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BECAUSE THERE IS (NO) HOPE FOR GUIDO CAVALCANTI AND T. S. ELIOT

The aim of the research is to carry out the analysis of the echoes of one of the most famous love ballads composed by the Italian medieval poet Guido Cavalcanti in Thomas Stearns Eliot's conversion poem *Ash Wednesday*. Eliot's reception of Cavalcanti's poetry is somewhat paradoxical, since in one of his critical essays the Italian poet is labelled as a "pagan" and *Ash Wednesday* represents Eliot's first greater work of high religiosity. Cavalcanti's poetry was known for not playing as significant a role in the formation of Eliot's poetic expression as Dante Alighieri's. On the other hand, claiming that he did not exert any influence on the English author's work would be wrong. The analysis starts from Eliot's use of the initial line of Cavalcanti's *ballatetta* as a leitmotif concentrating subsequently on the corresponding topics in the works of both authors and the way they are treated. Those are the ones of exile, transience of life, adoration of the Lady, the problem of obstacles preventing hero to reach the ideal and the theme of spiritual fulfilment. The research lays emphasis on the fact that Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* is modelled upon the essentially mythical pattern of quest set by Cavalcanti in his *ballatetta* and proves that Eliot's poem is a unique attempt to make the poetic tradition of former centuries eternally alive.

Keywords: Cavalcanti, Eliot, *ballatetta*, Middle Ages, love, religion, convention, Lady, exile

Eliot's fascination with Italian medieval poets, especially Dante Alighieri, is a well-known fact not only among the literary critics dealing with the influence of Italian medieval poetry on Anglo-American modernists. His great predecessor Ezra Pound shared the interest and was known to have cultivated Eliot's profound affection for this kind of literature primarily through meticulous analysis and innovative readings. Some critics observe certain reflexes of Ezra Pound's achievements even in Eliot's critical thoughts about the aforementioned works. (Singh, 1994: 48) Pound wrote copiously about Dante in *The Spirit of Romance, Literary Essays* as well as in other works² and, in fact, never stopped studying Dante and other medieval poets. (Ibid.)

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2 Steve Ellis draws the attention to Pound's analysis of Dante's artistic aims and strategies formulated in *De vulgari eloquentia*. See more in *Dante and English Poetry: Shelley to Eliot*, p. 174.

However, one must say that despite the enormous influence Dante exerted on him due to the technical perfection and visionary power his poetry emanated, Pound preferred Guido Cavalcanti (1250-1300), another Italian medieval poet. In the essay entitled "Tuscan Language", he says that "Dante himself never wrote so poignantly or with greater intensity than Cavalcanti." (Casella 2000: 72) Pound's even more radical favouring of Cavalcanti is reflected in the sonnet dedicated to Cavalcanti ("To Guido Cavalcanti", Canzoni, 1911) in which he claims that: "Dante and I are come to learn of thee / Ser Guido of Florence, master to us all..." (West 2009: xlvi). Pound's literary oeuvre was, as a result of the aforementioned affinity, enlarged by numerous translations of Cavalcanti's ballads.

The reasons that Pound's predilection for Cavalcanti originates from are certainly much deeper than the one formulated in the quoted fragment of his verse eulogy. According to Pound, Dante and Cavalcanti are the participants of the same creative paradigm embodying the intellectual complex of the Middle Ages. Dante represents theology, while Cavalcanti symbolizes science and philosophy. Dante's work doubtlessly includes science and philosophy but they are primarily theologically oriented so Dante's eyes are figuratively turned towards the sky, Cavalcanti, on the other hand, looks at the earth. (Ardizzone 2002: 10) On the other hand, it is believed that Guido Cavalcanti's work was of fundamental importance for his "project of reformulating, through poetry, the processes of Western culture on a new basis." (Ibid.)

Cavalcanti was known to have been well-acquainted with the poetic achievements of Provençal, Sicilian and Classical texts and famous for his efforts to promote a new approach to the convention of the medieval tradition known as *Dolce stil nuovo* (Sweet new style)³ that can be taken as "a lyrical philosophical inquiry into the nature of love." (Lambdin 2000: 83) The result of this investigation is „a newly created 'illustrious vernacular' that was simple, natural, clear, and elegant, and aimed at the articulation of the immediacy of passions and intellectually probing the nature, scope and origin of love, origin and strife in human relations.“ (Ibid.)

As for Eliot's medieval models, Dante's top position is indisputable and his debt to this author is "the kind which goes on accumulating, the kind which is not the debt of one period or another of one's life..." (Eliot 1952: 179) According to Eliot, Dante is "... beyond all other poets of our continent, the most European" (188) and the one who can teach us two lessons, "that the great master of a language should be the great servant of" ... and ..." the lesson of width of emotional range." (17) Eliot, understandably, never reproaches

3 "Term commonly used to designate a group of late 13th century Italian love poets and to describe the special character of their lyric production. The term first appears in Dante's *Purgatorio* (24.57), where it defines his poetic style(stil), separating it from that of the earlier Sicilian and Guittonian poets and describing its characteristics as audibly and intellectually pleasing (*dolce*) and new in concept (*nuovo*). Generally speaking, Dante's term has considerable validity: the "sweetness" of his style is attained, analysts have discovered, through a careful selection and ordering of words of pleasurable sound." See more in Green R. et al (ed.) 2012, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. p. 374.

Dante for his religious orientation, but is highly critical of Pound's distancing from Dante and eulogizing of Cavalcanti. He claims that "Pound finds Guido much more sympathetic than Dante, and on grounds which have little to do with their respective merits as poets." (Ellis, 1985: 174) Pound's infatuation with Cavalcanti is generally disapproved of by Eliot since "Guido was possibly a heretic if not a sceptic – as evidenced partly by his having had pneumatic philosophy and theory of corpuscular action which I am unable to understand." (42) Peter Dale Scott concludes that Eliot's prescription for Guido's heresy was the supervision of what he called orthodoxy, done not through clerical censorship, but relying on the influence of "the Church itself, in which orthodoxy resides". (1994: 67)

The reason for Eliot's insistence on Cavalcanti's alleged heresy should perhaps be looked for in the invectives Dante himself made in the first part of the *Divine Comedy* known as the *Inferno*. One could find them in the tenth chapter, in which Guido meets his father Cavalcante de Cavalcanti suffering in the sixth circle of hell reserved for heretics denying immortality of soul. On seeing Dante, Cavalcante asks why his son Guido does not follow him, along with Horatio, since he thinks Guido deserves the honour. Dante replies that Guido, like his father, did not believe in the Almighty. (Murphy 2007: 60) Besides, there are contemporary testimonies exposing Cavalcanti's devotion to sensual pleasures. Giovanni Boccaccio, for example, claims that Cavalcante and his son Guido "were well-known Epicureans, believing that the Soul dies with the body and therefore sensual pleasure was the highest good." (Ruud 2008: 416) However, the specific attitude is suspected to be just a paraphrase of Dante's judgement. (Ibid.)

It is important to point out that modern literary criticism diversifies Cavalcanti's expression of love. Maria Luisa Ardizzone, in her analysis of Cavalcanti's canzone "Donna me prega", claims that the poet, at the beginning of the poem, defines love by the use of two adjectives, *fero* [fierce] and *altero* [haughty], hinting at his readiness to tackle the two aspects of love - the animalistic one, producing pleasure in man and the other that is important "for the process of generation of form and therefore for the process toward intellection". (2002: 9) Accordingly, the main idea of "Donna me prega" lies in the fact that "love is metaphor for the sensitive soul and for the animal power that initiates a process of intellection without being involved itself in intellectual knowledge." (Ibid.)

Eliot was unwilling to appraise Cavalcanti's antagonizing of love and intellect as Ardizzone. His critical remarks, as mentioned, reveal that it was Cavalcanti's alleged "sensuality" that provoked his preference for Dante. The sensuality of the sort, however, did not prevent Eliot from taking one of Cavalcanti's poetic pieces as the thematic model for his conversion poem *Ash Wednesday* (1930). The poem in question, the *ballata* "As I've no hope of returning ever" ("Perch'i' no spero di tornar giammai")⁴ is considered one of

4 Two of Cavalcanti's poems are canzoni, a type of lyric poem originating from from Provençal poetry, of which the most famous is "Donna mi prega" ("A Lady Asks Me"), a

the most captivating items of the whole body of Cavalcanti's work⁵, composed in the tradition of *Dolce stil nuovo* known for its idealistic, spiritual concept of love and emphatic celebration of feminine beauty.

Cavalcanti was said to have composed the song while in exile⁶ from his native Florence in the town of Sarzana shortly before his death in 1300. The poet unmistakably feels the proximity of death and the despair consequently aroused permeates the poem shaped in the form of lament containing five strophes. The first strophe, done in form of sestina while the others are decas-tichs, starts with the line taken as its title:

“As I've no hope of returning ever,
Little ballad, lightly, softly,
Go yourself, to Tuscany,
Go straight to my lady,
Who of her great courtesy
Will show you highest honour.” (2007: 43)

Although desperate, since the return is impossible, Cavalcanti, addresses his poem in a highly conventional manner affectionately calling it *ballatetta* (small ballad) since it will perform the role of a mediator between him and his beloved. Aimed to convey at least a part of the tenderness the poet feels, the poem is, understandably, confessional to the extent that the conventions of the genre allow. Thus, at the beginning of the second stanza, the poet expresses the hope that the ballad “will bring her news of sighs, / Filled with pain, and great with fear.” (Ibid.)

As already said, Eliot's affinity for Cavalcanti's ballad has long been known to most of the readers and connoisseurs of his work. The former oftentimes proved unable to perceive the echoes of Cavalcanti's *ballatetta* in Eliot's poem further than the opening line, while the latter fully observe

beautiful and complex philosophical analysis of love, the subject of many later commentaries. Others are sonnets and *ballate* (ballads), the latter type is usually thought of as his best. See more in <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Guido-Cavalcanti>.

5 “Guido's existing opus includes 52 poems among which there are 6 sonnets, 2 songs, 11 *ballate*, 1 *motteto* and 2 independent stanzas. The poems were admired by modern writers such as, apart from Ezra Pound, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Cavalcanti's poetry was collected for the first time in 1527 and later in *Le rime de Guido avalsanti* (1902). Many poems were translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in *The Early Italian Poets* (1861; later retitled *Dante and His Circle*) and by Ezra Pound in *The Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti* (1912).” See more in Encyclopaedia Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Guido-Cavalcanti#ref261765>

6 Cavalcanti's exile came as a result of fierce political struggles in Florence whose main protagonists were the so-called Guelphs and Ghibellines. Finally, among the Guelphs there was a division into Blacks (supporters of the Papacy) and Whites who challenged the authority of Pope Boniface VIII. Dante and his best friend, Guido Cavalcanti, were in this second group. In order to maintain peace in the city, some radical supporters of the White party had to be temporarily exiled, and Cavalcanti was among them. Paradoxically, Dante, who had political power for a certain period of time, was forced to temporarily expel his friend from the city. Unfortunately, in the city of Sarzana where he spent his exile, a malaria epidemic broke out and Cavalcanti died soon after being infected. In the meantime, his sentence was revoked. See more in Murphy 2007: 59.

its complexities. Simon West claims that “The whole poem is inspired by the rhythmic force Eliot perceived in the original and an attempt to play with its possible translations in English.” (2009: 178) West observes the reflexes of Cavalcanti’s ballad in Eliot’s poem in its inherent rhythm and variations of Cavalcanti’s opening line being orchestrated in various parts of Eliot’s piece, which is, however, much longer than Cavalcanti’s ballad. Further discussion will show that West’s estimate is, although rather inspiring, not fully developed and therefore somewhat limited as far as some of the mentioned issues are concerned. The opening stanza of Eliot’s poem reads:

“Because I do not hope to turn again
 Because I do not hope
 Because I do not hope to turn
 Desiring this man’s gift and that man’s scope
 I no longer strive to strive towards such things
 (Why should the aged eagle stretch its wings?)
 Why should I mourn
 The vanished power of the usual reign?” (1991: 85)

The first line of *Ash Wednesday* is, obviously, a literal translation of Cavalcanti’s opening verse. Eliot deliberately avoids using the verb *return*, closest in meaning to the Italian equivalent *tornar*, so as to follow the rhythm of the original. The alternative choice of the verb *turn*, having wider meaning, does not violate the basic meaning of both verses and, besides, it is more similar to the initial term as far as the vocal structure is concerned. Besides, Eliot varies the thought in the two subsequent verses emphasizing the absence of hope (the first one) and the absence of hope to turn (the second one). Further sequences of the poems reveal that Cavalcanti and Eliot differ in the approach to the topic, since the former as the lyrical subject, emphatically begs the poem to go to Tuscany .../ ... straight to my Lady.” (2007: 43) while the latter, in an indirect, pessimistic way, renounces his present and past existence, having no prospects for the future.

A casual look at the rest of the poem indicates that the first lines of Cavalcanti’s poem served as the initial impulse for Eliot to write his poetic piece, which, is, understandably, much larger in even in thematic scope than Cavalcanti’s, since it contains six parts in which the author presents his spiritual or religious evolution, which occurred after he had become a practicing member of Anglican Church in 1927. Such a perspective on these poems is, as previously pointed out, both limited and misleading. Craig Raine criticizes the widespread practice in the comparative research of Cavalcanti’s and Eliot’s work to concentrate solely on the allusiveness of Cavalcanti’s poem title helping us identify it as the source of Eliot’s inspiration and reconstruct the meaning of the whole poem. (2006: 23) He refers to Eliot’s standpoint expressed in the essay “The Frontiers of Criticism” (1956):

“One can explain a poem by investigating what it is made of and the causes that brought it about; and explanation may be a necessary preparation for understanding. But to understand a poem it is also necessary . . . that we should

endeavour to grasp what the poetry was aiming to be.’ *Ash-Wednesday* opens with the thrice-repeated cry of despair— ‘Because I do not hope’—which is more important than Eliot’s borrowing from Cavalcanti.” (Ibid.)

One cannot but share Raine’s view and add that only the meticulous research of the whole variety of corresponding themes and motifs of both poems will result in the reconstruction of their meaning and measure the scope of Cavalcanti’s influence on the English poet. Certain topics common to both poets are more implicitly given and should be grasped from the social context. One of these is the topic of exile. Generations of literary historians were mentioning Cavalcanti’s exile in Sarzana where the poem was composed. The poem does not explicitly reveal it but in the first stanza one comes across the poet’s command to the *ballatetta* “Go yourself, to Tuscany” (2007: 43), disclosing the poet’s absence from Florence. As far as Eliot’s *Ash Wednesday* is concerned, there is no indication of the isolation or exile of the lyrical subject at the beginning of the poem. Ronald Schuhardt, however, recalls that at the beginning of the manuscript, just above the first part of the poem one finds the words: “Ballata: All Aboard for Natchez, Cairo and St. Louis,’ below which he penned ‘Perch’ io non spero’ the opening utterance of Cavalcanti’s own ‘Ballata: In Exile at Sarzana.’” (2001:149)

Apart from mentioning Cavalcanti and his *ballata* as the source of inspiration, Eliot enumerates several toponyms of which St Louis, his hometown, is the first, while the other two, less well-known, are in its immediate vicinity. One can, understandably, only speculate about the reason why Eliot chose the provisional title. It might be nostalgia for his native America and the longing for the love of his youth, Emily Hale, that made him consider England, his new homeland, a kind of exile. Ronald Schuhardt, who is quite positive about that, says that Eliot’s “modern ballad, *Ash-Wednesday* makes the journey in his place, recounting the anguish of a soul whose love poem laments the impossibility of a merely human love.” (Ibid.) The toponyms mentioned in the title are not to be found in the text of the poem and the only time when Eliot mentions exile is at the end of the third part of *Ash Wednesday*:

“Redeem the tune, redeem the dream
The token of the word unheard, unspoken
Till the wind shake a thousand whispers from the yew
And after this our exile.” (1991: 91)

John Kwan-Terry recognizes the last verse of the stanza as a fragment from the Catholic hymn *Salve Regina* which summarizes the effort of the lyrical subject to recover dreams, while listening to the word “unheard and unspoken.” (1994: 138) This critic identifies such a word as God’s Divine Word spoken by the apostle John (1:1), but the lyrical subject, instead of this word, hears the barren whispers from “yew trees.” (Ibid.) The true meaning, therefore, tragically eludes him and “he is forced back into exile in the finite world where separation from the correct or full understanding of the Absolute is the norm.” (Ibid.)

The following topic that both authors are obsessed with is the transience of life. The feeling that their days are numbered makes both lyrical subjects think no longer about fame, ambitions and love, of which only memories remain. The additional instruction that Cavalcanti imparts to his *ballatetta* is to visit his beloved. It contains a reference to his service to Love in bygone days:

“Oh, little ballad, sighing say
To her, when you’re presented:
‘Your servant comes
To be with you,
He leaves one,
Who was Love’s servant’” (2007: 44)

One has to pay attention to the past tense in the last line confirming the transitory nature of earthly pleasures. Eliot’s *tedium vita* shows itself even more distinctly. The emphatically confessional tone of address, occasionally similar to Cavalcanti’s, is in absolute contrast with his well-known modernist apartness as far as the emotions are in question:

“Because I do not hope to know again
The infirm glory of the positive hour
Because I do not think
Because I know I shall not know
The one veritable transitory power
Because I cannot drink
There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is
nothing again...” (1991: 85)

By varying Cavalcanti’s slightly modified initial phrase—“Because I do not hope to know again”, Eliot announces that the time, in which he truly lived a life at its fullest (“positive hour”), will never return, nor will his “transitory” physical strength, which is can also be equated with love that he cannot consume (“I cannot drink”). The absence of water and vegetation from the lyrical subject’s horizon, in the couplet with which the poem ends, symbolizes the disappearance of all that makes life worth living. Russell Eliot Murphy finds a deeper spiritual meaning in this section, since it expresses the lyrical subject’s desire to renounce everything earthly in order to accept higher forms of cognition and spirituality. (2007: 61)

Such a spiritual perspective is finally assailed by the image of death. Cavalcanti is quite explicit about this, informing the *ballatetta*:

“... that death
Grips me so that life deserts me,
Know how my heart with every breath
Beats hard, as the spirits speak inside me.
So much of my Being’s now undone,
I can scarcely suffer longer.”(2007: 43)

The opening verses, in a rather touching, courtly manner, disclose the degree of lyrical subject's decrepitude and his inability to prolong his life at least for a while.

The lyrical subject of Eliot's poem is not as much physical as he is a spiritual moribund, since the death he talks about has some more symbolic meaning. At the beginning of the second part of the poem, he talks about the mysterious "three white leopards (1991: 71) who:

...sat under a juniper-tree
In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety
On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been
contained
In the hollow round of my skull. And God said
Shall these bones live? Shall these
Bones live? And that which had been contained
In the bones (which were already dry) said chirping:
Because of the goodness of this Lady...(Ibid.)

The unreal situation in which the lyrical subject falls victim to the three bloodthirsty beasts is actually just one of numerous quizzical parts of the poem. However, if the devouring of the earthly remains, except bones, is taken symbolically, we can see how Eliot conjures up both the destructive and creative role of God's grace reducing the human body to the meagre remains in order to prepare it for future life. (Murphy 2007: 63). "Shall these bones live?" the question asked by the Lord (1 Kings 19 of Ezekiel) extending the allusion to Elijah who, in his escape from Jezebel, sat under a juniper tree seeking death. (Ibid.) The deep, religious meaning of the stanza, achieved by Eliot's intertextual intervention, does not exhaust all the possibilities of interpretation. The gruesome scene of lyrical subject's death hides a positive connotation reflected in the fact that the renunciation of worldly essence is the only way to reach the spheres of pure spirituality.

The thought of death is definitely put away owing to the prospect of resurrection that will happen "because of the goodness of the lady". The personality of Lady is certainly one of the key poetic symbols of both Cavalcanti's and Eliot's poetic pieces. Cavalcanti's adoration of the Lady and her beauty, which received full expression as a convention of *dolce stil nuovo*, actually had its origins in the Middle Ages. Cavalcanti's adored Lady is the embodiment of both beauty and intellect. Therefore, he sends his ballad to the Lady "Who of her great courtesy / Will show you highest honour" (2007: 43). The instructions he provides are followed by a series of compliments:

"You'll find a tender woman there,
Of an intellect so sweet,
That it will be delight complete
For you to leave her never." (44)

The lady we meet in Eliot's poem is not a symbol of worldly beauty and eroticism, but an omen of the spiritual transformation and renewal that occurred through his conversion to Anglicanism. In the previously quoted

passage, the possibility of resurrection or salvation is hinted at as the fruit of “Goodness of this lady” and:

“...because of her loveliness, and because
She honours the Virgin in meditation,
We shine with brightness.” (Ibid.)

In further lines the Lady is observed as someone possessing the dialectical aura or integrative power to reconcile her inherent opposites as well as the opposites tearing the world apart:

“Lady of silences
Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving
Worried reposed
The single Rose
Is now the Garden
Where all loves end
Terminate torment
Of love unsatisfied...” (86-87)

The address to Our Lady, in form of prayer, was said by the bones or the earthly remains of the lyrical subject, with the firm belief that her life-giving power will bridge the existential gap between the earthly and the eternal and that the sublimation of these opposites will create paradise – “the single rose / is now the garden.” In this sense, she should be considered the embodiment of Virgin Mary, although in the second verse of the passage it is claimed that her power comes from the fact that she “honours the Virgin.” Steve Ellis reminds us that the second part of Eliot’s poem was published under the title “Salutation” directly echoing the scene from the third part of Dante’s *Vita nuova* in which the appearance of Beatrice enlightens Dante and makes him blissful. (2009: 82) The impression that Lady leaves on Eliot is, as the poem records, pretty much the same.

The poetic image of the Lady dominates the entire second part of the poem but we meet her in other parts of the poem as well. In the fourth part, the poet presents the Lady as “The silent sister veiled in white and blue / Who walked between the violet and the violet.” (1991: 90) The fifth part contains the speculation upon the possibility of salvation initiated by wandering “Will the veiled sister pray for / Those who walk in darkness, who chose thee and oppose thee...” (92), ending with the inquiry about the prospects of the weakest members of humanity:

“Will the veiled sister pray
For children at the gate
Who will not go away and cannot pray...” (93)

The sixth part of Eliot's poem ends with a kind of prayer in which all of Lady's impersonations, the blessed sister, the veiled sister, the Lady of Silences and Virgin Mary, merge into an integral symbol of salvation:

“Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of
the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in HIS will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And Spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated”
And let my cry come unto Thee.” (1991: 95)

Eliot's lyrical subject, caught by universal religious ecstasy, prays for all humanity. The amazing emotional register it displays distinguishes it from Cavalcanti's *ballatetta* in which the poet concentrates exclusively on himself and the person he loves. Russell Eliot Murphy makes an interesting observation about the merging of the characters of the Lady and Holy Mother that occurs in the third part of Eliot's poem. He also draws the analogy with Dante's *Divine Comedy* in which the figure of Beatrice melts into the mighty character of Virgin Mary. He describes the intervention of Virgin Mary, who sends Beatrice to Dante's aid and instructs her to turn to Virgil, who, in the capacity of Reason, guides Dante in the first stages of the journey the hero undertakes with the aim of spiritual rebirth. (2007: 66) Comparing the characters' transformations in Dante's and Eliot's works, Murphy notes that Dante plays the role in relation to Eliot that Virgil played in relation to Dante. He adds that Eliot's Lady could not be identified with Beatrice as much as with a stylized character of a lady who belongs to the courtly love tradition on which Dante's adoration of Beatrice is based. (Ibid.) The adoration of the Lady modelled in the fashion of courtly love tradition and of the Lady who is an embodiment of the Christian ideal of heavenly love are irrevocably intertwined in the works of Dante and Cavalcanti. On the other hand, Eliot's relationship with the Lady is devoid of all sensuality and is purely religious.

Cavalcanti, together with Eliot's lyrical subject, while striving for the union with the Lady, follows a mythological pattern in which the lover, in his quest for the beloved, encounters obstacles that he must overcome. De Rougemont points out that there are two types of obstacles to a love relationship. The first one is external which means physical or social that keeps the lovers apart such as, for example “the presence of king, the suspiciousness of barons, the Judgment of God, and more generally the rules of feudal society.” (Brümmer 1993: 94). Another type of obstacles can be considered internal since they are born from the psyche of the hero who, like Tristan for example,

hinders himself for unknown reasons by putting the sword between himself and Iseult, or by making a sudden decision to return her to the king. (Ibid).

Cavalcanti's mortal illness belongs to the first type of the obstacles and as for the second ones he mentions evil people who can prevent him from achieving the last, purely spiritual contact with the Lady. Therefore, he tells the *ballatetta*, who is supposed to carry out the mission of a messenger of love, to avoid them at all costs:

“But take care to meet no eyes
Hostile to a gentle nature:
My disadvantage then for sure
You'd work, like one opposed,
And be by her reproved,
And so prove pain for me:
So that after my death there'd be,
Weeping and fresh dolour...” (2007: 94)

The diversification of the feeling of being in love can be even more elaborate:

“There are two things idealized by fin' amours: first, the beloved, the lady supremely beautiful in all respects; second, love itself, as the longing and desire elicited by the goodness and beauty of this particular woman. Thus, on the one hand, Arnaut de Mareuil addresses his beloved: ‘Good lady, perfect in all good qualities, so worthy are you above all the best women that I know’... On the other hand, the troubadours idealized love itself, their own desire, their own condition as lovers.” (Brümmer 1993: 95)

The words which knight de Mareuil uses to describe the beauty of his Lady are almost identical to those used by Cavalcanti qualifying his counterpart as “courteous”, “tender” and “sweet”.

The obstacles encountered by Eliot's lyrical subject in his quest for spiritual renewal, which the Lady metaphorically represents, are quite specific. The border between his mind and outer world vanishes and he becomes the representative of human race. The obstacles in question are mentioned in the third part of Eliot's poem, published as a separate edition in 1927 under the title “The Top of the Stairs” (“Som de L'Escalina”) taken from Dante's *Purgatory* (xxvi, 146) (Murphy: 64) On the way to redemption, symbolized by the Lady, the lyrical subject climbs upon a staircase of three levels, and on each of them hosting some frightening and mysterious forms. On the first staircase there is:

“The same shape twisted on the banister
Under the vapour in the fetid air
Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
The deceitful face of hope and of despair.” (89)

The temptation embodied by the “devil from the stairs” can be taken as a metaphor of eternal human inclination towards self-deception and for raising

false hopes. Upon overcoming the temptation, the lyrical subject arrives at the second staircase, which, unlike the first, is devoid of similar tempters. Instead, emptiness awaits the hero who sees that:

“There were no more faces and the stair was dark,
Damp, jagged, like an old man’s mouth drivelling, beyond
repair,
Or the toothed gullet of an aged shark.” (Ibid.)

However, this emptiness also looks ominous since it symbolizes nothingness, and the impression is enhanced by hideous details as “damp”, “jagged”, “old man’s mouth”, and “gullet of an aged shark.” The lyrical subject is therefore tired of struggle and incapable of new impressions and such numbness makes him more sensitive to what threatens on the third staircase. The scene that opens before the lyrical subject is totally different from the previous ones because it is rather pleasant:

“The broadbacked figure drest in blue and green
Enchanted the may time with an antique flute.
Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,
Lilac and brown hair;
Distraction, music of the flute, stops and steps of the mind
over the third stair...” (Ibid.)

The almost bucolic atmosphere, in which an unknown musician performs a pleasant melody, is no less dangerous for the lyrical subject who almost falls for it threatening to give up his spiritual journey. Its deceptive atmosphere is confirmed by the fact that the musician has not revealed his face and that the pleasant melody he performs is also unknown to the lyrical subject. The flute he plays is the favourite instrument of the forest god Pan, who was considered the embodiment of devil. Nothing is said about the overcoming of the temptation from the third staircase, in which devil is repeatedly involved implicating that those similar ordeals may continue to haunt lyrical subject indefinitely like in Dante’s *Inferno*.

The last, sixth part of Eliot’s poem starts with another variation of Cavalcanti’s verse “Because I do not hope to turn again”, which reads:

“Although I do not hope to tum again
Although I do not hope
Although I do not hope to tum” (94)

The positive, although not so distinct a tone, that can still be sensed, indicates that the lyrical subject, after the entire self-denial he experienced, has not lost hope in the possibility of new self-actualization. The following verses clearly confirm it:

“And the lost heart stiffens and rejoices
In the lost lilac and the lost sea voices
And the weak spirit quickens to rebel
For the bent golden-rod and the lost sea smell...” (Ibid.)

The spiritual transformation, although not yet achieved, looks well under way owing to the mediation of the Lady, so that only at the end one does realize the power of Eliot's central poetic symbol attaining metaphysical gleam. Lyrical subject, therefore, achieves the greatest degree of spiritual unity, his intellect and mind being eternally imbued with the Lady's grace. In *Ash Wednesday* the Lady figures not only as a symbol but a real person whom the poet piously addresses and whose constancy, loyalty and willingness he never doubts.

Some kind of optimism can be discerned in the last stanza of Cavalcanti's ballad:

“You, little weak and fearful voice
 Issuing from the sad heart weeping,
 Go with my soul, and this little song,
 And tell her of my mind that's ruined.
 You'll find a tender woman there,
 Of an intellect so sweet,
 That it will be delight complete
 For you to leave her never.
 And then, my soul, adore her,
 Worthy as she is, for ever.” (2007: 94)

Cavalcanti compensates for the lack of physical contact with the Lady by initiating the pilgrimage of love taken by the *ballatetta* which will forever remain with her as a sublimation of poet's soul. The qualities of the Lady that the poet mentions and her implicit willingness to remain faithful to him until the end make her similar to Eliot's Lady, if not to the fullest, then at least, to some of her pious impersonations. Therefore, one cannot accept Alison Milbank's claim that for Cavalcanti “the poem is a substitute for sexual consummation, written when the poet was mortally ill.” (224) This poem, definitely does not affirm the wayward Cavalcanti, the heretic Cavalcanti condemned by both Dante and Eliot.

Starting from Simon West's inspiring conclusions about the rhythmic cadences of Cavalcanti's ballad echoing in Eliot's poem, our analysis went further by focusing upon the thematic matches ranging from the depressive feeling of alienation generated by exile, the proximity of death, the adoration of the Lady, the obstacles standing on the path of the achievement of the desired ideal and final spiritual fulfilment of the quest. Cavalcanti's opening line, used by Eliot as a catchphrase of the upcoming spiritual search, is varied poetically following the pattern that Cavalcanti outlined in his *ballatetta*. Numerous differences in the treatment of certain aspects are caused primarily by the time gap between the epochs they belonged to. On the other hand, many qualities discussed in the essay are common to both Cavalcanti and Eliot. The guiding principle of our research is contained in the already quoted fragment of Eliot's essay “On the Frontiers of Criticism” specifying that “One can explain a poem by investigating what it is made of and the causes that brought it about.” Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*, based on Cavalcanti's *ballatetta*, is an outstanding confirmation of the fact that an author should

“...write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.” (Eliot 1948: 14) Our modest analysis casts just a dim light on Eliot’s unique attempt to eternalize the great poetic tradition and to make Cavalcanti his true fellow contemporary.

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ИАКО НЕ(И)МА НАДЕ ЗА ГВИДА КАВАЛКАНТИЈА И Т. С. ЕЛИОТА

Резиме

Циљ истраживања јесте да се изврши компаративна анализа одјека стихова једне од најпознатијих љубавних балада италијанског средњовековног песника Гвида Кавалкантија у песми *Чиста среда* енглеског модернисте Томаса Стернса Елиота. Његова рецепција Кавалкантијеве поезије унеколико је парадоксална, јер је у једном од Елиотових критичких есеја италијански песник означен као „паганин”, а *Чиста среда* представља прво веће Елиотово дело високе религиозности. С друге стране, познато је да Кавалкантијева поезија није представљала формативни фактор у духовном развоју енглеског аутора на начин на који је то некада био случај са поезијом Дантеа Алигијерија, али би било погрешно тврдити да је утицај потпуно занемарљив. Анализа полази од Елиотове употребе почетног стиха Кавалкантијеве баладе као лајтмотива, а затим се концентрише на одговарајуће теме у делима оба аутора и начин њихове обраде. То су теме изгнанства, пролазности живота, обожавања Госпе, препрека које спречавају јунака да дође до идеала као и остварење поменутог идеала. Истраживање инсистира на чињеници да је Елиотова *Чиста среда* направљена по узору на митски образац потраге који је Кавалканти поставио у својој балади и доказује да је то био Елиотов импресиван покушај да поетску традицију претходних векова учини вечно живом.

Кључне речи: Кавалканти, Елиот, балада, средњи век, љубав, религија, конвенција, дама, изгнанство

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