Complete Poems

“The first among my friends.”
Dante Alighieri

“He has more individual life of his own than belongs to any of his predecessors.”
Dante Gabriel Rossetti

“Guido is the first Italian poet worthy of the name.”
Francesco de Sanctis

“No psychologist of the emotions is more keen in his understanding, more precise in his expression.”
Ezra Pound

“With all his gravity, he has the secret of lightness.”
Italo Calvino
Complete Poems

Guido Cavalcanti

Translated by Anthony Mortimer
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For Richard Waswo
Complete Poems
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
10

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 aventurosa
fue la mia disianza!

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

Fra lor le donne dea
vi chiaman, come sète;
tanto adorna parete
ch’eo non saccio contare;
30

e chi poria pensare – oltra natura?
I

Fresh-blossoming new rose,
Pleasant delightful spring,
Gaily I rise and sing,
Giving praise to your worth
Throughout the green earth in meadow and pasture.

In joy let your fine worth
Be praised anew by all,
Proclaimed by great and small,
Along each country path;
   And may the sweet birds now,  
Each in his proper tongue,
Morning and evening sing
Your lauds upon the bough.
   Let the whole world sing out
Your high-exalted state;
The season now dictates
This as the fitting time
To hail you as sublime angelic creature.

   Angelic form, I say,
Lady, resides in you:  
God, how the luck was true
That turned my love your way!
   Your blithe and joyful air
Surpasses and transcends
Custom and nature’s bounds,
Miraculously fair.
   Among the ladies called
A goddess, as you are,
So perfect you appear
That all my words fall short;
And who can make his thought go beyond nature?
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.
Beyond our human nature
God made your lovely presence
To prove your very essence
That of a sovereign creature.

Let not your countenance
Ever be far from me;
Show no discourtesy,
O my sweet providence!

And if you find excess
In that I love you so,
Still blame me not; for know
That Love compels my course,
Against whom neither force avails nor measure.
Avete ’n vo’ li fior’ e la verdura
e ciò che luce ed è bello a vedere;
risplende più che sol vostra figura:
chi vo’ non vede, ma’ non pò valere.
In questo mondo non ha creatura
sì 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 segnoria,
perché di tutte siete la migliore.
II

In you the flowers are and all things green,
Whatever shines and is most fair to view;
Resplendently your face outbraves the sun:
No man has worth who does not look on you.
Throughout the world no creature can be seen
So full of beauty, of such comely hue;
If anyone fears love, your glance alone
Rouses his courage to desire anew.
The ladies that are in your company,
Thanks to the love I bear you, please me well;
And thus I bid them, in their courtesy,
That whosoever has more power and skill
Should honour and most prize your sovereignty,
Because you are the noblest of them all.
III

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;
orò, argento, azzuro ’n ornamenti:
ciò passa la beltate e la valenza
de la mia donna e ’l su’ gentil coraggio, 10
sì che rasembra vile a chi ciò guarda;
et tanto più d’ogn’altr’ ha canoscenza
quanto lo ciel de la terra è maggio.
A simil di natura ben non tarda.
III

A woman’s beauty and a sage’s heart,
Knights clad in armour and nobility,
Discourse of love, and birds that sing their part,
And tall ships sailing swiftly on the sea;
The calmness in the air when dawn gleams white,
Snow falling softly on a windless day,
Clear-flowing streams and flowering meadows bright,
Silver and gold and lapis lazuli:
Such things give way before my lady’s grace,
Her beauty, gentle heart and precious worth
That make whatever else is seen look base;
In knowledge she exceeds all other minds
Even as heaven is greater than the earth.
Good is not slow in seeking its own kind.
IV

Chi è questa che vèn, ch’ogn’om la mira, 
che fa tremar di chiaritate l’àre 
e mena seco Amor, si che parlare 
null’omo pote, ma ciascun sospira? 
O Deo, che sembra quando lì 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 si alta già la mente nostra 
e non si pose ’n noi tanta salute 
che propriamente n’aviàn canoscenza.
IV

Who comes this way, that all men stand and gaze,
Who gives a trembling brightness to the air,
And leads Love with her so that no one there
Can speak a word, but all must melt in sighs?
O God, the radiance of those glancing eyes,
Beyond what I can say, let Love declare:
All other women seem but fretful care
Before this lady’s modest gracious ways.
There is no tongue that can describe her grace,
Before her all the noble virtues bend,
Beauty’s divinity made manifest.
But we were never granted such great bliss,
Nor was our mind so raised as to pretend
To knowledge of her as she truly is.
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