Federica Anichini. *Voices of the Body. Liminal Grammar in Guido Cavalcanti's 'Rime'. Voci del corpo. Grammatica liminale nelle 'Rime' di Guido Cavalcanti. Interkulturelle Begegnungen*, 6. Munich: Martin Meidenbauer Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2009. Pp. 197. ISBN 978-3-89975-1119-131 (hardbound). n.p.

Federica Anichini's monograph *Voices of the Body* has much to recommend it. Chief among its attributes is the author's rigorous philological work, which she successfully employs to unveil how with his minor rhymes Guido Cavalcanti sought to demonstrate, through imagery and dramatic, phenomenological enactment, the principles at the heart of his philosophical disquisition on love in poetic form, the famed canzone *Donna me prega*. The monograph consists of five chapters. Anichini's close reading of the minor poems constitute the final two chapters, and in a certain sense her study and original contribution to scholarship. Chapters one through three prepare the reader for the dissection she so assiduously pursues in this concluding study.

Chapter one, *Guido Cavalcanti, or, of Lightness and Subtlety*, is dedicated to the twin paths of the Cavalcanti critical tradition that began in the coeval treatment of the poet and his work by Dante and Boccaccio, respectively. Anichini argues that the presentation of Cavalcanti as a vanishing author by Dante and Boccaccio was a strategy of self-portrayal that the poet himself employed in his *Rime*, where the speaker narrates through bodily signs his own psychic and ultimately physical dismantling.

Chapter two, *Human Love in Darkness*, takes as its subject early commentaries to *Donna me prega* (such as that of Dino Del Garbo) with respect to the canzone's scientific/medical content and the poet's affiliation with a heretical strand of natural philosophy known as Averroism. This radical Aristotelianism was made popular in Europe through Arab influences in Spain and the south of Italy, and was on the threshold of being stomped out in Cavalcanti's time, primarily for both its tenet that the individual soul dies with the body rather than rejoining the collective and for the various theological implications of this view. Anichini boldly asserts that Guido Cavalcanti consciously attempted "to preserve, by enclosing in verses, [this] content that contemporary culture was on the verge of banning" (51). It is with chapter three that she begins to systematically argue her thesis that love is an experience limited to the physical.

In chapter three, *The Body Speaks*, Anichini's close readings begin and the author identifies, within Cavalcanti's *Rime*, "common themes that are rhetorically forged without any loss of their scientific meaning" (51). Anichini discusses the contemporary speculative grammarians known as the Modistae who explored, as Cavalcanti did, the relation of corresponding verbal and mental signs to the reality they denote. She argues that Cavalcanti's linguistic experimentation in the minor rhymes reflect the "naturally signifying" signs of the Modistae (70). Cavalcanti's staging of the symptomatology and phenomenology of love, and of the tremor and the wounded heart in particular, are presented both as a pre-conceptual language and as a series of tacit happenings to which the reader bears witness.

Chapter four, *Spirits in Storm*, explores, as a prelude to Anichini's close read-

ing of the minor poems in light of pneumatology and the phenomena of spirits, the history of the term “spirit” and its multiple and overlapping meanings from its first appearance to its culmination in Augustinian thought. The phenomenological focus is on the emission of sighs by the wounded lover’s body. Anichini proffers a detailed description of pneumatic circulation and how images are created via the bodily vapours termed (and frequently personified in poetry as) spirits, and conversely how seeing an image, such as the beloved, impacts the poet’s vital forces (ultimately blocking his intellectual process). Sonnet XXVII is an object of close analysis. Anichini succeeds brilliantly in “unfold[ing] the cluster of the spirits’ meanings” in the composition to reveal Cavalcanti’s programmatic intention (108).

Chapter five, *Blinding Tears*, charts the historical treatment of tears in the Italian lyric tradition, from which Cavalcante diverges in turning to medical texts. Anichini suggests that in Cavalcanti tears do not bring levity or catharsis, as they did for other poets, but rather they serve as an obstacle to intellection and image creation. The author re-examines the intellectual exchange between Dante and Cavalcanti. Highlighting Dante’s insertion of verses from Guido Cavalcanti’s *Rime* into the *Commedia*, Anichini posits Dante’s rendering of Filippo Argenti as a figure of Guido Cavalcanti himself.

Anichini poetically organizes her own arguments along the same lines that Guido Cavalcanti structured his own poetry, by weaving *auctoritates* into the author’s own unfolding work. Anichini does this in two ways. Firstly, she introduces, quite seamlessly, relevant passages from Avicenna’s *Liber Canonis* into her chapters on Cavalcanti’s minor rhymes, relegating the major passages from the medical treatise to a healthy-sized Appendix. Secondly, she consistently draws upon the pioneering scholarly work of other authorities in Cavalcantian studies (namely Bruno Nardi and Maria Luisa Adizzone) in the construction of her argument.

Anichini’s work did not arise in a vacuum, and she happily thanks Maria Luisa Adizzone whose fascinating work in *Guido Cavalcanti: the other Middle Ages* established as sound those premises on which Anichini’s *Voices of the Body* is ultimately built: the influence of Arab culture and Averroism on Cavalcanti and poets of the Stil Novo; Cavalcanti as a logician and philosopher; the application of optics and other sciences to poetry, and the conclusion that love in Cavalcanti is diaphanous; the relationship of grammar to logic and thus the disruptive impact of love’s action on cognitive and creative processes such as image-formation and writing; the problem of ineffability and the poet’s solution to narrate the body through its own language of tremors, sighs and tears. A weakness, if any, in Anichini’s work, might well be that her study seems more a natural conclusion to Adizzone’s scholarship, a final chapter to the latter’s book, as it were, than the opening chapter of a sequel to it. Yet, it could easily be argued that a study as precise and focused as that of Anichini’s monograph could hardly be introduced without an ample presentation of the theoretical, historical, and critical background established by others, and that she so thoroughly and lovingly traces.

Regardless, *Voices of the Body* is exactly what a monograph should be: learned, precise, and original in a way that both builds upon and expands a critical tradition. With this publication, Anichini indeed offers a rich treasure trove to budding

and established scholars alike, not just those engaged in Cavalcantian studies, but in Medieval and Dante studies as well.

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Lloyd H. Howard. *Virgil the Blind Guide. Marking the Way Through the Divine Comedy*. Montreal and Kingston: Queen's University Press, 2010. Pp. xiv, 250. ISBN 978-0-7735-3655-5. n.p.

This exhaustive study of Virgil's authority in the *Commedia* is novel in its approach to a subject that has not previously been treated in a systematic fashion. As the author notes, his approach rejects the typical methodology of "simply noting patterns of repetition in an ad hoc manner" and instead looks for *formulas* of repetition and rhyming words, the examination of which reveals a message far different from their literal meaning. Based on a critical path established by the author in an earlier monograph, *Formulas of Repetition in Dante's Commedia*, Lloyd's fascinating study reveals that the repetition of certain words and rhymes continually leads the reader back to earlier episodes in the *Commedia* that expose Virgil's limitations as a guide and set the scene for his eventual replacement by more enlightened figures such as Beatrice and later the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ and Bernard of Clairvaux.

The book, however, is not an easy read. This is not to suggest that scholarly works should be simple but rather it is intended to make the reader aware that the meticulous attention Lloyd pays to groupings of words, to their repetition and rhyming formulae, often results in a text that is so peppered with quotations and translations that the flow of the author's arguments is interrupted. Moreover, because of the structure of Howard's study, it is at times somewhat repetitive, bordering on the tedious. None of this, however, detracts from the strength of Howard's findings and, notwithstanding the extremely dense nature of his prose style, the book is definitely worth reading.

Consisting of an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion, the book deals with "markers" or "linguistic signals" that, pointing to a concealed poetic itinerary, allow the clever reader to move back and forth within the *Commedia* and thus comprehend a truth beyond the literal text. In particular, Howard looks at sets of rhymes or repetitions with slight variations that continually remind the reader of Virgil's incompetence at various pivotal points in the *Commedia*. In the first chapter Howard examines Virgil's apparent authority as established in *Inferno* 7 where he tames Plutus, and in *Inferno* 12 where there is a similar encounter with the Minotaur. In both cases, the literal narrative presents Virgil as a competent and worthy guide through the depths of hell, a guide in whom Dante is right to place his trust. But Howard notes that there are clues as early as *Inferno* 12 that Virgil himself may entertain doubts about his own ability to navigate terrain that has been changed considerably since the harrowing of Hell. Indeed, Howard notes, as