



Guido Cavalcanti: The Other Middle Ages (Toronto Italian Studies)

Maria Luisa Ardizzone

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Guido Cavalcanti (d. 1300) is one of the greatest Italian poets of all time. His legacy consists of some fifty poems, of which his canzone on the nature of love, *Donna me prega* (*A lady asks me*) is the most famously difficult and complex. The poem is important not only because it sheds light on fundamental intellectual debates during the time of Dante, but also because of its influence on generations of poets and philosophers. In this study, Maria Luisa Ardizzone sets *Donna me prega* in an entirely new light - first, by examining its role in Cavalcanti's poetic practice, and second, by placing it in the context of ancient and medieval science and philosophy. The book deals with issues that are part of the intellectual history of Europe in the thirteenth century. Cavalcanti's work is interpreted by reconstructing the debate of ideas in which it participates, and the new model of poetry devised by Cavalcanti is one of the subjects of this book.

For Cavalcanti, as for Dante, Aristotle was a master. But unlike Dante, who followed a more orthodox interpretation of Aristotle's text, Cavalcanti preferred the Aristotelianism which derived from the Arabic commentator Averroes, whose approach was responsible for introducing a radical rereading of Aristotle incompatible with basic tenets of the Christian faith. In this alternative view, human desires and difficulties were resolved not through theology but through biology, natural philosophy, and medicine. While other scholars have noted Cavalcanti's Averroism, Ardizzone is the first to analyse it in light of sciences such as optics or logic, focusing on new issues of intellectual debate of Cavalcanti's time, as, for instance, the medieval theory of matter.

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