

13th/14th-Century Italian Poets

(Translations by Dante Gabriel Rossetti)

GUIDO GUINICELLI (1230-1276)

I. Sonnet

Concerning Lucy

When Lucy draws her mantle round her face,
So sweeter than all else she is to see,
That hence unto the hills there lives not he
Whose whole soul would not love her for her grace.
Then seems she like a daughter of some race
That holds high rule in France or Germany:
And a snake's head stricken off suddenly
Throbs never as then throbs my heart to embrace
Her body in these arms, even were she loth; —
To kiss her lips, to kiss her cheeks, to kiss
The lids of her two eyes which are two flames.
Yet what my heart so longs for, my heart blames:
For surely sorrow might be bred from this
Where some man's patient love abides its growth.

II. Canzone

Of the Gentle Heart

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

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

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

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

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

God, in the understanding of high Heaven,
Burns more than in our sight the living sun:
There to behold His Face unveiled is given;
And Heaven, whose will is homage paid to One
Fulfills the things which live
In God, from the beginning excellent.
So should my lady give
That truth which in her eyes is glorified,
On which her heart is bent,
To me whose service waiteth at her side.

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

III. Sonnet

He will praise his Lady

Yea, let me praise my lady whom I love:
Likening her unto the lily and rose:
Brighter than morning star her visage glows;
She is beneath even as her Saint above;
She is as the air in summer which God wove
Of purple and of vermilion glorious;
As gold and jewels richer than man knows.
Love's self, being love for her, must holier prove.
Ever as she walks she hath a sober grace,
Making bold men abashed and good men glad;
If she delight thee not, thy heart must err.
No man dare look on her, his thoughts being base:
Nay, let me say even more than I have said; —
No man could think base thoughts who looked on her.

IV. Canzone

He perceives his Rashness in Love, but has no choice

I hold him, verily, of mean emprise,
Whose rashness tempts a strength too great to bear;
As I have done, alas! who turned mine eyes
Upon those perilous eyes of the most fair.
Unto her eyes I bow'd;
No need her other beauties in that hour
Should aid them, cold and proud:
As when the vassals of a mighty lord,
What time he needs his power,
Are all girt round him to make strong his sword.

With such exceeding force the stroke was dealt
That by mine eyes its path might not be stay'd;
But deep into the heart it pierced, which felt
The pang of the sharp wound, and waxed afraid;
Then rested in strange wise,
As when some creature utterly outworn
Sinks into bed and lies.
And she the while doth in no manner care,
But goes her way in scorn,
Beholding herself alway proud and fair.

And she may be as proud as she shall please,
For she is still the fairest woman found:
A sun she seems among the rest; and these

Have all their beauties in her splendour drown'd.
In her is every grace, —
Simplicity of wisdom, noble speech,
Accomplished loveliness; All earthly beauty is her diadem,
This truth my song would teach, —
My lady is of ladies chosen gem.

Love to my lady's service yieldeth me, —
Will I, or will I not, the thing is so, —
Nor other reason can I say or see,
Except that where it lists the wind doth blow.
He rules and gives no sign;
Nor once from her did show of love upbuoy
This passion which is mine.
It is because her virtue's strength and stir
So fill her full of joy
That I am glad to die for love of her.

JACOPO DA LENTINO (1210-1260)

I. Sonnet

Of his Lady in Heaven

I have it in my heart to serve God so
That into Paradise I shall repair, —
The holy place through the which everywhere
I have heard say that joy and solace flow.
Without my lady I were loth to go, —
She who has the bright face and the bright hair
Because if she were absent, I being there,
My pleasure would be less than nought, I know
Look you, I say not this to such intent
As that I there would deal in any sin:
I only would behold her gracious mien,
And beautiful soft eyes, and lovely face,
That so it should be my complete content
To see my lady joyful in her place.

III. Sonnet

No Jewel is worth his Lady

Sapphire, nor diamond, nor emerald,
Nor other precious stones past reckoning,
Topaz, nor pearl, nor ruby like a king,
Nor that most virtuous jewel, jasper call'd,

Nor amethyst, nor onyx, nor basalt,
Each counted for a very marvellous thing,
Is half so excellently gladdening
As is my lady's head uncoronall'd.
All beauty by her beauty is made dim;
Like to the stars she is for loftiness;
And with her voice she taketh away grief.
She is fairer than a bud, or than a leaf.
Christ have her well in keeping, of His grace,
And make her holy and beloved, like Him!

IV. Canzonetta

He will neither boast nor lament to his Lady

Love will not have me cry
For grace, as others do;
Nor as they vaunt, that I
Should vaunt my love to you.
For service, such as all
Can pay, is counted small;
Nor is it much to praise
The thing which all must know, —
Such pittance to bestow
On you my love gainsays.

Love lets me not turn shape
As chance or use may strike;
As one may see an ape
Counterfeit all alike
Then, lady, unto you
Be it not mine to sue,
For grace or pitying.
Many the lovers be
That of such suit are free,—
It is a common thing.

A gem, the more 'tis rare,
The more its cost will mount:
And, be it not so fair,
It is of more account.
So, coming from the East,
The sapphire is increased
In worth, though scarce so bright;
I therefore seek thy face
Not to solicit grace,
Being cheapened and made slight.

So is the colosmine
Now cheapened, which in fame
Was once so brave and fine,
But now is a mean gem.
So be such prayers for grace
Not heard in any place;
Would they indeed hold fast
Their worth, be they not said,
Nor by true lovers made
Before nine years be past.

Lady, sans sigh or groan,
My longing thou canst see;
Much better am I known
Than to myself, to thee.
And is there nothing else
That in my heart avails
For love but groan and sigh?
And wilt thou have it thus,
This love betwixen us? —
Much rather let me die.

GUIDO DELLE COLONNE (1210-1287)

Canzone

To Love and to his Lady

O Love, who all this while hast urged me on, Shaking the reins, with never any rest, —
Slacken for pity somewhat of thy haste;
I am oppress'd with languor and foredone, —
Having outrun the power of sufferance, —
Having much more endured than who, through faith
That his heart holds, makes no account of death.
Love is assuredly a fair mischance,
And well may it be called a happy ill:
Yet thou, my lady, on this constant sting,
So sharp a thing, have thou some pity still, —
Howbeit a sweet thing too, unless it kill.

O comely-favoured, whose soft eyes prevail,
More fair than is another on this ground, —
Lift now my mournful heart out of its stound,
Which thus is bound for thee in great travail:
For a high gale a little rain may end.
Also, my lady, be not angered thou
That Love should thee enforce, to whom all bow.
There is but little shame to apprehend
If to a higher strength the conquest be;

And all the more to Love who conquers all.
Why then appall my heart with doubts of thee?
Courage and patience triumph certainly.

I do not say that with such loveliness
Such pride may not beseem; it suits thee well;
For in a lovely lady pride may dwell,
Lest homage fail and high esteem grow less:
Yet pride's excess is not a thing to praise.
Therefore, my lady, let thy harshness gain
Some touch of pity which may still restrain
Thy hand, ere Death cut short these hours and days.
The sun is very high and full of light,
And the more bright the higher he doth ride:
So let thy pride, my lady, and thy height,
Stand me in stead and turn to my delight.

Still inmost I love thee, labouring still
That others may not know my secret smart
Oh! what a pain it is for the grieved heart
To hold apart and not to show its ill!
Yet by no will the face can hide the soul;
And ever with the eyes the heart has need
To be in all things willingly agreed.
It were a mighty strength that should control
The heart's fierce beat, and never speak a word:
It were a mighty strength, I say again,
To hide such pain, and to be sovran lord
Of any heart that had such love to hoard.

For Love can make the wisest turn astray;
Love, at its most, of measure still has least;
He is the maddest man who loves the best;
It is Love's jest, to make men's hearts always
So hot that they by coldness cannot cool.
The eyes unto the heart bear messages
Of the beginnings of all pain and ease:
And thou, my lady, in thy hand dost rule
Mine eyes and heart which thou hast made thine own
Love rocks my life with tempests on the deep,
Even as a ship round which the winds are blown:
Thou art my pennon that will not go down.

TOMMASO BUZZUOLA, DA FAENZA (dates uncertain, poem from c. 1280)

Sonnet

He is in awe of his Lady

Even as the moon amid the stars doth shed
Her lovelier splendour of exceeding light, —
Even so my lady seems the queen and head
Among all other ladies in my sight.
Her human visage, like an angel's made,
Is glorious even to beauty's perfect height;
And with her simple bearing soft and staid
All secret modesties of soul unite.
I therefore feel a dread in loving her;
Because of thinking on her excellence,
The wisdom and the beauty which she has.
I pray her for the sake of God, — whereas
I am her servant, yet in sore suspense
Have held my peace, — to have me in her care.

DANTE (1265-1321)

Sonnet

From *La Vita Nuova*

My lady carries love within her eyes;
All that she looks on is made pleasanter;
Upon her path men turn to gaze at her;
He whom she greeteth feels his heart to rise,
And droops his troubled visage, full of sighs,
And of his evil heart is then aware:
Hate loves, and pride becomes a worshiper.
O women, help to praise her in somewise.
Humbleness, and the hope that hopeth well,
By speech of hers into the mind are brought,
And who beholds is blessed often whiles.
The look she hath when she a little smiles
Cannot be said, nor holden in the thought;
'Tis such a new and gracious miracle.

Sonnet

From *La Vita Nuova*

I felt a spirit of love begin to stir
Within my heart, long time unfelt till then;
And saw Love coming towards me fair and fain,
(That I scarce knew him for his joyful cheer),
Saying, " Be now indeed my worshiper! "
And in his speech he laugh'd and laugh'd again.

Then, while it was his pleasure to remain,
I chanced to look the way he had drawn near,
And saw the Ladies Joan and Beatrice
Approach me, this the other following,
One and a second marvel instantly.
And even as now my memory speaketh this,
Love spake it then: "The first is christen'd Spring;
The second Love, she is so like to me."

Sonnet (Omitted from *La Vita Nuova*)

Of Beatrice de' Portinari, on All Saint's Day

Last All Saints' holy-day, even now gone by,
I met a gathering of damozels:
She that came first, as one doth who excels,
Had Love with her, bearing her company:
A flame burned forward through her steadfast eye.
As when in living fire a spirit dwells:
So, gazing with the boldness which prevails
O'er doubt, I knew an angel visibly.
As she passed on, she bowed her mild approval
And salutation to all men of worth,
Lifting the soul to solemn thoughts aloof.
In Heaven itself that lady had her birth,
I think, and is with us for our behoof:
Blessed are they who meet her on the earth.

From *Inferno*, Canto V

The tale of Francesca Da Rimini

When I made answer, I began: "Alas!
How many sweet thoughts and how much desire
Led these two onward to the dolorous pass! "
Then turned to them, as who would fain inquire,
And said: "Francesca, these thine agonies
Wring tears for pity and grief that they inspire:
But tell me, — in the season of sweet sighs,
When and what way did Love instruct you so
That he in your vague longings made you wise? "
Then she to me: "There is no greater woe
Than the remembrance brings of happy days
In misery; and this thy guide doth know.
But if the first beginnings to retrace
Of our sad love can yield thee solace here,
So will I be as one that weeps and says.
One day we read, for pastime and sweet cheer,

Of Lancelot, how he found Love tyrannous:
We were alone and without any fear.
Our eyes were drawn together, reading thus,
Full oft, and still our cheeks would pale and glow;
But one sole point it was that conquered us.
For when we read of that great lover, how
He kissed the smile which he had longed to win,
Then he whom nought can sever from me now
Forever, kissed my mouth, all quivering.
A Galahalt was the book, and he that writ:
Upon that day we read no more therein."
At the tale told, while one soul uttered it,
The other wept: a pang so pitiable
That I was seized, like death, in swooning-fit,
And even as a dead body falls, I fell.

GUIDO CAVALCANTI (c. 1255-1300)

II. Sonnet

To his Lady Joan, of Florence

Flowers hast thou in thyself, and foliage,
And what is good, and what is glad to see;
The sun is not so bright as thy visage;
All is stark naught when one hath looked on thee;
There is not such a beautiful personage
Anywhere on the green earth verily;
If one fear love, thy bearing sweet and sage
Comforteth him, and no more fear hath he.
Thy lady friends and maidens ministering
Are all, for love of thee, much to my taste:
And much I pray them that in everything
They honour thee even as thou meritest,
And have thee in their gentle harbouring:
Because among them all thou art the best.

IV. Sonnet

A Rapture concerning his Lady

Who is she coming, whom all gaze upon,
Who makes the air all tremulous with light,
And at whose side is Love himself? that none
Dare speak, but each man's sighs are infinite.
Ah me I how she looks round from left to right,
Let Love discourse: I may not speak thereon.
Lady she seems of such high benison

As makes all others graceless in men's sight.
The honour which is hers cannot be said;
To whom are subject all things virtuous,
While all things beautiful own her deity.
Ne'er was the mind of man so nobly led,
Nor yet was such redemption granted us
That we should ever know her perfectly.

Petrarch (1304-1374)

(translations by A.S. Kline)

3

It was on that day when the sun's ray
was darkened in pity for its Maker,
that I was captured, and did not defend myself,
because your lovely eyes had bound me, Lady.

It did not seem to me to be a time to guard myself
against Love's blows: so I went on
confident, unsuspecting; from that, my troubles
started, amongst the public sorrows.

Love discovered me all weaponless,
and opened the way to the heart through the eyes,
which are made the passageways and doors of tears:

so that it seems to me it does him little honour
to wound me with his arrow, in that state,
he not showing his bow at all to you who are armed.

11

I have not seen you, lady,
leave off your veil in sun or shadow,
since you knew that great desire in myself
that all other wishes in the heart desert me.

While I held the lovely thoughts concealed,
that make the mind desire death,
I saw your face adorned with pity:
but when Love made you wary of me,

then blonde hair was veiled,
and loving glances gathered to themselves.
That which I most desired in you is taken from me:

the veil so governs me
that to my death, and by heat and cold,
the sweet light of your lovely eyes is shadowed.

12

If my life of bitter torment and of tears
could be derided more, and made more troubled,
that I might see, by virtue of your later years,
lady, the light quenched of your beautiful eyes,

and the golden hair spun fine as silver,
and the garland laid aside and the green clothes,
and the delicate face fade, that makes me
fearful and slow to go weeping:

then Love might grant me such confidence
that I'd reveal to you my sufferings
the years lived through, and the days and hours:

and if time is opposed to true desire,
it does not mean no food would nourish my grief:
I might draw some from slow sighs.

13

When from hour to hour among the other ladies
Love appears in her beautiful face,
by as much as their beauty is less than hers
by so much the desire that en-amours me grows.

I bless the place, the time, and the hour
in which my eyes gazed to such a height,
and I say: My spirit, give thanks enough
that you were then found worthy of such honour.

From her to you comes loving thought,
that leads to highest good, while you pursue it,
counting as little what all men desire:

from her comes that spirit full of grace
that shows you heaven by the true way':
so that in hope I fly, already, to the heights.

36

If I believed I could free myself, by dying,
from amorous thoughts that bind me to the earth,
I would already have laid these troubled limbs

and their burden in the earth myself:

but because I fear to find a passage
from tears to tears, and one war to another,
I remain in the midst, alas, of staying and crossing
on this side of the pass that is closed to me.

There has been enough time now
for the merciless bow to fire its final arrow
bathed and dyed already with others' blood:

yet Love does not take me, or that deaf one
who has painted me with his own pallor,
and still forgets to call me to him.

90

She let her gold hair scatter in the breeze
that twined it in a thousand sweet knots,
and wavering light, beyond measure, would burn
in those beautiful eyes, which are now so dim:

and it seemed to me her face wore the colour
of pity, I do not know whether false or true:
I who had the lure of love in my breast,
what wonder if I suddenly caught fire?

Her way of moving was no mortal thing,
but of angelic form: and her speech
rang higher than a mere human voice.

A celestial spirit, a living sun
was what I saw: and if she is not such now,
the wound's not healed, although the bow is slack.

106

A new young angel carried by her wings
descended from the sky to the green bank,
there where I passed, alone, to my destiny,

When she saw I was without companion,
or guard, she stretched a noose, woven of silk,
in the grass, with which the way was turfed.

Then I was captured: and later it did not displease me,
so sweet a light issued from her eyes.

118

My sixteenth year of sighs is left behind,
and I travel on towards my end:
and yet it seems but yesterday
the beginning of such great distress.

Bitter is sweet to me, and pain is gain,
and life is burdensome: and I pray it overcomes
ill Fortune, and I fear lest Death should close,
before then, those lovely eyes that make me speak.

Alas, I am here now, and would be elsewhere:
and wish to wish for more, and wish no more:
and because I can't do more, do what I can:

and fresh tears from old desire
show that I'm what I have always been,
no different yet despite a thousand changes.

121

Now you see, Love, that this young lady
scorns your rule, and cares nothing for my hurt,
and feels safe between two of her enemies.

You are armed, and she in loose hair and gown
sits barefoot amongst the flowers and grass,
pitiless towards me, and proud towards you.

I'm imprisoned: but if there's mercy still,
raise your bow, and with a few arrows
take vengeance, my lord, for me and you.

122

The heavens have revolved for seventeen years
since I first burned, and I am never quenched:
but when I think again about my state,
I feel a chill in the midst of flame.

The proverb is true, that our hair changes
before our vices, and though the senses slow
the human passions have no less intensity:
making a dark shadow to our heavy veil.

Alas, ah me, when will that day be,
when, gazing at the flight of my years,
I issue from the fire, and such long suffering?

Will the day come, ever, that only as I wish
the sweet air that adorns her lovely face
might please these eyes, and only as is fitting?

132

What do I feel if this is not love?
But if it is love, God, what thing is this?
If good, why this effect: bitter, mortal?
If bad, then why is every suffering sweet?

If I desire to burn, why tears and grief?
If my state's evil, what's the use of grieving?
O living death, O delightful evil,
how can you be in me so, if I do not consent?

And if I consent, I am greatly wrong in sorrowing.
Among conflicting winds in a frail boat
I find myself on the deep sea without a helm,

so light in knowledge, so laden with error,
that I do not know what I wish myself,
and tremble in midsummer, burn in winter.

133

Love placed me as a target for his arrow,
like snow in sunlight, or wax in the fire,
like a cloud in the wind: and I am hoarse already,
Lady, calling for your mercy: and you indifferent.

The mortal blow issued from your eyes,
against which no time or place helps me:
from you alone proceed, and it seems to you
a game, the sun and wind and fire that make me so.

Your thoughts are arrows, and your face the sun,
and desire is fire: with which joint weapons
Love pierces me, dazzles me and melts me:

and your angelic singing and your speech,
with your sweet spirit from which I've no defence,
are the breeze (l'aura) before which my life flies.

152

This humble creature, with bear's or tiger's heart,
that comes with human face and angel's form,
moves me to smiles and tears, in hope and fear,

so that my whole state is changeable.

If she does not receive or free me soon,
but keeps me like a man between two worlds,
by what I feel in my heart pass through my veins
sweet poison, Love, my life will be ended.

My fragile courage and my weariness
cannot withstand such shifting suffering now,
that I burn, freeze, blush and pale in a moment.

I hope to end my misery by fleeing,
like one who bit by bit vanishes:
for truly there's no one who cannot die.

153

Go, warm sighs, to her frozen heart,
shatter the ice that chokes her pity,
and if mortal prayers rise to heaven,
let death or mercy end my sorrow.

Go, sweet thoughts, and speak to her
of what her lovely gaze does not include:
so if her harshness or my stars still hurt me,
I shall be free of hope and free of error.

Through you it can be said, perhaps not fully,
how troubled and gloomy is my state,
as hers is both peaceful and serene.

Go safely now that Love goes with you:
and you may lead fortune smiling here,
if I can read the weather by my sun.

183

If that sweet look of hers can kill me,
and the sweet subtlety of her words,
and if Love has such power over me
when she merely speaks, or when she smiles,

then what would happen, alas, if her eyes
were free of Mercy, either through my fault
or evil fate, and if I feared death itself
there where I now feel secure?

So if I tremble, and go with icy heart,
when I see her expression change,

it is a fear born of long experience.

Woman by nature is a changeable thing:
so that I know a loving mood
lasts only a little time in a lady's heart.

197

The heavenly breeze that breathes through
that green laurel where Love wounded Apollo's
heart, and set the sweet yoke on my neck,
so that freedom's slow to be restored to me,

had the same power on me as Medusa had
when she turned the old Moroccan giant to flint:
nor can I now be free of that lovely knot,
that exceeds the sun, not just amber or gold:

I mean the blonde hair, and the noose of curls,
that binds the soul, armed with humility
not weapons, so gently and so tightly.

Her shadow alone turns my heart to ice,
and paints my face a fearful white:
her eyes have the power to turn me to marble.

203

Alas, I burn, and others will not believe me:
if all believed she who's above all others
still does not, she who alone I wish to do so:
she does not seem to believe, and yet she sees.

Infinite beauty, yet of such little faith,
do you not see my heart in my eyes?
If my fate were not otherwise, I surely must
find mercy at the fountain of pity?

My passion, for which you care so little,
and your praises that pervade my verses,
may yet perhaps set thousands on fire:

since, my sweet flame, in my thoughts, I see,
long after us, this tongue, grown cold, yet your
two lovely closed eyes, there, glowing still.

215

Noble blood, a calm and humble life,
high intellect, and a heart that's pure,

the fruit of wisdom in her youth's flower,
a joyful spirit in a thoughtful face,

her planets have brought together in this lady,
or rather the ruler of the stars: with true honour,
worthy praise, high esteem, and great value,
to exhaust all the crowd of divine poets.

Love finds himself met with Chastity in her,
adorned with natural beauty's dress,
and an aspect that speaks with its silences,

and most of all her eyes, that together
light the nights, and dim the daylight,
make honey bitter, and wormwood sweet.

218

When she's among graceful and lovely ladies
she who has no equal in the world,
her face has the same effect on others,
as the daylight has on the lesser stars.

Love seems to whisper in my ear,
saying: 'Life will be beautiful while she
is visible in this world: then I'll see it troubled,
virtue and my kingdom will die with her.'

As if Nature were to take the sun and moon
from the sky, winds from the air, leaves
and grass from the earth, intellect and speech

from man, and fish and waves from the seas:
so much and more would things be dark and lonely,
if Death closed her eyes and hid her away.'

291

When I see the Dawn go down the sky
with rosy forehead and her golden hair,
Love assails me, so I grow pale,
and sighing say: 'There is Laura now.'

O happy Tithonus, you know the hour
when you'll regain your dear treasure:
but when will I who lack my sweet?
To see her once again I have to die.

Your partings cannot be so very harsh,

since every night she returns to you,
and does not scorn your whitened hair:

while she who carried off my thoughts
makes my nights sad, and darkens my days,
and leaves me nothing of her but her name.

336

She comes to mind, rather is already there,
she who cannot even be banished by Lethe,
such as I saw here in the flower of her years,
all burning with the rays of her planet.

I see her, lovely and chaste, as if at our first
meeting, gathered in herself, and so distant,
that I cry: 'It is truly her: she is still alive.'
and beg the gift of her of her sweet tongue.

Sometimes she answers, sometimes not a word.
Like a man who errs, and then sees clearly,
I say in my mind: 'You are deceived about her.'

Know that in thirteen hundred and forty eight,
on the sixth day of April, in the first hour,
that soul, so blessed, issued from its body.'

343

Thinking of her, who now honours Heaven,
the gentle glance, the bowing head of gold,
the face, the voice of angelic modesty
that sweetened my life, and now grieves me,

I find it a great wonder that I still live:
nor would I be living if she who made us doubt
whether she was more lovely or more virtuous,
was not quick to rescue me, towards dawn.

O how sweet, and chaste, and kind her greeting:
and how intently she listens and takes note
of the long story of my pain!

Then when the clear daylight seems to strike her,
she returns to Heaven, knowing every path,
and her eyes and both her cheeks are wet.

364

Love held me burning, twenty-one years,

happy in the fire, and in grief full of hope:
then, when my lady leapt to heaven with
my heart, another ten years, weeping.

Now I'm weary, and reclaim my life
from that error that almost crushed
the seeds of virtue: and, God on high,
I grant my final years devotedly to you:

penitent and sad at my years ill spent,
that should have been put to better use,
in fleeing trouble and finding peace.

Lord, who first imprisoned me in this cell,
release me, save me from eternal harm,
who know my fault, and do not excuse it.

The English Petrarchan Tradition

Phillip Sidney

from *Astrophel and Stella*

7

When Nature made her chief work, Stella's eyes,
In colour black why wrapp'd she beams so bright?
Would she in beamy black, like painter wise,
Frame daintiest lustre, mix'd of shades and light?
Or did she else that sober hue devise,
In object best to knit and strength our sight,
Lest if no veil those brave gleams did disguise,
They sun-like should more dazzle than delight?
Or would she her miraculous power show,
That whereas black seems Beauty's contrary,
She even in black doth make all beauties flow?
Both so and thus, she minding Love should be
Placed ever there, gave him this mourning weed,
To honour all their deaths, who for her bleed.

12

Cupid, because thou shin'st in Stella's eyes,
That from her locks, thy day-nets, none 'scapes free,
That those lips swell, so full of thee they be,
That her sweet breath makes oft thy flames to rise,
That in her breast thy pap well sugared lies,
That her Grace gracious makes thy wrongs, that she

What words so ere she speak persuades for thee,
That her clear voice lifts thy fame to the skies:
Thou countest Stella thine, like those whose powers
Having got up a breach by fighting well,
Cry, "Victory, this fair day all is ours."
Oh no, her heart is such a citadel,
So fortified with wit, stored with disdain,
That to win it, is all the skill and pain.

25

The wisest scholar of the wight most wise
By Phoebus' doom, with sugar'd sentence says,
That Virtue, if it once met with our eyes,
Strange flames of love it in our souls would raise;
But for that man with pain his truth describes,
Whiles he each thing in sense's balance weighs,
And so nor will, nor can behold those skies
Which inward sun to heroic mind displays,
Virtue of late with virtuous care to stir
Love of herself, took Stella's shape, that she
To mortal eyes might sweetly shine in her.
It is most true, for since I her did see,
Virtue's great beauty in that face I prove,
And find th'effect, for I do burn in love.

48

Soul's joy, bend not those morning stars from me,
Where Virtue is made strong by Beauty's might,
Where Love is chasteness, Pain doth learn delight,
And Humbleness grows one with Majesty.
Whatever may ensue, oh, let me be
Co-partner of the riches of that sight:
Let not mine eyes be hell-driv'n from that light:
Oh look, oh shine, oh let me die and see.
For though I oft myself of them bemoan,
That through my heart their beamy darts be gone,
Whose cureless wounds ev'n now most freshly bleed:
Yet since my death-wound is already got,
Dear killer, spare not thy sweet cruel shot:
A kind of grace it is to kill with speed.

60

When my good angel guides me to the place,
Where all my good I do in Stella see,
That heav'n of joys throws only down on me
Thunder'd disdains and lightnings of disgrace:
But when the rugg'st step of Fortune's race

Makes me fall from her sight, then sweetly she
With words, wherein the Muses' treasures be,
Shows love and pity to my absent case.
Now I, wit-beaten long by hardest Fate,
So dull am, that I cannot look into
The ground of this fierce Love and lovely hate:
Then some good body tell me how I do,
Whose presence absence, absence presence is;
Blest in my curse, and cursed in my bliss.

71

Who will in fairest book of Nature know
How Virtue may best lodg'd in beauty be;
Let him but learn of Love to read in thee,
Stella, those fair lines which true goodness show.
There shall he find all vices' overthrow,
Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty
Of Reason, from whose light those night birds flee;
That inward sun in thine eyes shineth so.
And not content to be Perfection's heir
Thyself, dost strive all minds that way to move,
Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair.
So while thy beauty draws the heart to love,
As fast thy virtue bends that love to good:
"But ah," Desire still cries, "give me some food."

76

She comes, and straight therewith her shining twins do move
Their rays to me, who in her tedious absence lay
Benighted in cold woe; but now appears my day,
The only light of joy, the only warmth of love.
She comes with light and warmth, which like Aurora prove
Of gentle force, so that mine eyes dare gladly play
With such a rosy morn, whose beams most freshly gay
Scorch not, but only do dark chilling sprites remove.
But lo, while I do speak, it groweth noon with me,
Her flamy glist'ring lights increase with time and place;
My heart cries, 'Ah, it burns'; mine eyes now dazzl'd be:
No wind, no shade can cool, what help then in my case,
But with short breath, long looks, staid feet and walking head,
Pray that my sun go down with meeker beams to bed.

102

Where be those roses gone, which sweeten'd so our eyes?
Where those red cheeks, which oft with fair increase did frame
The height of honour in the kindly badge of shame?
Who hath the crimson weeds stol'n from my morning skies?

How did the colour vade of those vermilion dyes
Which Nature self did make, and self engrain'd the same?
I would know by what right this paleness overcame
That hue, whose force my heart still unto thraldom ties.
Galen's adoptive sons, who by a beaten way
Their judgments hackney on, the fault on sickness lay,
But feeling proof makes me say they mistake it far:
It is but Love, which makes his paper perfect white
To write therein more fresh the story of delight,
While Beauty's reddest ink Venus for him doth stir.

108

When sorrow (using mine own fire's might)
Melts down his lead into my boiling breast;
Through that dark furnace to my heart oppress'd
There shines a joy from thee, my only light;
But soon as thought of thee breeds my delight,
And my young soul flutters to thee, his nest,
Most rude despair, my daily unbidden guest,
Clips straight my wings, straight wraps me in his night,
And makes me then bow down my head and say,
"Ah, what doth Phoebus' gold that wretch avail
Whom iron doors do keep from use of day?"
So strangely (alas) thy works in me prevail,
That in my woes for thee thou art my joy,
And in my joys for thee my only annoy.