Provençal (troubadouric) and “Sicilian School” range of poetic features, stands in contrast to his “doctrinal” masterpiece, *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore*, whose spirituality is in line with Dante’s *Donna Angelica* in the name of Beatrice, his great love who would lead him through Paradise in *The Divine Comedy*. *Al cor gentil* was no doubt Dante’s (and many others’) favorite, a poem which any decent anthology of Italy’s best medieval poetry must include.

Nevertheless, and for all his earthly praise, Dante is not one to forget a person’s shortcomings. John D. Sinclair, in his essay on Canto XXVI of *Purgatorio*, gives an interesting interpretation to why the Florentine poet placed Guinizzelli, and the Provençal poet Arnaut Daniel, in Purgatory among the penitents of lust. He attributes their fate to their poetic output, which contains many poems of “amatory passion without measure or restraint or trace of spiritual value.” Sinclair goes on to ask: “Was it their greater work, belonging to the poetic succession which culminated in Dante’s praise of Beatrice and his vision of her in paradise, was for him the sign and

proof of their repentance?" Considering the all-encompassing seriousness that Dante attached to poetry, Sinclair's interpretation is worth pondering.

Note on the Translations

Guinizzelli's poems consist of *canzoni* and *sonetti*. My English translation of his poems represents a kind of youthful experiment (well updated) to account for each of the poet's words while daring to retain his sentence structure. Naturally this goal has produced translations that are, to say least, non-standard English, and are not really meant to be read aloud, as regular translations can be. These "hyper-literal" renderings could be of use to beginning students, some translators, or interested individuals with a minimum of Italian, who wish to get a primary grasp of the antiquated words along with the often difficult structure of the poetic line. I have made only a minimal attempt at deep interpretation of the poet's often divergent "micro" meanings—and very little on structural analysis—which many scholarly books can provide. In the latter case, for example, I simply use the common word *stanza* instead of words like *terzina* (three-line stanza) or *quartina* (four-line stanza) and rarely comment of the significance of rhyme.

Grading the shades of difference in the evolution of various words and expression—and countless other aspects of the poems—is an investigation

for high scholarship; and these are the kinds of considerations that motivate extended research: alternate meanings (shades of meaning, actually) are discoverable in deep and learned readings. With this in mind I stress the important fact that in my translations I have, for the most part, chosen most direct sense of the words and expressions, as I interpreted *direct* at that time (alongside the deeper help of scholarly commentators).

In short, this essay is an unusual experiment in that it attempts to straddle the line between scholarship and popular reading.

The enumeration of the poems is that of Gianfranco Contini in his *Poeti del Duecento* (vol. II). It is not a chronology; but it happens to be excellent for the introduction of period trends. It is not known in what order Guinizzelli composed his poems, but to speculate on his intellectual progression would be an interesting exercise for students. It might also be useful to render my translations into straightforward verse. So far as I know, this essay provides the only complete English translation of Guinizzelli's work in one place (and it seems that some of his poems have never been translated before).

The Poems, Translations and Commentary

Canzone II

Madonna, il fino amor ched eo vo porto
mi dona sì gran gioia ed allegrezza,
ch'aver mi par d'Amore,
che d'ogni parte m'aduce conforto,
quando mi membra di voi la 'ntendenza, 5
a farmi di valore,
a ciò che la natura mi me mina
ad esser di voi, fina,
così distrettamente innamorato
che mai in altro lato 10
Amor non mi pò dar fin piagimento:
anzi d'aver m'allegra ogni tormento.

Dar allegrezza amorosa natura
senz'esser l'omo a dover gioi compire,
inganno mi simiglia:
ch'Amor, quand'è di propria ventura, 15
di sua natura adopera il morire,
così gran foco piglia;
ed eo, che son di tale amor sorpreso,
tegnom' a grave miso
e non so che natura dé compire, 20
se non ch'audit' ho dire
che 'n quello amare è periglioso inganno
che l'omo a far diletta e porta danno.

Sottil voglia vi poteria mostrare
come di voi m'ha prisò amore amaro, 25
ma ciò dire non voglio,

ché 'n tutte guise vi deggio laudare;
per ch'e' più dispietosa vo'n declaro
se blasmo vo'nde toglio.

Fiemi forse men danno a sofferire, 30
ch'Amor pur fa bandire
che tutta scanoscenza sia in bando,
e che ritrae 'l comando
a l'acusanza di colui c'ha 'l male:
ma voi non blasmeria; istia, se vale. 35

Madonna, da voi tegno ed ho 'l valore;
questo m'avene, stando voi presente,
che perd' ogni vertute:
ché le cose propinque al lor fattore
si parten volentero e tostamente 40
per gire u' son nascute;
da me fanno partut' e vène 'n voi,
là u' son tutte e plui;
e ciò vedemo fare a ciascheduno,
ch'el si mette 'n comuno 45
più volentero tra li assai e boni,
che non stan sol', se 'n ria parte no i poni.

In quella parte sotto tramontana
sono li monti de la calamita,
che dàn vertud' all'aire 50
di trar lo ferro; ma perch' è lontana,
vòle di simil petra aver aita
per farl' adoperare,
che si dirizzi l'ago ver' la stella.
Ma voi pur sète quella 55
che possedete i monti del valore,
unde si spande amore;

e già per lontananza non è vano,
ché senz' aita adopera lontano.

Ahi Deo, non so ch'e' faccia ni 'n qual guisa, 60
ché ciascun giorno canto a l'avenente,
e 'ntenderme non pare:
ché 'n lei non trovo alcuna bona entisa
und' ardisc' a mandare umilmente
a lei merzé chiamare; 65
e saccio ch'ogni saggio e' porto fino
d'Amor che m'ha 'n dimino;
ch'ogni parola che a ciò fòri porto
pare uno corpo morto
feruto a la sconfitta del meo core, 70
che fugge la battaglia u' vince Amore.

Madonna, le parole ch'eo vo dico
mostrano che 'n me sia dismisura
d'ogni forfalsitade;
né 'n voi trova merzé ciò che fatico, 75
né par ch'Amor possa per me drittura
sor vostra potestade;
né posso onqua sentire unde m'avelle,
se non ch'e' penso bene
ch'Amor non porì avere in voi amanza; 80
e credolo 'n certanza,
ch'elo vo dica: "Te·llo innamorato,
ch'a la fine poi mora disamato".

D'ora 'n avanti parto lo cantare
da me, ma non l'amare, 85
e stia ormai in vostra canoscenza
lo don di benvoglienza,

ch'i' credo aver per voi tanto 'narrato:
se ben si paga, molto è l'acquistato.

My lady, the perfect [noble] love I bring you me gifts me such great joy and happiness (which to me appears of [to come from, be a manifestation of] Love [itself]) that in every place [aspect] me it brings comfort, when I remember for you my desire, to make myself virtuous, so that my nature urges me to be of you, perfect one, so distressingly enamored, that never from another side [from nowhere else] Love not to me can give noble pleasure [from no other can Love give me noble pleasure]: in fact to have cheers me every torment [to have every torment cheers me].

To give happiness [to a] loving nature without [to] the man owing joy complete, [a] deception to me seems: for love, when it is of [its] own tendency, by its nature causes [one] to die, so great [a] fire it catches [starts]; and I, who am of such love seized, consider myself in graveness placed, do not know what [my] nature must accomplish, except that, if not heard I have said [if I had not heard said], that in that [kind of] love is perilous deception that [to] the man makes delight and [but] brings ruin.

A lesser desire to you would be able to show how for you it has taken me love bitter [how bitter love for you has seized me], but this to say I do not want, because in every fashion you I must praise; since more ruthless I you of it declare if blame from you I remove [I would declare you more ruthless if I remove from you the blame for bitter love]. It would do me perhaps less harm to suffer, because Love anyhow makes [one] to proclaim that all ingratitude be abolished, and that it removes the command [intensity] of the complaints of whomever has the malady: but you it [Love] would not blame. It resists, if [it is] worthy.

My lady, from you I keep and have value; [but] this to me happens, being you present, I lose every virtue: for the things near to their maker depart willfully and immediately to turn to where they are born; from me they make

departure and go to you, there where they are all [united] and abundant; and this we see make [happen] to anyone, should they themselves place in company most willing among the many and good, who do not stand alone, if in wicked place do not them you put.

In that part [region] under North Star there are the mountains of the magnet, that give virtue [power] to the air to attract iron; but since it [that region] is far, it [the air] wants of a similar stone to have help to make it operate, so that it directs the [compass] needle toward the [North] star. But you too are [like] that [in] that you possess the mountains of value [virtue, power], from which itself disperses love [from which [love disperses itself]; and in spite of distance is not [in] vain, because without help it operates [from] afar.

O God, I do not know what to do nor in what manner, because each day I sing to the comely one, and to understand me she does not seem: for in her I do not find any good [favorable] disposition [toward me]: because of which I dare to direct [myself] humbly to her for pity to ask; and I know that every wise [thing, demonstration] I bring perfect of Love that has me in dominion; that every word which about this out I bring seems a dead body wounded at the skirmish of my heart, which flees the battle where Love wins.

My lady, the words that I to you say show that in me there be a dearth of falsity; not in you does it [my dearth of falsity] find mercy for which I toil, nor does it seem that Love can through me [derive] right on [a right to] your power; I cannot ever sense why to me it [this lack of right] adheres, except that I think truly that Love could not have in you loving [i.e., not have a place in you]; I believe it in certainty, what he [Love] to you says: "Keep him in love, so that in the end then he dies unloved." [i.e., dies for want of love.]

From now on I part the singing from me, but not the loving; and be it now in your knowledge the gift of benevolence, which I believe to have for you much narrated: if well one pays, much is the acquired.

Dante appreciated this canzone for its structure and use of the volgare. In his Latin work *De vulgari eloquentia* (“On Eloquence in the Vernacular”), discussing poetic worthiness of Italy’s linguistic variations, he writes, simply, “The great Guido” (*maximus Guido*) and refers to the present canzone, though he does not mention its content. (His praise, at that point, was after Guinizzelli’s death and surely refers to his later output.)

The expression *fino amore* (sometimes *fin amor*) is important in medieval love poetry; and it was so to the Provençal versifiers and others. It refers to a refined, noble, virtuous love of the highest spiritual quality. Many of Guinizzelli’s poems incorporate this sentiment in one way or another and the notion is clearly embedded in the present poem. While *fin amor* can have civilizing effect on the poet, love—unrequited love—leads to torment—sometimes maddening torment and confusion—an effect evident in the present canzone and expressed in many personal ways in his other poems as well as in the work of his predecessors and contemporaries.

The poetic language of Guinizzelli is typical of the period. Many of the words and tropes passed from love poet to love poet, words that were not necessarily used in daily Italian speech. Words from Occitan, or the *langue d’oc* (the old language of southern France, spread by the troubadours in their singing travels) and the native verbal enrichments of the Sicilian

School (in the brilliant and fascinating court of Frederick II, in which the langue d'oc exerted significant poetic influence), play a characteristic role in the Italian verse of this period. Often variants of the same word can be found: *Auzel* (bird) as against the more Italian *augello* or even the modern *uccello*. A lot of these irregularities are the product of the northern transcribers of the Sicilian School's work. Practically all of the latter has, unfortunately, not survived in its original, untouched versions.

In the fifth stanza of this poem we find a reference to love and magnetism. The metaphor is in the love-poem tradition, though Guinizzelli moves towards further developments of borrowed ideas; and this "scientific" reference is a hint of what will be an energized feature in his work, particularly in his great *Al cor gentil*. In the present poem we see that love's operation is at one with certain natural phenomena. It is therefore a part of nature. It would even seem that the lady's power has one up on the natural world: whereas, in one reading, it appears that the North Star acts as an intermediary, the lady's power attracts *senz'aita* ("without help"). Might this be advanced telecommunication?

Over all the poem is about the contradiction between the overwhelming desire for his lady's regard and his philosophic (some might say convoluted) acceptance of her ruthless disregard. That she realizes this situation and deliberately allows it to happen is something the poet is aware

of (Stanza 7). But apparently the benefits outweigh the suffering. Indeed in the difficult third stanza he seems to say that his calling her ruthless is actually a sign of his dedication (rather than just a flat complaint, which a lesser love might register); it is better therefore to suffer loving her—and brave her disregard—than to be undedicated, which would be a sign of her diminished importance. He would suffer more under this condition and less with his attitude of acceptance, even if it is still painful. (*[D']aver m'allegro ogni tormento* —“To have every torment cheers me”—he says in the very first stanza.) Indeed, true love does not know ingratitude and Love itself can never blame. At the end of the poem he is left with the hope (leaves himself with the hope) that his benevolence will pay off.

Guinizzelli tries to work out his situation in words in what appears to be a deliberate series of contradictions; and thus he gives us a foretaste of his penchant for the challenge of reasoning. The poem still treats the theme of Love's torment, and his words, he confesses, seem like dead bodies fallen in the skirmish of his heart (Stanza 6). He will eventually abandon the suffering when he takes his innovative leap into the sweeter Stil Nuovo realm, though in the present poem he does exhibit the redeeming spiritual and moral qualities of Love and clearly states them, drawing from tradition. Not present, however (and still long off in this numbering of his poems), is

the beyond-the-world elevation of the subject that he will achieve (and which will so inspire Dante to of world-renown literary heights).

Canzone V:

Lo fin pregi' avanzato, ch'a lo meo cor sarrea, a ciò come sarrea, ch'ell' ha ogne valore inver' me comprovato?	5
Per fin amor sarrea, ché a dir non sarrea tutto quanto valore: per ch'e' noll vorrea dire, perché m'incresce dire, ché non posso 'l meo core dimostrare finero, acciò che non finero - la mia vita.	10
Finare mi convene, ch'e' mi son miso a tale che non dice mai tale, anzi mi fa orgoglianza; com' om che pinge bene colora viso tale che li conven mal, tale è soffrire orgoglianza: per che a me convene soffrir ciò che avene, ma eo voglio soffrire tutto lo meo penare, per ch'e' non ho penar - lungia stagione.	15 20 25

La sua beltà piagente
e 'l fin amor ch'è puro
inver' me che son puro, 30
in lei tutt' ha piagenza;
regn' a pregio valente
e valor che non pur'ò
dire sì alt' o puro,
tant' ha vera piagenza
già per cui lo meo core 35
altisce in tal lucore
che si ralluma come
salamandra 'n foco vive,
ché 'n ogni parte vive - lo meo core.

D'un'amorosa parte 40
mi vèn voler ch'è sole,
che inver' me più sòle
che non fa la pantera,
ched usa in una parte
che levantisce sole: 45
ché di più olor s'ole
su' viso che pantera.
Anche in vo' i' spero
merzé che non dispero,
perch' è 'n voi pietate, 50
fin pregio, bon volere,
per ch'è a voi voler - lo meo cor pare.

Radobla canoscenza
che 'n voi tuttora mira,
ché chiunqua vo mira 55
non ha consideranza;
m'avete ben saccenza
che chi voi serve e smira

non pò fallir, se mira
 vostra consideranza: 60
 per ch' eo non arò fallo,
 perch' eo dimori 'n fallo,
 ch'è già lunga speranza
 in voi d'amor ch'eo v'aggio,
 ch'e' non credo, s'e' v'aggio, - altro venire. 65

The perfect esteem elevated, which at my heart might be, at that [state] how could it [ever] be, [now] that she has every value [power] to me proved. Through perfect love [actual service to her] it would be [thus elevated], since to speak [describe it] would not be [do justice to] all of [her] value: for which [therefore] naught I would want to say, because it hurts me to say, since I cannot my heart demonstrate [its] end [consummate essence] , so that I do not [want to] end — my life [i.e., and instead be in actual service to her].

To end [die] me suits; since I me am put to such [a woman] that says never such [says as much; i.e., recognizes my state]; rather, me she makes [shows me] pride; Like a man who paints well [but] colors a face such [that] suits him badly [does not satisfy him], such it is to suffer [her] pride: because to me it suits to suffer [put up with] that which happens, but I want to suffer all my pain, because [then] I do not have pain - [for a] lengthy season.

Her pleasing beauty and the perfect love that is pure towards me who am pure [worthy], in her all has [noble/moral] pulchritude; she reigns at [such] prized capacity and [noble] worth that I cannot even have [words] to say so high or pure, so much she has true [noble/moral] pulchritude indeed for which my heart rises in such splendor that itself it illuminates like [the] salamander [which] in fire lives, since in every part [of her] lives - my heart.

From an amorous place [i.e., the lady] to me comes [a] will that is [like the] sun, which affects me more regularly than does not [than would] the

panther [the panther's power], which inhabits in a place [in] which rises [the] sun: even more than [the] odor [that] perfumes on [out from] the face of [the] panther. Also in [from] you I hope [for] pity which I do not despair [of], because it is in you pity, perfect merit, and good will, because it is to your will - my heart conforms.

Redoubles knowledge [knowledge increases] which in you constantly reflects, since whoever on you reflects does not have comprehension; but you have good awareness that who you serves [who serves you] and contemplates cannot err, if he reflects [on] your wisdom: for which I will not have error however much I live [find myself] in error, because it is indeed long hope in you of love that I for you have, so that I do not believe, if you I have [if I should have you] - else to happen. [i.e., that I would ever change].

This difficult and often obscure canzone strongly reflects the troubadouric courtly-love tradition and is considered an example of *Trobar Clus*. *Trobar* in Provençal, means *to find* or *to trope* (“trope” as in literary metaphors, etc.) and refers to the poetic composition itself. In fact, a troubadour is a “finder” (modern French *trouver*—to find) or “tropicist.” *Clus* means closed, hence we are dealing with a “closed composition,” a poem that is hermetic, obscure and meant only for the initiated. This was an elite form adopted by poets who fancied a certain degree of separation from “ordinary” folk, who they believed could never appreciate their “enlightened” perceptions. The style was later looked down upon by Dante, Cavalcante, and the other Stil Nuovo poets as the very opposite of elite. Rather they considered its willful obscurity, its repetitive word-tricks, its intricate rhyme

schemes, and its metrical gymnastics antiquated and foolish, its formal detachment from its subject alien to serious spiritual and philosophic exposition.

The salamander, in verse 38, is from a folkloric tradition that dates back to the Greeks, and we will see it again later on. In medieval times the creature was thought to be created by fire itself and capable of living in its flames. It is often a symbol of strength, resistance to hardship. In medieval love poetry it is connected with undying passion; and in the above poem it symbolizes the illumination-purification of the heart.

In verse 43, the panther, another creature in the Medieval Bestiary, makes an appearance. It is frequently a symbol of the death and resurrection of Christ, and is an enemy of the dragon. Guinizzelli refers only to the perfume that comes from the face (*viso*) of the panther, meaning the panther's mouth or nostrils. It was believed that after eating its meal the animal hid away in its lair for three days (as Christ lay in the tomb for three days) and then emerged with a sweetly perfumed breath. This scent was capable of attracting animals (except the evil dragon). Guinizzelli compares the power of the panther and its scent to the extreme potency of amorous desire engendered by the love object, who (to bring it down a level) may in fact have been sweetly perfumed.

As in the previous canzone (II) the poet alternates between praise and pain and tells of the benefits that accompany the suffering. Anyway, his

torment is lessened through suffering (which is a kind of escape valve, one must suspect). He wishes to be of service to his Lady, but she has great pride, for she recognizes her power; but, it seems, she does not sufficiently recognize his state enough to gift him the generosity of mercy (*merzé*) or pity (*pietate*). It is his desire for service to her that keeps him alive, and he admits to a moral benefit in loving her. As so often happens in the poems, the poet is a prisoner of his love; he smoothes out its contradictions by fashioning a particular way of life that accommodates them. Topping off the moral benefits is the element of hope, which the poet touches on in stanzas 4 and 5. A reading of the poem in Italian with its repetitive words and short verses can give a sense of insistent and nervous obsession, which is relatable to its subject matter.

Sonnet IX

Ch'eo cor avesse, mi potea laudare
avante che di voi foss'amoroso,
ed or è fatto, per tropp'adastare
di voi e di me, fero ed argoglioso:

ché subitore me fa isvariare
di ghiaccio in foco e d'ardente geloso;
tanto m'angoscia 'l profondo pensare
che sembro vivo e morte v'ho nascoso.

5

Nascosa morte porto in mia possanza,
e tale nimistate aggio col core
che sempre di battaglia me menaccia;

10

e chi ne vol aver ferma certanza,
riguardimi, se sa legger d'amore,
ch'i' porto morte scritta ne la faccia.

That a heart I had, I was able to boast before of you I was enamored, and now it is made, because of too much conflict of you and of me, cruel and proud:

because suddenly me it makes change from ice to fire and from ardency to frozenness; so much it distresses me the deep thought [mental anguish] that I seem alive and death I there have hiding [inside me].

Hidden death I carry in my being, and such enmity I have with the heart that always with battle it threatens me;

and who of it wants to have firm certainty, look at me, if he knows how to read of love, because I carry death written in the face.

Clearly this is a sonnet about the anguish that love and an inattentive, recalcitrant lady can cause. Like *Lo fin pregi' avanzato* (Canzone V) it is from an earlier period in Guinizzelli's development. The poet's otherwise untroubled heart abandoned him after he fell in love—an unfortunate result indeed. His condition is so bad that he feels both dead and alive simultaneously and experiences cold sweats. (References to love and death, in one form or another, are to be looked for in his other poems.)

Again, this theme has precedent in the tradition, as does Cavalcante's *Quando di morte mi conven trar vita*, ("When of death it helps me to drag life." It continues: "and out of heaviness joy, why from such distress does the spirit of Love invite me to love?") Similar psychological dilemmas or puzzles taunt the early love poets (but the case of the Stil Nuovo Cavalcante it troubles to a more advanced and intellectual degree). The *battaglia* that Guinizzelli refers to in the above poem is just this sort of problem.

Sonnet XI

Lamentomi di mia disaventura
e d'un contrarioso destinato,
di me medesimo ch'amo for misura
una donna da cui non sono amato;

e dicemi Isperanza: « Sta' a la dura,
non ti cessar per reo sembiante dato,
ché molto amaro frutto si matura
e diven dolce per lungo aspettato ».

5

Donqua creder vogl'io a la Speranza:
credo che mi consigli lealmente
ch'eo serva a la mia donna con leianza.

10

Guigliardonato serò grandemente:
ben mi rasembra reina di Franza,
poi de l'altre mi pare la più gente.

*I lament me of my misadventure and of an adverse destiny, of me myself
that I love beyond measure a woman by whom not I am loved;
and says to me Hope: "Be strong, don't yourself stop for [the] hostile
appearance given [shown you], because much bitter fruit itself matures and
becomes sweet with long wait."*

*So to believe I want to in Hope: I believe it counsils me trustfully that I serve
my lady with faithfulness.*

*Recompensed I will be grandly: fully she to me resembles the queen of
France, since of the others to me she seems the most noble.*

While this sonnet again tells of the poet's pain at not being loved in return, it is largely and intimately a poem about hope—something the poet can thankfully cling to while waiting for his lady's acceptance. Of interest is the word *guigliardonato* (recompensed), in verse twelve. It is derived from *guerdon*, an Anglo-French word (variously spelled) that means recompense or award for a service. To a troubadour this was the highest gift he could receive from his lady for his dedication and praise. (Here the word is Italianized with the past participle *-ato*, the appended word being *donato*, Italian for *gifted*.) Much has been made in literature of the relationship—or range of relationships—between the troubadours and their lady-loves, since the *guerdon* could sometimes be (let us say) a physical gift, regardless of the lady's marital status or of her husband's role as the poet's protector. In the bulk of Guinizzelli's early work it appears that the poet's highest desire is his

lady's kind recognition, loving appreciation, or simple greeting in acknowledgement of his vassal-like appreciation of her.

Sonnet XII

Gentil donzella, di pregio nomata,
degnà di laude e di tutto onore,
ché par de voi non fu ancora nata
né s'è compiuta de tutto valore,

pare che 'n voi dimori onne fiata 5
la deità de l'alto deo d'Amore;
de tutto compimento siete ornata
e d'adornesse e di tutto bellore:

ché 'l vostro viso dà s'è gran lumera 10
che non è donna ch'aggia in sé beltate
ch'a voi davante non s'ascuri in cera;

per voi tutte bellezze so' afinate,
e ciascun fior fiorisce in sua maniera
lo giorno quando vo' vi dimostrate.

Noble maiden, of prestige noted, worthy of praise and of all honor, for it seems that of [like] you not [none] was ever born nor so accomplished of all merit,

it seems that in you resides every breath the divinity of the high god of Love; of all accomplishment you are embellished, and of adornments [fine qualities] and of all beauty:

because your face gives so great luminosity that [there] not is woman who has in her [such] beauty who of you in front does not dim in visage [literally in wax—"in cera"; e.g., in exterior form];

through you all beauties are refined, and each flower flowers in its way the day when you yourself demonstrate [show yourself].

Scholars generally agree that this poem is a *rima dubbiosa* or “doubtful poem,” and may not be Guinizzelli’s even if it is traditionally included among his poems. It is thought to be the work of a Florentine poet, possibly by Rinuccino da Firenze, a figure of debatable identity. It is a very pretty sonnet that flows neatly and smoothly. Here it is worth to stray bit into what is an interesting side-issue. One is tempted to associate its recipient and subject with “La Compiuta Donzella” (the “Accomplished Maiden”), the first known female poet writing in the Italian vernacular, about which little is known but who has left three sonnets. *A la stagione in cui il mondo foglia e fiora* (“In the season in which the world brings forth leaves and flowers”) is her most cited and concerns her parents wishing on her an undesired marriage, a situation that prevents her from finding solace in the blossoms of spring. Words such as *compiuta* and *compimento* (“accomplished” and “accomplishment”) tend to force a suspicion that the poem is about her, but this is not certain. Several poets wrote their praises to her, including the significant pre-Stil-Novo poet Guittone d’Arezzo (c.1235-1294):

Soprapiacente donna, di tutto compiuto sapere (“Most pleasing lady full of accomplished wisdom”). Guittone will make an important appearance in an exchange with Guinizzelli later in this essay.

Sonnet XV

Pur a pensar mi par gran meraviglia
come l'umana gent' è sì smarrita
che largamente questo mondo piglia
com' regnasse così senza finita,

e 'n adagiarsi ciascun s'assottiglia
come non fusse mai più altra vita:
e poi vène la morte e lo scompiglia,
e tutta sua 'ntenzion li vèn fallita;

e sempre vede l'un l'altro morire
e vede ch'ogni cosa muta stato,
e non si sa 'l meschin om rifrenire;

e però credo solo che 'l peccato
accieca l'omo e sì lo fa finire,
e vive come pecora nel prato.

Just to think [about it] seems to me [a] great wonder how humankind is so lost that largely this world it takes as if it reigned so without end,

and in reclining itself [going about thoughtlessly] each endeavors as if not there were ever more another life: and then comes death and him [or it, humankind] unsettles, and all his intention [plans] to him comes [to] failure;

and always he sees the one [and] the other die and sees that every thing changes state, and not himself knows the petty man [how] to stop [it];

and therefore I believe only that sin blinds the man and thus him makes to end [puts him to an end], and live like [a] sheep in the pasture.

This sonnet belongs to the didactic or moralizing tradition, which existed in individual authors side by side with the secular or non-religious. The religious sonnet is typical of the prolific Tuscan poet Guittone d'Arezzo, who at one time Guinizelli looked up to (and whom in more detail, as already stated, we will meet later on). As with Sonnet XI, the message of the present poem is clearly expressed, but is quite dark and solemn. The poet is struck by how people go about without regard for their soul in the afterlife. Those who live sinfully go about *come pecora nel prato* (final verse). The notion of men as sheep is, of course, an image in use to this day and is applied to a person's thoughtless adherence to any kind of trend or movement, or to the thoughtless disregard of some guiding sensibility presumed to be all-important. In his his book *Convivio* ("Banquet") (I, XI, 9-10), a book that ranges widely from the cultural to the scientific, Dante writes "Questi sono da chiamare pecore, e non uomini" ("These are to be called sheep, and not men") in referring to those who follow each other's biases in regard to the vernacular tongues of Italy. "For if a sheep throws itself off a cliff a thousand paces high all the others will follow."

Sonnet XVI

Fra l'altre pene maggio credo sia
sopporre libertà in altrui voglia:
lo saggio, dico, pensa prima via
di gir, che vada, che non trovi scoglia.

Omo ch'è priso non è 'n sua bailia: 5
conveneli ubedir, poi n'aggia doglia,
ch'a augel lacciato dibattuta è ria,
che pur lo stringe e di forza lo spoglia.

In pace donqua porti vita e serva 10
chi da signore alcun merito vòle:
a Dio via più, che volontate chere;

a voi, messer, di regula conserva,
pensate a lo proverbio che dir sòle:
« A bon servente guiderdon non père »

Among the other pains [the] greatest I believe is to subjugate liberty to others' will: the wise, I say, thinks before away going, which [route] he goes, [so] that he does not find rock[s].

A man who is taken [subjugated] is not in his [own] governance: it serves him to obey, even of it he has sorrow, because to a tied bird [a bird in lime] fighting is bad, for nevertheless it tightens and of strength it wastes.

In peace therefore he brings life [willful vitality] and serves who from [his] master any merit wishes; to God it goes more [more so it is with God], whose will demands;

to you, [esteemed] sir, of rules conservator, think of the proverb that says often: "To [a] good servant compensation does not perish."

Like Sonnet XV this poem is another example of the didactic-moral-philosophic variety but is developed with proverbs, a favorite trait of Guinizzelli. It appears likely to have been addressed to a religious person. Sending poems back and forth as messages or debates (called *tenzoni*) or to ask for another poet's opinion of the poem was a popular activity of this period. In the first two lines the poet states that the greatest of all pains (or hardships) is to subjugate one's will to another person's; in the next two he advises, in essence, to "look before you leap" to avoid difficulties along the route. The rest of the poem, however, makes the case for subjugation; this is in order to receive eventual benefits when in service to a master—even more important in the service of God. The poet may be saying, "One should be sure to know what is ahead before dedicating one's self to service." After reference to the Deity, the ending of the poem becomes more confident: "To a good servant compensation does not perish." (Note the word *guiderdon* again, touched on in the commentary to Sonnet XI.) The word *messer*, in line twelve essentially means *sir* but is a title of extra respect applied to persons of elevated position (in some cases *milord* or *honorable* would be a fitting translation). It is clear that this sonnet is written probably to a religious person or someone who is of (or is to be of) a religious station, because in line twelve he reveals that the poem's recipient is *di regula conserva*, "a keeper of the rule."

Sonnet XVII

Chi vedesse a Lucia un var capuzzo
in cò tenere, e como li sta gente,
e' non è om de qui 'n terra d'Abruzzo
che non ne 'namorasse coralmente.

Par, sì lorina, figliuola d'un tuzzo 5
de la Magna o de Franza veramente;
e non se sbatte cò de serpe mozzo
come fa lo meo core spessamente.

Ah, prender lei a forza, ultra su' grato, 10
e baciarli la bocca e 'l bel visaggio
e li occhi suoi, ch'èn due fiamme de foco!

Ma pentomi, però che m'ho pensato
ch'esto fatto poria portar dannaggio
ch'altrui despiacera forse non poco.

Who[ever] should see on Lucia a vair hood atop [her] head keep [wear],
and how on her it is graceful, there not is a man from here to land of
Abruzzi who not of her would love heartfully.

She seems, so leathered [dressed in such a way], the child of a far-away
northern type [tuzzo] of Germany or of France truly: and it does not beat
like [beats more than] a serpent chopped [a beheaded serpent's body] as
does my heart frequently.

Ah, to take her by force, beyond her gratitude [against her will], and to kiss
her mouth and the beautiful face and her eyes, which are two flames of fire!
But I regret, because I thought that this deed would bring harm that others
[someone else, i.e., Lucia] it would displease perhaps not little.

This is a refreshingly different sonnet that diverges from the heavenly into the earthly (and even the earthy). It is definitely from the pre-Stil-Novo Tuscan period. Lucia is such a delight to behold in her little hood of vair that there is not a man from here to the Abruzzi who would not fall for her with all his heart. The mountainous Abruzzi region of Italy was considered a far-away place, so the reference means “to the ends of the earth.” (Vair, by the way, is the fur of the Siberian squirrel, but this certainly would not have worked in any kind of translation!) The second stanza again adopts images of “far-away” people and places, which heightens the expansiveness of and the adventure to be found in Lucia’s beauty. (Perhaps if Marco Polo, 1245-1324, were the sublimating poet he might have stayed at home!) The word *lorina* in verse 5, is from the Latin *lorcus*: “of leather.” Stanza 5 ends with a starkly visual but rather unromantic simile that compares the trashing body of a decapitated serpent to the beating of the poet’s heart. But this bold image leads appropriately to Guinizzelli’s most direct exposition of physical love (Stanza 3). However, come the final stanza, he applies the breaks of remorse, and he disavows any attempt to live out his fantasy.

Sonett XVIII

Volvol te levi, vecchia rabbiosa,
e sturbignon te fera in su la testa:

perché dimor' ha' in te tanto nascosa,
che non te vèn ancider la tempesta?

Arco da cielo te mandi angosciosa 5
saetta che te fenda, e s'ia presta:
che se fenisse tua vita noiosa,

avrei, senz'altr'aver, gran gio' e festa.
Ché non fanno lamento li avoltori,
nibbi e corbi a l'alto Dio sovrano, 10
che lor te renda? Già se' lor ragione.

Ma tant'ha' tu sugose carni e dure,
che non se curano averti tra mano:
però romane, e quest'è la cagione.

Twister you lift [may a twister lift you], old rabid one, and a turbine you strike on top the head: why stayed have you in yourself so hidden, that it does not to you come to kill the tempest [that a tempest does not come and kill you]?

Rainbow to you [may it] send agonizing arrow that you [it] rend, and be [it] quick: that it end your life obnoxious,

I would have, without other having [without any doubt or other emotion], great joy and jubilation. Why don't they implore vultures, kites, and crows [Why don't vultures, kites, and crows implore] the high God sovereign that them you render? [that he consign them to you?] Indeed you are their reason [their natural right].

But so much have you oozy [sugose: probably "rugose," gritty] meat and tough, that themselves they do not care to have you between [their] hand[s]: and so you remain, and that is the reason.

This is a particularly nasty sonnet that one would expect from a disgruntled adolescent, and we are compelled place it, at face value, among Guinizelli's earlier output. Actually it belongs to a class of poems that is called *comico-realistica*, which flourished in Tuscany in the latter part of the 13th Century. Such poems, which were not necessarily comic or ironic, were often critical of individuals (fathers, bankers, the elderly), of respected institutions (the church and the clergy), of the courtly love tradition and beyond. Earthy love and the celebration of drink were not off limits. The rise of the mercantile class in Tuscany brought to life the trend of reading for entertainment; and out of this development came also the plethora of *novelle* (tales or short stories) of this period, which found their highest expression in Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

One of several poets of the *comico-realistica* variety is the rebellious, irreverent Cecco Angiolieri (1250-1319), a prolific poet from a well-to-do family, who penned *S' l' fosse foco, arderei 'l mondo* -- "If I were fire, I'd burn up the world." It continues: "If I were wind, I'd storm it; / If I were water, I'd drown it; / If I were God, I'd send it to the abyss; / If I were Pope, then I'd be happy; / for all the Christians I'd swindle / If I were emperor, know what I would do? I'd chop off everyone's head." (Cecco would have loved modern social media.) In the present poem it is easy to imagine an eccentric, annoying neighbor who may have been a thorn in the poet's side for some

reason. Guinizzelli is often called the *poeta visivo* (visual poet), noted especially for images of nature; and it is easy to see why even in this sonnet: he wishes tornados to take up the old woman, a rainbow to send her a deadly arrow, for various species of birds attack her (which won't happen as her meat is too gritty and tough for them).

Of linguistic interest are two words from the first two lines: *volvol* and *sturbignon*. The first is fashioned from the Latin *volvere* (“to turn around”), though scholar Pietro Pelosi finds an extended meaning from Greek descendant words signifying an intestinal disorder (a bit of *acida*, perhaps, to go along with the turbine!). The word *sturbignon* from Latin *torbo* (*(s)turbare*: (Italian “upset”); and the scholar Sanguinetti (also cited by Pelosi) finds a link to *sturbo*, meaning a bad event or accident. In any case, the poet has certainly gone “all out” in his wishing ill upon the Vecchia Rabbiosa.

Sonnet XX

Guinizzelli to Guittone d'Arezzo

O caro padre meo, de vostra laude
non bisogna ch'alcun omo se 'mbarchi
ché 'n vostra mente intrar vizio non aude,
che for de sé vostro saver non l'archi.

A ciascun reo sì la porta claude,
che, sembr', ha più via che Venezi' ha Marchi;

5

entr' a' Gaudenti ben vostr' alma gaude,
ch'al me' parer li gaudii han sovr'alarchi.

Prendete la canzon, la qual io porgo
al saver vostro, che l'aguinchi e cimi,
ch'a voi ciò solo com' a maestr' accorgo,

10

ch'ell' è congiunta certo a debel' vimi:
però mirate di lei ciascun borgo
per vostra correzion lo vizio limi.

O dear father mine, of your praise [in praise of you] no need [there is no need] that any man himself to venture, for in your mind enter vice does not dare, which [vice] outside of you your wisdom does not it bend [does not turn away].

On every wickedness so [completely] the door closes, which [wickedness], it seems, has more paths than Venice has Marcos; among the Jovials [Jovial Friars] indeed [is] your soul jovial [your soul rejoices], which [joviality], to me it seems, the Jovials have superabundant[ly].

Take this song [N.B.: song, (canzon) refers to another poem sent along with the present sonnet], which I offer to wisdom yours, that it [your wisdom] might it wring and prune, because to you only as master I realize,

because it is put together certainly of weak twigs: therefore examine of it every aspect [that] through your correction the defect eliminate.

Guinizzelli sent this sonnet to Guittone d'Arezzo (c.1235-c.1294) along with a canzone (thought to be *Tegno de folle 'mpres'*, a *lo ver dire*, numbered I in the present arraignment). Guittone was a highly prolific Tuscan poet and an important figure between the Sicilian School and

Guinizzelli, particularly in light of the latter's future developments as initiator of the Dolce Stil Nuovo (and Dante's less than admiring assessment of Guittone). He was a powerful, influential figure in the pre-Stil-Novo generation and, despite his personal and divergent contributions, stayed within the extravagant tendencies of the Provençal-Sicilian style. He did, however, seriously progress from courtly love poetry into moral-religious compositions. This transition is associated with his having left the secular life to join the Knights of the Blessed Virgin Mary, also known as the Jovial Friars, which order Guinizzelli references in the present poem.

The early Guinizzelli owes a lot to Guittone, both in subject, style, and metaphor, and *O caro padre meo* at first sight appears to be a *sirventes*, a Provençal form of poetry praising one's benefactor. But the poem has lately been given reassessment that suggests something of the opposite, a taunt, a poking fun at Guittone for his antiquated style and perhaps personal hypocrisies. (Dante puts at least a couple of Jovial Friars, but not Guittone, in hell for hypocrisy associated with Florentine affairs. See Canto XXIII of the *Inferno*.)

Taken as an oblique form of criticism, the present poem could be placed in the satiric tradition. It does appear to mimic Guittone in certain aspects; and it tends toward glibness for its metaphors: "wickedness...has more paths than Venice has Marcos." (Marco, of course, is a common name in

Venice, Saint Marco being its patron saint.) If Guinizzelli engaged in any sarcasm, it would be because of the new butting up against the old, the younger poet registering his independence.

Guittone d'Arezzo to Guinizzelli

Figlio mio diletto, in faccia laude
non con descrezion, sembrame, m'archi:
lauda sua volonter non saggio l'aude,
se tutto laudator giusto ben marchi;

per che laudar me te non cor me laude, 5
tutto che laude mertì e laude marchi:
laudando sparte bon de valor laude
legge orrando di saggi e non di Marchi.

Ma se che degno sia figlio m'acorgo,
no amo certo guaire a tte dicimi, 10
ché volonteri a la tua lauda accorgo.

La grazia tua che «padre» dicimi,
ch'è figlio tale assai pago, corgo,
purché vera sapienzia a ppoder cimi.

Son [of] mine delightful, in face [before me] praises not with prudence, it seems me, to me you send: [it seems to me you send me imprudent praises:] praise his willingly not he wise [man] it hears, [the wise man does not willingly listen to his own praises], [even] if everything the praiser rightly well marks [even if everything the praiser says "hits the mark"];

for which [reason] to praise me you [for me to praise you] not [from] heart me praise [my heart does not allow me to praise you]; all that [even if]

praise you merit and praise you mark [deserve]: praising separates good [perhaps simple lip-service decency] from merited praise, [which is the] law honoring [honored by] the wise and not [of] the fools. [Marchi here means unwise, according to a reading that leads back to the Tristan legend.]

But if that worthy be [the] son I realize, [But if I consider you a worthy son,] not I love lament to you [what] you tell me [i.e., I do not desire to criticize your sentiments, or rework your poem], for willingly I to your praise I realize [I hear your praise].

The thanks [graciousness] that [in that] 'father' you call me, who is [a] son [with whom] so greatly I am content, I accept, provided that true wisdom to [your] potential you achieve.

This sonnet is difficult in the way that *Lo fin pregi' avanzato* (V) is difficult, and the meaning of certain verses are debated by scholars. (Note that Guittone adopts the same rhyme scheme as Guinizelli, not an easy thing to do.) The poem's overall meaning, however, is clear enough: After lecturing the younger poet about the imprudence of praise, Guittone declines to criticize Guinizelli's poem because, he says, if he considers him a worthy "son," to accept his praise and then criticize him is something he ought not to do. But, in light of the growing poetic divide between them, one cannot help feel that Guittone is deliberately distancing himself from a serious recognition of the poem, which work, as noted, was likely *Tegno de folle 'mpres'* (Canzone I, below), recognized favorably by Dante. He seems to cleverly skirt the issue, suggesting at last that Guinizelli has not

reached his full potential (which may have been true in his poetry, but perhaps not in the way Guittone meant), if by “wisdom” he ultimately means his own way of writing and assessing poetry. Note also that Guinizzelli uses the respectful *voi* to address the older poet, but the latter speaks to his “son” with the familiar *tu*. This formality is in keeping with an ostensibly respectful relationship, as it should be considering the venerability of Guittone, regardless of what Guinizzelli present opinion of him may have been.

This poetic exchange (or *tenzone*) is an important point in the early history of Italian literature. But the controversies of exchanged sonnets reach their zenith, and with more directness, in the *tenzone* of Guinizzelli and another older poet, Bonagiunta da Lucca, in Sonnet XIX, the last in the present numbering.

Canzone III

Donna, l'Amor mi sforza ch'eo vi deggia contare com'eo so 'nnamorato, e ciascun giorno inforza la mia voglia d'amare:	5
pur foss'eo meritato! Sacciate in veritate che s'è pres'è 'l meo core di vo', incarnato amore, ca more di pietate,	10

e consomar lo faite
in gran foch' e 'n ardore.

Nave ch'esce di porto
con vento dolze e piano, 14
fra mar giunge in altura;
poi vèn lo tempo torto,
tempesta e grande affanno
li aduce la ventura;
allor si sforza molto
como possa campare, 20
che non perisca in mare:
così l'amor m'ha colto
e di bon loco tolto
e miso a tempestare.

Madonna, audivi dire 25
che 'n aire nasce un foco
per rincontrar di venti;
se non more 'n venire
in nuviloso loco,
arde immantementi 30
ciò che dimora loco:
così 'n le nostre voglie
contrar' aire s'accoglie,
unde mi nasce un foco
lo qual s'astingue un poco 35
in lagrime ed in doglie.

Grave cos'è servire
signor contra talento
e sperar guiderdone,
e mostrare 'n parere 40
che sia gioia 'l tormento

contra su'oppinione.
Donqua si dé gradire
di me, che voglio ben fare,
e ghirlanda portare 45
di molto orgoglio ardire:
che s'eo voglio ver dire,
credo pinger l'aire.

A pinger l'air son dato,
poi ch'a tal sono adutto: 50
lavoro e non acquisto.
Lasso, ch'eo li fui dato!
Amore a tal m'ha 'dutto,
fra gli altri son più tristo.
O signor Geso Cristo, 55
fu' i' però sol nato
di stare innamorato?
Poi madonna l'ha visto,
megli' è ch'eo mora in quisto:
forse n'avrà peccato. 60

Lady, love forces me that to you I must recount how I am in love, and each day reinforces my desire to love: if only were I rewarded! You know in truth that so taken is my heart by you, incarnate love, that it dies of anguish, and to consume it does in great fire and in ardor.

Boat that leaves from port with wind sweet and even [calm], among [across] sea reaches in high [water]; then comes the weather twisted, tempest and a great breathlessness [travail] it brings [to] the future; then one exerts much [to figure out] how one might live, that one not perish at sea: so love me has affected, and from good place taken and put to tempest.

Lady, I heard tell that in air is born a fire [i.e., lightning] by meeting of winds; if it does not perish in coming to [a] cloudy place, it burns rapidly that which occupies [that] place: so in our desires contrasting air [i.e., winds] themselves unite, from which in me is born a fire that itself extinguishes a little in tears and pain.

Grave [Serious, Difficult] it is to serve [a] master against [one's] desire and to hope for recompense, showing in appearance that it is joy the torment, against one's [actual] sentiment. Therefore one [i.e., love or lady] must please me, [I] who wishes good to do, and garland [i.e. glory] to bring, much pride venturing [or presuming]: for if I wish the truth to tell, I believe I [vainly] paint the air.

To paint the air I am given [destined], because to such I am suited: I work and I do not acquire. Woe, that I to her was given [destined]! Love has to such me has reduced, [that] among the others I am [the] most sad. O, lord Jesus Christ, was I therefore only born to stay in love? Since my lady it [my pitiable state] has seen, better it is that I die in this [condition], for then of it she will have pity [and/or remorse].

This canzone is about love unreciprocated, and is typical of the joy vs. depression contrast found often in Guinizzelli. Also typical, but with greater extension thus far, is his use of natural phenomena. The rough-sea-tempest-love metaphor in the second stanza, while not unique, is forcefully visual and is rendered like a tiny adventure in itself, appearing (when the curtain opens) on a tiny stage or screen. This leads to another atmospheric metaphor, which like the tempest-trope is emotionally precise, and even approaches the “scientific-technical” (*protoscientific*, is the proper word) in its pairing with the adventure of love: “If it (lightning) does not perish in

coming to (a) cloudy place, it burns rapidly that which occupies (that) place...” The poet begins again to brush with the natural sciences, sounding a bit like an ancient Greek meteorologist (indeed, many scientific notions in Medieval poetry can be traced back to the ancients, such as Aristotle, for their sources). The “Mountains of Magnet” metaphor in the fifth stanza of Canzone II (a work favorably cited by Dante), is another example of the poet’s penchant for the workings of nature in the arena of love.

In verse 9 the poet calls his lady “incarnate love.” Here she is the living embodiment of the immaterial force itself, as Christ is understood as God incarnate. Other poets have said this of their ladies, but in the later Guinizzelli the reader must always keep an eye out for a more serious positioning of the idea within a thoroughgoing metaphysics (even if not expressed at this point). Whatever the concept, it eventually will hold for anyone’s lady, not just the poet’s; for this universality will turn out to be Guinizzelli’s most advanced position in his corpus. This idea-extension is relatable most specifically to his masterpiece *Al cor gentil*.

According to scholar Furio Brugnolo (cited by Akash Kumar, see ibliog.) a similar extension of concepts (without perhaps the move toward universality), is evident in *Donna, l'Amor mi sforza*. Brugnolo shows that this poem is a refashioning of a canzone—*Madonna, dir vo voglio*—by the most significant poet of the Sicilian School (and one who is high up among

other pre-Stil-Novo poets), Giacomo da Lentini. He is, in fact, an often unrecognized star in all of literary history, as he is credited with the invention of the sonnet. (Da Lentini is frequently called *il Notaio*, or the Notary, because of his imperial position in Frederick II's court.) Generally, one might say that just as Guinizzelli's best work is an advancement of what came before him, so was da Lentini's work in its own way an innovative extension of its own antecedents. In the present case this development concerns the later reflection by his poem (*Madonna, dir vo voglio*) of a work by the Occitan (lang d'oc) poet Folquet de Marseille: *A vos, midontç, / voill retrair en cantan* ("To you, madonna, / I want to sing about how love has taken me"). So one could say that Guinizzelli's *Donna mi Sforza* is in fact the third generation of a particular poetic composition.

A detailed examination of the relationship between these three works cannot be the goal of this basic commentary (the brief introduction of Giacomo da Lentini being its primary motive); but a couple points will be noted for the "flavor" of such analysis. Da Lenitni's canzone begins, *Madonna, dir vo voglio / como l'amor m'a priso*, "Lady, I want to tell you how love has taken me." Guinizzelli's opening is clearly more intense: *Donna, amor mi sforza / ch 'eo vi deggia contare / com'eo so 'nnamorato*: "Love forces [or compels] me / that I must tell you / how I am in love." The later poet appears closer emotionally and psychologically to the source of

his love-situation. His is not just a “want” but a “must.” He is himself is part of the natural force of love (always a force of nature). He also uses a sea-storm metaphor, which will be reflected by Guinizelli. Da Lentini writes,

Lo vostr’amor che m’ave in mare tempestoso,
è sì como la nave c’a la fortuna getta ogni pesanti
e campan per lo getto di loco periglioso:
similmente eo getto a voi, bella, li mei sospiri e pianti,
che s’eo no li gitasse, parria che soffondasse,
e bene soffondara, lo cor tanto gravara—in suo disio; Che tanto
frange a terra tempesto che s’atterra,
Ed eo così rinfrango: quando sospiro e piango—posar crio.

Your love that has placed me in a tempestuous sea, is like a ship that by [adverse] fortune throws off every heavy thing, and they save [by being jettisoned] from [reaching] a perilous place [situation]: similarly I throw to you, beautiful one, my sighs and weeping, which if they were not jettisoned, it would seem that I would drown, and indeed I would drown, the heart so weighted, for the tempest breaks up when it lands [reaches land], and so I break up: when I sigh and weep—to rest I believe.

Guinizelli’s metaphor, by contrast, is lengthened to the point where he the poet’s tears merge with the natural phenomena, as rain, and even uses the word *affanno*, meaning breathlessness, along with the word *tempesta*, both associated with the air or wind, one signifying lack, the other excess. While da Lentini ends his metaphor with sighs and tears (which give relief in themselves), Guinizelli continues on to another stanza and introduces a

theory of lightning (in effect, prolonging the storm); and it is here that his tears give relief by extinguishing the “fire” inside him that was born from contrasting emotions, as the “fire” of lightning is born from contrasting winds.

Rather than adopt da Lentini’s poem out of pure imitation, Guinizzelli appears to be testing his ability to extend the earlier poet’s ideas. This is a significant hypothesis for the growth of a new style. Many other similarities with da Lentini’s poem, some quite subtle, are to be found in Guinizzelli’s *Donna, l’Amor mi sforza*, and in other works in his corpus.

Sonnet VI

Lo vostro bel saluto e 'l gentil sguardo,
che fate quando v'encontro, m'ancide:
Amor m'assale e già non ha riguardo
s'elli face peccato over merzede,

ché per mezzo lo cor me lanciò un dardo
ched oltre 'n parte lo taglia e divide;
parlar non posso, ché 'n pene io ardo
sì come quelli che sua morte vede.

5

Per li occhi passa come fa lo trono,
che fer per la finestra de la torre
e ciò che dentro trova spezza e fende;

10

remagno como statüa d'otono
ove vita né spirto non ricorre,
se non che la figura d'omo rende.

Your lovely greeting and the kind look you make when you I encounter kills me: Love assails me and indeed has no care if it makes [of it] sin or mercy [bad or good],

for through middle of heart me it hurled a dart that beyond [measure] in part[s] it cuts and divides; to speak I cannot, for in pain [sadness] I burn as who his death sees.

Through the eyes it passes as does the lightning bolt, which strikes through the window of the tower and that which inside it finds breaks and splits;

I remain like a statue of brass where life nor spirit cannot resort, except that [even if] the shape of man evidences [itself otherwise].

His lady's gracious acknowledgement of him and especially her *gentil squardo* slays the poet. The effects of this *squardo* are the central subject of the sonnet; and this penetrating experience has a long history from the Provençal writers through the Sicilian School. In the third stanza, love passes through the eyes and into the heart, a process that is a staple in the basket of Love's effects, present also in Dante but with more gentility than here; and which immediately brings to mind his *Tanto Gentile* sonnet, where Beatrice's appearance *dà per li occhi una dolcezza al core*, "gives through the eyes a sweetness to the heart." It is the opposite of what the mythical Medusa is known for. The lady's appearance in Guinizelli's poem, however, still creates a good deal of mayhem, cutting his pump in half and bringing a sense of imminent death. The poet ends in a kind of half-life, a

spiritless statue that merely looks like a person. It is not that the lady spurns him, which is the problem in other poems—here she is pleasant to him as she passes. Even so, the effects are adverse. Obviously, what the poet wants is not available to him in this half-life. The only other acceptable outlet, one must surmise, is faith, faith in heaven, which Guinizzelli will later touch on and Dante (to say the least) expansively provide. Poetry itself, of course, as a forceful urge (recall Canzone III: *l'Amor mi sforza ch'eo vi deggia contare*), must provide some relief, but it is available to the poet, we deduce, only in the half-life degree.

Sonnet VIII

Dolente, lasso, già non m'asecuro,
ché tu m'assali, Amore, e mi combatti:
diritto al tuo rincontro in pie' non duro,
ché mantenente a terra mi dibatti,

come lo trono che fere lo muro
e 'l vento li arbor' per li forti tratti.
Dice lo core agli occhi: « Per voi moro »,
e li occhi dice al cor: « Tu n'hai desfatti ».

5

Apparve luce, che rendé splendore,
che passao per li occhi e 'l cor ferìo,
ond'io ne sono a tal condizione:

10

ciò furo li belli occhi pien' d'amore,
che me feriro al cor d'uno disio
come si fere augello di bolzone.

Sorrowful [me], alas, still I do not myself assure [find security], because you me assail, Love, and battle me: directly at your encountering, on [my] feet I do not remain, for at once to ground you me beat,

like the [lightning] bolt that strikes the wall and the wind the trees with its strong tugs. Says the heart to the eyes: "Through you I die," and the eyes say to the heart: "You us ruined."

Light appeared, which made splendor, which passed through the eyes and [the] heart [it] wounded, because of which I am in such condition: it was the beautiful eyes filled with love, which me wounded at heart with a desire as is wounded a bird with bolzone [with a blunt metal-tipped arrow].

Again the *tempesta d'amore*, and the poet is struck with a lightning bolt that throws him to the ground. Then, to make matters worse, he is finished off with an arrow. Again the first strike comes to the heart through the eyes. This process initiates a dialog between the organs, which blame one another. The terrible contradiction is that the light gives splendor (two undeniably positive words), and it is splendor that causes the poet's wound. It must be like the pain one experiences when hearing a beautiful passage of music, painful because its ultimate sense is ungraspable. The philosopher Susanne Langer, in her book *Philosophy in a New Key*, calls music *unconsummated symbol*; so it is, as noted, that the poet's deepest

desire—however we define it—is unrealized, and this yearning for the possession of beauty makes for the devastating effects (to be relieved a little, as noted in the previous poem, by the poetic enterprise). “That’s all, I’m destroyed,” a modern young man might murmur to a friend when catching an extra glimpse of a desirable but unapproachable woman. *Disfatto*, the Medieval poet might say—*undone*. Despite the philosophic approaches a critic might take in analyzing this poem, it does not belong to the Stil Nuovo variety. To what extent did this excess of passion—or something related to it outside poetry—move Dante to land Guinizzelli in Purgatory?

Sonnet XIV

Si sono angostioso e pien di doglia
e di molti sospiri e di rancura,
che non posso saver quel che mi voglia
e qual poss'esser mai la mia ventura.

Disnaturato son come la foglia
quand'è caduta de la sua verdura,
e tanto più che m'è secca la scoglia
e la radice de la sua natura:

sì ch'eo non credo mai poter gioire,
né convertir – la mia discomfortanza
in allegrezza – di nessun conforto;

soletto come tortula voi' gire,

5

10

solo partir – mia vita in disperanza,
per arroganza – di così gran torto.

So [much] I am anguished and full of sadness and of many sighs and of rancor, that I cannot know that which I want and what can be ever my fate.

Denatured I am like the leaf when it is fallen from its greenery, and so much more that me is [on or of me is] dried-up the slough and the roots of its nature [of its or my natural being]:

so that I do not believe ever to be able to enjoy, nor change - my discomfiture into happiness - of any comfort;

alone like tortoise I want to travel, alone [or only] to separate [myself] - my life in desperation, out of contempt - of such great wrong.

Once again the devastating effects of...love? Because of the body of evidence that came before, we might tend in haste to assume that love is again the cause of the poet's suffering, even though neither love nor lady is mentioned in this poem. The poem may very well be of a funereal nature—perhaps the precious object of love has passed on. The sentiments work both ways. Love and death. In the first stanza the poet confesses that he does not know what he wants. This is a telling reflection of what was alluded to in the commentary of Sonnet VIII: the final, ungraspable object of yearnings. Again, the poet is “denatured,” metaphorically like nature's leaf detached from its source but literally from his true nature. This negative metaphor is opposed to the metaphoric joys that will be found in

Guinizzelli's few Stil Nuovo poems: The object of the arrow in the final stanza of Sonnet VIII, we saw, was a little bird (that is, the poet's heart), which was pierced; while in Guinizzelli's greatest poem we will see that the bird finds its home in the forest glade or green and that the glade is there for the bird just as the bird is there for the glade. This is quite a peaceable respite from the violent battles that rend the heart, or the fate of the denatured leaf. At the end of the present poem we learn that some great wrong has been committed, and while the first hypothesis that comes to mind is, again, unrequited love, the bitter sentiment left by real death could certainly be the reason. Whatever the case, the poet chooses ultimately to find his way in closed-up, self-absorbed tortoise-life (and in that of the autumn leaf detached from its previously nourishing but now impossibly distant branch).

Canzone I

Tegno de folle 'mpres', a lo ver dire,
chi s'abandona inver' troppo possente,
sì como gli occhi miei che fér' esmire
incontr'a quelli de la più avenente
che sol per lor èn vinti
senza ch'altre bellezze li dian forza:
ché a ciò far son pinti,
sì come gran baronia di segnore,

5

quando vuol usar forza,
tutta s'apresta in donarli valore. 10

Di sì forte valor lo colpo venne
che gli occhi no'l ritenner di neente,
ma passò dentr' al cor, che lo sostenne
e sentési plagato duramente;
e poi li rendé pace, 15

sì come troppo agravata cosa,
che more in letto e giace:
ella non mette cura di neente,
ma vassen disdegnosa,
ché si vede alta, bella e avenente. 20

Ben si pò tener alta quanto vòle,
ché la plu bella donna è che si trove
ed infra l'altre par lucente sole
e falle disparer a tutte prove:
ché 'n lei èno adornezze, 25

gentilezze, savere e bel parlare
e sovrane bellezze;
tutto valor in lei par che si metta;
posso 'n breve contare:
madonna è de le donne gioia eletta. 30

Ben è eletta gioia da vedere
quand'apare 'nfra l'altre più adorna,
ché tutta la rivera fa lucere
e ciò che l'è d'incerchio allegro torna;
la notte, s'aparisce, 35
como lo sol di giorno dà splendore,
così l'aere sclarisce:
onde 'l giorno ne porta grande 'nveggia,

ch'ei solo avea clarore,
ora la notte igualmente 'l pareggia. 40

Amor m'ha dato a madonna servire:
o vogl'i' o non voglia, così este;
né saccio certo ben ragion vedere
sì como sia caduto a 'ste tempeste:
da lei non ho semblante 45

ed ella non mi fa vist'amorosa,
per ch'eo divegn'amante,
se non per dritta forza di valore,
che la rende gioiosa;
onde mi piace morir per su' amore. 50

I hold of [I accuse of] foolish enterprise, the truth to tell, who oneself abandons towards [a] too powerful [one], just as my eyes that did mirror against [in] those of the most fascinating [lady]; that only through them [her eyes] they [my eyes] are conquered without [the] other beauties them giving [adding] strength: for this to do they are compelled, just as the troops of a nobleman, when he wishes to use force, all he prepares in giving them valor.

With such force worthy [adept] the blow came that the eyes not it kept [back] for nothing [anything], but it passed inside the heart, which sustained it there and felt itself wounded gravely. And then them [the eyes] it [the heart] rendered peace, as too grave thing [too grave a case], who dies in bed and lies [there]: She does not place care of nothing [does not care at all], but goes away disdainful, for she herself sees high [sees herself as superior], beautiful, and fascinating.

Well [with good reason] herself she can to hold high [superior] as much as she wants, for the most beautiful woman she is that is found, and who among the others seems shining sun, and makes them to disappear in all appraisements: because in her are charms, gentility, wisdom, beautiful

speech, and summit of beauties: all value in her seems that itself places; I can in brief confirm: my lady is of other women a jewel elect.

Well [with good reason] she is an elect jewel to see when she appears among the others [and] more adorned, so that the countryside she makes to brighten, and that which to her is encircled happy turns [all that is around her becomes happy again]; the [at] night, she appears, like the sun of day gives splendor, thus the air illumines: so that the daytime of her carries great envy, since it alone has luminosity, now the night likewise it equals [equals it].

Love has given me my lady to serve, whether I wish it or not, and I am not certain what reason I can see how I have fallen into this tempest: from her I receive no look and no sign of enamorment that I should become her lover, if not for the direct force of her worthiness; which renders her like a jewel, so that I am pleased to die for her love.

Dante, In *De vulgari eloquentia*, cites this canzone for its excellence of structure. He regards the poem's syntactic organization as belonging to the most illustrious of his categories. (His book is largely about language and its usage and therefore avoids a discussion of the poem's sentiments or overall meaning.) The poem begins with the moralizing/didactic tone of advice which belongs to a class of this period. The poet quickly tells us why he advises against putting too much faith in a powerful master, and he uses his lady's eyes—her eyes alone, unaided by her other beauties—as an example of the weaponry the “master” can muster up. (Compare this metaphor with the direct statement in the fourth stanza of Canzone III:

Grave cos'è servire signor contra talento, “Grave a thing it is to serve a master against one’s will.”) The Lady is always, and obviously, the powerful spiritual, moral and psychological master. (In the present canzone the lady seems aware, at the start of stanza 2, of her powers, and here there may be even a suggestion of haughtiness, certainly of pride.) The power of the Lady is true at all times, and this extends to even the best Stil Nuovo poems as an absolute staple. Again in the second stanza comes the well-known *colpo d’amore* (love-strike). The eyes, defenseless, are the first recipients of the strike (of the “shock and awe,” to quote a former U.S. defense minister). As always, in the tradition, the strike passes through to the heart. But here the heart is gravely wounded; the eyes and heart make peace in the way a terminally ill person finally accepts his condition and then dies. (Compare stanza 2 of Canzone I, for another “dead-in-bed” metaphor; and see the second stanza of Sonnet Eight for another *colpo d’amore*, which is a brief dialog between the eyes and the heart.)

But all this violence does not deter the poet from being drawn back, compulsively, to praising his lady’s full range of positive features, which indeed are considerable (in the third stanza). These qualities make her a *gioia eletta*. The jewel and its “virtue” (particular power) we will see again in the poet’s Stil Nuovo poems to follow; but here (in the fourth stanza) as a foretaste we see nature reflecting the positivity of the lady’s precious

elements: The manifestation of her improves the *riviera*, or fruited countryside; she makes the night seem like day and the day envious of night. It is all a kind of miracle. Again, however (in the fifth and final stanza), the poet reminds us of his *tempeste*, which is why he began the poem with a kind of warning. The allurements of his lady have made a slave of him (as so often happens). He does not know why Love has chosen him to fill this position. He receives nothing from his lady in return. Nevertheless, he says, *mi piace morir per su' amore*— “It pleases me to die for her love.” (Compare “to have every torment cheers me” in verse 12 of Canzone II.) What a dilemma the poet has gotten himself into! This terrible contradiction is the psychological problem of the poem, one which forces the poet, in effect, to suggest to the reader: “Do as I say, not as I (helplessly) do.” He is like the addict on the street, who when given a dollar, thanks you with advice: “Listen, my friend, don’t become like me.”

Canzone IV

Al cor gentil reppaira sempre Amore
come l'ausello in selva a la verdura;
né fe' Amor anti che gentil core,
né gentil core anti ch'Amor, natura:
ch'adesso con' fu 'l sole,
sì tosto lo splendore fu lucente,
né fu davanti 'l sole;

5

e prende Amore in gentilezza loco
così propriamente
come calore in clarità di foco. 10

Foco d'amore in gentil cor s'aprende
come vertute in petra preziosa,
che da la stella valor no i discende
anti che 'l sol faccia gentil cosa;
poi che n'ha tratto fore 15
per sua forza lo sol ciò che li è vile,
stella li dà valore:
così lo cor ch'è fatto da natura
asletto, pur, gentile,
donna a guisa di stella lo 'nnamora. 20

Amor per tal ragion sta 'n cor gentile
per qual lo foco in cima del doplero:
splendeli al su' diletto, clar, sottile;
no li stari' altra guisa, tant'è fero.
Così prava natura 25
recontra amor come fa l'aigua il foco
caldo, per la freddura.
Amor in gentil cor prende rivera
per suo consimel loco
com'adamàs del ferro in la minera. 30

Fere lo sol lo fango tutto 'l giorno:
vile reman, né 'l sol perde calore;
dis' omo alter: « Gentil per sclatta torno »;
lui semblo al fango, al sol gentil valore:
ché non dé dar om fé 35
che gentilezza sia fòr di coraggio
in degnità d'ere'
sed a vertute non ha gentil core,

com'aigua porta raggio
e 'l ciel riten le stelle e lo splendore. 40

Splende 'n la 'ntelligenzïa del cielo
Deo criator più che 'n nostr'occhi 'l sole:
quella intende suo fattor oltra cielo,
e 'l ciel volgiando, a Lui obedir tole;
e con' segue, al primero, 45
del giusto Deo beato compimento,
così dar dovria, al vero,
la bella donna, poi che 'n gli occhi splende
del suo gentil, talento,
che mai di lei obedir non si disprende. 50

Donna, Deo mi dirà: « Che presomisti? »,
sïando l'alma mia a Lui davanti.
« Lo ciel passasti e 'nfin a Me venisti
e desti in vano amor Me per semblanti:
ch'a Me conven le laude 55
e a la reina del regname degno,
per cui cessa onne fraude ».
Dir Li porò: « Tenne d'angel sembianza
che fosse del Tuo regno;
non me fu fallo, s'in lei posi amanza». 60

*To the noble heart repairs always Love [Love always comes home] like the
bird in forest among the green; neither was made Love [was Love made]
before noble heart, nor noble heart before Love, nature [made by nature]:
at once as was the sun [as soon the sun was created], immediately the
splendor was shone, nor was [it] before the sun; and takes Love in [Love takes
to] noble place [i.e., the heart] so appropriately as warmth in clarity of fire.*

Fire of love in the noble heart itself takes [takes hold] as virtue [the fine or magic quality] of the stone precious, it [its quality] from the star [its] virtue does not descend before the sun makes [it] noble thing [i.e., purifies it]; after it from it has extracted by its force the sun that which in it is impure [after the sun has removed from the star that which is impure], star in it gives value [it gives value to the star]: so the heart that is made by nature elect, pure, noble, woman in [the] manner of star it enamors [enamors it].

Love for such reason resides in noble heart for which [just as] the fire atop [a] torch; it shines there at its pleasure, clear, light; not there would it be other manner [cannot be otherwise], so is it proud [or strong]. So abject nature opposes love as does the water the fire hot [fire's heat], by its coldness. Love in the noble heart takes shelter as its kindred place as diamond of the iron in the mine.

Strikes the sun the mud all the day: foul it remains nor [does] the sun lose warmth; says haughty man: "Noble through lineage I return [I am traced or born]"; him I compare to the mud, to the sun noble worth; for not must to give man trust that nobility be outside the heart ["heartfulness," or soul] in dignity of heredity if by virtue [by predisposition] not he has the noble heart, as water conducts rays [of light] and the sky keeps the stars and the [its] splendor.

Shines in the intelligence [i.e., in the Hierarchy of Angels] of heaven God creator more than in our eyes the sun: that [i.e., the intelligence] understands its maker beyond heaven, and the heavens turning, to Him to obeying takes; and likewise follows [i.e., likewise follows the will], instantly, of the just God [to] blessed completion, thus [in the same way] to give she must [i.e., give to her lover], in truth, the beautiful lady, since in the eyes she shines in her gentle-man, [her] will, that never her to obeying not himself removes [he can never remove himself from obeying her].

Lady, God me will tell, "what did you presume?" [or dare] being my soul to him before. "The heaven[s] you passed [through] and in the end to Me

came and gave in vain love [earthly love] Me semblance [semblance of Me]: for to Me should [go] the praises and to the queen of the reign worthy [true rein], by which ceases every deception [failing]. To tell Him I will be able, "She took of angel resemblance [of] who was of Your reign; not me was failed [I did not sin], if in her I placed love."

Al cor gentil is Guinizelli's greatest poem. It is his Beethoven's Ninth. Had he written only this one poem his elevated place in Italian literary history would have been assured. In *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante compliments Guinizelli for his use of the *edecasillabo*, the eleven-syllable verse-length considered spacious and amenable to rich expression (which Dante employs unwaveringly in *La divina commedia*). In *Convivio*, Dante discourses at length on the ideas expressed in *Al cor gentil*, deriving his comments, in this section, mostly from Aristotle's *Ethics* and *On the Soul*. The following passage from *Convivio* obviously reflects what Guinizelli touches on in the fourth stanza: "So let none of the Uberti of Florence or the Visconti of Milan say 'Because I am of such a race I am noble,' for the divine seed does not fall upon a race (that is, family stock) but on individuals; and...family stock does not make individuals noble, although individuals make family stock noble." (*Convivio*, IV, XX, 5)

Even more revealing is the "scientific" or technical idea of an object's disposition (or lack of same) to receive its proper virtue. Dante writes, "God alone bestows this grace on the soul of that human being whom he sees

dwelling perfectly within his own person, prepared and disposed to receive this divine act. For according to what the Philosopher affirms in the second book of *On the Soul*, 'Things must be well disposed to their agents if they are to receive their acts.' Hence if the soul dwells imperfectly in a person, it is not well disposed to receive this blessed and divine infusion, just as if a precious stone is not well disposed or is imperfect, it cannot receive the celestial virtue, as the noble Guido Guinizelli [sic] said in a canzone of his that begins 'Love hastens ever to the gentle heart.' (*Convivio* IV, XX, 7)

In *Al cor gentil* the precious stone metaphor does not appear until the second stanza, but a close parallel is made in the first: that is, of a bird coming home to its proper residence. This metaphor does not match the fact of simultaneous natural unity that follows the second half of stanza 1, where the sun and splendor, and clarity and fire, arise together and are inseparable. In the latter examples, both are at one (though bird and tree were probably created together, one for the other). And so it is with the precious stone and the virtue that makes it precious: It comes about by way of the sun and could not exist otherwise. And so, as stated in verses 3 and 4, Love and the noble heart arise together by nature. "Like and like must meet," writes one translator; but we should reiterate that the phenomenon is often closer than that, as with fire and clarity. Yes, the existing potential in the noble heart is brought out by the Love, but one would not exist

without the other. Such is the science of it all, as today some scientists believe that consciousness and objects of consciousness may have somehow arisen together.

The second stanza carries over the same ideas as the above, with the aforementioned gem-and-sun and now star-and-sun analogies. The sun brings to life the virtue of the star (its brilliance) by removing that which was impure in it. This adds the possibility of impurity in the affected object, even though Guinizzelli in the final lines of this stanza says that like the sun to the star the donna gives value to “the heart that is made by nature elect, pure, noble.” The lady therefore enamors the heart, bringing into existence (we must assume) a potential that by nature already (mysteriously) exists there. The potential to be enamored is the “sub-atomic” elect aspect of nobility. Therefore we must assume that the absence of the lady’s power is in itself a vulnerable impurity or lesser existence of the heart. Nobility needs to be activated. To be strict about it in terms of “non-duality,” the lady would not have been given her power by nature were it not for the simultaneous creation noble heart’s potential. The two go together like “up-and-down,” “right-and-left.” Again, this “activation” idea is similar to the consciousness-world etiology, which is a concern of modern quantum physics and which argues for a (mysterious) non-duality of the perceiver and the perceived (already present in earlier philosophies).

“Non-activation”—the impossibility of the abject heart to receive nobility—is equally and naturally true. This heart (stanza 3) is as opposed to Love’s nobility as coldness opposes heat, two qualities at odds with one another. In contradistinction, Guinizzelli returns to the “shelter” or “proper place” metaphor, as with the bird in the forest’s green: Love resides in the noble heart as a diamond resides in a mine and nowhere else. The ignoble heart, on the contrary (stanza 4), can be exposed to the power of nobility at length and still remain vile, just as mud is still mud no matter how strongly the sun strikes it (completely unlike the precious stone). Recalling Dante’s above-cited commentary—“[L]et none of the Uberti of Florence or the Visconti of Milan say ‘Because I am of such a race I am noble’...” — Guinizzelli debunks those who boast that their familial line furnishes them with nobility. He bluntly compares them to the mud. Their hearts are in absolute opposition to water’s natural receptiveness to sunlight and the stars’ splendor in their truly ordained place.

Dante pays direct homage to Guinizzelli and *Al cor gentil* in Chapter XX of *La vita nuova*. Dante’s sonnet begins:

Amore e ‘l cor gentil son una cosa,
Sì come il saggio in suo dittare pone
E così esser l’una senza l’altro osa
Com’alma razional senza ragione.

Love and the noble heart are one thing, as the wise man in his rhyme asserts and thus to be the one without the other dares [to venture] as the rational soul without reason.

Dante concludes the sonnet by saying that the activation of love works both ways, from woman to man and also from man to woman.

In stanza 5 Guinizelli takes a cristo-scholastic turn with reference to the Hierarchy of Angels, which preside over the celestial workings of the universe according to God's will. This is a great leap from the earthy items thus far incorporated and hugely more distant from the mud. Of great significance is the introduction of the Lady, now not just the poet's loved one but all those who possess (to quote Dante) *intelletto d'amore*, "love's intellect" or "knowledge of love" (from Dante's famous canzone, number XIX in *La vita nuova*, his little book of poems and commentary). Such a knowledge, we here presume, postulates an innate understanding by the noble (gentil) woman of love's workings, which include, we further presume, the full range of spiritual significance inherent in Amore. Now Guinizelli gives to the noble Lady a "responsibility," though the word *dovria* (she should) suggests must or will, by nature or "science" : Just as the Hierarchy of Angels follows the will of God, so must her lover obey her will, a function from which he can never remove himself.

In the final stanza the poet imagines his soul before God. The Deity questions him about his worship of a flesh-and-blood woman, giving an earthy person the semblance of God, since the praise should have gone to Him and to the Madonna, or Virgin Mary, the Queen of Heaven. The poet explains that his lady took on the resemblance of one of God's angels. This is the only place where the poet breaks from away from abstract philosophy and brings an actual lady (his own) into the poem. Critics have faulted Guinizzelli for this, as he turned away from the theoretical, theological exposition of Love and into the down-to-earth personal (and even the cute), as in his other poems. He is snapped back at earth as if on a rubber band. However, it is certain that loving now carries more weight than ever before.

Al cor gentil is the doctrinal poem of the Dolce Stil Nuovo, even a kind of manifesto. It is the beginning of a new direction in Italian poetry of this period and provides influences that reached beyond its time. Its greatest achievement is that it lead to the concept of the *Donna Angelicata*—the Angelicized Woman, who in the name of Beatrice conducted Dante through Paradiso. This concept, in a metaphorical capacity, will be reflected, lightly or less lightly, in literature and art, here and there, for centuries. (Think of the teenage girl who unexpectedly and mysteriously reappears as the very last image of Federico Fellini's 1960 film *La dolce vita*; her appearance and

her faint smile tells us that there still is hope for the fallen main character, Marcello, to be delivered from his decadent anguish. It is pure “Stil Nuovo.”)

The Donna Angelicata (who is usually blond, like Beatrice) represents a departure from the familiar courtly love figure who, though elevated, was a creature of earth; and while this earthly figure can inspire spiritually and morally, she still causes extreme havoc in the poet’s bi-polar quotidian existence (as we have seen in Guinizzelli on more than a few occasions) and can even carry sexual thoughts at times. In much of *Al cor gentil*, on the other hand, we no longer dwell on the feudal vassal-like relationship of the poet to his Lady; and it leaves an opening for what will become, in Dante, an actual, functioning theological connection that is a way of he universe and leads directly to God. Here the Feminine will provide a direct route to salvation wherein the metaphors disappear and the woman functions as a true Christ figure.

Sonnet IV

Vedut'ho la lucente stella diana,
ch'apare anzi che 'l giorno rend'albore,
c'ha preso forma di figura umana;
sovr'ogn'altra me par che dea splendore:

viso de neve colorato in grana,
occhi lucenti, gai e pien' d'amore;

5

non credo che nel mondo sia cristiana
sì piena di biltate e di valore.

Ed io dal suo valor son assalito
con sì fera battaglia di sospiri
ch'avanti a lei di dir non seri' ardito.

10

Così conoscess' ella i miei disiri!
ché, senza dir, de lei seria servito
per la pietà ch'avrebbe de' martiri.

Seen I have the shining star Diana [Venus, the morning star], which appears before the day renders clarity, that has taken form of a figure human; beyond every other to me seems that it gives splendor:

face of snow colored in berry, eyes luminous, cheerful and full of love; I do not believe that in the world there be a Christian [any woman] so full of beauty and of virtue.

And I by her virtue am assailed with such fierce battle of sighs that before her to speak I would not be dared [I would not dare].

Thus [if only] could know she my desires! for, without to say [without speaking], by her I would be served [requited] by the pity she would have for [my] sufferings ["martyrings"].

This sonnet begins with a miracle, that of the planet Venus manifesting itself in the shape of a splendid human figure. If we haven't already guessed who or what this figure is, the second stanza zeros in on the fair physical attributes and valore of the lady. One might still say, however, that it is the miraculous appearance of the Madonna. But by the third stanza the

poet is assailed with a battle of sighs again; and now we are certain we are dealing with a flesh-and-blood woman. (The word *battaglia* gives it away; for while one might sigh, and become mute, before the appearance of the Madonna, and before her beauty and unsurpassed virtue, it is unlikely to be expressed as a battle.) While this poem enters with elements that suggest a Stil Nuovo poem we find ourselves back in suffering mode. By the end the poet is again a martyr, and while this carries a Christian parallel, the poet is still a vassal yearning for recognition of his dedication.

Sonnet X

Io voglio del ver la mia donna laudare
ed asembrarli la rosa e lo giglio:
più che stella d'iana splende e pare,
e ciò ch'è lassù bello a lei somiglio.

Verde river' a lei rasembro e l'âre,
tutti color di fior', giano e vermiglio,
oro ed azzurro e ricche gioi' per dare:
medesimo Amor per lei rafina meglio.

5

Passa per via adorna, e sì gentile
ch'abassa orgoglio a cui dona salute,
e fa 'l de nostra fé se non la crede;

10

e no lle pò apressare om che sia vile;
ancor ve dirò c'ha maggior vertute:
null'om pò mal pensar fin che la vede.

I want of truth [honestly and accurately] my lady to praise and liken her to the rose and the lily: more than star Diana [Venus, the morning star] she shines and appears, and all that is up there [on high] beautiful to her I compare.

Verdant country to her I compare and the air, all colors of flowers, yellow and vermilion, gold and blue and rich jewels for to gift: even Love through her refines better.

She passes by way [goes on her way] adorned, and so gracious that she lessens pride in whom she gives greeting, and makes him of [converts him to] our faith [even] if not it he believes;

and not she can come near man who be vile [of non-virtuous nature]; moreover you I will tell that she has [even] more virtue [spiritual qualities]: no man can evil to think after her he sees.

The calm, elevated and sweetly beautiful opening of this sonnet tells us that we are again in Dolce Stil Nuovo territory. The poet is direct in telling us that he is comparing his lady to the precious things of heaven and earth and that she even excels the morning star in splendor. And while Guinizzelli's lady will never reach the heights of Dante's Beatrice, the flowers he compares her to are closely associated with the Madonna or Virgin Mary. The second stanza indulgently reflects Guinizzelli's reputation as the *Poeta Visivo* or "Visual Poet." Look no further: every color a flower possesses is reflected in her being, along with jewels and the countryside itself. This praise, of course, is not merely of the Lady's beauty (which we

gather through ordinary poetic “custom”) but even more so of her virtue in the highest and noblest sense. Nature in its brilliant totality brings her to mind. It is interesting that Guinizzelli uses the words “compare” twice (*asembrarli*, “to liken her,” in verse 2, and *rasembro*, “I compare,” in verse 5). In a curious, atypical way (at least for him) Guinizzelli goes outside the purity of “just-so” metaphors and tells us about himself, what he is doing. A certain honesty pervades his direct admission, and this, perhaps, reflects his “scientific” strain (or, at least, his straining for that).

Anyone familiar with Dante’s *La vita nuova* and his famous *Tanto gentile* sonnet (V.N. XXVI) will be struck immediately by the similarity between stanza 3 of the present poem and verses 5 through 8 of Dante’s, whose rhythm strikes the ear with familiarity:

Ella si va, sentendosi laudare,
benignamente d’umiltà vestuta,
e par che sia una cosa venuta
dal cielo in terra a miracol mostrare.

*On her way she goes, hearing herself praised, benignly in humility clothed,
and she seems to be a thing come from heaven to earth a miracle to show.*

The most notable verse, however, is verse 11 of both poems, which should be read aloud in the original for the shared one-syllable rhythm:

Guinizzelli: *e fa 'l de nostra fé se non la crede* (“and converts to our faith

ev-en those who don't believe [it]"). Dante: ...*intender non la può chi no la prova* ("to understand it he can-not who has not felt it").

Inspiration from Guinizzelli—conscious, unconscious, or something in between—is clearly there. This brings to mind a slew of sayings like the one attributed to Igor Stravinsky: "Lesser artists borrow; great artists steal." Of course, *inherit* might be the polite word when it comes to Medieval poetry.

In stanza 3 Guinizzelli writes, ...*abassa orgoglio a cui dona salute* ("she lessens pride in whom she gives greeting"). The *salute* (as greeting) is of high importance in Guinizzelli and the pre-Divine Comedy Dante; it is the *guerdon* that gives the poet strength, without which his well-being ("*salute*") is in danger (as we have often seen in Guinizzelli's poems). It is the first (and may be the only) stage of the lady's recognition of the poet. In the present poem and in Dante's the greeting has a universal effect and works on people other than the poet. Now Guinizzelli's *salute* humbles all who receive it; in Dante's poem ...*ogne lingua deven tremando muta, e li occhi no l'ardiscon di guardare*; "All tongues become tremblingly mute, and eyes do not dare to look upon her." In both this poem and in Dante the *salute* has transformative moral power and the power of salvation: In the present poem it makes believers out of non-believers; and Dante in *La vita nuova* (XI), writes, "I say that when she appeared anywhere, I in the hope of her miraculous greeting could deem no one my enemy; on the contrary, the

flame of charity overcame me, which made me forgive all those who had offended me.” We see this moral observation in the final verse of Guinizzelli’s poem: “No man can think evil after seeing her,” which is a clear precursor to what Dante will write. Backing up to the two preceding verses, the poet states that she cannot even come near a man of non-virtuous nature. One supposes that he would have to come to her, which would assume of him a slightly better basic state than that of the hopeless mud in *Al cor gentil*.

Sonnet XIII

Madonna mia, quel dì ch'Amor consente
ch'i' cangi core, volere o maniera,
o ch'altra donna mi sia più piacente,
tornerà l'acqua in su d'ogni riviera,

il cieco vederà, 'l muto parlente
ed ogni cosa grave fia leggera:
sì forte punto d'amore e possente
fu 'l giorno ch'io vi vidi a la 'mprimiera.

5

E questo posso dire in veritate:
ch'Amore e stella fermaron volere
ch'io fosse vostro, ed hanlo giudicato;

10

e se da stella è dato, non crediate
ch'altra cosa mi possa mai piacere,
se Dio non rompe in ciel ciò c'ha firmato.

My lady, that day that Love consents that I change heart, will or way, or that another woman to me be more pleasing, it will turn the water in on every river [reverse the course of every river],

the blind will see, the mute speak and every thing heavy will be light: so strong [a] point [moment] of love and powerful was the day that I you saw at the first.

And this I can say in truth: that Love and star [heaven's astrological workings] will resolve that I be yours, and they have it judged [and they have so determined it];

and if from star[s] it is given, do not believe that another thing me can ever please, if God does not break in heaven that which He has fixed [determined].

The poet's love is at one with the will of the universe—with heaven's will; should his love ever cease, the laws of physics would be turned upside down and all impossibility would be reversed—so great was his initial love-strike. It was a special day, to say the least. In literature a hyperbole that reaches an impossible degree is called an adynaton, and Guinizelli certainly employs it in this sonnet. We can easily see here, again, the dantesque connection of the Lady to Medieval theology that reflects conceptions of heaven and its influence in the world. His love—and we must assume his encounter—was predetermined by God along with all the other natural phenomena that make up life on earth.

Sonnet XIX

Bonagiunta to Guinizzelli

The following sonnet was written by Bongiunta Orbicciano da Lucca (or simply "Bonagiunta") who lived from about 1220 to 1297. Like Giacomo da Lentini, he was a notary; unlike da Lentini he wrote few memorable poems, inheriting his ideas from various Tuscan and Sicilian-School poets. This is his most notable poem, but only incidentally, as it is addressed to Guinizzelli in skeptical regard to the new style of composition pursued by the younger poet. Therefore it is part of an important *tenzone* in early Italian literature.

Voi, ch'avete mutata la maniera
de li plagenti ditti de l'amore
de la forma dell'esser là dov'era
per avanzare ogn'altro trovatore,

avete fatto como la lumera
ch'a le scure partite da' splendore,
ma non quine ove luce 'l'alta spera,
la quale avanza e passa di chiarore.

5

Così passate voi di sottiglianza,
E non si può chi ben ispogna,
cotant'è iscura vostra parlatura.
Ed è tentuta gran dissimiglianza,
ancor che 'l senno vegna da Bologna,
traier canson per forza di scrittura.

10

You, who has changed the manner of the pleasant rhymes of love from the form of being there where it was to exceed every other troubadour,

you made like the lantern that to the dark parts gives brightness, but not here where light the high[est] spheres [shines or "spheres"; i.e., the sun], the [one] which advances and [sur]passes of [in] clarity.

So you [sur]pass you of [in] subtlety [surpass all others in subtlety] so it is obscure your talking. And it is held [a] great upsetting, even if the astuteness comes from Bologna, to pull [out a] canzone by force of writing[s] [i.e., scholarly texts].

Right from the opening of his sonnet Bonagiunta defines Guinizelli as someone who has gone against tradition “to exceed every other troubadour.” Bonagiunta remains tied to the old custom, even falling back on the word *trovatore*. While he claims that Guinizelli is making like a lantern, shedding light in dark places, he is not bright enough, certainly not as bright as the sun. Some scholars believe that by *sun* Bonagiunta refers to the Sicilian School poet, Giacomo da Lentini, one of those from whom Bonagiunta derived a good deal of inspiration. Guinizelli’s subtlety renders his meanings obscure, and it is considered bad form to compose a poem whose sense is derived from “brainy” writings (rather, we assume, solely from pure and deep personal sentiment).

Guinizzelli to Bonagiunta (XIX)

Omo ch'è saggio non corre leggero,
ma a passo grada sì com' vol misura:
quand'ha pensato, riten su' pensiero
infin a tanto che 'l ver l'asigura.

Foll'è chi crede sol veder lo vero
e non pensare che altri i pogna cura:
non se dev'omo tener troppo altero,
ma dé guardar so stato e sua natura.

5

Volan ausel' per air di straine guise
ed han diversi loro operamenti,
né tutti d'un volar né d'un ardire.

10

Dëo natura e 'l mondo in grado mise,
e fe' despari senni e intendimenti:
perzò ciò ch'omo pensa non dé dire.

Man who is wise does not run fast, but with steps gradual as wants measure [prudent measure]: when he has thought, he holds in thought until such [time] as the truth it is secured.

Foolish is who believes alone to see the true and not to think that others [do not] there put care: not himself must man to hold too high, but must watch his state and his nature.

They fly the birds through air in various ways and have diverse their behaviors, neither all are of one [kind of] flight nor of one daring [temperament].

God nature and the world in degrees placed, and made disparate capacities and intuitions: therefore that which man thinks [hurriedly concludes] he must not say.

Guinizzelli opens his poem with an idea that mimics scientific method: let one's conclusions develop in prudent steps until one arrives at the truth. This echoes Sonnet XVI: *Lo saggio, dico pensa prima di gir...* ("the wise man, I say, thinks before going [on a journey]"). Primarily this is the first step in a route that begins with self-examination (and later, we assume, external observation) to arrive at the truth. The present poem is filled with philosophic advice and statements and therefore belongs to the didactic variety.

The second stanza warns against one's believing that others have not put as much diligence into their research as one's self has; therefore one must self-examine for overconfidence of this kind. Continuing: Like birds in flight, people do things in their own ways and at their own capacities. Everyone is different; for God fashioned all things in grado, in degrees or grades—that is, of differing faculties. The latter statement is a bit of a put-down of Bonagiunta, as is the final verse, which, in effect, advises "man" to hold his tongue until he has thought things through (echoing advice from the first stanza).

So it is clear that Guinizzelli was aware of his position in relation to most poets of his time and that they perceived his difference. In the above two sonnets we have a lucid confrontation of the movement from one attitude to another, and this shift can be taken as an evidential foundation of Dante's commitment to the "revolution," visible in many ways, both in his creative

and didactic writing. In *De vulgari eloquentia* (I, XIII, 1), searching for the perfect vernacular, Dante registers his opinion of Bonagiunta's Tuscan dialect and poetry. Apparently Bonagiunta and other poets of his tongue believed their language to be of an illustrious sort, an attitude that Dante takes issue with: "[N]ot only is it the common people who lose their heads in this way, for we find that a number of well-known men have believed as much: like Giuttone d'Arezzo, who never even aimed at a vernacular worthy of court, or Bonagiunta da Lucca [...] all of whose poetry, if there were space to study it closely, we would find to be fitted not for a court but at best for a city counsel." (See Sonnet XX to review Guinizelli's encounter with Giuttone.)

It may come as a surprise that it is Bonagiunta who first utters the words *Dolce Stil Nuovo*. In truth, of course, it is Dante who puts the words in his mouth. (In *The Divine Comedy* he places Bonagiunta among the Golosi or Gluttonous, the second highest, or least trying, position in the tower of Purgatory (before the Earthly Paradise). Apparently Bonagiunta was a real "bon vivant"; and his was not the kind of *bon* that gets you into Paradise. The punishment here is that the souls cannot eat from the tempting fruit-filled trees that are there to assist in their abstemious repentance.) Bonagiunta recognizes Dante and says (in Sinclair's straight verse translation):

“But tell me if I see here him that brought forth the new rhymes, beginning with Ladies that have the intelligence of love.” [See commentary, Canzone IV.] And I said to him, “I am one who, when love breathes in me, take note, and in that manner which he [Love] dictates within go on to set it forth.”

“Oh brother, now I see the knot that held back the Notary [Giacomo dal Lentini] and Guittone [d’Arezzo] and me short of the sweet new style [Dolce Stil Nuovo] that I hear; I see well how your pens follow close behind the dictator [Love], which assuredly did not happen with ours, and he that sets himself to examine further sees nothing else between one style and another.” (*Purgatorio*, Canto IV, 48-62)

It seems that Purgatory not only cures you of gluttony it also teaches you to see (or to admit) that your poetic sensibilities did not make the grade.

The first mention of Guido Guinizzelli in *Purgatorio* occurs in Canto XI when Dante encounters those who repent of their pride. He encounters Oderisi da Gubbio, a painter and manuscript illuminator about which little is known but with whom Dante seems to have been acquainted. Oderisi praises another painter (Franco the Bolognese), whose superior skill Oderisi would not admit to in life. Then he accepts the fact that with the passage of time each artist must relinquish his elevated position to the next great innovator: “In painting Cimabue thought to hold the field and now Giotto has the cry, so that the other’s fame is dim...” He goes on to say, “...

so has the one Guido taken from the other the glory of our tongue, and he, perhaps, is born that shall chase the one and the other from the nest.” By “the one Guido” Oderisi refers to Guido Cavalcante, one of the stars of the Dolce Stil Nuovo and a good friend of Dante, second in fame only to Dante as a medieval writer of sonnets and canzoni. (See commentary for Sonnet IX.) By the “other” Guido he means Guido Guinizzelli, to whom Cavalcante owes the “glory” of the new, elevated language in his own poetry. Oderisi then says that, as things go, perhaps someone will arrive on the scene who will supersede both of them. This someone is Dante himself, of course. Dante is aware of the irony in elevating himself in a place where one is punished for pride. He later says to Oderisi, “Thy true speech fills my heart with true humbleness and abates a great swelling in me.”

It is in Canto XXVI that Dante meets up with Guinizzelli (Guinicelli or Guinizelli depending on the edition). He is in the second highest level of Purgatory, that of the Lustful. It is a matter of debate among scholars as to the meaning of his specific category here, and it is beyond the scope of this essay to tackle it; but sticking only to poetry, and bowing out a bit, we would have to cite poems like Sonnet XVII, and perhaps similar works that are lost, as examples of lust. (Purely from the *Purgatorio* text and its references themselves, the case might be made, I gingerly venture, for cross-dressing, an interpretation of excess love.) The poet identifies himself in verse 92: “I

am Guinicelli, and I make my purgation already because of my good sorrowing towards the end.” (The punishment here is fire, but it seems not to be physical torture; rather it is a flame that cleanses, purging—not without inflicting anguish, of course—the last vestiges of sin.) Dante is moved at the sight of him, and would have hugged him but for the prohibitive fire, and writes, using the reverential *voi*, “Such as the grief of Lycurgus, the two sons became on seeing their mother again, I became, but with more restraint when I heard speak his own name the father of me and of others my betters, whoever has used sweet and graceful rhymes of love...” Guinizelli responds, “Thou leavest such a trace and so clear in me by that which I hear thee tell, as Lethe [the river of forgetfulness] cannot destroy or dim; but if thy words have now sworn truth, tell me for what cause thou showest thyself, by speech and look, to hold me dear.” Dante responds, “Those sweet lines of yours, which so long as the modern use shall last will make their ink still dear.” Sinclair writes in his commentary of Canto XXVI, “No modern poet is so often named or quoted in Dante’s writing as Guinicelli and it is always in terms of praise...”

Directly after Dante’s acclaim, Guinizelli graciously shifts his own received lauds to Arnaut Daniel, the Provençal poet, who is there with others in this region. While Arnaut’s work was often of the exaggerated variety, Dante admired him for his adoption and use of the *langue d’oc*

Arnaut's own vernacular (Dante has him speak his eight lines in that language); and he values his position in the love poetry conventions that would follow in the various Italian schools. Therefore he is a significant early step in the trajectory that would lead to Dante's great work.

Just before Arnaut appears Dante describes Guinizzelli's leave-taking from the canto: "[P]erhaps to give place to others who were near him, he disappeared through the fire as through the water a fish goes to the bottom." There is no doubt that his hope for Paradise eventually will be fulfilled.

(N.B.: All translations in the present section are from John D. Sinclair's translation of the *Purgatorio*. See Bibliog.)

So ends this essay on Guinizzelli's position in early Italian poetry. Of course, a study of Guinizzelli can be greatly expanded; a deepening of insight can be gained by a consideration of other poets of the Dolce Stil Nuovo and the relationship between their respective works. Aside from Guinizzelli (c.1230-1276) and Dante (1265-1321), other Stil Nuovo poets are Guido Cavalcante (c.1255-1300), Lapo Gianni (active 1298-1328), Gianni Alfani (active between the 13th and 14th Centuries), Dino Frescobaldi (c.1271-c.1316), and Cino da Pistoia (1270-1336/37). Aside from Dante, the most illustrious of these was Guido Cavalcante, whose influence extends well beyond his own period. His sonnets and canzoni

were much darker than Dante's. Rumored a non-believer, he was analytical and introspective in the matter of *amore*; and in his *Donna mi prega*, his own "doctrinal" poem, he associates love with the planet Mars (symbolizing war) rather than with Venus, the usual love-planet.

It difficult to say if Guinizzelli had any notion that his best work would be so influential (Dante was age eleven when he passed away; and the earliest by far of the other stilnovists, Cavalcante, was about twenty-one). In Purgatory he asked to know why Dante holds him dear. He knew, however, that he was pursuing something different and perhaps that a new trend was in the wind, as witness his exchange with Bonaguinta.

Historical conjecture aside, one must imagine that he has made it to Paradiso by now and that all of earth's controversies concern him much less than they do his legions of analysts, speculators, and explicators.

Two Fine Translations of *Guinizzelli's Poems*

1. *Al Cor Gentil*

Translation by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882)

Within the gentle heart Love shelters him,
As birds within the green shade of the grove.
Before the gentle heart, in Nature's scheme,
Love was not, nor the gentle heart ere Love.
For with the sun, at once,
So sprang the light immediately; nor was
Its birth before the sun's.
And Love hath his effect in gentleness
Of very self; even as
Within the middle fire the heat's excess.

The fire of Love comes to the gentle heart
Like as its virtue to a precious stone;
To which no star its influence can impart
Till it is made a pure thing by the sun:
For when the sun hath smit
From out its essence that which there was vile,
The star endoweth it.
And so the heart created by God's breath

Pure, true, and clean from guile,
A woman, like a star, enamoureth.

In gentle heart Love for like reason is
For which the lamp's high flame is fann'd and bow'd:
Clear, piercing bright, it shines for its own bliss;
Nor would it burn there else, it is so proud.
For evil natures meet
With Love as it were water met with fire,
As cold abhorring heat.
Through gentle heart Love doth a track divine, --
Like knowing like; the same
As diamond runs through iron in the mine.

The sun strikes full upon the mud all day;
It remains vile, nor the sun's worth is less.
"By race I am gentle," the proud man doth say:
He is the mud, the sun is gentleness.
Let no man predicate
That aught the name of gentleness should have,
Even in a king's estate,
Except the heart there be a gentle man's.
The star-beam lights the wave, --
Heaven holds the star and the star's radiance.

God, in the understanding of high Heaven,
Burns more than in our sight the living sun:

There to behold His Face unveil'd is given;
And Heaven, whose will is homage paid to One,
Fulfils the things which live
In God, from the beginning excellent.
So should my lady give
That truth which in her eyes is glorified,
On which her heart is bent,
To me whose service waiteth at her side.

My lady, God shall ask, "What dared'st thou?"
(When my soul stands with all her acts review'd;)
"Thou passed'st Heaven, into My sight, as now,
To make Me of vain love similitude.
To Me doth praise belong,
And to the Queen of all the realm of grace
Who endeth fraud and wrong."
Then may I plead: "As though from Thee he came,
Love wore an angel's face:
Lord, if I loved her, count it not my shame."

2. *Vedut'ò la Lucente Stella Diana*
Translation by Ezra Pound (1885-1972)

I have seen the shining star of the dawn
Appearing ere the day yieldeth its whiteness.
It has taken upon itself the form of a human face,
Above all else meseems it gives splendor.
A face of snow, color of the ivy-berry,
The eyes are brilliant, gay, and full of love,
And I do not believe there is a Christian maid in the world
So full of fairness or so valorous.
Yea, I am so assailed of her worth,
With such cruel battling of sighs,
That I am not hardy to return before her;
Thus may she have cognizance of my desires:
That without speaking, I would be her servitor
For naught save the pity that she might have of my anguish.

The Rossetti translation first appeared in The Early Italian Poets, 1861.
The Pound translation is from Pound's The Spirit of Romance, 1910.

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Peter Lucia was born and raised on the New Jersey Shore, where he still resides. He has degrees from Columbia University in Italian Studies with a very high concentration in Philosophy. He taught Italian as a graduate student at Columbia and Italian and English at Berlitz School of Languages in Los Angeles and Beverly Hills. His serious hobbies (and sometime-professions) include classical guitar, which he has played since the mid-1960s, computer art, photography, travel to Italy, local history, and writing. He often contributes these skills and interests to the personal projects of friends and family. He has no dogs, no cats, no wife, and no kids.

Also by Peter Lucia:

One Week in Venice (novel) and The Murder at Asbury Park (local history).
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