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Stil Novo Poetry: Guido Guinizzelli and Guido Cavalcanti

The literary works: Two collections of love poems (22 by Guido Guinizzelli and 52 by Guido Cavalcanti) written in the late 1200s; transcribed in Italian in the mid-1300s; translated into English by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1861.

Synopsis: The poems focus on love for a lady, the noble heart, and the superiority of the lady: Guinizzelli's lyrics elevate her positive attributes over the poet's distress and introduce the concept of the "noble heart"; Cavalcanti's poems speak of the poet's deep suffering from love and the inner struggle of a soul afflicted with opposing emotions.

The term *stil novo* designates a loosely organized group of late-thirteenth-century poets who shared an innovative treatment of love poetry. Outstanding among poets connected with this new style were Guido Guinizzelli and Guido Cavalcanti, the first of whom was approximately two decades older than the second. Two men by the name of Guido Guinizzelli are mentioned in documents from Bologna around the mid-1200s, one belonging to the noble class, the other to a family of skilled laborers. Most probably, Guinizzelli the poet was born around 1240 to a family originally involved in

craftsmanship and, later on, in the practice of law. Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, Guinizelli pursued a commercial and judicial career. He was working as a consulting lawyer in the mid-1200s, and also writing poetry. At the time, Bologna and the major cities in the Romagna region, as well as nearby Tuscany, were rent by fierce political struggle between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. Guinizelli sided with the Ghibellines, supporters of the emperor. When they were defeated in 1274, he was sent from Bologna to Monselice, a small town in northern Italy. Never returning to Bologna, Guinizelli died in exile around 1276.

Guido Cavalcanti, a poet on the opposite political side, led an even more eventful life than Guinizelli. Probably born around 1250, Cavalcanti belonged to one of the most powerful Florentine families involved in the political struggle between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. As a small child, he was banished from Florence after the Ghibelline victory of Montaperti in 1260; all families supporting the Guelphs were expelled from the city at the time, and their houses were razed to the ground. Six years later, among other far-reaching consequences, a Guelph victory in southern Italy allowed Cavalcanti to return to Florence. In 1267 Cavalcanti became engaged to a woman belonging to a family whose political views opposed his own; theirs was probably one of the engagements celebrated that year to bring about peace between warring factions. In the 1290s, his political faction itself split into smaller factions--the White Guelphs and the Black Guelphs. The first was aligned with the longtime rich, and the drive to keep Florence independent, the second with the newly wealthy and the Pope. Cavalcanti sided with the first, the White Guelphs, and their main representatives in Florence, the Cerchi family. They opposed the Donati, leaders of the Black Guelphs and a family personally hated by

Cavalcanti. Nearly killed by Corso Donati, Cavalcanti attempted to murder him in return but also failed.

Cavalcanti took an active part in the political life of Florence, trying to help bring the continuous struggles to an end. He was barred, along with other noblemen, from public office in 1293-94 in accordance with the anti-aristocratic laws passed at the time. There was violent street-fighting following the assassination of the imprisoned Cerchi. Afterwards, in June 1300, the priors (elected magistrates) of Florence, including the poet's former friend Dante, banished Cavalcanti, sending him into exile to Sarzana, in northern Italy. The banishment was revoked in July 1300, but Cavalcanti apparently contracted malaria and died that same year in August.

Though Guinizzelli and Cavalcanti led eventful political lives, their poems contain little autobiographical information. The bulk of their lyrics center instead on love. Some critics attribute this absence of politically charged verse to repression by the winning faction against anyone likely to publicize opposing views. Others ascribe the predominance of love in *stilnovist* poetry to the profound philosophical research and debate in the thirteenth century at the universities of Paris and Bologna, following the introduction of newly translated works by Aristotle. Certainly this debate affected the way the poets wrote their love lyrics. Rejecting the mannered style of their predecessors, they developed a new type of poetry, with Guinizzelli distinguishing himself as its forerunner, Cavalcanti as its initiator in earnest. Guinizzelli introduces elements of this new style in the poem "Love Returns Always to a Noble Heart" (*Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore*); Cavalcanti demonstrates it in full in "A lady Beseeches me and Therefore I Am Willing to Treat" (*Donna me prega,--per ch'eo voglio dire*).

Events in History at the Time of the Poems

From Frederick II to peninsular disharmony. Political and social unrest plagued the regions of Italy during the Middle Ages. In Sicily, the emperors of Germany attained a measure of power when one of their descendents, Henry VI, married Constance of Altavilla, heiress of the Norman dynasty that was then in control of the island. Henry's son, Frederick II, firmly established his power throughout southern Italy, thanks to a feudal structure of imperial administrators and vassals that left very little freedom to the individual villages and towns. His obstacle to further expansion into central Italy was the Church, which had established a wide net of semi-independent territories that were loyal to the Pope. Fierce animosity soon developed in the territories of Tuscany and the Romagna. On one side were the supporters of the Pope (the Guelphs)--who opposed the Holy Roman Emperor and his policy of strict subjugation of local authorities; on the other side were supporters of the emperor (the Ghibellines), who objected to the papacy's assumption that it was entitled to extend its spiritual power into temporal matters, deeming its interference intolerable. Eventually, after two violent battles in central and southern Italy at Benevento (1266) and Tagliacozzo (1268), the Ghibellines were defeated and the last descendant of the German dynasty was killed. After the Ghibelline defeat, the Guelphs returned to power in Florence for good, but then split into two factions. Around 1300 they divided into the Black and White Guelphs, repeating the earlier division between supporters of the Pope and followers of the Holy Roman

Emperor. There was by then also a poetic split, perhaps best understood as a progression from the Sicilian school of poetry that had gathered around Frederick II to a new style.

Emergence of the new style. Among the late-thirteenth-century writers who favored an innovative treatment of love poetry was Dante Alighieri, author of the *Commedia*, or ***The Divine Comedy*** (also in *WLAIT 7: Italian Literature and Its Times*). The term *stil novo* was in fact coined by Dante in *Purgatory 24* (lines 55-57) of his *Divine Comedy*.

Traveling through Purgatory, Dante meets the Tuscan poet Bonagiunta Orbicciani, a representative of the “old style,” to whom Dante explains that he is one of the new poets who, without fanfare or rhetoric, expresses with fidelity the love in his heart. Enlightened by Dante’s explanations, Bonagiunta understands the difference between the old school of poetry (represented by himself, the Tuscan poet Guittone d’Arezzo, and the Sicilian poet Giacomo da Lentini [alluded to by Dante as the Notary]). “My brother, now I see,” Bonagiunta says to Dante, “the knot that held Guittone and the Notary and me back from the sweet new style I hear!” (Dante, *Purgatory 24*, lines 55-57). Guinizzelli’s fame as the precursor of this *dolce stil novo*, or sweet new style, rests on the fact that Dante himself, when he meets Guinizzelli soon after Bonagiunta in *Purgatory 26*, recognizes him as the one who influenced the new circle of poets. Dante praises him as “a father to me, and to those my betters, who have ever used the sweet and pleasant rhymes of love” (Dante, *Purgatory 26*, lines 97-99). Earlier, in *Purgatory 11*, Dante had established a kind of literary chronology within the *stil novo* movement by saying that the second Guido (Guido Cavalcanti) had outdone the poetic skills of the first (Guido Guinizzelli), and by foreseeing with veiled modesty the advent of a new poet (Dante himself) who would

surpass them both: “Thus hath one Guido from the other snatch’d the letter’d prize: and he, perhaps, is born, who shall drive either from their nest” (Dante, *Purgatory* 11, lines 97-99). Other *stil novo* poets include Lapo Gianni, Gianni degli Alfani, Dino Frescobaldi, and Cino da Pistoia.

The new style and medieval philosophy. Both Guinizzelli and Cavalcanti wrote a few love poems that are openly erotic, but the image of the lady in their works is mainly one of physical insubstantiality. Normally she served a philosophical purpose, an emphasis in keeping with scholarly trends of the day. During the 1100s and 1200s there was a surge in the growth of urban centers in Italy, prompted by movement from the countryside to the city. Apart from causing economic and social changes, the shift to cities meant that new cultural institutions needed to be created to satisfy the needs of a burgeoning population. Fundamental among these institutions were universities, which gave rise to medieval philosophy, a discipline that took on a name born of its association with them--Scholasticism. Among other concerns, the Scholastics tried to reconcile rational and religious beliefs by explaining how human reason was related to faith and how the intellect could comprehend the idea of divine revelation. This philosophical quest generated renewed interest in Plato (427-347 B.C.E.) and, especially, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.).

From 500 to 800 C.E. philosophical speculation focused on Plato, whose beliefs could easily be related to some ideas of Christianity. The theory of One Supreme Being who regulates the whole universe, for instance, lent itself well to the Christian concepts of one and only one first cause, God the Creator, and the soul’s immortality. Also, Plato’s

belief that the physical world must have a metaphysical source could be adapted to the Christian notion that the physical world is but an illusion of the senses, an image of a superior realm located in heaven. Plato's ideas led to interpretations that gave rise to a system of thought called Neoplatonism. Some *stilnovists*, like Guinizelli and most notably Dante, echoed Platonism in their theories of love, considering the lady and the ideal beauty she represented as physical intermediaries between the sensible world and the higher, invisible realm of God.

Aristotle was the other Greek philosopher who stirred the curiosity of medieval thinkers, but not until the second period of Scholasticism (the 1200s). Until then Aristotle's works had not been available in Latin, the common language of medieval Europe. After the remarkable linguistic effort made in the twelfth century by the Archbishop of Toledo and his school of translators in Spain, the Aristotelian corpus became accessible in its Latin version to students and professors in schools and universities. Aristotle had written extensively about the intellect and the way it functions in relation to the senses. Some of the key concepts in Aristotle's works regarded the natural world and the way human beings apprehend it. Contrary to Plato, Aristotle believed that the explanation of physical phenomena is contained within the phenomena themselves, and is apprehended through the senses. Human knowledge, taught Aristotle, originates in the perception of sensible forms. Once the intellect has apprehended the sensible forms of the physical world, it can envision the essence of the physical forms. This process of abstraction is made possible by the existence of a potential and an actual intellect. In its potential stage, the intellect has the ability to apprehend abstract forms. When this ability is triggered by sensory perceptions, the intellect interprets the data

received by the senses, developing from potentiality into act, thus becoming actual intellect. Aristotle illustrates this complex intellectual process through an example from the physical world. Just as colors--which are potentially visible--are actually perceived through light, so does the potential intellect turn into actual intellect when stimulated by sensory perceptions.

Several medieval philosophers opposed Aristotle's ideas because they gave human reason a prevailing role, thereby minimizing the role of divine revelation. Nevertheless, many Aristotelian ideas were taken up and elaborated by the poets of the *stil novo*. Aristotle came up with a theory of change from potentiality into act, for instance; traces of this theory can be recognized in Guinizelli's "I Think a Man Foolish, To Tell the Truth" (*Tegno de folle 'mpres, ' a lo ver dire*), a poem about a lady whose appearance causes the countryside around her to turn into a luminous landscape. Her radiant beauty makes a potentially visibly joyous land become just that. This idea of transformation and movement implied the concept of creation as opposed to Plato's theory of fixed, eternal essences. The idea may also be a reflection in poetry of the fact that rapid social changes were occurring in the regions of Tuscany and the Romagna.

The Aristotelian theory of the possible and actual intellect preoccupied Cavalcanti, who, in his poem "A lady Beseeches Me" (*Donna me prega*) elaborated on the chances of the intellect ever changing from potentiality into act when one is under the influence of physical love. In "Who Is It Who Comes, Whom Every Man Admires" (*Chi é questa che vèn, ch'ogn'om la mira*), he stresses the impossibility of attaining any knowledge in the lady's presence. When she appears, she creates turmoil in onlookers

and prevents a man's senses from connecting calmly with his intellect in order to turn sensible images into a vision of the mind.

Guinizzelli's and Cavalcanti's poems center on the turmoil created by the lady's appearance and the effects of love on the poets' hearts and bodies. These effects are philosophical as well as lyrical. The lady is not only the source of poetic inspiration; she also becomes the image that the poet uses to illustrate his theory of knowledge.

Natural Wonders--Light, Stars, and Love

A philosophy of light developed in Italy and England during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. According to this philosophy, just as light can be explained through mathematical rules, so can all physical events, since they are all made visible by light. Rules governing the phenomena of light can thus be used to explain the whole visible world. This idea found its way into Cavalcanti's "A lady beseeches me," along with Aristotle's concept of the possible intellect. Explaining what brings love into existence, the poet says it is "formed, like the diaphanous, by light" and "finds its place and dwelling in the possible intellect" (Cavalcanti in Shaw, p. 98). That is, love is potentially there in the heart, and the woman brings it into existence, just as light brings into visible form the potential colors mentioned.

Aristotle maintained that the stars and the planets cause everything in the universe to move and change. In keeping with the way he understood the

universe, the *stilnovists* believed that the lady was able to bring about change by stirring up emotions in the poet's noble heart. They also referred in their poetry to the planet Mars. Medieval astrologers associated Mars with evil influence. Thus, whoever was under its influence was in a state of mental disorder, a reference that found its way into poetry, becoming associated with the condition of the lover.

Another common strategy used by the *stilnovists* to describe a lady was a simile comparing her to the qualities of the sun, stars, or angels. In the poems of both Guinizelli and Cavalcanti such similes are not just a strategy to conjure a visual image. Nor are they just an exterior way of praising the lady through flamboyant expression. Rather they are logically connected with the Aristotelian theory of change from potentiality into act.

Philosophy of the noble heart. One of the main tenets of the *stilnovists*, especially Guinizelli, was that “love and the noble heart are concomitant co-creations, with the noble heart as natural abode for love” (Brand and Pertile, p. 20). This theory was based on the belief that love could be fully understood only by those who were endowed with honorable feelings, regardless of their lineage or social status. Although the theory of the noble heart was part of an established literary tradition, it is particularly associated with the climate of social mobility that characterized the main cities in the central regions of Tuscany and the Romagna in the thirteenth century. At that time, the political power of the aristocracy, traditionally hereditary, was being eroded by the rising merchant class, and a new idea of power based on merit was developing. The communal societies and their “democratic” values seem to have been the perfect cradle for the development of the

theory of the noble heart, which held that what counted most was not who a man's ancestors were but the purity of his feelings. Such a theory would provide a fundamental premise that justified doing away with rigid social structures based on an aristocratic hierarchy. At the same time, a poem that celebrated this new theory would give expression to an individual soul. The idea of the noble heart, defined not by wealth or aristocratic title but by integrity of emotion, had much to do with the advent of the new style of poetry in the Italian states. In the words of one literary historian, the *stil novo* poets changed the very social basis of poetry, shifting it "from a feudal court with fixed, inherited values to an imaginary country: the community that joins them is a community of the noble heart and an aristocracy of the spirit" (Edwards, p. xxiii).

One cannot say with certainty that the theory of the noble heart was the expression of "democratic" values emanating from the communes (self-governing, semi-republican cities) in the 1200s. However, the vast literary and philosophical debate that the theory awakened indicates that scholars in those years were taking seriously the issue of knowledge, which entailed understanding love. It also suggests that to their minds knowledge was intimately tied to the inner workings of passions in a noble heart.

The Poetic "Song"

A *canzone* ("song"), one of the most important forms of Italian poetry, is a poem with a certain metrical structure. It is commonly made up of a varying number of stanzas of equal length (usually between 5 and 7) until the final stanza, which is

usually shorter than the rest. Every stanza is divided on the basis of different rhyming patterns into an opening and a closing part (the *fronte* and *coda*, respectively), generally made up of eleven-syllable (a hendecasyllable) and seven-syllable lines. Shaped but not invented by Italians, the song is thought to derive from the Provençal literature of France.

The Poems in Focus

Contents summary--“Love returns always to a noble heart”. Guinizzelli’s poetic production consists of 5 songs, 15 sonnets, and 2 fragments of songs. Their sequence of composition remains unknown. Most of his poems center on the superiority of the lady and the effects of love on the poet’s heart. Primarily they do so through praise of the beautiful lady, who is compared to a star or an angel, and through vivid description of the deadly consequences of love on the poet. The lyrics depict him as struck by a thunderbolt, wounded by an arrow, or left like a dead body by Love’s assault, a “brass statue / with no life or spirit flowing” (Guinizzelli in Edwards, Poem 6, p. 33). Some of Guinizzelli’s poems are influenced by earlier genres and styles, especially the image of the poet as the worshipper of the lady--a depiction that harks back to the feudal obedience of a vassal to his lady. However, in his trademark poem, *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore* (“Love returns always to a noble heart”), Guinizzelli introduces into poetry a philosophical concept of love that was new in the vernacular language of Italy and was to be the main theme of some of the later *stilnovists*.

The poem begins with love returning to a noble heart, just as a bird going back to its natural setting, a forest. After the initial comparison, the verse proceeds with the typical progression of a philosophical demonstration--a thesis is put forward and then illustrated through examples. The thesis is that love and the noble heart are coexistent: "Nature did not make love before the noble heart, / Nor the noble heart before love (Guinizzelli in Edwards, Poem 4, p. 21). Love is said to be joined with the noble heart just like the sun is tied to brightness, or heat is associated with fire. The second stanza explains that love descends into a noble heart through the action of the lady, drawing an analogy between two series of elements: a) the sun, a precious stone, and a star; b) nature, the noble heart, and the lady. Medieval thinkers taught that the sun, by purifying a precious stone, enables it to receive its special qualities from a star; in like manner, nature makes a heart noble and pure, which enables it to be infused with love from a lady. Through examples taken, once again, from the natural world, the third stanza stresses that love's true abode is the noble heart, and that love is incompatible with a base nature. Love rightfully dwells in the noble heart "like a diamond in a vein of ore," or like fire "on the tip of a candle" (Guinizzelli in Edwards, Poem 4, p. 21). After explaining the coexistent nature of love and the noble heart, and their necessary relationship, the poet goes on to expound the doctrine that derives from the premises in the first three stanzas: No man should believe / That nobility exists outside of the heart / By right of lineage, / Unless he has a noble heart disposed to virtue (Guinizzelli in Edwards, Poem 4, p. 21). The fact that true nobility resides not in lineage but in a pure heart is unchangeable and corroborated again by nature, this time by the recurrence of unchangeable natural phenomena. No matter how long the sun shines on mud, dirt will remain dirt, while the

sun will continue to shine, emanating the same heat. The fifth stanza establishes a subtle comparison between God and the lady. The angels, who are attracted to God, make the heavens turn by the intensity of their desire to be close to God, and by so doing they are able both to obey Him and to satisfy their own wishes. By the same token, just as God bestows perfect satisfaction on the angels who obey Him by keeping them near Him, so the lady should grant grace to her lover when his eyes shine with desire, which is always a desire to obey her. The sixth and last stanza is a somewhat humorous dialog between God and the poet. Picturing himself in the sight of the Almighty, the poet imagines God remonstrating for the blasphemous comparison made by the poet between the sacred love that is due Him and the profane love that the poet feels for his lady. “But,” says the poet, “I shall say to Him, “She had the likeness / Of an angel from your kingdom. / It’s not my fault if I fell in love with her” (Guinizzelli in Edwards, Poem 4, p. 23).

Although no clear evolution can be established in Guinizzelli’s production of poems, it is commonly agreed that the comparison of the lady to an angel belongs to the last stage in the thematic development of his poetry. This and other themes in his lyrics influenced poems by later *stilnovists*, such as Cavalcanti. Influential elements include the theme of praise of the lady, the imagery of light and the importance of what is seen, and the poet’s absorptions in his pain and suffering, as shown in the following lines:

Your lovely greeting and the gentle gaze
 You give me when I meet you kill me:
 Love assaults me and still is unconcerned
 Whether he does me good or ill,

For he shot an arrow through my heart's center
 That cuts one part from the other and divides the whole:
 I cannot speak since I burn in great pain
 Like a man who sees his own death.

(Guinizzelli in Edwards, Poem 6, p. 33)

Especially this last theme of death is characteristic of Guinizzelli's verse.

“A lady beseeches me, and therefore I am willing to treat”. Like Guinizzelli's corpus, Cavalcanti's 52 poems are almost exclusively about love. His production consists of 36 sonnets, 11 ballads, 2 songs, 2 isolated stanzas, and 1 short, witty poem. Cavalcanti especially connects love to states of psychic dissolution and physical distress. Indeed, his recurring words are “sighs, sorrow, fear, dismay, battle, death” (*sospiri, dolor, temenza, sbigottimento, battaglia, morte*). Cavalcanti's earlier poems praise the lady (*Fresca rosa novella*--Fresh new rose), and a few realistic lyrics that describe sensual love (*In un boschetto trova' pasturella*--In a little wood I once found a young shepherdess [Cavalcanti, Poem 46 in *Rime*, p. 156, trans. T. Serafini]). Apart from these, Cavalcanti's poems portray love as a spirit that kills, as in *Voi, che per gli occhi miei passaste al core*--You, who pierce my heart through my eyes (*Rime*, Poem 13, p. 93; trans. T. Serafini).

Love is a fleeting accident brought about by a physical stimulus on earth and not a permanent quality, the poet declares at the beginning of “A lady beseeches me.” In this first stanza Cavalcanti outlines the whole poem. He will give a philosophical and scientific explanation of where love dwells and who brings about its creation; what are

love's virtues and powers; what is its essence and its effects; what pleasure it gives, and whether it is visible. Love, writes the poet in the second stanza, dwells in that part of the soul where memory is, and it originates from a darkness that comes from Mars (according to some medieval philosophers, memory resided in an impressionable part of the soul connected with sensory perception). As a passion of the senses, love is described by Cavalcanti as a darkness that obscures the intellect. Love comes from a form--an idea--that the mind abstracts from visual perceptions. This ideal form takes its place in the possible intellect (i.e., the part that receives all intelligible forms from the senses and, by interpreting them, develops into its counterpart, the active intellect). In the possible intellect, love is accompanied by no pain and no pleasure but by contemplation (since at this stage it is still connected with an idea of the mind and does not involve a physical transmutation due to passion). In this internal space, love is contained within itself and can "provide no kindred image" because it does not have a physical counterpart yet (Cavalcanti in Shaw, p. 98). The third stanza is about virtue and the power of love. Love is not a rational virtue aiming at the perfect good (a good guided by reason); rather, it is a sensitive virtue (aimed at gratifying the senses). As a consequence, whoever is affected by love only gains an incomplete knowledge (his discernment being defective because he is guided by the senses rather than by reason). Not only that, but love is often so powerful that it results in the death of the lover who has lost rational control over himself. In the next stanza the poet speaks about the essence and the effects of love in its actuality. In contrast with the earlier image of ideal love as a contemplation of beauty free of desire and suffering, when it passes from potentiality into act, love becomes a ceaseless yet fleeting desire. In its active incarnation, love exceeds the boundaries of natural balance. It

is a conflict of emotions that turns laughter into tears, or disfigures the lover's face with fear. As in Guinizzelli's poem, love is normally a characteristic of a noble heart, but Cavalcanti's version does not subscribe to the Guinizzellian idea of a love that is partially satisfied in the presence of the lady. Here the lover sends out sighs, stares into empty space, is oblivious to his own safety, and can find no solace or gain any knowledge through love.

The last two verses of the fourth stanza "are a fling against the traditional convention of Provençal and Italian poets that Love is joy; that the lover finds happiness even in his bitterest trials; that Love is . . . the source of wisdom. . . . There is no truth in all that, says Guido: Love is acute pain, helpless misery, and confusion of thought, except at first, when it seems to promise happiness" (Shaw, p. 69). The pleasure that inspires love is based on affinity, declares the poet in the fifth stanza, because it comes from finding a lady of similar attitudes and inclinations. Although the lover can apparently tell from the lady's glance whether pleasure is near, love itself is invisible. Hard to see because of lack of color and secluded in the darkness that comes from Mars, love--a transient accident--makes it enormously risky to engage in amorous relationships, the poet seems to suggest. Nonetheless, from love alone "comes the true reward," Cavalcanti admits out of his own sad experience, speaking as "one, in all sincerity, who can be trusted" (Cavalcanti in Shaw, p. 101).

Deadly love. In Cavalcanti's verse, the lady around whom the poetry revolves is no longer a being who turns the country into a luminous landscape as in some of Guinizzelli's poems. Instead she takes on a destructive dimension, her glance splitting the

poet's heart in four: *Perché non fuoro a me gli occhi miei spenti*--Why were my eyes not ripped from my body (*Rime*, Poem 12, p. 92; T. Serafini). Many of Cavalcanti's poems give voice to a personal drama of psychic fragmentation and speak of Death personified, appearing before the poet and tearing apart his heart (as in the earlier cited "You, who pierce my heart through my eyes"). For Cavalcanti, love is a battle and he, a victim. His love for the lady is debilitating; it breaks him into ailing pieces. The lady is fragmented in his verse by metonym, the substitution of the part for the whole, as in "her 'noble spirit' laughing and telling the lover that he must die"; likewise, the poet-lover is fragmented into suffering parts: "the eyes, the heart and soul, the tears, the 'grieving spirit'" (Harrison, p. 78). Love empties him of life, leaves him as speechless as a copper statue, as in *Tu m'hai sì piena di dolor la mente*--You have filled my mind with so much grief (*Rime*, Poem 8, p. 83; trans. T. Serafini). So powerful is love that it results in the "death" of the lover, meaning he loses rational control over himself.

The idea of death in Cavalcanti's poetry takes on a remarkable bodily characterization, a development that owes much to the intertwining of natural science with philosophy in his day. During the thirteenth-century, enthusiasm for Aristotle culminated in the study of the philosophical theories of one of his most prestigious commentators, the physician and philosopher Averroes (Latin name for the Arabic philosopher Ibn Rushd). Among others, Averroes proclaimed the existence of vital spirits, maintaining that they were moved by one organ only, the heart, and that they carried the vital faculties out to the limbs and back to the heart. If this back-and-forth movement perchance was interrupted, "a sudden and unforeseen death was brought about," cautioned physician Ugo of Siena, who subscribed to the teachings of Averroes

(Corti, p. 11; trans. T. Serafini). The belief that such spirits were real bodily entities imbued Cavalcanti's representation of death. He infused it with frequent personifications of the spirits fleeing the heart, speaking to the flabbergasted soul of the lover, or addressing the personification of love itself. Through this convention, the standard metaphors of death and anguish in connection with love acquired a physiological dimension. They became tied to ideas of literal cessation of life and pain, distinguishing Cavalcanti's poetry in a way that made it truly innovative within the framework of thirteenth-century Italian lyrics.

Sources and literary context. In his sonnet 20a Guinizzelli acknowledges that he is indebted to the poet Guittone of Arezzo, the most representative of a group of Tuscan poets who introduced into the regions of Tuscany and the Romagna the early lyrics of the Sicilian School (the poetic movement that flourished under Frederick II in the early thirteenth century). Guinizzelli even addresses Guittone as his artistic father in the sonnet, but it is difficult to ascertain if Guinizzelli's praise was sincere, or merely a way to tone down the innovative tendencies in his lyrics by paying formal homage to an established school of poetry. Whatever the motivations, Guinizzelli's sonnet indicates that he was well aware of the literary models of his day. In fact, both Guinizzelli's and Cavalcanti's verses can be tied not only to the poetry of Sicily but also to that of the non-Italian area of Provence.

Provençal and Sicilian poetry offered the models for the theory of the noble heart, which they, in turn, derived from the famous twelfth-century treatise *De amore* (On Love) by Andreas Cappellanus. In his book Cappellanus makes it clear that behavior is

the most important feature when one wants to acquire love, and stresses that “only goodness of character makes a man rejoice in true nobility and shine forth” (Cappellanus in Edwards, p. xli). Guinizzelli also took concepts as well as metrical and rhyme schemes from Provençal and Sicilian models, as did Cavalcanti and the other *stilnovists*. The Provençal representation of love as a feudal relationship of service, for instance, is evident in Guinizzelli’s and Cavalcanti’s assertion of the superiority of the lady. Sicilian elements resonate in Guinizzelli’s nature-based imagery--sun, stars, fire, iron, and magnets. However, Guinizzelli differs from Sicilian tradition by elevating the lady above her earthly connection with nature and above her worldly function as a sensual symbol bound to the physical plane. His lady is an intermediary between a man’s idealized love for her and the yearning for God. Guinizzelli furthermore introduces through his poetry a new regard for the ability of love to pierce any “noble” heart, not just that of an aristocrat. In Cavalcanti’s case, the poet swings Italian poetry more fully into a new direction. Earlier Sicilian and Tuscan poems portrayed the lady as an angel in a social milieu, or celebrated her angelic nature within a moral project of the poet’s religious purification, as in Guittone’s verses. Cavalcanti’s lady, however, is devoid of any social or religious purpose. Instead she mediates between individual human experience and a higher philosophical truth. In this, Cavalcanti was probably influenced by the Scholastic debate on knowledge and the nature of love, and by works on the teachings of Averroes. Cavalcanti seems to have known the radical theories of Aristotle and Averroes elaborated in books like *Questio de felicitate* (On Happiness), written by the physician Giacomo of Pistoia and dedicated to Cavalcanti. In the poet’s mind, the idea of perfect happiness was connected with rational control over human passions.

Reviews. The most eloquent and enthusiastic commentator on Guinizelli's poetry was Dante. In his opinion Guinizelli was a model of artistic composition. At a time when poets were experimenting with the developing Italian language and its metric potentials, Dante admired Guinizelli's skill in versification: "Guinizelli adopts the 'most splendid' (*superbius*) eleven-syllable line which affords the poem adequate duration and the necessary scope for richness in meaning, construction and vocabulary" (Dante in Edwards, p. xxvi). Guinizelli's idea of the angelic lady would lead to the identification in Dante's poetry of earthly love with the love for God. The earthly love would find its most powerful manifestation in a worldly lady of idealized beauty.

While Dante praised Guinizelli for his boldness, others objected to it. Guinizelli faced bitter opposition from "old style" poets such as Guittone and Bonagiunta Orbicciani. Bonagiunta wrote a sizzling sonnet that criticized Guinizelli for deviating from the usual "pleasant" ways of writing love lyric, complaining about his obscure language. Guittone wrote a sonnet that spoke of Guinizelli's alleged abuse of metaphor and comparison (as in *S'eo tale fosse ch'io potesse stare*--If I were the kind of man who could reproach, Guinizelli in Edwards, p. xxv).

No doubt Guittone also engaged in literary debate with Cavalcanti, who wrote a harsh sonnet depicting Guittone as unable to write poetry that followed a logical process of reasoning. Apparently Cavalcanti showed a refusal to compromise in his writing, demonstrating a stubbornness that is in line with characterizations by contemporaries. The uncompromising nature of Cavalcanti's writing is in line with descriptions made by his contemporaries, who spoke of him as "touchy and irascible" or as "courteous and

brave, but haughty, a loner and absorbed in study” (Villani and Compagni in Brand and Pertile, p. 22). His reputation as a natural philosopher probably influenced his reception as a poet. Remarkably Dante does not give Cavalcanti a role in *The Divine Comedy*, mentioning him there only indirectly. The exclusion has been ascribed by some critics to Dante’s and Cavalcanti’s differing philosophical views. Some speak of Cavalcanti’s theories as rational and free from religious concerns, in contrast to Dante’s deeply Christian ideas. The philosophical bent of Cavalcanti’s poetry was heavily criticized by Guido Orlandi. In one of his sonnets, Orlandi disapproves of Cavalcanti’s reasoning, calling it overly subtle. Among later commentators who appreciated Cavalcanti’s philosophical erudition was Giovanni Boccaccio. He devotes one of the short stories in his *Decameron* to Cavalcanti (also in *WLAIT 7: Italian Literature and Its Times*). In the story, Cavalcanti outwits a group of ignorant rogues who are unable to understand the subtleties of his words (*Decameron*, 4.9).

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