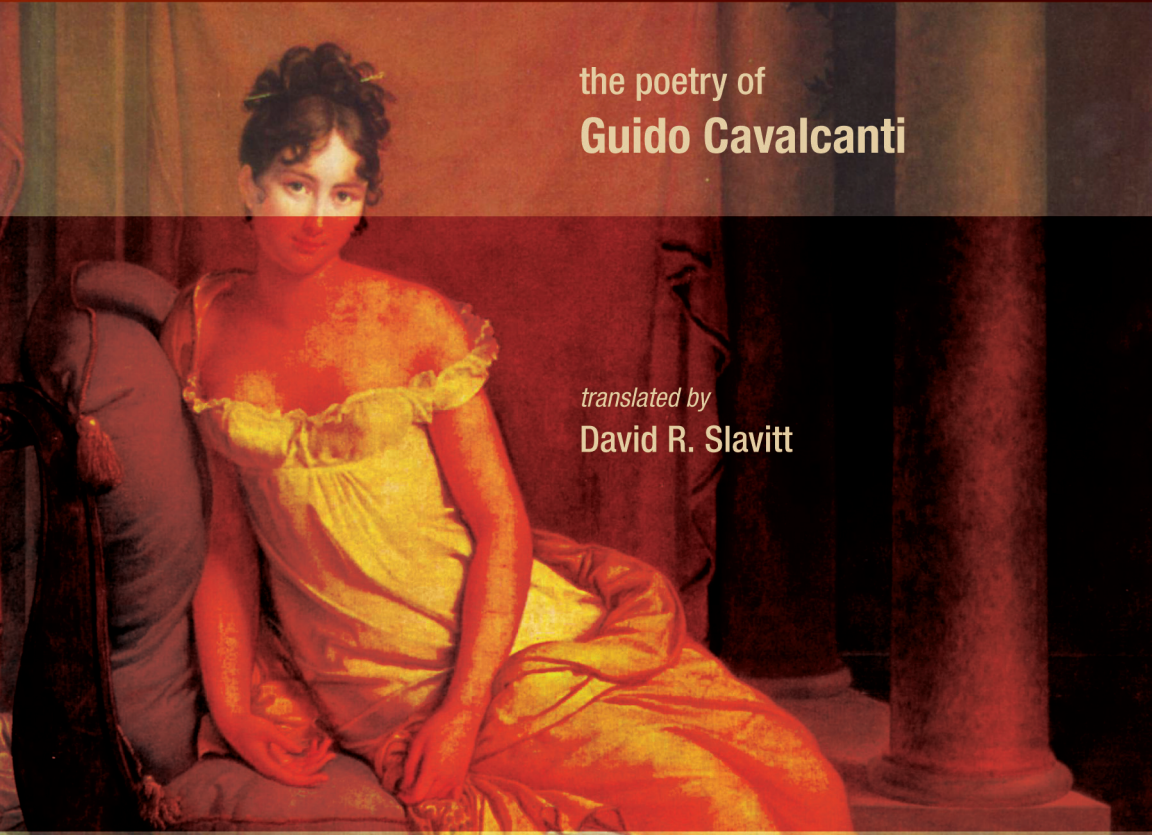


The Metabolism of Desire

the poetry of
Guido Cavalcanti

translated by
David R. Slavitt



THE
METABOLISM
OF DESIRE

MINGLING VOICES

Series editor: Manijeh Mannani

Give us wholeness, for we are broken.

But who are we asking, and why do we ask?

—PHYLLIS WEBB

Mingling Voices draws on the work of both new and established poets, novelists, and writers of short stories. The series especially, but not exclusively, aims to promote authors who challenge traditions and cultural stereotypes. It is designed to reach a wide variety of readers, both generalists and specialists. Mingling Voices is also open to literary works that delineate the immigrant experience in Canada.

SERIES TITLES

Poems for a Small Park

E.D. Blodgett

Dreamwork

Jonathan Locke Hart

Windfall Apples: Tanka and Kyoka

Richard Stevenson

The dust of just beginning

Don Kerr

Roy & Me: This Is Not a Memoir

Maurice Yacowar

Zeus and the Giant Iced Tea

Leopold McGinnis

Musing

Jonathan Locke Hart

Praha

E.D. Blodgett

Dustship Glory

Andreas Schroeder

The Kindness Colder Than the Elements

Charles Noble

The Metabolism of Desire:

The Poetry of Guido Cavalcanti

Translated by David R. Slavitt

THE
Metabolism
of **Desire**

The Poetry of Guido Cavalcanti

Translated by David R. Slavitt



AU PRESS

Copyright © 2012 David R. Slavitt
Published by AU Press, Athabasca University
1200, 10011 – 109 Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 3S8

ISBN 978-1-926836-84-3 (print)

ISBN 978-1-926836-85-0 (PDF)

ISBN 978-1-926836-86-7 (epub)

A volume in *Mingling Voices* ISSN 1917-9405 (print) 1917-9413 (online)

Cover design by Kate Hall.

Printed and bound in Canada by Marquis Book Printers.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Cavalcanti, Guido, d. 1300

[Selections. English & Italian. 2012]

The metabolism of desire : the poetry of Guido Cavalcanti /
translated by David R. Slavitt.

(Mingling voices, ISSN 1917-9405)

Text in Italian with English translation on opposite pages.

Issued also in electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-926836-84-3

1. Cavalcanti, Guido, d. 1300 — Translations into English.

I. Slavitt, David R., 1935 — II. Title. III. Series: Mingling voices

PQ4299.C2A27 2012 851'.1 C2012-900699-8

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada
through the Canada Book Fund (CBF) for our publishing activities.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

Assistance provided by the Government of Alberta, Alberta Multimedia
Development Fund.

**Government
of Alberta ■**

This publication is licensed under a Creative Commons License, Attribution–
Noncommercial–No Derivative Works 2.5 Canada: see www.creativecommons.org. The text may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes,
provided that credit is given to the original author. To obtain permission for
uses beyond those outlined in the Creative Commons license, please contact
AU Press, Athabasca University, at aupress@athabascau.ca.

For Janet. *Ancora.*

PREFACE

Guido Cavalcanti (ca. 1255–1300) was, after Dante, the most important Italian poet of the thirteenth century. Dante’s legacy, of course, lies largely in his magnificent *Divina Commedia*, which no one has ventured to imitate. But Cavalcanti’s shorter poems also broke fresh ground, creating models that influenced Petrarch and most other poets of the renaissance. Cavalcanti adapted the courtly traditions of Provençal poetry into Guido Guinizelli’s *dolce stil nuovo* (sweet new style), which also attracted Dante. In contrast to the high-toned rhetoric of *alta tragedia*, this more intimate and modest approach to literature allowed for a wide range of inflection, the introduction of ambivalence and ambiguity, and the variations in mood that are all fundamental to poetry about the experience of love and desire.

I first encountered these poems — some of them, anyway — in Ezra Pound’s translations, which seemed to me curiously antique: they appeared to contradict his dictum about “making it new.” Indeed, at the time they were composed, the most striking feature

of Cavalcanti's poems was their modernity. Many decades later, I found myself translating Dante's *La Vita Nuova*, in which Dante refers to Cavalcanti as his *primo amico*, his "best friend." This prompted me to go back and at least take another cursory look, not at the Pound translations but at the originals. Now it was clear that they were charming, intellectually supple, and, in their elaborate formal structures, would be amusingly difficult to render into English. I tried a couple of them to see how they might sound in my voice, and I was pleased enough to continue. The Pound versions after all, had been both intriguing and off-putting, and were, in any event, quite old. Why not then look again and really make it new? Mark Cirigliano produced a translation twenty years ago that renders the meanings of the poems but ignores the rhymes. This is useful for those who are reading the Italian text and referring to the pages *en face* for help, but my suspicion is that readers with little or no Italian just look at the English version, and, doing that, miss the poetry.

Dante and Cavalcanti may have been friends, but their views of the world and their notions about love could not have been farther apart. Dante was an optimist. His beloved Beatrice becomes, after her death, a presiding presence in the poet's life and, in the *Commedia*, his guide through much of Paradise. Cavalcanti, in contrast, looks on love as an obstacle to the perfect life. He understood that passions are, by nature, unruly and that they could be destructive and even ruinous. In this, he was closer to the ideas of Propertius and Ovid — and also, I think, closer to the truth.

I have tried to make my English renditions follow as closely as possible the form of Cavalcanti's originals, even if this has at times meant sacrificing sedulous fidelity to his meaning. After all, the main thing a poem "means" is that it is a poem: its "message" is only one element that is often secondary. Our dismal experience in schools, writing essays about the significance of this piece of

verse or that, have a misleading effect, I fear, on students and then, later, on readers. What is essential in Cavalcanti's poems is their lilt, their grace, their appealing dexterity. These are the qualities I have made every effort to reproduce.

— *DRS*



THE
METABOLISM
OF DESIRE

Fresca rosa novella,
 piacente primavera,
 per prata e per rivera
 gaiamente cantando,
 vostro fin presio mando — a la verdura.

Lo vostro presio fino
 in gio' si rinovelli
 da grandi e da zitelli
 per ciascuno camino;
 e cantin[n]e gli auselli
 ciascuno in suo latino
 da sera e da matino
 su li verdi arbuscelli.

Tutto lo mondo canti,
 po' che lo tempo vène,
 sì come si convene,
 vostr'altezza presiata:
 ché siete angelicata — criatura.

Angelica sembranza
 in voi, donna, riposa:
 Dio, quanto avventurosa
 fue la mia disianza!

Vostra cera gioiosa,
 poi che passa e avanza
 natura e costumanza,
 ben è mirabil cosa.

Fresh newborn rose,
harbinger of spring,
in joy do I sing
of green fields and streams,
that embody our dreams
and offer us pleasure.

In delightful array,
bejeweled with the dew,
to the young and old, too,
you mount a display
of a world you renew
each April and May
and up in the blue
sky the birds pray
and the whole world joins in
for the season once more
has arrived to restore
a value to earth
angelic in worth
and rich beyond measure.

With an angel's face
you offer a light
on the path to the height
of encompassing grace!
Joyful and bright,
all our commonplace
places and days
are blessed in your sight.

Fra lor le donne dea
vi chiaman, come sète;
tanto adorna parete,
ch'eo non saccio contare;
e chi poria pensare — oltra natura?

Oltra natura umana
vostra fina piasenza
fece Dio, per essenza
che voi foste sovrana:
per che vostra parvenza
ver' me non sia luntana;
or non mi sia villana
la dolce provedenza!

E se vi pare oltraggio
ch' ad amarvi sia dato,
non sia da voi blasmato:
ché solo Amor mi sforza,
contra cui non val forza — né misura.



Among women, you
are a goddess or queen,
and nothing I've seen
can begin to suggest
what can't be expressed
let alone taught.

God gave you your
sovereign perfection
to show the direction
good men should search for.

And in my dejection
I beg and implore
that you heal and restore
and offer protection
to my errant life.

Do not take offense,
at my impertinence.

Love draws me to you,
and whatever I do,

I am nonetheless caught.



Avete 'n vo' li fior' e la verdura
e ciò che luce od è bello a vedere;
risplende più che sol vostra figura:
chi vo' non vede, ma' non pò valere.

In questo mondo non ha creatura
s' piena di bieltà né di piacere;
e chi d'amor si teme, lu' assicura
vostro bel vis' a tanto 'n sé volere.

Le donne che vi fanno compagnia
assa' mi piaccion per lo vostro amore;
ed i' le prego per lor cortesia

che qual più può più vi faccia onore
ed aggia cara vostra signoria,
perché di tutte siete la migliore.



A canopy of green leaves, interlaced
in dappled sunshine bright with morning dew
is miraculous to anybody who
is not deficient in judgment or in taste.

A figure of perfection, call it, with your
beauty as its analogue: it pleases
even those afraid to love and eases
their minds. To see your face is to adore.

The ladies who are your companions share
in the aura of your presence, and to those
I appeal as well. If they cannot compare

with you, they do you honour standing close
beside you. As the fairest of the fair,
you are the light in which all beauty glows.



Biltà di donna e di saccente core
 e cavalieri armati che sien genti;
 cantar d'augelli e ragionar d'amore;
 adorni legni 'n mar forte correnti;

aria serena quand' apar l'albore
 e bianca neve scender senza venti;
 rivera d'acqua e prato d'ogni fiore;
 oro, argento, azzuro 'n ornamenti:

ciò passa la beltate e la valenza
 de la mia donna e 'l su' gentil coraggio,
 sì che rasembra vile a chi ciò guarda;

e tanto più d'ogn' altr' ha canoscenza,
 quanto lo ciel de la terra è maggio.
 A simil di natura ben non tarda.



The beauty of young women, the wisdom of sages,
brave cavaliers in arms and ready for war,
the twitter of birds in treetops, the outrageous
logic of lovers, ships running before

a fresh wind, the air's stillness at dawn,
snowflakes floating down from the grey skies,
the babble of brooks, the wildflowers upon
a meadow in all the colours of paradise

all pale beside my lady whose lovely face
and gentle heart show the unworthiness
of him who catches a glimpse of her perfection,

for she is an earthly vessel of heaven's grace
before whose greatness we are so much less,
beyond any redemption or even correction.



Chi è questa che vèn, ch'ogn'om la mira,
 che fa tremar di chiaritate l'âre
 e mena seco Amor, sì che parlare
 null' omo pote, ma ciascun sospira?

O Deo, che sembra quando li occhi gira,
 dical' Amor, ch'i' nol savria contare:
 cotanto d'umiltà donna mi pare,
 ch'ogn'altra ver' di lei i' la chiam' ira.

Non si poria contar la sua piagenza,
 ch'a le' s'inchin' ogni gentil vertute,
 e la beltate per sua dea la mostra.

Non fu sì alta già la mente nostra
 e non si pose 'n noi tanta salute,
 che propriamente n'aviàn conoscenza.



Who is this who comes to make the air
shimmer with springtime clarity and leads
the way to love so that no man who heeds
her presence can speak but only gasp and stare?

O God, you are immanent when all eyes turn
to her, and only Love can understand
the modest grace she has at her command.
The eyes of other envious women burn.

All other noble virtues defer to her
beauty that is a mark of the divine
before which all of us must genuflect,

and we are redeemed as she deigns to perfect
our souls and like a fiery furnace refine
our sluggish hearts and minds and make them stir.



Li mie' foll' occhi, che prima guardaro
 vostra figura piena di valore,
 fuor quei che di voi, donna, m'acusaro
 nel fero loco ove ten corte Amore,

e mantinente avanti lui mostraro
 ch' io era fatto vostro servidore:
 per che sospiri e dolor mi pigliaro,
 vedendo che temenza avea lo core.

Menârmi tosto, senza riposanza,
 in una parte là 'v' i' trovai gente
 che ciascun si doleva d'Amor forte,

Quando mi vider, tutti con pietanza
 dissermi: « Fatto se' di tal servente,
 che mai non déi sperare altro che morte. »



It was my reckless eyes that first beheld
your ineffable worth and condemned me to
live in that wasteland over which the bold
master, Love, holds court as tyrants do.

They welcomed me there, a new captive, a slave,
and were delighted to hear my sighs and groans.
We are taught as little boys to try to be brave,
but I felt an icy fear deep in my bones.

They led me to a place where noblemen
gathered who also suffered in the thrall
of Love. Their somber welcome to me I

still shudder at: “You are a denizen
of the kingdom or the dungeon that holds us all
and from which there is no escape until you die.”



Deh, spiriti miei, quando mi vedete
 con tanta pena, come non mandate
 fuor della mente parole adornate
 di pianto, dolorose e sbigottite?

Deh, voi vedete che 'l core ha ferite
 di sguardo e di piacer e d'umiltate:
 deh, i' vi priego che voi 'l consoliate
 che son da lui le sue virtù partite.

I' veggo a lui spirito apparire
 alto e gentile e di tanto valore,
 che fa le sue virtù tutte fuggire.

Deh, i' vi priego che deggiate dire
 a l'alma trista, che parl' in dolore,
 com' ella fu e fie sempre d'Amore.



Come, my spirits, see that I am in such
distress and give me the help that I require,
words to soothe my tears that are hot as fire
so that my cheeks burn at their rivulets' touch.

You see a heart that is sorely wounded, one
addicted to a lady's slightest glances.
Console him in these painful circumstances,
his strength and even his virtues having gone.

But I see a spirit approach him with a sweet
loftiness that fascinates him so
that he forgets himself in a defeat

of all his senses. You must now complete
the instruction that he needs, letting him know
that Love will dictate where he has to go.



L'anima mia vilment' è sbigotita
 de la battaglia ch'e[l]l'ave dal core:
 che s'ella sente pur un poco Amore
 più presso a lui che non sòle, ella more.

Sta come quella che non ha valore,
 ch'è per temenza da lo cor partita;
 e chi vedesse com' ell' è fuggita
 diria per certo: «Questi non ha vita.»

Per li occhi venne la battaglia in pria,
 che ruppe ogni valore immantenente,
 sì che del colpo fu strutta la mente.

Qualunqu' è quei che più allegrezza sente,
 se vedesse li spiriti fuggir via,
 di grande sua pietate piangeria.



My soul looks on and is wholly terrified
to see the battle within my heart that goes
this way and then that, because it knows
that if Love gains a toehold, it brings woes

that are as lethal to it as any foes.
Anyone observing from outside
examining the corpse would say it died
from a wound that was as deep as it was wide.

The first foray was at the eyes and came
irresistibly through my poor defences
routing my mind and scattering my senses.

Whoever feels such rapture wonders whence his
spirits have been attacked, and in grief and shame
cries out, but he has only himself to blame.



Tu m'hai sì piena di dolor la mente,
 che l'anima si briga di partire,
 e li sospir' che manda 'l cor dolente
 mostrano agli occhi che non può soffrire.

Amor, che lo tuo grande valor sente,
 dice: «E' mi duol che ti convien morire
 per questa fiera donna, che nientè
 par che piatate di te voglia udire.»

I' vo come colui ch'è fuor di vita,
 che pare, a chi lo sguarda, ch'omo sia
 fatto di rame o di pietra o di legno,

che si conduca sol per maestria
 e porti ne lo core una ferita
 che sia, com' egli è morto, aperto segno.



You have filled my mind with so much sorrow
that the soul itself is assaulted and tries to flee.
Heartsick, my body sighs from my bones' marrow
and I've reached my limit, as anyone can see.

Even Love is sympathetic and says,
“It is hard that the cruel lady for whom you pine
gives you no pitiful glance or comforting phrase.
This was never a part of my design.”

I am unmanned and have to wander through
the world like an intricate figure of wood or brass
produced by some toymaker to amuse.

Strangers who pause to stare at me as I pass
can't tell that I suffer and haven't a clue
that I am dead, a victim of her abuse.



Io non pensava che lo cor giammai
 avesse di sospir' tormento tanto,
 che dell'anima mia nascesse pianto
 mostrando per lo viso agli occhi morte.

Non sentio pace né riposo alquanto
 poscia ch'Amore e madonna trovai,
 lo qual mi disse: «Tu non camperai,
 ché troppo è lo valor di costei forte.»

La mia virtù si partìo sconsolata
 poi che lassò lo core
 a la battaglia ove madonna è stata:

la qual degli occhi suoi venne a ferire
 in tal guisa, ch'Amore
 ruppe tutti miei spiriti a fuggire.

Di questa donna non si può contare:
 ché di tante bellezze adorna vène,
 che mente di qua giù no la sostiene
 sì che la veggia lo 'ntelletto nostro.

Tant' è gentil che, quand' eo penso bene,
 l'anima sento per lo cor tremare,
 sì come quella che non pò durare
 davanti al gran valor ch'è i-llei dimostro.

Per gli occhi fere la sua claritate,
 sì che quale mi vede
 dice: «Non guardi tu questa pietate

ch'è posta invece di persona morta
 per dimandar merzede?»

E non si n'è madonna ancor accorta!

I had not supposed that my heart could sustain
such pangs, such pains and tears torn from within
my soul so that my face, a death's-head grin
would alarm even the casual passerby.

Thus I languished under Love's discipline
once I had found my lady, and he made plain
that I could not survive, my body and brain
not strong enough to resist her or even to try.

I lost whatever I had of vital force
and with it my heart was gone,
beseiged as it had been without remorse,
while with her eyes she struck with deadly aim
at my guards who, one by one,
fell or fled, routed beyond all shame.

She is far beyond description, being
ethereally adorned. With intellect
rather than the senses one might inspect
the beauty she brings us from another sphere.

Noble and full of grace, she can project
beyond the eyes' capacities for seeing
a splendour as captivating as it is freeing
wherever it is that she may deign to appear.

Still it was through my human eyes that I
was stricken, and now whoever
sees me turns to her and asks her why

she does not show me pity's tenderness
although my lady never
seems to have taken note of my distress.

Quando 'l pensier mi vèn ch'i' voglia dire
a gentil core de la sua vertute,
i' trovo me di sì poca salute,
ch'i' non ardisco di star nel pensiero.

Amor, c'ha le bellezze sue vedute,
mi sbigottisce sì, che sofferire
non può lo cor sentendola venire,
ché sospirando dice: «Io ti dispero,
però che trasse del su' dolce riso
una saetta aguta,

c'ha passato 'l tuo core e 'l mio diviso,
Tu sai, quando venisti, ch'io ti dissi,
poi che l'avéi veduta,
per forza convenia che tu morissi.»

Canzon, tu sai che de' libri d'Amore
io t'asemplai quando madonna vidi:
ora ti piaccia ch'io di te mi fidi
e vadi 'n guis' a lei, ch'ella t'ascolti;
e prego umilmente a lei tu guidi
li spiriti fuggiti del mio core,
che per soverchio de lo su' valore
eran distrutti, se non fosser vòlti,
e vanno soli, senza compagnia,
e son pien' di paura.

Però li mena per fidata via
e poi le di', quando le se' presente:
«Questi sono in figura
d'un che si more sbigottitamente.»



The thought crosses my mind that I should try
to speak to her, expressing my fervent praise
for her nobility, but as I gaze
at her I am dumbstruck and cannot say

 a single word let alone blurt out a phrase.

For this Love mocks me, amused to see that I
am able when she approaches only to sigh,
and enjoys my hopelessness and my dismay.

 “The arrow from her smile,” he said, “has hit
into your heart’s core,
and neither by your courage, strength, or wit
 can you contrive any defense or cure.
You’ve seen her and therefore
your painful death is imminent and sure.”

 O song, you know that when I beheld her face
I copied you out from Love’s great folios
where poetry that I have admired shows
how to speak to a lady and by what art
 one may with some persuasiveness disclose
his feelings and argue his hopeless case.
You may appeal with dignity and grace
for pity for the deep wound in my heart.

 My scattered spirits quailed at this great task
and neither could tell her how
she had transformed my life nor venture to ask
 for pity as I languish and decay.
Therefore go to her now
on behalf of one who is about to pass away.



Vedete ch'i' son un che vo piangendo
 e dimostrando — il giudicio d'Amore,
 e già non trovo sì pietoso core
 che, me guardando, — una volta sospiri.

Novella doglia m'è nel cor venuta,
 la qual mi fa doler e pianger forte;
 e spesse volte avèn che mi saluta
 tanto di presso l'angosciosa Morte,
 che fa 'n quel punto le persone accorte,
 che dicono infra lor: «Quest' ha dolore,
 e già, secondo che ne par de fòre,
 dovrebbe dentro aver novi martiri.»

Questa pesanza ch'è nel cor discesa
 ha certi spirite' già consumati,
 i quali eran venuti per difesa
 del cor dolente che gli avea chiamati.

Questi lasciaro gli occhi abbandonati
 quando passò nella mente un romore
 il qual dicea: «Dentro, Biltà, ch'e' more;
 ma guarda che Pietà non vi si miri!»



You see me as one who often weeps and shows
for anyone to observe Love's lurid brand
and yet I find no man to understand
my suffering or condole with me at all.

Fresh grief comes to batter my heart with a bruise
upon a bruise, and I weep bitterly
in pain so sharp that I might not refuse
the invitation Death extends to me.

Only a few who are close to me can see
my suffering, realize how I am unmanned
by torment not even the bravest could withstand,
and show concern at my precipitous fall.

What spirits I once had have been laid waste
and when the afflicted heart appealed to them for
aid, desperate that they should come in haste
to help it in this savage civil war,
their answer was that they could do no more.
Then, into my mind there came a bland
voice: "It is within, at Love's command,
that he dies, knowing Pity's odds are small."



Poi che di doglia cor conven ch' i' porti
 e senta di piacere ardente foco
 e di virtù mi traggi' a sì vil loco,
 dirò com' ho perduto ogni valore.

E dico che' miei spiriti son morti,
 e 'l cor che tanto ha guerra e vita poco;
 e se non fosse che 'l morir m'è gioco,
 fare'ne di pietà pianger Amore.

Ma, per lo folle tempo che m'ha giunto,
 mi cangio di mia ferma oppinione
 in altrui condizione,
 s' ch'io non mostro quant' io sento affanno:
 là 'nd'eo ricevo inganno,
 chè dentro da lo cor mi pass' Amanza,
 che se ne porta tutta mia possanza.



My heart is full of grief and feels the heat
of passion's lethal but delightful fire
that drags me down to wallow in the mire,
from which I would arise if only I could.

My embattled spirits languish in a defeat
where troops bestrew the field about to expire
and death has become an object of desire
so that Love weeps in pity, as he should.

It is a kind of madness: my mind is changed
and my appearance as well from what it was
to a mask in which anguish does
not display itself as I walk the streets.
In my chest my heart still beats,
but Love is lodged there like some parasite
diminishing my strength every day and night.



Perché non fuoro a me gli occhi dispeni
o tolti, sì che de la lor veduta
non fosse nella mente mia venuta
a dir: «Ascolta se nel cor mi senti?»

Ch' una paura di novi tormenti
m'aparve allor, sì crudel e aguta,
che l'anima chiamò: «Donna, or ci aiuta,
che gli occhi ed i' non rimagnàn dolenti!

Tu gli ha' lasciati sì, che venne Amore
a pianger sovra lor pietosamente,
tanto che s'ode una profonda voce

la quale dice: — Chi gran pena sente
guardi costui, e vedrà 'l su' core
che Morte 'l porta 'n man tagliato in croce —.»



Why were my eyes not torn from their sockets to keep
her image from burning itself into my brain
where it has caused me agonizing pain
not only in daylight but even when I am asleep?

In fear of further pangs my soul implores,
“Lady, help me! I beg you for relief
from the torments I undergo in my abject grief.
Even Love feels pity for me and remorse.

You have left my eyes in such a sorry state
that Love appeared to me to offer his
condolences as well as to intone:

‘Whoever suffers, let him look at this
martyr whose heart Death has gone to great
trouble to carve into the man’s gravestone.’”



Voi che per li occhi mi passaste 'l core
 e destaste la mente che dormia,
 guardate a l'angosciosa vita mia,
 che sospirando la distrugge Amore.

E' vèn tagliando di sì gran valore,
 che' deboletti spiriti van via:
 riman figura sol en signoria
 e voce alquanta, che parla dolore.

Questa virtù d'amor che m'ha disfatto
 da' vostr' occhi gentil' presta si mosse:
 un dardo mi gittò dentro dal fianco.

Sì giunse ritto 'l colpo al primo tratto,
 che l'anima tremando si riscosse
 veggendo morto 'l cor nel lato manco.



You found your way through my eyes and went from there
to establish yourself in my heart and then in my mind.
Look at me now that I have been defined
by Love who has infected me everywhere.

He overwhelms my organs and my bones
so that my spirits in their peril flee.
My bold face is all that is left of me
and a voice with which to express my woes in groans.

That power of love that attacked me from your eyes
has ruined me by a blow to my left side
with its unerring spear point and I stagger

like someone on a battlefield who tries
not to fall down even though he has died.
Or no, not a spear point: call it a lady's dagger.



Se m'ha del tutto obliato Merzede,
 già però Fede — il cor non abbandona,
 anzi ragiona — di servire a grato
 al dispietato — core.

E, qual sì sente simil me, ciò crede;
 ma chi tal vede — (certo non persona),
 ch'Amor mi dona — un spirito 'n su' stato
 che, figurato, — more?

Ché quando lo piacer mi stringe tanto
 che lo sospir si mova,
 par che nel cor mi piova
 un dolce amor sì bono
 ch'eo dico: «Donna, tutto vostro sono.»



If Compassion has all but forgotten me,
my heart has not abandoned in return
Fidelity, but rather without reward
still waits upon hers.

Those who have suffered as I do will agree
that Love gives us what dignity we earn
worth none the less for being thus ignored
as now and again occurs.

Whenever I am racked by my delight,
it seems in my heart to rain
in a mist of love and pain
and a gloom only my lady can make bright.



Se Mercé fosse amica a' miei disiri,
e 'l movimento suo fosse dal core
di questa bella donna, [e] 'l su' valore
mostrasse la vertute a' mie' martiri,

d'angosciosi dilette i miei sospiri,
che nascon della mente ov'è Amore
e vanno sol ragionando dolore
e non trovan persona che li miri,

giriano agli occhi con tanta vertute,
che 'l forte e 'l duro lagrimar che fanno
ritornerebbe in allegrezza e 'n gioia.

Ma sì è al cor dolente tanta noia
e all'anima trista è tanto danno,
che per disdegno uom non dà lor salute.



If luck could look with favour on my desire
and if it came from my lady's heart with the power
to encourage me and let me thrive in a shower
of hope from heaven that knows how to admire

devotion of any kind, I do believe
my sighs would not only subside but turn into
hosannas of praise as grey brightens to blue
when angry weather grants us a reprieve.

My squalls of tears would cease and joy at last
would be what gives my eyes their special shine,
each teardrop like a jewel delighting to be

dug from the earth to glitter and be free . . .
But it hasn't happened, and the pain that has been mine
deforms me so that I am an oucast.



A me stesso di me pietate vène
 per la dolente angoscia ch' i' mi veggio:
 di molta debolezza quand' io seggio,
 l'anima sento ricoprir di pene.

Tutto mi struggo, perch' io sento bene
 che d'ogni angoscia la mia vita è peggio;
 la nova donna cu' merzede cheggio
 questa battaglia di dolor' mantene:

però che, quand' i' guardo verso lei,
 rizzami gli occhi dello su' disdegno
 sì feramente, che distrugge 'l core.

Allor si parte ogni virtù da' miei
 e 'l cor si ferma per veduto segno
 dove si lancia crudeltà d'amore.



If from nowhere else, compassion for me
must come from within myself, and if I must seek
pity for being in anguish and feeling weak,
then I must have pity myself for what I see.

I waste away, diminishing day by day
with each new torment my new lady ordains
to add to my already plentiful pains
and I am filled with sorrow and dismay.

I look in her direction and see a disdain
I do not think I deserve, which shrivels my soul.
I cannot believe such cruelty comes from her.

It numbs my heart as it fuddles my poor brain.
In the absence of anyone else who might condole
with me I must serve as my own comforter.



S'io prego questa donna che Pietate
non sia nemica del su' cor gentile,
tu di' ch'i' sono sconoscente e vile
e disperato e pien di vanitate.

Onde ti vien sì nova crudeltate?
Già risomigli, a chi ti vede, umile,
saggia e adorna e accorta e sottile
e fatta a modo di soavitate!

L'anima mia dolente e paurosa
piange ne li sospir' che nel cor trova,
sì che bagnati di pianti escon fòre.

Allora par che ne la mente piova
una figura di donna pensosa
che vegna per veder morir lo core.



If I were to ask this lady to make a truce
so that Pity and her heart contend no more
in this desperate and uncivil civil war,
it would be, I am certain, of but little use.

Whence comes this cruel and even sadistic streak
in someone who seems as gentle as you do,
as wise and as lovely? Somehow, inside you
there is delight in hurting the helpless and weak.

I grieve for myself, of course, but for you as well,
who are so different from what one might expect,
and this gives a special bitterness to my tears.

One who would give comfort and protect
those who suffer comes instead to dwell
on my death throes and my amusing fears.

✍

Noi siàn le triste penne isbigotite,
 le cesoiuzze e 'l coltellin dolente,
 ch'avemo scritte dolorosamente
 quelle parole che vo' avete udite.

Or vi diciàn perché noi siàn partite
 e siàn venute a voi qui di presente:
 la man che ci movea dice che sente
 cose dubbiose nel core apparite;

le quali hanno destrutto sì costui
 ed hannol posto sì presso a la morte,
 ch'altro non n'è rimasto che sospiri.

Or vi preghiàn quanto possiàn più forte
 che non sdegn[i]ate di tenerci noi,
 tanto ch'un poco di pietà vi miri.



We are those sedulous quills, the keening knife
that sharpens their points, and the sorry scissors that lie
on top of the desk where we translate each sigh
to the words you read about his wretched life,

and we come to you directly to appeal
to you on his behalf whose hand lies still
in a failure not only of inspiration but will
and to tell you of the sadness he tries to conceal.

You have reduced him to this and brought him near
death, for he does not move for hour on hour
or touch us even absentmindedly.

We come to beg, then, if it is in your power,
to restore him to us, showing him pity. Hear
and respond with kindness to our unanimous plea.

✍

I' prego voi che di dolor parlate
 che, per vertute di nova pietate,
 non disdegn[i]ate — la mia pena udire.

Davante agli occhi miei vegg' io lo core
 e l'anima dolente che s'ancide,
 che mor d'un colpo che li diede Amore
 ed in quel punto che madonna vide.

Lo su' gentile spirito che ride,
 questi è colui che mi si fa sentire,
 lo qual mi dice: «E' ti convien morire.»

Se voi sentiste come 'l cor si dole,
 dentro dal vostro cor voi tremereste:
 ch'elli mi dice sì dolci parole,
 che sospirando pietà chiamereste.

E solamente voi lo 'ntendereste:
 ch'altro cor non poria pensar né dire
 quant' è 'l dolor che mi conven soffrire.

Lagrima ascendon de la mente mia,
 sì tosto come questa donna sente,
 che van faccendo per li occhi una via
 per la qual passa spirito dolente,
 ch'entra per li [occhi] miei sì debilmente
 ch'oltra non puote color scoprire
 che 'l 'maginar vi si possa finire.



You speak of sorrows and therefore to you I turn
for compassion, understanding, and concern
from a brother in the fellowship of woe.

I see my heart and soul and watch them die
from the mortal blow by which they both were stricken
by Love when I saw my lady and my eye
betrayed me and my blood began to quicken —
an illusion of health to some of us who sicken.
Her laughter still rings in my ears although
it is my knell, as she and I both know.

If you could feel the pangs of my heartache
you would tremble for me and in sympathy
offer sweet words or even, for my sake,
weep, familiar yourself with misery.
Or perhaps you might touch my shoulder to signal to me
a bond beyond any words — and stronger so —
and walk with me with both our heads bent low.

My tears well up whenever I think of her
and my grieving spirit pours out its distress.

You understand how suddenly this can occur.
I feel my very skeleton deliquesce
and my eyes grow dim in moments of such duress,
fading the vivid colors of nature's show
to the grey blur of an ominous tableau.



O tu, che porti nelli occhi sovente
Amor tenendo tre saette in mano,
questo mio spirto che vien di lontano
ti raccomanda l'anima dolente,

la quale ha già feruta nella mente
di due saette l'arcier soriano;
a la terza apre l'arco, ma sì piano
che non m'aggiunge essendoti presente:

perché saria dell'alma la salute,
che quasi giace infra le membra, morta
di due saette che fan tre ferute:

la prima dà piacere e disconforta,
e la seconda disia la vertute
della gran gioia che la terza porta.



The spirit comes as a messenger from the soul
that resides in the mind to greet you who have in your
hand three arrows that Love uses in war
with nothing less than victory as his goal.

The deadly Syrian bowman has let go two
of those shafts and they have already wounded me.
He bends his bow for the coup de grâce but he
falls short this time — I think because of you.

But it would be salvation to be killed
and leave this body's prison and its pain,
my pitiable cries and groans all stilled.

The first arrow is sweet and deceives the brain
with pleasure and with longing to be fulfilled,
by the joy of the third for which I wait in vain.



O donna mia, non vedestù colui
che 'n su lo core mi tenea la mano
quando ti respondea fiochetto e piano
per la temenza de li colpi sui?

E' fu Amore, che, trovando noi,
meco ristette, che venia lontano,
in guisa d'arcier presto soriano
acconcio sol per uccider altrui.

E' trasse poi de li occhi tuo' sospiri,
i qua' me saettò nel cor sì forte,
ch'i' mi partì' sbigotito fuggendo.

Allor m'aparve di sicur la Morte,
acompanata di quelli martiri
che soglion consumare altru' piangendo.



Ah, my lady, did you see a moment ago
him with his hand on my heart as I was making
an effort to answer you, even though shaking
with fear and anticipating another blow?

It was Love who came to me with intent to shoot
like one of those Syrian archers who never miss
even a distant target. He came with his
quiver of lethal arrows of evil repute.

He drew from your own eyes the deadly dart
that he fired at me with devastating effect
so that I was dismayed and tried to flee,

but there was Death against whom I could not protect
myself as my agonies racked me and tore me apart,
for they work together in ghastly synergy.

✍

Veder poteste, quando v'inscontrai,
quel pauroso spirito d'amore
lo qual sòl apparir quand' om si more,
e 'n altra guisa non si vede mai.

Elli mi fu sì presso, ch'i' pensai
ch'ell' uccidesse lo dolente core:
allor si mise nel morto colore
l'anima trista per voler trar guai;

ma po' sostenne, quando vide uscire
degli occhi vostri un lume di merzede,
che porse dentr' al cor nova dolcezza;

e quel sottile spirito che vede
soccorse gli altri, che credean morire,
gravati d'angosciosa debolezza.



One seldom sees him as if in flesh but when
one of his victims is dying, Love will appear
and you have seen him with me, standing near
and when Death takes me, he will say "Amen."

At any rate, I could see him and my soul
took on the hideous pallor of death and I
wept and heaved a sigh and another sigh
that, having lost all will, I could not control.

But then he held back, having just discerned
a gleam of blessed pity in lovely eyes
and my heart resumed its beating in my chest.

Such a look to a lover, as he dies,
can restore in him life's fire that once burned
and snatch him back from his eternal rest.



Io vidi li occhi dove Amor si mise
 quando mi fece di sé pauroso,
 che mi guardâr com' io fosse noioso:
 allora dico che 'l cor si divise;

e se non fosse che la donna rise,
 i' parlerei di tal guisa doglioso,
 ch'Amor medesmo ne farei cruccioso,
 che fe' lo immaginar che mi conquise.

Dal ciel si mosse un spirito, in quel punto
 che quella donna mi degnò guardare,
 e vennesi a posar nel mio pensiero:

elli mi conta sì d'Amor lo vero,
 che[d] ogni sua virtù veder mi pare
 sì com' io fosse nello suo cor giunto.



Those eyes in which Love settled glared at me
in evident distaste as if I were
something loathsome and an affront to her.
It was an absolute catastrophe.

But then she managed a smile by which I was
restored, and I could challenge Love and show
that I had an answer for his thunderous “No”
and might manage to plead my hopeless cause.

It was a stirring of spirit that arrived
from heaven when my lady deigned to glance
in my direction in affability,

making it clear to the world how love can be
transforming in its vicissitudes and chance.
Because she smiled at me, I have survived.



Un amoroso sguardo spiritale
 m'ha renovato Amor, tanto piacente
 ch'assa' più che non sòl ora m'assale
 e stringem' a pensar coralemente

della mia donna, verso cu' non vale
 merzede né pietà né star soffrente,
 ché soventora mi dà pena tale,
 che 'n poca parte il mi' cor vita sente.

Ma quando sento che sì dolce sguardo
 dentro degli occhi mi passò al core
 e posevi uno spirito di gioia,

di farne a lei mercé, di ciò non tardo:
 così pregata foss' ella d'Amore
 ch'un poco di pietà no i fosse noia!



Again, one of those flashes of the eyes
that Love has sent assailed me to possess
my entire being with thoughts that I confess
are of her in a way she cannot realize,

for she gives me little forbearance let alone
favor, and I am often in such pain
that my heart is numb as is my frozen brain
in torments unsuspected and unknown.

Sometimes she smiles but she cannot conceive
of what this does and how it instills in me
a joy as intense as it is also brief.

I'd thank her for such gifts as I receive
but then she would guess the great power that she
wields over my happiness and my grief.



Posso degli occhi miei novella dire,
 la qual è tale che piace sì al core
 che di dolcezza ne sospir' Amore.

Questo novo plager che 'l meo cor sente
 fu tratto sol d'una donna veduta,
 la qual è sì gentil e avenente
 e tanta adorna, che 'l cor la saluta.

Non è la sua biltate canosciuta
 da gente vile, ché lo suo colore
 chiama intelletto di troppo valore.

Io veggio che negli occhi suoi risplende
 una virtù d'amor tanto gentile,
 ch'ogni dolce piacer vi si comprende;
 e move a loro un'anima sottile,
 rispetto della quale ogn'altra è vile:
 e non si pò di lei giudicar fòre
 altro che dir: «Quest' è novo splendore.»

Va', ballatetta, e la mia donna trova,
 e tanto li domanda di merzede,
 che gli occhi di pietà verso te mova
 per quei che 'n lei ha tutta la sua fede;
 e s'ella questa grazia ti concede,
 mandi una voce d'allegrezza fòre,
 che mostri quella che t'ha fatto onore.



Let me say something new about my eyes,
something delightful and so ineffably fine
that Love must admit the victory is mine.

My lady is of such noble beauty that she
fills my heart with gratitude and grace
and displays a refinement only a few can see
and respond to — the elegant modeling of her face
and the way she moves or merely stands in place.
In tiniest detail and large design
she is perfection in every plane and line.

In the bright gleam in her eye I see a strength
of love in which all pleasure and delight
are melded so as to reveal at length
the soul within by insight more than sight
that cannot bear to behold what is too bright.
When loveliness and virtue thus combine
their radiance is close to the divine.

Go, then, ballata, and find my lady to say
I beg of her one favour — that she turn
her eyes to you in pity for my dismay
and that she consider your words and from them learn
how closely I have studied her to discern
how dazzlingly her qualities can shine
and in my mind her image is my shrine.



Veggio negli occhi de la donna mia
 un lume pien di spiriti d'amore,
 che porta uno piacer novo nel core,
 sì che vi desta d'allegrezza vita.

Cosa m'aven, quand' i' le son presente,
 ch'i' no la posso a lo 'ntelletto dire:
 veder mi par de la sua labbia uscire
 una sì bella donna, che la mente
 comprender no la può, che 'mmantenente
 ne nasce un'altra di bellezza nova,
 da la qual par ch'una stella si mova
 e dica: «La salute tua è apparita.»

Là dove questa bella donna appare
 s'ode una voce che le vèn davanti
 e par che d'umiltà il su' nome canti
 sì dolcemente, che, s'i' 'l vo' contare,
 sento che 'l su' valor mi fa tremare;
 e movonsi nell'anima sospiri
 che dicono: «Guarda; se tu coste' miri,
 vedra' la sua vertù nel ciel salita.»



There is in my lady's eyes a radiance
of the spirits of love that brings a scintillant
delight comprising everything I could want,
reawakening joy and its energy.

Whenever I am near her I feel a new
sensation my intellect cannot begin
to describe, taken aback when it is in
an altered state to which there is no clue
in ordinary life. Who can construe
such transports or who could ever understand,
unless he has known himself such a moment of grand
elevation, a glimpse of eternity?

When she appears there is a voice that resounds
preceding her and in awe pronouncing her name
and I tremble in like awe when I hear it proclaim
that she is coming. It resonates and astounds
and my soul leaps up as if to burst its bounds,
sighing: "Look at her and bask in the rays
of her eyes that are always brimming with heaven's praise,
for that is where inevitably she will be."



Donna me prega, — per ch'eo voglio dire
 d'un accidente — che sovente — è fero
 ed è sì altero — ch'è chiamato amore:

sì chi lo nega — possa 'l ver sentire!
 Ed a presente — conoscente — chero,
 perch'io no spero — ch'om di basso core
 a tal ragione porti canoscenza:
 ché senza — natural dimostramento
 non ho talento — di voler provare
 là dove posa, e chi lo fa creare,
 e qual sia sua vertute e sua potenza,
 l'essenza — poi e ciascun suo movimento,
 e 'l piacimento — che 'l fa dire amare,
 e s'omo per veder lo pò mostrare.

In quella parte — dove sta memora
 prende suo stato, — sì formato, — come
 diaffan da lume, — d'una scuritate
 la qual da Marte — vène, e fa demora;
 elli è creato — ed ha sensato — nome,
 d'alma costume — e di cor volontate.

Vèn da veduta forma che s'intende,
 che prende — nel possibile intelletto,
 come in subietto, — loco e dimoranza.
 In quella parte mai non ha possanza
 perché da qualitate non descende:
 resplende — in sé perpetüal effetto;
 non ha diletto — ma consideranza;
 sì che non pote largir simiglianza.

A lady commands me and therefore I would discuss
an accident that can happen to anyone,
no matter how proud he be he is suddenly stricken
 by unruly Love that can overwhelm any of us.
Would he who doubts that this can occur to stun
the bravest in one of these onslaughts and grievously sicken
 believe what I speak of? No, but those who know
know while the trivial mind that has never read
philosophy can hardly undertake
a challenging subject of this kind or make
 an attempt to tread this difficult path or go
in hope of his fathoming what I've said.
From the slumbers of daily life Love can awake
the spirit both to joy and grief for his sake.

 In that part of the brain where memory is found
Love takes its form like some transparent thing
that we can see plain when there is light
 behind to distinguish it from its background.
We suspect no harm as it comes on gossamer wing
but it quickly grows in weight and strength from slight
beginnings to overwhelm us. The intellect
 seeks contemplation and does not much attend
to images and this is its protection
against the blandishments of Love's projection
 which have on it a minimal effect
and against which it is able to defend.
But the senses, which are vulnerable to affection,
rebel against the wit and its correction.

Non è vertute, — ma da quella vène
ch'è perfezione — (ché si pone — tale),
non razionale, — ma che sente, dico;
for di salute — giudicar mantene,
ch la 'ntenzione — per ragione — vale:
discerne male — in cui è vizio amico.

Di sua potenza segue spesso morte,
se forte — la virtù fosse impedita,
la quale aita — la contraria via:
non perché oppost' a naturale sia;
ma quanto che da buon perfetto tort'è
per sorte, — non pò dire om ch'aggia vita,
ché stabilita — non ha signoria.
A simil pò valer quand'om l'oblia.

L'essere è quando — lo voler è tanto
ch'oltra misura — di natura — torna,
poi non s'adorna — di riposo mai.

Move, cangiando — color, riso in pianto,
e la figura — con paura — storna;
poco soggiorna; — ancor di lui vedrai
che 'n gente di valor lo più si trova.
La nova — qualità move sospiri,
e vol ch'om miri — 'n non formato loco,
destandos' ira la qual manda foco
(imaginar nol pote om che nol prova),
né mova — già però ch'a lui si tiri,
e non si giri — per trovarvi gioco:
né cert' ha mente gran saver né poco.

Love is not a sense but comes from the senses
as their object and their motivating force
in a different domain from that where reason holds sway
and does not calculate its gains and expenses
or reckon the likely outcome of its course,
but hurtles blindly forward, come what may.
Death, then, lies in wait when Love takes over
and reason no longer directs how life should go,
not because Love is suicidal or mad
but it cannot distinguish good from bad,
as the lover sooner or later comes to discover.
He cannot see value in living and does not know
why he was even born. It is truly sad
that he cannot remember the joys that he once had.

When Love is the master and desire is in control
there is no respect for nature's balance and measure:
he takes no food and never lies down to rest.

It rules over his heart and mind and soul,
chasing faster and faster in search of pleasure.
Oddly enough, it prefers to afflict the best
people whom you would think were aware
of this particular risk, and yet they sigh,
their refinement having been made into
the weapon that Love's art employs to subdue
these helpless gentlefolk. (It is most unfair.)

They are dumbstruck, paralyzed, and enchanted by
Love's magic, which stupefies its victims, too,
so that they forget whatever they knew.

De simil tragge — complessione sguardo
che fa parere — lo piacere — certo:
non pò coverto — star, quand' è sì giunto.

Non già selvagge — le bieltà son dardo,
ché tal volere — per temere — è sperto:
consiegue merto — spirito ch'è punto.

E non si pò conoscer per lo viso:
compriso — bianco in tale obbietto cade;
e, chi ben aude, — forma non si vede:
dunqu' elli meno, che da lei procede.

For di colore, d'essere diviso,
assiso — 'n mezzo scuro, luce rade.
For d'ogne fraude — dico, degno in fede,
che solo di costui nasce mercede.

Tu puoi sicuramente gir, canzone,
là 've ti piace, ch'io t'ho sì adornata
ch'assai laudata — sarà tua ragione
da le persone — c'hanno intendimento:
di star con l'altre tu non hai talento.



From someone who is in that way inclined
Love extracts a glance or quizzical smile
that seems to promise a favorable response,
for beautiful women are to a lover's mind
deadly arrows that arrive by force or guile
and pierce the soul in the transformation the sun's
bright rays bring to plants, but here is no
visible force only a blind desire
for the one who is and yet is not the great
object to strive for, adore, and hate.

A deception, we believe in it although
we have been burnt before in Love's hot fire
the embers of which we revive, knowing we wait
for a conflagration and a most painful fate.

And you, canzone, can set out on your way
wherever you like, embellished as you have been
so that what you say or seem to say
will please those with the taste to recognize
merit (lesser readers you despise).



Pegli occhi fere un spirito sottile,
 che fa 'n la mente spirito destare,
 dal qual si move spirito d'amare,
 ch'ogn'altro spiritel fa gentile.

Sentir non pò di lu' spirito vile,
 di cotanta vertù spirito appare:
 quest' è lo spiritel che fa tremare,
 lo spiritel che fa la donna umile.

E poi da questo spirito si move
 un altro dolce spirito soave,
 che sieg[u]e un spiritello di mercede:

lo quale spiritel spiriti piove,
 ché di ciascuno spirit' ha la chiave,
 per forza d'uno spirito che 'l vede.



Through the eyes a spirit reaches forth
from the mind to another similar waiting spirit
to rouse it to love, simply by being near it,
and enrich all other spirits in their worth.

A meek and lowly spirit cannot go
on such transports as spirits of strength can achieve,
and yet a little spirit, if it believe
in itself can dissuade a lady from saying no.

From the first spirit, a second is soon hatched,
sweet and gentle, the spirit of a kind
of acquiescence that Love fans into fire.

This happens when the two spirits are matched
and kindred in two souls of a like mind.
in the grand spirit of virtuous desire.



Una giovane donna di Tolosa,
 bell' e gentil, d'onesta leggiadria,
 è tant'è dritta e simigliante cosa,
 ne' suoi dolci occhi, della donna mia,

che fatt' ha dentro al cor disiderosa
 l'anima, in guisa che da lui si svia
 e vanne a lei; ma tant'è paurosa,
 che no le dice di qual donna sia.

Quella la mira nel su' dolce sguardo,
 ne lo qual face rallegrare Amore
 perché v'è dentro la sua donna dritta;

po' torna, piena di sospir', nel core,
 ferita a morte d'un tagliente dardo
 che questa donna nel partir li gitta.



I found in Toulouse a certain young lady who
was noble, lovely, elegant, and she
resembled my Lady — or rather say that the two
were as much alike as a pair of twins can be.

She stirs my soul and even tempts it to stray
and it is more from timidity than honour
that I do not speak directly to her or say
what is in my mind as I am gazing on her.

My spirit lolls in the sweet glance of her eyes
and revels in how good she makes me feel,
she who is and is not the one I love.

But then it slinks back, knowing how unreal
the encounter was. Abruptly the feeling dies
from an arrow she was hardly conscious of.



Era in penser d'amor quand' i' trovai
due foresette nove.

L'una cantava: «E' piove
gioco d'amore in noi. »

Era la vista lor tanto soave
e tanto queta, cortese e umile,
ch'i' dissi lor: «Vo' portate la chiave
di ciascuna vertù alta e gentile.

Deh, foresette, no m'abbiate a vile
per lo colpo ch'io porto;
questo cor mi fue morto
poi che 'n Tolosa fui. »

Elle con gli occhi lor si volser tanto
che vider come 'l cor era ferito
e come un spiritel nato di pianto
era per mezzo de lo colpo uscito.

Poi che mi vider cos' sbigottito,
disse l'una, che rise:
«Guarda come conquise
forza d'amor costui!»

L'altra, pietosa, piena di mercede,
fatta di gioco in figura d'amore,
disse: «'L tuo colpo, che nel cor si vede,
fu tratto d'occhi di troppo valore,
che dentro vi lasciaro uno splendore
ch'i' nol posso mirare.
Dimmi se ricordare
di quegli occhi ti puoi. »

Wrapped up in my thoughts as I strolled along, I met
a couple of cheerful and choice
girls, one of whom gave voice
to the joys that love can bring.

It was a great, unexpected delight for me
to encounter this pretty and very friendly pair
and I praised them both in all sincerity
for their appearance, more than passing fair,
and also their dignity and gracious air.
I let the two know how
I'd been hurt in love and could now
begin recovering.

They looked at me with eyes that were very pretty
and saw how a little spirit emerged from my
wound to elicit from them whatever pity
was in their hearts — a kind word or a sigh.

One laughed, I think in wonderment, that I
had been hurt so much
by Cupid's brutal touch:
it was an amazing thing.

The other one responded to me sweetly
and said to me that I was progressing well,
and this she punctuated most discreetly
with a lovely smile on which I shall not dwell.

From my eyes, she said, she could tell
that the radiance was bright,
for she could still see the light
that remained there glimmering.

Alla dura questione e paurosa
la qual mi fece questa foresetta,
i' dissi: «E' mi ricorda che 'n Tolosa
donna m'apparve, accordellata istretta,
Amor la qual chiamava la Mandetta;
giunse sì presta e forte,
che fin dentro, a la morte,
mi colpîr gli occhi suoi.»

Molto cortesemente mi rispuose
quella che di me prima avëa riso.
Disse: «La donna che nel cor ti pose
co la forza d'amor tutto 'l su' viso,
dentro per li occhi ti mirò sì fiso,
ch'Amor fece apparire.
Se t'è greve 'l soffrire,
raccomàndati a lui.»

Vanne a Tolosa, ballatetta mia,
ed entra quetamente a la Dorata,
ed ivi chiama che per cortesia
d'alcuna bella donna sie menata
dinanzi a quella di cui t'ho pregata;
e s'ella ti riceve,
dille con voce leve:
«Per merzé vegno a voi.»



She asked me what had happened and I replied
that Love had called upon me in Toulouse
to show me a woman there who stupefied
me with a face and body one could confuse
with another Lady I loved — a bruise on a bruise.
Amanda was her name,
and in her eyes was the flame
that still is simmering.

The one who had laughed turned serious to remark,
“The lady set her sights upon you, then,
seeing your weakness, decided she might spark
the tinder in your heart that blazed up when
you felt that passion that burns in women and men.
It was Love’s moment and he
struck with ferocity
for an easy vanquishing.”

Go, then, ballad, to Toulouse to say
you wish to be presented to her for whom
you have been made and ask her as you pray
in the Church of the Daurade in a corner’s gloom
if she might not allow you to presume
her mercy might allow
me to approach her now
in the hope to which I cling.



Gli occhi di quella gentil foresetta
hanno distretta — sì la mente mia,
ch'altro non chiama che le', né disia.

Ella mi fere sì, quando la sguardo,
ch'i' sento lo sospir tremar nel core:
 esce degli occhi suoi, che m'è [con' d]ardo,
un gentileto spirito d'amore,
 lo qual è pieno di tanto valore,
quando mi giunge, l'anima va via,
come colei che soffrir nol poria.

I' sento pianger for li miei sospiri,
quando la mente di lei mi ragiona;
 e veggio piover per l'aere martiri
che struggon di dolor la mia persona,
 sì che ciascuna virtù m'abbandona,
in guisa ch'i' non so là 'v'i' mi sia:
sol par che Morte m'aggia 'n sua balia.

Sì mi sento disfatto, che Mercede
già non ardisco nel penser chiamare,
 ch'i' trovo Amor che dice: «Ella si vede
tanto gentil, che non pò 'maginare
 ch'om d'esto mondo l'ardisca mirare
che non convegna lui tremare in pria;
ed i', s'i' la sguardasse, ne morria.»

The eyes of that country girl have had a strong
effect on me and I long for her and turn
my love toward her for whom I presently burn.

I look at her and feel in my heart a flutter
as if it had been struck by one of those
arrows Cupid fires at us with utter
disregard of propriety he knows
we shall soon forget — and I suppose
he's right, as sooner or later most of us learn
here in our brief, giddily random sojourn.

My sighs rack my body and my mind
works up elaborate fantasies in all
of which I contrive somehow to find
time with her. The chances, though, are small
and grief consumes me. I am in its thrall
and am afflicted as my emotions churn
and weak as a springtime flower or tender fern.

My usual braggadocio is gone
and I dare not even imagine asking for
mercy from her. Even to look upon
her face would be a privilege far more
dear than I deserve or dare implore.
If Love begged her for pity and concern,
would her response to him be gentle or stern?

Ballata, quando tu sarai presente
a gentil donna, sai che tu dirai
de l'angoscia[to] dolorosamente?
Di': « Quelli che mi manda a voi trà guai,
però che dice che non spera mai
trovar Pietà di tanta cortesia,
ch'a la sua donna faccia compagnia. »



Ballad, you go for me and speak on my
behalf to inform her of the state of my soul.

Tell her how I am woebegone and sigh
continually and ask that she condole

with a suffering that I cannot control.
Although I expect nothing at all, I yearn
to have some message from her in return.

✍

Quando di morte mi conven trar vita
 e di pesanza gioia,
 come di tanta noia
 lo spirito d'amor d'amar m'invita?

Come m'invita lo meo cor d'amare,
 lasso, ch'è pien di doglia
 e di sospir' sì d'ogni parte priso,
 che quasi sol merzé non pò chiamare,
 e di virtù lo spoglia
 l'afanno che m'ha già quasi conquiso?

Canto piacere, beninanza e riso
 me'n son dogli' e sospiri:
 guardi ciascuno e miri
 che Morte m'è nel viso già salita!

Amor, che nasce di simil piacere,
 dentro lo cor si posa
 formando di disio nova persona;
 ma fa la sua virtù in vizio cadere,
 sì ch'amar già non osa
 qual sente come servir guiderdona.

Dunque d'amar perché meco ragiona?
 Credo sol perché vede
 ch'io domando mercede
 a Morte, ch'a ciascun dolor m'adita.

From the contemplation of death one learns to be
alive; and from suffering, gladness.
So, from torment and madness,
Love imposes his pedagogy on me.

How can my heart in its severe travail
prompt me to think of love,
beset as it is by plaintive groans and sighs
so severe that I feel faint and quail
at the daunting prospect of
begging for the mercy she denies?

Singing and dancing under sunny skies
to me are cues for tears,
and from my face it appears
that Death attends on me impatiently.

Love that comes from mutual pleasure can stay
and grow within the two
hearts to constitute a whole new being.

But in a single heart, profound dismay
eats at it — all it can do
is melt away, a defeated army fleeing.

Love, nevertheless, instructs me, seeing
how I am in such despair
that I have ceased to care
whether it's he or Death who sets me free.

I' mi posso blasmar di gran pesanza
più che nessun giammai:
ché Morte d'entro 'l cor me tragge un core
che va parlando di crudele amanza,
che ne' mie' forti guai
m'affanna là ond'i' prendo ogni valore.

Quel punto maladetto sia, ch'Amore
nacque di tal maniera
che la mia vita fera
li fue, di tal piacere, a lui gradita.



I complain as no one has ever done
while Death draws from my heart
another kind of heart that speaks to call
attention to the pains of Love that one
may transform into art
but that does not diminish them, and small
comfort comes (if any comes at all).
I'd be better off dumb
than having cruel Love come
who torments victims so exquisitely.



Io temo che la mia disavventura
 non faccia sì ch'ì' dica: «I' mi dispero,»
 però ch'ì' sento nel cor un pensiero
 che fa tremar la mente di paura,

e par che dica: «Amor non t'assicura
 in guisa, che tu possi di leggero
 a la tua donna sì contar il vero,
 che Morte non ti ponga 'n sua figura.»

De la gran doglia che l'anima sente
 si parte da lo core uno sospiro
 che va dicendo: «Spiriti, fuggite.»

Allor d'un uom che sia pietoso miro,
 che consolasse mia vita dolente
 dicendo: «Spiritei, non vi partite!»



I worry lest my misfortunes have turned me
sour, have curdled my heart and mind to despair,
and my soul trembles with fear to venture there
to the realms of abnegation and accidie.

I worry lest my heart, assailed with fear,
warns me that to dare address her and ask
for mercy would be to fail and that such a task
would be an invitation for Death to appear.

What greater grief can the wretched soul endure
than to listen to the sighs of the heart that say
the spirits that remain are about to flee?

Is there no compassionate man who may
listen to my complaints and suggest a cure
that might induce those spirits to stay with me?



La forte e nova mia disavventura
 m'ha desfatto nel core
 ogni dolce penser, ch'i' avea, d'amore.

Disfatta m'ha già tanto de la vita,
 che la gentil, piacevol donna mia
 dall'anima destrutta s'è partita,
 sì ch'i' non veggio là dov'ella sia.

Non è rimaso in me tanta balia,
 ch'io de lo su' valore
 possa comprender nella mente fiore.

Vèn, che m'uccide, un[o] sottil pensero,
 che par che dica ch'i' mai no la veggia:
 questo [è] tormento disperato e fero,
 che strugg' e dole e 'ncende ed amareggia.

Trovar non posso a cui pietate cheggia,
 mercé di quel signore
 che gira la fortuna del dolore.

Pieno d'angoscia, in loco di paura,
 lo spirito del cor dolente giace
 per la Fortuna che di me non cura,
 c'ha volta Morte dove assai mi spiace,
 e da speranza, ch'è stata fallace,
 nel tempo ch'e' si more
 m'ha fatto perder dilettevole ore.

My signal lack of success has obliterated
the dreams that came to me
of love and undone my equanimity.

My entire life is ruined in such a way
that my noble lady has gone without a trace
and my soul is such a shambles that I can't say
where I might start to look for her lovely face.

No one shows me pity or suggests that place
where I might hope to see
what Fortune denies me by her cruel decree.

A painful thought occurs to me — that I
shall never see her again, and all the pain
of devices on which torturers rely
consumes me — not in body but in brain
to embitter me and render me insane.
I'm afraid I begin to be
a grotesque apparition from which men flee.

I am full of inexpressible anguish because
Fortune is indifferent or hostile to
my welfare and she mauls me with her claws
and calls upon Death to declare that my life is through.

What my deceptive hopes have made me do
produces a nullity
closer to farce, I fear, than tragedy.

Parole mie disfatt' e paurose,
là dove piace a voi di gire andate;
ma sempre sospirando e vergognose
lo nome de la mia donna chiamate.

Io pur rimagno in tant' aversitate
che, qual mira de fòre,
vede la Morte sotto al meo colore.



Go, then, my words, diffident as you are,
and wander where you will, making my sighs
audible to audiences far
from where we are now and apprise
the world how a man in such agony dies,
and some of them may agree
that Death often waits upon such adversity.



Perch' i' no spero di tornar giammai,
 ballatetta, in Toscana,
 va' tu, leggera e piana,
 dritt' a la donna mia,
 che per sua cortesia
 ti farà molto onore.

Tu porterai novelle di sospiri
 piene di dogli' e di molta paura;
 ma guarda che persona non ti miri
 che sia nemica di gentil natura:
 ché certo per la mia disavventura
 tu saresti contesa,
 tanto da lei ripresa
 che mi sarebbe angoscia;
 dopo la morte, poscia,
 pianto e novel dolore.

Tu senti, ballatetta, che la morte
 mi stringe sì, che vita m'abbandona;
 e senti come 'l cor si sbatte forte
 per quel che ciascun spirito ragiona.

Tanto è distrutta già la mia persona,
 ch' i' non posso soffrire:
 se tu mi vuoi servire,
 mena l'anima teco
 (molto di ciò ti preco)
 quando uscirà del core.

Because I have no hope of going back
to Tuscany, my dear
little ballad, I fear
that you must go to pay
my respects to my Lady: I pray
she'll receive your message well.

You will bear news to her of my many sighs
full of dreadful imaginings as they've been.

But tell her of this discreetly and in the guise
of literature, lest someone listen in
and gloat about what you are saying, or laugh, or grin.
If she were to smile, too,
or show any doubts about you,
it would be death for me
and then, in eternity,
the permanent sorrows of hell.

You understand, little ballad, how death
holds me already in its iron grip
so that my heart flutters and my breath
comes painfully and I must bite my lip
to keep from crying out. I stagger and trip
as I try to cross the room.
Act, therefore, as my groom
and take my soul with you
after it passes through
to escape from its fleshly cell.

Deh, ballatetta mia, a la tu' amistate
quest'anima che trema raccomando:

menala teco, nella sua pietate,
a quella bella donna a cu' ti mando.

Deh, ballatetta, dille sospirando,
quando le se' presente:

« Questa vostra servente
vien per istar con voi,
partita da colui
che fu servo d'Amore. »

Tu, voce sbigottita e deboletta
ch'esci piangendo de lo cor dolente,
coll'anima e con questa ballatetta
va' ragionando della strutta mente.

Voi troverete una donna piacente,
di sì dolce intelletto
che vi sarà diletto
starle davanti ognora.
Anim', e tu l'adora
sempre, nel su' valore.



This soul of mine I commend to you as a friend
I trust and I rely on you to care
for it in its pitiful state as the two of you wend
your way to my Lady. As soon as you get there,
tell her not only the news about how I fare,
but ask if she'll allow
my soul to stay with her now
that it has parted from me
(in my constant misery)
and with her resolves to dwell.

Try to speak with confidence to her
as you present my soul in verse that shows
a mind less steady than I should prefer
for you may rely on this Lady who well knows
what I had intended to compose,
and she, in her delight,
may put your defects right,
for being near her perfection
will be a sufficient correction
by which we may both excel.



Certe mie rime a te mandar vogliendo
 del greve stato che lo meo cor porta,
 Amor aparve a me in figura morta
 e disse: «Non mandar, ch'i' ti riprendo,

però che, se l'amico è quel ch'io 'ntendo,
 e' non avrà già sì la mente accorta,
 ch'udendo la 'ngiuliosa cosa e torta
 ch'i' ti fo sostener tuttora ardendo,

ched e' non prenda sì gran smarrimento
 ch'avante ch'udit' aggia tua pesanza
 non si diparta da la vita il core.

E tu conosci ben ch'i' sono Amore;
 però ti lascio questa mia sembianza
 e pòrtone ciascun tu' pensamento.»



I was about to send you some verses of mine,
complaints of the kind I usually make,
but Love showed up to warn, “This would be a mistake.
Do not send him even a single line.

If the friend is the one I think he is, he may
not have steeled his mind to receive such news,
depressing and more than likely to confuse
a man who loves you and cause him great dismay.

Before he gets to the sestet, he may feel
not merely troubled but stricken. And what can he do
at such a distance to offer you sympathy?

Do you wish to cause him harm? Do you not see
what the poem conveys? I’m telling you
to take good care about what you reveal.”



A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core
Nel cui cospetto ven lo dir presente,
In ciò che mi rescrivan suo parvente,
Salute in lor signor, cioè Amore.

Già eran quasi che atterzate l'ore
Del tempo che onne stella n'è lucente,
Quando m'apparve Amor subitamente,
Cui essenza membrar mi dà orrore.

Allegro mi sembrava Amor tenendo
Meo core in mano, e ne le braccia avea
Madonna involta in un drappo dormendo.

Poi la svegliava, e d'esto core ardendo
Lei paventosa umilmente pascea:
Appresso gir lo ne vedea piangendo.



To anyone whose heart and soul have been smitten
and to whom these presents come (so that they agree
and confirm that they, too, suffer what happened to me
and therefore can vouch for the truth of what I have written),

greetings — in Love's name, whose tyranny
oppresses us. A third of the way through the night,
at the hour when myriad stars twinkle their light,
Love in his awesomeness appeared to me.

In a spirit that seemed cheerful, Love held in his hand
my heart, and in his arms my Lady, asleep,
wrapped in a blanket. Gently, he woke her and

fed her my burning heart. You can understand
how frightened she was as she ate it. I saw him weep,
as he disappeared, grief-stricken and unmanned.



Vedeste, al mio parere, onne valore
 e tutto gioco e quanto bene om sente,
 se foste in prova del signor valente
 che segnoreggia il mondo de l'onore,

poi vive in parte dove noia more,
 e tien ragion nel cassar de la mente;
 sì va soave per sonno a la gente,
 che 'l cor ne porta senza far dolore.

Di voi lo core ne portò, veggendo
 che vostra donna alla morte cadea:
 nodrialà dello cor, di ciò temendo.

Quando v'apparve che se 'n già dolendo,
 fu 'l dolce sonno ch'allor si compiea,
 ché 'l su' contraro lo venìa vincendo.



You've felt, I think, every power and delight
a noble man can feel, and therefore you know
how Love can lord it over both high and low
in repetitive demonstrations of his might.

He lives in a place where troubles are unknown
and considers in the turrets of our minds
how to exploit the chances that he finds
to subjugate us all before his throne.

He took away your heart that you wanted to give
to your lady who was in a sad decline
you wanted to reverse and have her live.

But then love goes and its alternative
come to exchange sweet sleep, both yours and mine,
for torments, endless and definitive.



Guido, i' vorrei che tu e Lapo ed io
fossimo presi per incantamento
e messi in un vassel, ch'ad ogni vento
per mare andasse al voler vostro e mio;

sì che fortuna od altro tempo rio
non ci potesse dare impedimento,
anzi, vivendo sempre in un talento,
di stare insieme crescesse 'l disio.

E monna Vanna e monna Lagia poi
con quella ch'è sul numer de le trenta
con noi ponesse il buono incantatore:

e quivi ragionar sempre d'amore,
e ciascuna di lor fosse contenta,
sì come i' credo che saremmo noi.



Ah, Guido, would it not be splendid if
you and Lupo and I were subject to
some wizard's spell and set upon the blue
sea together in a magic skiff

that we could steer simply by our thoughts
to go this way or that? No wind or wave
could hinder us as we three good and brave
fellows sailed on, as if we were Argonauts.

The enchanter might provide us with company,
your Vanna, Lapo's Lagio, and my love, too,
and we could use the occasion to converse

on the subject of love — a blessing or a curse.
Or are men or women likelier to be true?
And this could continue for all eternity.



S'io fosse quelli che d'amor fu degno,
 del qual non trovo sol che rimembranza,
 e la donna tenesse altra sembianza,
 assai mi piacerea siffatto legno.

E tu, che se' de l'amoroso regno
 là onde di merzé nasce speranza,
 riguarda se 'l mi' spirito ha pesanza:
 ch'un prest' arcier di lui ha fatto segno

e tragge l'arco, che li tese Amore,
 sì lietamente, che la sua persona
 par che di gioco porti signoria.

Or odi meraviglia ch'el disia:
 lo spirito fedito li perdona,
 vedendo che li strugge il suo valore.



A lovely idea, but only for those who
are worthy of love, as I seem not to be.
I have no more than a fading memory
of my Lady's favour — and I am in envy of you.

From your viewpoint you may judge if I
have been fairly treated or not. My hope is gone
that is the only food that love thrives on,
and from the arrow's deep wound I may die.

Love laughs at me: the joy he promised me
is his alone as he swaggers and preens at his
absurdly easy conquest, and he has the nerve

to ask my pardon, even while I serve
as a menial in his court, and the truth of it is
that I do forgive him in my debility.



Se vedi Amore, assai ti priego, Dante,
 in parte là 've Lapo sia presente,
 che non ti gravi di por sì la mente
 che mi riscrivi s'elli 'l chiama amante

e se la donna li sembra avenante,
 ch'e' si le mostra vinto fortemente:
 ché molte fiate così fatta gente
 suol per gravezza d'amor far sembiente.

Tu sai che ne la corte là 'v'e' regna
 e' non vi può servir om che sia vile
 a donna che là entro sia renduta:

se la sofferenza lo servente aiuta,
 può di leggier cognoscer nostro sire,
 lo quale porta di merzede insegna.



I beg of you, dear Dante, if you happen to see
Love where Lupo is hanging out these days,
drop me a line — is he okay? in a daze?
Enjoying himself? Or sunk in misery?

Is the lady kindly disposed to him or does he
persaude himself, ignoring the evidence
of eyes and ears as well as common sense
and having lost touch with all reality?

In Love's court, where only the noble may
serve a lady cloistered there, it is
patience by which the suitor can succeed.

It may take time before our master will heed
requests and supplications such as his
and in his own good time perhaps give way.



Dante, un sospiro messenger del core
 subitamente m'assalì dormendo,
 ed io mi disvegliai allor, temendo
 ched e' non fosse in compagnia d'Amore.

Po' mi girai, e vidi 'l servitore
 di monna Lagia che venìa dicendo:
 «Aiutami, Pietà!», sì che piangendo
 i' presi di merzé tanto valore,

ch'i' giunsi Amore ch'affilava i dardi.
 Allor l'adomandai del su' tormento,
 ed elli mi rispuose in questa guisa:

«Di' al servente che la donna è prisa,
 e tengola per far su' piacimento;
 e se no 'l crede, di' ch'a li occhi guardi.»



Dante, a sigh that came from my heart's core
assaulted me, surprising me as I slept,
and I awoke to escape from it, but it kept
after me as threatening as before.

Was it Love's minion? But then I happened to see
Lagia's servant who called out in his pain
for pity which he emphasized with a rain
of tears that was a renewal of strength for me.

Soon thereafter I encountered Love and I
asked why he tortured Lapo with such force.
“Tell him,” Love said, “that the lady is now caught

and will behave toward him just as she ought,
in obedience to me and to him of course,
as a quick look into her eyes will verify.”



I' vegno 'l giorno a te 'nfinite volte
 e trovoti pensar troppo vilmente:
 molto mi dòl della gentil tua mente
 e d'assai tue virtù che ti son tolte.

Solevanti spiacer persone molte;
 tutt'or fuggivi l'annoiosa gente;
 di me parlavi sì coralemente,
 che tutte le tue rime avie ricolte.

Or non ardisco, per la vil tua vita,
 far mostramento che tu' dir mi piaccia,
 né 'n guisa vegno a te, che tu mi veggi.

Se 'l presente sonetto spesso leggi,
 lo spirito noioso che ti caccia
 si partirà da l'anima invilita.



I see you often and, more and more alarmed,
I see that you are now in a terrible mood,
your noble mind depleted of all its good
and I must assume that you've been badly harmed.

You never suffered fools and always fled
from bores, but you were always easy with me,
and we would discuss love, life, and poetry
but lately when we meet, what I feel is dread.

What has happened to you to make me shy
even of praising your work? You are annoyed
by anything or by nothing at all. Heed

the words of this sonnet you hold in your hand to read
and let your spirit learn to evade or avoid
the malign spirit you are tormented by.



Certo non è de lo 'ntelletto acolto
 quel che staman ti fece disonesto:
 or come già, [n] men [che non] dico, presto
 t'aparve rosso spirito nel volto?

Sarebbe forse che t'avesse sciolto
 Amor da quella ch'è nel tondo sesto?
 o che vil razzo t'avesse richesto
 a por te lieto ov' i' son tristo molto?

Di te mi dole: di me guata quanto
 che me 'n fiede la mia donna 'n traverso
 tagliando ciò ch'Amor porta soave!

Ancor dinanzi m'è rotta la chiave
 del su' disdegno che nel mi' cor verso,
 sì che n'ho l'ira, e d'allegrezza è pianto.



What obtains? This morning your face was red,
blushing, I must assume, for some shameful act
that you could not justify to yourself and that lacked
honour and reason. Is the life you lately led

entirely gone? Have you forgotten the one
who looks down from heaven? Has Love released you from
your thralldom? And in your confusion is there some
trivial pleasure you've found? What have you done?

I grieve for you. But my own case appears
no better, for my Lady wounds me through
the heart in which Love reigns in his domain,

tormenting me and showing me disdain
over which I brood, as lovers often do,
in a perpetual gloom of sighs and tears.



Guido, quel Gianni ch'a te fu l'altrieri
salute, quanto piace alle tue risa,
da parte della giovane da Pisa,
ch'e' fier d'amor me' che tu di trafieri.

Ella mi domandò come tu ieri
acconcio di servir chi l'hae uccisa,
s'ella con lui a te venisse in guisa
che nol sapesse altre ch'egli e Gualtieri;

sicché [l]i suo' parenti da far macco
non potesser già ma' lor più far danno
che dir: «Mendate da la lungi scacco!»

Io le rispuosi che tu senza inganno
portavi pien di ta' saette un sacco,
che gli trarresti di briga e d'afanno.



From Gianni to Guido: Greetings and salutations
from him whom you met in the street only yesterday.
We laughed together as only good friends may
at my Pisan ladyfriend and her tribulations.

She asked me to appeal to you who serve
Love (from whom she has received such deep
wounds) if he would go with him and keep
watch, as she and Walter both deserve.

She worries lest her relatives interfere
and needs him to guard her, parry their likely blows,
and provide for her safety, her kindly musketeer.

I replied to her that you were well armed with those
arrows that Love carries and you could appear
yourself as her escort if such a moment arose.



Gianni, quel Guido salute
ne la tua bella e dolce salute.
Significàstimi, in un sonetto
rimatetto,
sìl voler de la giovane donna
che ti dice: «Fa' di me
quel che t'è
riposo.» E però ecco me
apparecchiato,
sobarcolato,
e d'Andrea coll'arco in mano,
e ccogli strali e cco' moschetti.
Guarda dove ti metti!
ché la Chiesa di Dio
sì vuole di giustizia fio.



Gianni, that Guido dispatches
a kind greeting that matches
his clever sonnet
and comments upon it:
she tells you that she
is willing to be
your solace? Go to
and try all the new
and strange combinations
of the books' illustrations,
but keeping in mind
that the church is not blind
to what goes on behind
drawn blinds and exacts
a price for some acts.



A quella amorosetta foresella
passò sì 'l core la vostra salute,
che sfigurò di sue belle parute:
dond' i' l'adomanda': «Perché, Pinella?

Udistù mai di quel Guido novella?»
«Sì feci, ta' ch'appena l'ho credute
che s'allegaron le mortai ferute
d'amor e di su' fermamento stella,

con pura luce che spande soave.
Ma dimmi, amico, se te piace: come
la conoscenza di me da te l'ave?

Sì tosto com' i' 'l vidi seppe 'l nome!
Ben è, così con' si dice, la chiave.
A lui ne mandi trentamilia some.»



Your greeting to the farmer's daughter moved
her heart in such a way that her face flushed.
For a moment she was speechless, but then words rushed,
for what she had assumed was now disproved.

She supposed you'd forgotten her and by the same
token, she was trying herself to forget
that day, not so long ago when you first met.
It came as a pleasant surprise that you knew her name.

With a light that turned her eyes to stars in the sky,
she said she was delighted to hear from you
and asked me. "Do give Guido, in reply,

my greetings." She said she only wished she knew
how to express herself. Then, with a sigh,
she sent you a thousand hugs and kisses, too.



Ciascuna fresca e dolce fontanella
 prende in Liscian[o] chiarezze e vertute,
 Bernardo amico mio, solo da quella
 che ti rispuose a le tue rime agute:

però che, in quella parte ove favella
 Amor delle bellezze c'ha vedute,
 dice che questa gentilezza e bella
 tutte nove adornezze ha in sé compiute.

Avegna che la doglia i' porti grave
 per lo sospiro, ché di me fa lume
 lo core ardendo in la disfatta nave,

mand' io a la Pinella un grande fiume
 pieno di lammie, servito da schiave
 bell' e adorn' e di gentil costume.



Every spring and rivulet up there
in Lizzano takes on a clarity from her
who replied to you and answered your debonair
greeting as all of us men about town prefer.

She is a kind of water nymph whom I
was lucky to meet and I am delighted to know
that she thinks of me — although I regret the sigh
you speak of. Tell her that I sigh also.

A splendid girl, as I am sure you too
noticed, a country sprite of the kind that we
imagine in our daydreams, a creature who

possesses a certain modest nobility,
and the message that she sent to me through you
demonstrates her conviviality.



Se non ti caggia la tua santalena
 giù per lo cólto tra le dure zolle
 e vegna a man[o] d'un forese folle
 che la stropicci e rèndalati a pena:

dimmi se 'l frutto che la terra mena
 nasce di secco, di caldo o di molle;
 e qual è 'l vento che l'annarca e tolle;
 e di che nebbia la tempesta è piena;

e se ti piace quando la mattina
 odi la boce del lavoratore
 e 'l tramazzare della sua famiglia.

I' ho per certo che, se la Bettina
 porta soave spirito nel core,
 del novo acquisto spesso ti ripiglia.



Suppose the St. Helen coin you carry for luck
fell somewhere in a field where some sharp-eyed
country fellow, trudging along, spied
its gleam and grabbed it from where it lay in the muck.

What then? Does he ask if his good fortune came
from moisture, dryness, heat, or a western breeze?
Does he check the fog, the dew, the stars, all these
or none? Does he wonder what good deed to blame?

He asks no questions, keeps his big mouth shut,
and as if nothing happened goes about
his daily routine, just as he always does.

He doesn't want his wife to ask him what
he has been up to, and, when he answers, doubt
his answer as she imagines what never was.



In un boschetto trova' pasturella
più che la stella — bella, al mi' parere.

Cavelli avea biondetti e ricciutelli,
e gli occhi pien' d'amor, cera rosata;
con sua verghetta pasturav' agnelli;
[di]scalza, di rugiada era bagnata;
cantava come fosse 'namorata:
er' adornata — di tutto piacere.

D'amor la saluta' imantenente
e domandai s'avesse compagnia;
ed ella mi rispose dolzemente
che sola sola per lo bosco gia,
e disse: «Sacci, quando l'augel pia,
allor disïa — 'l me' cor drudo avere.»

Po' che mi disse di sua condizione
e per lo bosco augelli audìo cantare,
fra me stesso diss' i': «Or è stagione
di questa pasturella gio' pigliare.»

Merzé le chiesi sol che di basciare
ed abbracciar, — se le fosse 'n volere.

Per man mi prese, d'amorosa voglia,
e disse che donato m'avea 'l core;
menòmmi sott' una freschetta foglia,
là dov'i' vidi fior' d'ogni colore;
e tanto vi sentìo gioia e dolzore,
che 'l die d'amore — mi pareva vedere.



I found in a little bosky dell a dear
shepherdess, as lovely as could be —

blond hair in ringlets, a face the pink of a peach,
eye that sparkled with life, and a musical laugh

I couldn't resist as I saw her gracefully reach
for one of her laggard lambs with her curved staff.

And there was a pretty song she had that she half-
hummed, half-sang, quite unself-consciously.

I greeted her and let her know how I
admired her and then I asked her whether

she might perhaps have a companion nearby,
some young man with whom she was together.

My heart was, when she answered, as light as a feather
for she was alone and didn't want to be.

"When the birds chirp," she said, "I feel alone
and lonely," and I thought this boded well,

for birds were indeed singing, as my own
heart was singing too in that bosky dell.

I begged a kiss from this sweet demoiselle
and she smiled at me and nodded agreeably.

She took my hand and led me into the shade
of an overhanging bough and said she had

given me her heart, and there she made
the flowers dance and my heart beat like mad

in a moment that had to be the gift of a glad
god who was kind that day to her and me.



Da più a uno face un sollegismo:
 in maggiore e in minor mezzo si pone,
 che pruova necessario senza rismo;
 da ciò ti parti forse di ragione?

Nel profferer, che cade 'n barbarismo,
 difetto di saver ti dà cagione;
 e come far poteresti un sofismo
 per silabate carte, fra Guittone?

Per te non fu giammai una figura;
 non fòri ha' posto in tuo un argomento,
 induri quanto più disci; e pon' cura,

ché 'ntes' ho che compon' d'insegnamento
 volume: e fòr principio ha da natura.
 Fa' ch'om non rida il tuo proponimento!



There is in a logician's syllogism
a kind of beauty with major premise and minor
and the necessary conclusion. What could be finer?
It is playing with light using a mental prism.

But you, brother Guittone, fail to see
how logic works, which makes it hard for you
to reason in verse. Your verse is defective, too,
so that what you write is a double catastrophe.

Your arguments are obtuse; your prosody's lame;
and the more you apply yourself, the worst it becomes.
Are you perhaps engaged in some kind of game?

Is this designed to elicit laughter from chums?
You seem to lack talent and wit, as well as shame,
and your reader's eyes glaze as his mind numbs.



Una figura della Donna mia
s'adora, Guido, a San Michele in Orto,
che, di bella sembianza, onesta e pia,
de' peccatori è gran rifugio e porto.

E qual con devozion lei s'umilia,
chi più languisce, più n'ha di conforto:
li 'nfermi sana e' domon' caccia via
e gli occhi orbati fa vedere scorto.

Sana 'n publico loco gran langori;
con reverenza la gente la 'nchina;
d[i] luminara l'adornan di fòri.

La voce va per lontane camina,
ma dicon ch'è idolatra i Fra' Minori,
per invidia che non è lor vicina.



At the church of San Michele in Orto they have
a Madonna to whom the faithful come to pray.
She is their help and hope and refuge, and they
worship her in piety and in love.

Before her holy image they lie on the floor
prostrate and beg for her pity and intercession
for cures or for forgiveness of transgression,
or simply for comfort from one whom they adore.

She chases devils away and she can cure
blindness, and people come to her in need.
The friars of St. Francis, lofty and pure,

declare that this is idolatry the creed
forbids, but their objections might be fewer
if the statue were theirs; then they might have agreed.



S'avessi detto, amico, di Maria
gratia plena et pia:
«Rosa vermiglia se', piantata in orto,»
avresti scritta dritta simiglia.
Et veritas et via:
del nostro Sire fu magione, e porto

della nostra salute, quella dia
che prese Sua contia,
[che] l'angelo le porse il suo conforto;
e certo son, chi ver' lei s'umilia
e sua colpa grandia,
che sano e salvo il fa, vivo di morto.

Ahi, qual conorto — ti darò? che plori
con Deo li tuo' fallori,
e non l'altrui: le tue parti diclina,
e prendine dottrina
dal publican che dolse i suo' dolori.

Li Fra' Minori — sanno la divina
[i]scrittura latina,
e de la fede son difenditori
li bon' Predicatori:
lor pridicanza è nostra medicina.



Dear friend, if you had said of Mary that she
full of grace and piety
is a crimson rose, the garden's finest flower,
your comparison would surely be
the light and way that we
travel better and of much greater power.

She was, when the angel came to her, salvation
from that annunciation
and the Lord's dwelling place during the time
of her pregnancy and his gestation.
To greet her in adoration
is surely to be healed and absolved of crime.

What can I tell you? To admit your faults before
the Lord and repent, heart sore,
is surely the pious thing for a man to do,
but remember the publican who
prayed in the way that Jesus admired more.

The Franciscans have studied the divine
scripture, verse and line.
And when they preach or pray we then
may say "Amen"
and may their vision of heavenly peace be thine.



La bella donna dove Amor si mostra,
 ch'è tanto di valor pieno ed adorno,
 tragge lo cor della persona vostra:
 e' prende vita in far co·llei soggiorno,

perc' ha sì dolce guardia la sua chiostra,
 che 'l sente in India ciascun lunicorno,
 e la vertude l'arma a fera giostra;
 vizio pos' dir no I fa crudel ritorno,

ch'ell' è per certo di sì gran valenza,
 che già non manca i·llei cosa da bene,
 ma' che Natura la creò mortale.

Poi mostra che 'n ciò mise provedenza:
 ch'al vostro intendimento si convene
 far, per conoscer, quel ch'a lu' sia tale.



A beautiful lady, one in whom Love dwells
and reveals himself in his full panoply,
as a wizard with with his book of magic spells,
calls out to a man's heart imperiously.

In her that heart is able to thrive, secure
in her virtue that any unicorn can sense
enjoying a passion altogether pure,
with the woman's and also with his own defence.

She is perfection, with the sole defect
of her mortal state that Nature assigns to us all—
which makes more urgent the love that you two share.

In this, it seems that Nature is correct,
making it clear that we who are in her thrall
must live to the very fullest of what we can bear.



A suon di trombe, anzi che di corno,
vorria di fin' amor far una mostra
d'armati cavalier, di pasqua un giorno,
e navigare senza tiro d'ostra

ver' la Gioiosa Garda, girle intorno
a sua difesa, non cherendo giostra
a te, che se' di gentilezza adorno,
dicendo il ver: per ch'io la Donna nostra

di su ne prego con gran reverenza
per quella di cui spesso mi sovene,
ch'a lo su' sire sempre stea leale,

servando in sé l'onor, come s'avene.
Viva con Deo che ne sostiene ed ale,
né mai da Lui non faccia dipartenza.



With a fanfare of trumpets I should like a parade
of knights on some feast day in tribute to you
and to sail on a galleon without any aid
of wind or oars as magic vessels do

toward Lancelot's *Joyeuse Garde* where I shall find
excuses not to joust with you whom I
revere for your nobility of mind.
On the the truth of what you say men can rely.

Our Lady above I think of every day
and pray that she continue loyal to her lord
preserving her honour and her character.

May she live with God, take comfort in his word,
never forsaking him in any way
as long as he sustains and nourishes her.



Di vil materia mi conven parlare
 [e] perder rime, silabe e sonetto,
 sì ch'a me ste[sso] giuro ed imprometto
 a tal voler per modo legge dare.

Perché sacciate balestra legare
 e coglier con isquadra archile in tetto
 e certe fiate aggate Ovidio letto
 e trar quadrelli e false rime usare,

non pò venire per la vostra mente
 là dove insegna Amor, sottile e piano,
 di sua maniera dire e di su' stato.

Già non è cosa che si porti in mano:
 qual che voi siate, egli è d'un'altra gente:
 sol al parlar si vede chi v'è stato.

Già non vi toccò lo sonetto primo:
 Amore ha fabricato ciò ch'io limo.



I must speak of subjects that are low
and do not well comform with the metre and rhyme
of pretty sonnets, although at the same time
some gracefulness is never malapropos.

You may know how to string a bow and fire
an arrow that hits a barrel, and you may have read
a bit of Ovid: you think you are well bred.
But there may be much more that you require.

Love is picky about whom he accepts
into his academy and demands
those who can understand what is plain or subtle.

He is not something one can hold in his hands
and his knowledge is only hinted to adepts
from whom there is never question or rebuttal.

Love guides my pen. To him goes all the credit.
But I am afraid that you, my friend, don't get it.



Amico, i' saccio ben che sa' limare
con punta lata maglia di coretto,
di palo in frasca come uccel volare,
con grande ingegno gir per loco stretto,

e largamente prendere e donare,
salvar lo guadagnato (ciò m'è detto),
accogliere gente, terra guadagnare.
In te non trovo mai ch'uno difetto:

che vai dicendo intra la savia gente
faresti Amore piangere in tuo stato.
Non credo, poi non vede: quest'è piano.

E ben di' 'l ver, che non si porta in mano,
anzi per passion punge la mente
dell'omo ch'ama e non si trova amato.

Io per lung' uso disusai lo primo
amor carnale: non tangio nel limo.



You are a wonder and you can sharpen a fine
blade with a rough file. Like a little bird
you flit from branch to branch and perform absurd
tricks with which you embellish every line.

You are a generous fellow to whom men go
in need or to tell their secrets, because you are
discreet, too. And amusing. You have gone far,
but with all those virtues there is a flaw also.

You annoy all sensible people with your prating
constantly of Love and complaining of how
bad he makes you feel. Buck up and face

a truth that you can't hold in your hand but stays
clear enough — that it is humiliating
to us and you, as you wallow in despond's slough.

It's simply carnal love, gussied up a bit,
and you want to avoid it, just as you do dog shit.



Guata, Manetto, quella scrignutuzza,
e pon' ben mente com'è divisata
e com' è drittamente sfigurata
e quel che pare quand' ella s'agruzza!

Or, s'ella fosse vestita d'un'uzza
con cappellin' e di vel soggolata
ed apparisse di diè accompagnata
d'alcuna bella donna gentiluzza,

tu non avresti niquità sì forte
né sarestii angoscioso sì d'amore
né sì involto di malinconia,

che tu non fossi a rischio de la morte
di tanto rider che farebbe 'l core:
o tu morresti, o fuggiresti via.



Take a gander, Minetto old fellow, at her,
dressed to the nines she is, but a hunchback too,
and when she shrugs there is nothing else to do
but stifle our laughter or, as some prefer,

laugh out loud, if only to keep from choking.
She strolls about sometimes in the streets of the town
with a woman of fashion, as if she were her clown,
for the sight of the two of them side by side is provoking.

How would you like it if she were the one with whom
you fell in love? Such things are not unknown
and Love can easily play such a terrible trick.

Would you retreat to the safety of your room?
Or would you be brave enough to go out alone —
to flee the city? To die? You can take your pick.



Novelle ti so dire, odi, Nerone:
 che' Bondelmonti trieman di paura,
 e tutti Fiorentin' no li assicura,
 udendo dir che tu ha' cuor di leone:

e' più trieman di te che d'un dragone,
 veggendo la tua faccia, ch'è sì dura
 che no la riterria ponte né mura,
 se non la tomba del re Pharaone.

Deh, con' tu fai grandissimo peccato:
 sì alto sangue voler discacciare,
 che tutti vanno via senza ritegno!

Ma ben è ver che ti largâr lo pegno
 di che pot[e]rai l'anima salvare:
 sì fosti paziente del mercato!



Nerone, dear kinsman, there are reports I hear
that the Buondelmonti, for all the Florentines say,
are not at all reassured and in their dismay
at your reputation for courage tremble in fear.

They mutter among themselves that you are like
a dragon in your fierceness: their chances are small
even behind a moat or curtain wall
to withstand you or survive whenever you strike.

They compare you to those tombs the pharaohs built
in the desert sands, with a heart as hard as those
enormous and implacable hewn stones.

They forgive your debt to them, write off their loans,
and wish to draw the business to a close,
so that now you do not even owe them guilt.

✍



This book was typeset in Bembo,
the Monotype revival of a serif face
cut by Francesco Griffo in the late
15th century in Italy.