CHAPTER 3

Order in the ‘prima maniera’ and two early narrative experiments

The order and the grouping of the love sonnets, which corresponds in the two manuscripts, Laurenziano Rediano 9 and Vaticano lat. 3793,¹ has been taken to show that Guittone conceived and wrote the courtly poems in well-defined families. Quaglio sees these groups of poems as a testing ground for the ‘onne mainera’ Guittone boasts of at the end of c. xi:

L'ingegnoso suo ‘trovare’ si manifesta non meno che con invenzioni metriche, prosodiche, retoriche, con innovazioni strutturali, mediante le quali le tendenze didattiche tentano di superare la frammentarietà del discorso poetico così articolato nella organizzazione di cicli lirici narrativi: i primi sonetti (nn. 1-18 dell’ed. Egid) espongono la storia di un amore infelice; segue una collana (sonetti nn. 19-30) che trattano della lealtà in amore; un folto gruppo di sonetti (nn. 31-80) insieme a varie canzoni sviluppa, nelle forme del ‘contrasto’ e delle ‘noie’ (non manca la donna-schermo), il motivo della gioia, quasi riequilibrato dal contrasto, realistico e popolaresco, tra l'amante e la donna villana. E si aggiunga anche una sorta di ars amandi (sonetti 87-110), condotta sulla falsariga di Ovidio e Andrea Cappellano . . . (pp. 265-6)

His debt to earlier studies is not hard to see, and the synthesis he makes of them is appealing. He accepts the groups of sonnets first proposed by Pellizzari² (who ‘improved’ on the grouping suggested by Pelaez in his review of the Pellegrini edition of the rime amorose)³ and retained by Margueron with two minor changes in his first appendix;⁴ he also uses Margueron’s phrase ‘cycles lyrico-narratifs’. To this he adapts Tartaro’s phrase ‘superare la frammentarietà del discorso poetico’,⁵ and with it the concept of an intended structural symmetry which Tartaro confines to his discussion of the conversion manifesto, c. xxv. For Tartaro the traditional discourse is broken into secular and religious ‘experience’, and c. xxv imposes a total unity on the two halves of the canzoniere. For Quaglio ‘la frammentarietà del discorso poetico’ lies in its multiple courtly themes and situations, which Guittone links together in families of poems. Quaglio is careful to avoid noting specific canzoni in his narrative cycles, though he does mention ‘varie canzoni’ in the third group (ss. 31–80). He distinguishes between the first three groups of sonnets (‘cicli narrativi’), and the ars amandi (ss. 87-110); and he sees the ‘contrasto realistico e popolaresco’ (ss. 81–6) as a kind of balance to the ‘gioia’ motif in the third group. His reticence pinpoints difficulties in the groups as defined by Pellizzari, difficulties recognized in part by Margueron.
There is no manuscript evidence of any organic growth in the *canzoni*. They have been attached to the first three cycles on the basis of thematic likeness and could only be said to correspond to certain static points in the sonnet 'stories'. This is particularly true of the third cycle where the Pellizzari/Margueron outline of six episodes applies solely to the sonnets. The general title 'lyrico-narrative cycles' offers no explanation for the fifth and sixth groups which are decidedly non-narrative, nor even for the fourth group, the 'tenzone con la donna villana', which is a narrative only in the sense that it has first-person protagonists, where the first three cycles describe changes in a situation.

The drawback in Pellizzari's grouping is his reliance on thematic content as the sole criterion of likeness, and it seems to me that the inadequacy of this criterion, if used on its own, has prevented any serious interpretation of the sonnet families as provided by both the most authoritative manuscripts. It is clear that the fourth, fifth and sixth sonnet groups are non-narrative, and that the fourth and fifth represent different attitudes to the *fin'amors* ideals from those revealed in the first three groups. It is equally clear that the affinity which is perceived between the *canzoni* and the sonnets is based on their serious presentation of *fin'amors* ideals and not on narrative elements common to both. The narrative element in Guittone's sonnets, rudimentary though it may be, is synonymous with a 'straight' presentation of traditional courtly language and sentiment; while the anti-courtly experiment is reserved for two genres, low-style 'contrasto' and the didactic *ars amandi*.

We saw in the palinodes that Guittone's view of his courtly poetry was not uniform, and that both his degree of moral responsibility for the sentiments in that poetry and the vividness of conversion as event, depend on the poet's sense of identity with his courtly persona. These distinctions are relevant to the love sonnets which, from preliminary observation, fall into two broad categories — narrative/courtly, and non-narrative/anti-courtly. In so far as 'narrative' means an attempt to draw a sustained and changing line of events (as distinct from the static and occasional motifs of troubadour lyrics, self-contained and unconnected), it would seem that he tried to infuse life into those motifs by forging them into stories told in verse. If my earlier equation between identity of present and past persona and the 'reality' of the event is correct, it seems reasonable to suggest that the linking of sonnets into well-defined families was an attempt to represent as a real event what individual lyrics would pass off as imaginary or fictive.

I shall try to show that the printed, that is, manuscript, order of the _sonetti d'amore_ — 'serious' narratives, and anti-idealistic genre groups — does in fact reveal and correspond to a discernible process of disengagement from the _fin'amors_ ideal as a literary inspiration, and that the sonnet families are steps towards the self-criticism of 'Ora parrà s'eo saverò cantare' and the other poems written after conversion. I shall argue that Guittone's early development, prior
to the central phase, begins with an attempt at a primitive and pure statement of courtly sentiment (where the author is assimilated into his persona), then moves to a more knowing manipulation (authorial) of the genres and the lexical range (where the roles of poet and persona are clearly separated).

I shall argue that each family of poems represents an experimental advance in this line of development, and that each experiment reveals a deeper authorial grasp of the relationship of non-courtly to courtly elements in the poetry as experience. Beginning with an outline of the thematic unity in each sonnet family, I shall try to show that they display specific styles and stages in Guittone’s early poetic. I shall argue that in them Guittone attempted a deep and thorough search of his antecedent material for its stances and attitudes to fin’ amors, and that he gradually moved away from what he saw as the classical and direct self-projection of an archaic and pure stage in lyric idealism. His hind-sighted rejection of the ‘prima maniera’, expressed in moral terms, simply completes and crystallizes a process that had been in motion from the beginning. And I shall suggest that the variety of genre and style in the pre-conversion poetry is not the result of an a priori decision to experiment with ‘onne mainera’ but is the result of an authorial search for a ‘sincere’ voice in the courtly poetic, which drove him to try every ‘mainera’ that the inherited poetic offered him.8

Such an interpretation would support the view which sees Guittone’s later didactic-intellectual manner and moral pre-occupation as already present in the love poetry.9 That view explains what happens in the early poems, in the light of Guittone’s socio-historical background, as an expression of his ‘sentire pratico e buon senso borghese’. I would see the early poetry as revealing a constant tension between two levels of reality — the literary tradition conceived in its feudal purity, and the non-courtly formation of a latter-day practitioner — which can be traced from beginning to end of the ‘prima maniera’. I would show Guittone at grips with the formalistic elements in courtly poetry, trying to appropriate its ideals by turning stock sentiment into the stuff of real experience. And, instead of a hind-sighted anticipation of later concerns in the early poems, I would see the sonnet families (and then the canzoni) as a series of provisional ‘answers’, as a constant re-appraisal of the courtly ethos, as a sign of dynamic if not always vertical growth in the canzoniere, and as a necessary preparation for his open rejection of fin’ amors in middle life.

Guittone’s sonnets offer the most promising opening to this kind of study because, as thematically coherent cycles, they provide him with an extended and consistent first-person persona; they make use of a wide range of traditional themes and styles; and their idealism ranges from archaic purity of fin’ amors to ‘modern’ cynicism. I shall study them first not to suggest chronological priority over the canzoni but to show them as a background to the whole courtly range in the canzoniere, against which the canzoni will stand out as individual statements which can be related to points in the total development traced by the
The chronological order of most of the pre-conversion poems is unknown, and if there is any order at all it will have to be deduced from internal evidence. Though there is a risk of imposing a trajectory on the mysterious processes of thought, I am led to my interpretation by what seems to be a development in the early poems towards the authorial voice which characterizes the later poems; and by the need to offer some insight into many poems which escape the anthologies and which, to my knowledge, have not been studied in the context guaranteed them by the best manuscript sources.

Over and above the narrow thematic range which defines the boundaries of his narrative cycles, Guittone uses several linking devices to ensure continuity and forward movement within each group. At certain points he refers to the previous or following sonnets to give them a coherence and perspective they lack as individual poems. The opening quartina of s. 12 refers to the six or seven sonnets of complaint against the cruelty of love which open the first cycle. In the opening lines of s. 21 he recapitulates the promise of love he made in ss. 19 and 20. Sonnet 49 marks the end of the tenzone in the third cycle and introduces a new episode in the story. These are only a few examples, but they suggest that Guittone uses a narrative technique and that it centres on points of climax within each family, which give an undulating line to each story rather than a steady, forward progression. A closely-related device is his use of past verbs to recapitulate the action and to provide a springboard for the next movement. The past verbs in the opening quartina of s. 50 summarize the tenzone, ss. 37–49, and lead down into a series of complaint/abuse sonnets. In a similar way the past verb ‘so stato’ at the outset of s. 19 puts a new complexion on the first cycle (ss. 1–18), as if its serious protestations had been false. Close attention to the change in verb tense will reveal Guittone’s awareness of the temporal unity of each cycle, the moments of stasis, and the likely new turn of events. At other events within each cycle there is an obvious continuity of movement from sonnet to sonnet, as between ss. 12 and 13, 20 and 21, and 36 and 37; a continuity occasionally underlined by a verbal echo of the coblaus capfinidas type, as between ss. 9 and 10. These devices are more noticeable in the unwieldy third cycle. They serve to string the episodes together and keep the eye roving back over the earlier twists in the narrative line. Sonnet 62, which comes early in a fresh impulse of ‘gioia’, consciously matches s. 54, which lists in plaisier form the lover’s disillusionment with love. Sonnet 76, which echoes the incipit of s. 72, ‘gioia amorosa amor’, seems in that recapitulation to round off the ‘lontananza’ motif explored in ss. 72–5.

These devices within the poems themselves tend to confirm the order of sonnets within each cycle as given by the two manuscripts. I shall support them with many observations on the shifting nature of the author-persona identity within each cycle and from cycle to cycle, and shall suggest that Guittone’s narrative experiments were more serious and self-conscious than the mere
grouping of thematically related poems could ever show. They are Guittone's attempt to identify the traditional voice of the love lyric with his own, through the cumulative effect of a consistent persona identifiable throughout a given series of extended situations (the story of each cycle) which, by interlacing and self-reflecting devices, creates the illusion of personal biography. If we look at the narrative as a coherent theme and a consistent first-person protagonist, we shall see that whenever the narrative line changes direction or tone, the tension between Guittone's inherited language and his private vision of courtly values becomes acute, and threatens a breakdown in the carefully fostered illusion of identity between the poet and his persona.

THE FIRST NARRATIVE CYCLE, ss. 1–18

The one narrative development in the first cycle, a sudden and complete change from 'woe to weal' which takes place halfway on, reveals the essential problem of creating a lyric 'story' out of the sentimental polarity of joy and fear in courtly lyric literature. As a narrative the cycle develops by repeating the two classic sentiments of the serving lover, and it sets the pattern of naive fin' amors idealism by which the other cycles will be judged. The salient features of that pattern are Guittone's presentation of 'Amore' and the lady, and the kind of language he uses.

The lover speaks from within a given situation, in this case unfavourable at the outset. When not addressing himself alternately to 'Amore' or to his lady, he is locked in an inner monologue of self-encouragement. 'Amore', though he is only vaguely personified as the Ovidian deity, plays the standard part given him in high courtly literature. He rules the lover's physical, emotional and intellectual life, dispensing the passion of love as he wills and deciding when that love should be, or seem to be, reciprocated:

Spessamente lo chiamo e dico: Amore,
chi t'ha dato di me tal segnoraggio,
ch'h'ai conquiso meo senno e meo valore?

[Often I call him saying, 'Love, who has given you such power over me that you have taken possession of my wisdom and my inner strength'?]

che f or m'hai miso di mia possessione,
e messo in quella de la donna mia,
e sempre mi combatti onne stagione.

[for you have dispossessed me of myself and given me over to my lady, and you keep warring against me endlessly.]

Pietá di me, per Dio, vi prenda, Amore,
poi si m'avete forte innaverato;
da me parte la vita a gran dolore,
se per tempo da voi non sono atato

s. 1, 9–11
s. 2, 3–5
s. 8, 1–4
"Madonna" remains a shadowy figure, the butt of an intense and balletic play of emotions on the lover’s side. She is his unseen mover, ‘orgogliosa e fera’, who may grow ‘dolze e pietosa’ if he persists in his service and in his plea for ‘merzé’:

Spietata donna e fera, ora te prenda
di me cordoglio, poi morir mi vedi;
che tanta pietà di te discenda,
che 'n alcuna misura meve fidi.

[Cruel and pitiless lady, take pity on me since you see me dying. May such mercy flow down from you as will in part revive me.]

E tutto ciò non cangia in lei talento,
ma sempre sì n'avanza il fero orgoglio;
ed eo di lei amar però non pento.

[But none of this has any effect on her will; rather, it only hardens her cruel pride all the more. In spite of this I don’t regret loving her.]

E la merzé, ch'ognor per me si grida,
de dolze e de pietosa umilitate,
piacciavi l'orgoglio vostro conquida.

[May the pity that comes from sweet and kindly gentleness, and which I keep on crying out for, conquer your hard heart.]

Ed e o lo provo per la donna mia,
ch'è fatta ben piú d'ogné altra pietosa
de piú crudel che mai fosse, ni sia

[And I have experienced this in my lady who, from being the most cruel imaginable, has become more kindly than any other lady.]

And just as Guittone assigns to ‘Amore’ and ‘madonna’ their traditional and characteristic roles in what is formal, derivative courtly verse, so he writes that verse in an equally traditional and ‘archaic’ manner.

These early sonnets are a mine of rhetorical figures, but their syntax is on the whole straightforward and the *ornatus* is *facilis* rather than *difficilis*. Especially noteworthy as typical of writing based on troubadour models are the endemic constructions for synonym and repetition, and the nominal *conversiones* which can give a calm stateliness to what is often a sentiment of anguish. Tied to this construction, which is essential to the troubadour concept of courtly ideals and a *forma mentis*, is the phraseology which the earliest Italian poets took over from Provençal and Old French lyric and which gives an archaic patina to entire sonnets in this earliest expression of Guittone’s ‘prima maniera’.

In spite of the formulaic and make-weight style of Guittone’s inherited diction (which he will have seen as the style fitting his persona’s situation), and in spite of a certain staccato quality which comes from obvious matching or separation
of *quartine* and *terzine*, Guittone presents his persona ‘straight’, committed to an experience of courtly love. His persona is unself-conscious in his pursuit of the *fin’amors* male ideals; he is at once the hero and the chronicler of the events related in the poems. It is the lover’s constant and unmitigated introspection which turns this chain of sonnets into an embryonic *storia animae*:

Fero dolore e crudel pena e dura,  
ched eo soffersien coralmente amare,  
menòmi assai sovente in dismisura,  
e mi fece de voi, donna, sparlare.  

*The harsh pain and the bitter suffering that I experienced from loving with all my heart often led me into indiscretion and made me abuse you, my lady.*

Ben l’ha en podere e la ten conoscenza,  
com’eo già dissì, la madonna mia,  
che, senza chieder lei ciò che m’agenza,  
m’ave donato e miso me en balia.  

*Wisdom truly governs my lady and guides her, as I said before, for without being asked she has given me my delight and put me under her sway.*

Yet there are signs in this first cycle that Guittone baulked at the troubadour assumption that the poet spoke ‘as if’ he were the persona of his poem. Several sonnets amount to authorial asides on the biographical quality of the poems that surround them, and give the impression that Guittone, temporarily detached from the sentimental experience he is describing, passes judgement on his suffering and rejoicing lover. These asides reflect the real world of non-courtly ethics and foreshadow the rationalizing and quasi-logic of Guittone’s later manner. In them he seeks to strengthen the lover’s resolve and straighten his conduct, as if to overcome the stumbling-blocks that had kept literary lovers on their long-suffering knees for more than a century. At the same time what will be seen to be authorial incursions into an ideal and closed biography suggest that the persona, as passed on to Guittone by the Provençal/Sicilian tradition, was not on his own a sufficiently clear spokesman for Guittone’s questioning restatement of the *fin’amors* lyric ideal.

Early in the cycle, s. 5 introduces non-courtly elements which affect the intensity of first-person narrative. The sonnet comes between two mildly contorted poems on the familiar motif of the contrast between the lover’s dogged devotion and the lady’s harsh disregard — both of them sonnets of self-encouragement where the ‘io’ is locked in self-communing discourse:

Malgrado vostro e mio son benvogliente,  
e serò, ché non posso unque altro fare  

*In spite of your reaction and my hurt feelings I still love you, and I’ll continue to do so because I can’t do otherwise*]

Ch’eo l’ho servita a tutto ’l me podere,  
e ’n chererli mercé già no alento  


For I have served her to the limit of my powers and I never cease to implore her pity.

The form of s. 5, a strict balance between general principles and their particular application, interposes a distance between the persona of the poem and his sentimental condition:

Ah! con mi dol vedere omo valente
star misagiato e povero d'aver,
e lo malvagio e vile esser manente,
regnare a benenanza ed a piacere;
e donna pro cortese e canoscente
ch'è laida sì, che vive in dispiacere;
e quella ch'ha bieltá dolze e piagente,
villana ed orgogliosa for savere.
Ma lo dolor di voi, donna, m'amorta,
ché bella e fella assai più ch'altra sete,
e più di voi mi ten prode e dannaggio.
Oh, che mal aggia il die che voi fu porta
si gran bieltá, ch'altrui ne confondete,
tanto è duro e fellon vostro coraggio!

Ah, how I suffer when I see a man of worth discomforted and deprived of possessions while the evil and base man is rich, living in comfort and pleasure. And I suffer when I see a worthy, gracious and intelligent woman remain uncourted just because she is ugly, while the one with charming beauty is unbelievably base and arrogant. But the suffering I feel in your regard, lady, is mortal because you are more beautiful and more cruel than any other lady, and what concerns me most is the good and the harm that come from you. O, cursed be the day that such great beauty was bestowed on you, for your heart is so hard and cruel that you torment others with it!}

Guittone sets out to combine general ethical considerations (lines 1-8) with a first-person complaint against ‘madonna’. To offset the sonnet’s natural tendency to remain a mixture of two separate styles of address, one in the quartine, the other in the terzine, he attempts to give the ideas a coherent inner growth. The second quartina matches the first in reverse order and pulls the opening mercantile image (a contrast between worth and material possessions) on to a plane of courtly social behaviour (a contrast between physical appearance and inner disposition), from which the lover can apply that abstract state of affairs to his lady. If the ‘donna ch’ha bieltá’ can be ‘villana ed orgogliosa’, it is only a simple transition to ‘voi, donna, sete bella e fella’.

In several details of construction Guittone shows how he tried to tighten the sonnet as it moved towards a conventional closing curse on ‘madonna’s’ bewitching beauty. The paratactic ‘e’ with which the second quartina begins (line 5), suggests that ‘donna’ and ‘omo’ are weighed on the same pair of scales. The second quartina balances the first and highlights Guittone’s negative statement of ideal conduct in both the man and the lady. But by the second quartina emphasis has shifted from material possessions to sentimental
attitudes. The strongly adversative 'ma' of line 9 accentuates a fluent and logical application of general principles to his particular case. The paired contrasts, 'bella-fella', 'prode-dannaggio' of lines 10-11 echo and condense, in reverse order, the key qualities of the quartine. By comparative progression his lady (line 10) is more beautiful and more harsh than the standard lady in lines 7-8; his profit and loss in her regard (line 11) is greater than that of the standard man in lines 2-4. The two quartine find their climax and synthesis in lines 10-11.²⁴

Yet these linking devices and the binomial formulae scattered throughout the sonnet, ²⁵ which give it the look of archaic homogeneity, fail to conceal the non-courtly bluntness of the opening quartina. It could be argued that those lines denounce the way things are in real society — the contemporary urban commune where only the 'fellon' prospers — and echo a key idea in the Guelph anti-feudal polemic, that inner worth ('valore') merits material reward and that wealth can be won only by the truly worthy. As a logical appeal to a practical order of merit it has little in common with a courtly and literary ideal where 'valere' is always the sign and guarantee of respectable social and amatory mores — and not of profit and loss. To lay down an ethico-mercantile principle as model for the lover's behaviour and as touchstone of the accord between female grace, worth and beauty, is to question the courtly social ethos. In earlier days a woman could have been beautiful and pitiless — bad luck, one just whined and cursed as the lover does at the end of this sonnet. But to suggest that inner worth (line 5) can reside in an ugly subject (line 6)²⁶ and that ignorance of that hidden worth, or the lady's flaunting of her physical appeal, are wrong on the analogy that material wealth is not an index of inner worth in the possessor, seems to me an example of Guittone's pragmatism at odds with the sentimental values his persona should be upholding at this stage.²⁷

In the context of the first sonnet cycle Guittone probably meant to do no more than apply to his lover's case the evident disparity between appearance and reality, between merit and reward. The lover's worth goes unseen; the lady is lovely but hard. Yet Guittone seems in this sonnet unaware of the strength and breadth of his analogies, which are more sweeping than he needs for his example. The analogy is too objective and 'modern' to be the observation of the archaic lover himself. In this sense the 'mi' of 'con mi dol vedere' (line 1 — an incipit that anticipates 'opening' reflections in the later poetry),²⁸ is the 'mi' of Guittone as author, and not the persona 'mi' of 'm'amorta' (line 9). What the lover has on his mind (lines 9-11) would prevent him worrying about the 'malvagio manente' and the 'donna cortese ch'è laida', who are real figures outside the framework of courtly ideals.²⁹ The didactic exempla of the quartine betray Guittone's private concern for values outside those pertinent to the event described in the first terzina, and for a moment they shatter in their realism the poet's illusion of courtly biography.

In s. 5 Guittone gives a hint of his difficulty in pitching the courtly tone
exactly. This gives way quickly to the safe and familiar lover’s complaint which within five sonnets works its way round to the antithetical moment, the lady’s response and the lover’s ‘gioia’. But before that resolution of grief into joy, the lover’s anguish reaches a climax in s. 9 and for the first and only time in this cycle Guittone breaks into the halting metre of a sonnet with internal rhyme:

Se Deo - m’aiuti, amor, peccato fate,
se v’allegrate — de lo male meo:
com’eo — piú cher merzé, piú mi sdegnate;
e non trovate, — amor, perché, per Deo!...  
Tegno eo — tanto ch’eo merzé trovasse,
che mai non fasse — piú per me, de fede,
che dir: merzede, — amor, merzé, merzene!   s. 9, 1-4, 12-14

[As I hope for God’s mercy, love, it is wrong of you to rejoice at my misfortunes. The more I beg your pity the more you scorn me, and, by God, you have no reason to do so, love!... I am so obsessed with finding pity that I do nothing, I swear, except cry: ‘have pity, love, pity, pity!’]

The rimalmezzo is not a random exercise but the turning point in the first cycle. The dolorous commonplaces in the preceding sonnets are here compressed into a tense and bewildered cry by a religious devotee. Yet the lines are broken after the third and fifth syllable with a formal mastery that foreshadows an immediate change in the lover’s case. This is Guittone’s first attempt to enter the story by stylistic means alone. It is as if he were breaking the lover’s knot by a show of force, and it is a clear sign that his technical virtuosity is not haphazard but is applied for precise effects and at calculated moments. When the final cry is taken up at the beginning of the next sonnet, and the taut repetition has subsided into a narrative link-line, the crisis is over, and after two religious celebrations of the power of ‘merzé’, in ss. 10 and 11, the lover contrasts past with present experience and seems to anticipate in a lower key, and from within the courtly framework, his literary self-criticism in the conversion poems:

Fero dolore e crudel pena e dura,
ched eo soffersien coralmente amare,
menòmi assai sovente in dismisura,
e mi fece de voi, donna, sparlare.  
Or che meo senno regna ‘n sua natura
sí, che dal ver so la menzogna strare,
conosco che non ment’om ni pergiura
piú ch’eo feci onni fiata ‘n voi biasmare,
Ché non vive alcun che tanto vaglia,
dicesse che ‘n voi manchi alcuna cosa,
ch’eo vincere nond’el credesse in battaglia.  
Non fo natura in voi poderosa,
ma Deo pensatamente, u’ non è faglia,
vi fe’, com fece Adamo e sua sposa.   s. 12, 1-14

[The harsh pain and the bitter suffering that I experienced from loving with all my heart often led me into indiscretion and made me abuse you, lady. Now
that I have returned to my senses, so that I can tell a lie from the truth, I
acknowledge that no-one lies or perjures himself more than I did whenever I
criticized you. For there isn't a man alive so strong that I wouldn't be con-
fident of defeating him in battle if he said that you were imperfect. Nature
played no part in your creation. Instead, God, whose intention cannot err,
created you directly, the way He made Adam and his spouse.]

When the persona reproaches himself as poet (lines 3–4, 7–8), he sets the con-
trasting moments of anguish and joy into a narrative perspective.31 There can be
no doubt that the sentiments of the preceding sonnets were uttered earlier in
time, that one led to the other, and that the persona is responsible, as poet, for
his own utterance. As a self-critical stance it has its counterpart in the palinodes
which identify past poet with past persona,32 yet the difference in depth is
obvious. In the later canzoni the self-aware convert-poet was to confess as his
‘follor’ all the writing in which he, as poet-protagonist, was subject to ‘madon-
na’s’ scorn and favour. In this sonnet, ‘dismisura’ (line 3) is the excess of
language to which she drove the ‘unself-conscious’ lover-poet. Here, the persona
speaks from within a courtly fiction with pretensions to narrative depth; there,
Guittone gives that fiction a moral dimension because he judges it as an outsider.

At the end of this unwitting anticipation of later conversion there are signs
that Guittone does question the identity between persona and poet affirmed in
the quartine. To compensate for his past ‘sparlare’ and ‘biasmare’,33 the lover
makes the bold claim that her creation was willed directly by God without
natural mediation, ‘the way He made Adam and his wife’ (lines 12–14). This
could pass for pre-stilnovist praise of ‘madonna’s’ angelic nature; yet the simple
comparison34 is closer to the scriptural defence of womankind in c. xx, lines
61–8, where Guittone attacks cynical male exploitation of the role fixed for
ladies by courtly literature. It also suggests an early variation on the defence of
female chastity in c. xlix, lines 21–7, where he claims that women can make good
the harm done by Eve. In s. 5 Guittone broke his spell by evincing a more
modern and ethical awareness than the situation allowed. Here, his religious
hyperbole foreshadows a later concern for the equality of man and woman
before God, and, with it, a practical respect for real women outside the paragon
context set for them by literature. It is as if his need for a climax of praise —
one terzina that will make up for all the scorn that the lover had heaped on his
lady — makes Guittone forget the lover’s restricted situation and limited for-
malae, both of which he does recall in the chivalric challenge in the first terzina,
lines 9–11. If the final pious comparison (line 14) has a decidedly non-courtly
ring,35 it is because a domestic and ‘bourgeois’ statement is ludicrous on the
lips of a fin’amors lover.

These two examples of tonal discord within a sonnet may betray only a lapse
of narrative coherence or the unconscious intrusion of ideas that were to mature
in Guittone’s later writing. Yet they point to his recurring uneasiness with the
limited conceptual and vocal range of the courtly ‘io’, as if he would broaden and deepen the lover’s experience with more realistic insights, and root the lover’s sentiment into the firmer soil of non-courtly principles.

The lover’s self-criticism in s. 12, which orders the previous eleven sonnets into a loose narrative with one simple change of direction, effectively blocks any further change in the story line. In this early experiment, marked by its simple vision of the bare essentials, there are only two alternatives — the lover’s woe (‘donna orgogliosa’) or weal (‘donna pietosa’). Once the lover-poet has recognized her acceptance of him in ss. 10, 11 and 12, praise can only repeat itself and the story loses momentum. So when Guittone experiments with the persona’s stance, and shifts, in the short compass of three sonnets, ss. 11 to 13, from unself-conscious monologue to literary self-criticism and then to didacticism, he seeks at this point of stasis in the story line to extend the narrative in a way that is more natural and ‘honest’ for him than pseudo-biographical discourse. The immediate effect of the two changes of stance (from ss. 11 to 12, and from ss. 12 to 13) is a progressive withdrawal from immersion in the emotionally turbulent event to a serene and reflective detachment from it, which Guittone makes up for by an even purer courtly idealism than in the narrative sonnets. The didactic mode triumphs in the six sonnets that follow s. 12, and apart from several nagging references to his own experience as a guarantee of his teaching, and an echo of s. 16 in s. 18, the narrative line all but disappears. What takes its place is an enlightened courtly male self-interest, couched as advice to other lovers:

Ho da la donna mia in comandamento,
ch’eo reconforti onni bon servidore,
perché inver lui sua donna ha fero core
s. 13, 1–4
[I have been ordered by my lady to reassure every loyal lover who is troubled and suffers because his lady is hard-hearted towards him]

Donque chi vol d’amor sempre gioire
conven ch’entenda in donna de valore,
ché ’n pover loco om non po aricchire.

s. 18, 12–14
[Therefore the man who wants always to rejoice in love should pursue a woman of worth, for a man cannot draw riches from where there is poverty.]

The teaching fiercely upholds ‘madonna’s’ paramount place, is suitably feudal in its heavy use of the master-servant analogy, and is properly archaic in its ‘provenzaleggiante’ diction. A first reaction to this change may be worth noting down. If the speaking voice seems suddenly at ease, it may not be so much because the persona’s problems are over but because Guittone is particularly sure of his words and style when teaching others. The speaker’s complete trust in the viability of the best male virtues because they have worked, seems to me the most glaring effect of Guittone’s personal pragmatism on his inherited
literary taste. The fin' amors lover locked in his experience was never satisfied with himself — amorosus semper est timorosus — and was always ready to launch into self-reproach. Should a change of stance do away with that saving diffidence?

The colour of pastiche given by the addition of a group of teaching sonnets to a rounded if limited sentimental experience, and the uneasy extension of the narrative line, can be verified in detail. The logic in Guittone's didactic celebration of courtly service, and its self-contained certainty, work against his attempt to make the lover-cum-poet also pass for teacher, because they work against that narrative coherence in which Guittone might have found a suitably versatile persona for his own voice. Just as the modern awareness in s. 5, lines 1–8, clashed with the more limited conceptual possibilities open to the courtly lover, so the feudal teaching in ss. 13–18 clashes with the events as already outlined in the previous poems. A few details will make this clear.

When in s. 13, lines 9–11, the lover-turned-teacher takes for granted the unfailing power of 'amore', 'servir' and so on, he forgets that according to s. 12 he was the scorned suppliant of ss. 5, 6, 7 and 8, and that at that stage in his story those virtues were of no avail:

Ch'eo l'ho servita a tutto 'l me podere . . .
E non mi val; und'eo tormento e doglio

[For I have served her to the limit of my powers . . . to no avail; this is why I suffer and grieve.]

The discretion and reserve he demands of a true servant in ss. 15, lines 5–6, and 17, lines 12–14, ought to have sounded inconsistent to Guittone after his clamorous appeals for mercy elsewhere (s. 2, lines 1–4, s. 8, lines 1–4, and especially s. 9, line 14, and s. 10, line 1) — inconsistent, that is, if he saw a natural continuity from lover to teacher in the same narrative cycle. Praise of the lady's initiative, in s. 18, lines 3–4, reads strangely after the lover's conscious application of 'umiltá' to break her 'orgoglio', in s. 10, lines 9–14. The quartine of s. 14, which not only repeat the classical equation between madonna's 'bellezza' and 'saggezza' but deride the man who desires a 'donna laida o vil', show just how unsentimental and non-courtly are the lines in s. 5 where the 'donna laida e cortese' stands as a reproach to the blindness brought on by the fin' amors pursuit of beauty at all costs.

One could object that it is futile to seek narrative cohesion in a teaching genre, yet the opening quartina of s. 13 makes it clear that Guittone was setting the narrative on precisely that new course:

Ho da la donna mia in comandamento,
ch'eo reconforti onni bon servidore,
ched è disconfortato ed ha tormento,
perché inver lui sua donna ha fero core

s. 13, 1–4
[I have been ordered by my lady to reassure every loyal lover who is troubled and suffers because his lady is hard-hearted towards him.]

The discrepancies in narrative consistency which I have touched on merely point to a more fundamental problem already outlined, namely of finding in a restricted number of stances or modes of delivery a convincing and sustained identity of voice with the first-person protagonist. Narrative, or at least the superficial linkage that gives an impression of continuity to thematically related single poems, which passes for narrative in Guittone's earliest sonnets, is difficult because the troubadour models which embody his inherited notions of lyric literature are occasional poems, each one separate and self-contained and, within certain ritual limits, capable of endless variation — 'un dramma che non conosce scioglimento'. The situations are given and defined by genre traditions. They are not open to change by Guittone's personal pragmatism, which only succeeds in opening a gap between author and persona whenever and however it enters a poem. The narrative shortcomings of the first cycle suggest that at the beginning of his 'prima maniera' Guittone was able to cope with only one variation of the sentimental range and that, once he had exhausted its possibilities, teaching was the only course left to him, in the absence of stylistic and lexical resources which had yet to find expression in the sonnets. The didactic and priestly role may be the reverse side of the devotee's experience in occasional lyrics, but it destroys a narrative illusion because it presumes a vantage point remote from the 'experience' which the narrative seeks to create — so remote that the confident maxims of courtly teaching contradict at every turn the restless and uncertain history of the lover this teacher is supposed to have been.

There is, however, another side to this group of teaching sonnets which is worth noting now for what follows. It is in germ an ars amandi and foreshadows the ars amandi proper which is probably Guittone's last extended experiment with the sonnet before the conversion poems. Although in these early 'insegnamenti' he does not invoke Andreas Capellanus, there are already signs of that male solidarity and self-satisfaction which characterize the later work, though as yet no cynical exploitation of female complicity. Here the lover's desire to teach is dictated by the lady and he shares his experience to comfort his peers, sufferers like himself. In the later ars amandi he will set himself up to enlighten the less well-informed as a self-appointed expert in theory and practice; and his protestations of modesty at the end of that treatise will serve to underline his academic grasp of the subject and his superiority over his pupils. The courtly teaching poems are, in turn, the forebears of those later sermons to ladies, such as c. xlix and ss. 151, 152, in which Guittone will demonstrate supreme confidence in the male prerogative to interpret another morality. The serene didacticism which marks his later work is not absent from his earliest poems, and
it is a sign of that seriousness and consistency which marks his whole production and makes up for the incidental mistakes and failures in his early narrative experiments.

THE SECOND NARRATIVE CYCLE, ss. 19–30

Clearly, Guittone was not satisfied with his first experiment; and it seems more significant that s. 19 resumes the first-person narrative stance discontinued since s. 12, than that the theme should change from ‘amore corrisposto’ to ‘lealtà in amore’. The change of motif and the resumption of inward discourse would seem to signify a fresh attack on the narrative problem. Guittone commits the persona once more to the harsh experience of fin’ amors, and once again he presents him as uncritical of the code and immersed in his monologue. However, s. 19 reveals a lover more critical of himself at that point than at any moment in the first cycle, and this calls for some comment. We saw that s. 12 drew the earlier sonnets into a ‘narrative’ of blame and praise, and I suggested that the lover-poet stance in that sonnet represented a middle stage of self-awareness in Guittone’s movement from monologue to teaching. Sonnet 12 was an embryonic phase in that self-criticism which, in the conversion manifestoes, fixes all the courtly poetry in its baleful stare. Compared with his self-reproach for verbal ‘dismisura’ in s. 12, the persona’s confession in s. 19 looks decidedly moral, and closer in spirit to that of the conversion poems:

Sí como ciascun omo, enfingitore
e, ora, maggiormente assai ch’amante
so stato ver di lei, di bieltá fiore;
e tanto giuto ei so dietro e davante
con prego e con mercé e con clamore,
facendo di perfetto amor sembiante,
che me promise loco en su’ dolzore
adesso che lei fusse benestante.

Eo, pensando la mia gran malvagia,
e la gran fede in lei dolce e pietosa,
sí piansi di pietá, per fede mia;
e fermai me di lei non prendar cosa
alcuna mai, senza mertarla pria,
avendo forte e ben l’alma amorosa. s. 19, 1–14

[Just as every man nowadays is much more a deceiver than a lover, so have I been towards her, the flower of beauty, and I so importuned her from every direction with clamorous entreaties and supplications, that she promised me a place in her affections as soon as she found herself well disposed. Reflecting on my deep deceit and on her unsuspecting trust, sweet and compassionate as she is, I wept tears of compunction, I swear it, and I resolved never to take anything from her without first deserving it by having a heart steadfastly and truly full of love.]
In this new beginning the lover brands as deceitful the ‘perfetto amor’ he displayed in the first cycle. This backward glance places the experience of ss. 1–18 as an earlier and more innocent phase and betrays a sense of the reality beneath courtly euphemism which was nowhere present in the first cycle. Now, no man is sincere when it comes to the hallowed language of praise and entreaty (lines 4–5). If this is an attack on the male abuse of the courtly code it is a remarkable confession considering that Guittone was only at the beginning of his disengagement from high fin’amors idealism; and it foreshadows the exploitation of female gullibility he will teach in the ars amandi sonnets. The change from complacent teaching (s. 18) back to first-person monologue, is achieved by an exaggerated self-reproach which now enables the lover to pursue fin’amors afresh, as if he were starting from scratch. Self-reproach is a potent marshalling element in Guittone’s narrative structures, as the conversion poems have shown. Sonnet 19 is to the first cycle what s. 12 is to the sonnets that precede it and what c. xxv will be to the entire body of courtly poetry. And s. 19 hints at a later and deeper identity between moral sensibility (the poet’s) and the persona’s ‘fatti d’amore’.

An outline of the movement in ss. 19–30 will show how in the second experiment Guittone stretched the limbs of his narrative out of their given, cramped position. After a fresh start, ss. 19, 20, which wins at once a token promise of reward, s. 20, lines 12–14, the lover drops into familiar hyperbole of self-dedication, s. 21. He seeks to enter Love’s service and ‘madonna’s’ favour as if for the first time, vaunting his chances against the failure of others in ss. 22, 23 and 24:

\[
\text{cioè l’amor, ch’ogni om ch’el signoria guaimenta e dice che per lui si more, e pur se pena di trovare via como de sé islocar possa lo core.}
\]

\[
\text{Ed eo pur peno di condurlo a mene e di venir de sua corte servente s. 24, 5–10}
\]

[that is, love; for every man whom it masters laments and says he is dying because of it, and does nothing but torment himself to find a way of removing his heart from its control. Yet I do nothing but try to draw it to myself and to become a retainer at its court.]

He then resigns himself to a failure, s. 24, lines 12–14, which at once reflects on his poetic worth:

\[
\text{Ben saccio de vertà che ’l meo trovare val poco, e ha ragion de men valere, poi ch’eo non posso in quel loco intrare ch’adorna l’om de gioia e de savere. s. 25, 1–4}
\]

[I am fully aware that my poetry is of little account and by rights should be worth even less, because I cannot enter that place which graces a man with joy and wisdom.]
As in s. 12, where the lover’s reflection on his role as poet signalled a staging point in the first experiment, so now the lover-poet draws away from the static and hopeless state outlined in his downward plunge from s. 19 to s. 24, and after one last stab at winning Love’s mercy (ss. 26–7), he moves outwards to a public appeal (ss. 28–30) in which the persona-poet is now unequivocally Guittone himself.60

The pattern of growth resembles that in the first cycle, but it would be rash without a closer look at the evidence to presume that Guittone’s answers and possible mistakes will be the same as before. Now, the initial degree of self-awareness is deeper; the situation is, if anything, more limited; the style is a little more varied; and the rounding off of the experiment more dramatic. However, we can expect the weak or uncertain spots to show up as discords of tone and logic, and we must fix our attention on those sensitive areas to build up the emerging picture of Guittone at grips with his early persona.

The knowing start might lead us to expect a new spirit of self-searching vis-à-vis ‘perfetto amore’, reflected throughout this short sequence. What do we find? ‘Madonna’s’ reported acceptance of the lover at the end of s. 20 obliges him to resume the correct postures of self-reproach and self-encouragement:

\[
\text{Ed ella disse me che 'n mia possanza} \\
\text{s'era si misa, che, s'ormai vetasse} \\
\text{lo meo piacer, li torneria 'n pesanza.} \\
\text{s. 20, 12–14}
\]

[But she replied that she had already committed herself to me and that if she were now to refuse my wishes it would weigh heavily on her.]

\[
\text{Ma tuttavia l'amor quasi è neente} \\
\text{ver quel ch'eo so ch'ad amare convene,} \\
\text{che prendere e donar vol giustamente.} \\
\text{Ma, como in ferro piú che 'n cera tene} \\
\text{e val entaglia, varrá similmente} \\
\text{amor, ch'è 'n me piú che 'n altro servene.} \\
\text{s. 21, 9–14}
\]

[Nevertheless my love is almost nothing compared with what I acknowledge to be necessary for a love that wishes to take and give merely what belongs to it by right. Yet, just as an incision is more lasting in metal than in wax, so will that love be, which is more sincere in me than in others.]

When he does recall the less sentimental behaviour of other men, in the terzine of s. 22,61 he rejects their worldly wisdom for a waiting game which is in line with his desire in s. 19 to wipe the slate clean — though it does smack of the male complacency of ss. 14–18. So far so good. But in the next three sonnets one senses that by deliberately trying to bypass the common harsh experience and by turning his persona head-on to the most demanding ideals of love service, Guittone lost sight of that male resourcefulness and its implied degree of sophistication which had been his starting point and term of reference.62
che m'è dolor mortal vedere amare
piacent'omo talor donna non bella,
e non amerá lui, ma le dispare;
e trovo me che non guari amo quella
che m'ama forte e che piacente pare
in tutte cose ove bieltá s'apella.

[for it pains me deeply to see a handsome man love a plain woman, as sometimes happens, and her not love him but, rather, dislike him; whereas, I find that I simply cannot love the one who loves me passionately and is so gracious wherever beauty is invoked.]

Ahi Deo, chi vidde mai tal malatia
di quella che sorpreso hame lo core?
ché la cosa ch'altruipar venen sia
è sola medicina al meo dolore

[Ah God, whoever saw a sickness like the one that has overtaken my heart? Yet the only cure for my pains is that which to others seems poison.]

What began as the persona’s experience coloured by Guittone’s moral sensibility, becomes a struggle to master the traditional literary experience of suffering in love. The initial subtlety of self-perception, which marked the second experiment as an advance over the first, founders in a trough of conventional despair.

The terzine of s. 23 bring to mind ss. 5 and 14. His attitude to the lady is predictably closer to that of s. 14, lines 3–4⁸ though in line with the governing sentiment of self-reproach, lines 12–13, which now puts on the lover all the onus for not loving. The ‘mortal suffering’ he feels comes from an exalted male fidelity to the moral code imposed by fin’amors. A man can love an ugly woman if she reveals noble inner attributes. Here she is apparently more mindful of the code than he is, for she loves him in spite of his ugliness presumably because she recognizes his virtue. Guittone’s instinctive trust in the ideal of female superiority reasserts itself in the terzine, which presume a relationship not based on physical attraction. He could have incorporated the insight of s. 5, lines 5–7, into s. 23, lines 9–14, had he retained the more realistic sympathy for women which s. 19 implies. In his will to embrace what is harmful to others (s. 24), other men (lines 5–8) are once more the playthings of love, and not the knowing manipulators they had been in ss. 19, line 3, and s. 22, lines 9–11. By s. 24 the narrative torment of not loving is deadlocked in a dilemma where Guittone plays the persona’s hopeless aspirations against the common experience of frustration. The doggedly ‘provenzaleggianté’ diction in ss. 21–3 (the ideal as narrative reflected in the most archaic style) is offset by a heavy use of adversative particles (the narrative caught in hopeless alternatives). But the line of growth returns in s. 25 — just as it did in s. 12 — when the lover reflects on the worth of his poetry. Yet now there is this difference that where, in ss. 13–18, Guittone broke his narrative deadlock by lifting the lover on to a podium,
in ss. 25–30 he invokes the public context of genuine literary correspondence, which gives biographical and hence narrative credence to his exchange with Bandino:

Ben saccio de vertà che 'l meo trovare
val poco, e ha ragion de men valere,
poi ch'eo non posso in quel loco intrare
ch'adorna l'om de gioia e de savere . . .
per ch'eo rechiamo e chero lo savere
di ciascun om ch'é prode e canoscente
a l'aiuto del meo grandeSpiacere.

[I am fully aware that my poetry is of little account and by rights should be worthless, because I cannot enter that place which graces a man with joy and wisdom . . . For this reason I beg and implore the advice of whoever is upright and wise, to help me in my great affliction.]

The poet’s call to all worthy men, ‘ciascun om’, seems to contradict the opening lines of s. 19. There, men in love had been deceivers and manipulators of the code; yet by s. 24 they are at the mercy of an irresistible force. In s. 22, lines 9–11 other men are carpe diem cynics who scoff at his naivety; now, in s. 25, there are trustworthy counsellors at hand who may show him how to enter that place ‘ch'adorna l'om de gioia e de savere’. The banal sentiments in s. 25, which I would see as an attempt by Guittone to compensate for narrative break-down, are marked by a particularly heavy use of the make-weight, repetitive style. It is a kind of verbal relapse after the all-out effort in s. 27, where the lover’s subtle striving is reflected in the awkward syntax and rare end-rhyme, and which, together with s. 26, logically precedes s. 25:

ma quant’eo più recheo, lor men pare
ch'eo presso sia di voi trovar merce,
e veggio vo a fedel desiderare
tal, che non vol, e che v'odia e descree.
Donque deritto n’ho, s’eo meraviglio,
che voglio e deggio e posso esser servente
e, com’eo sia, m'ingegno e m'asottiglio;
e tutto ciò non vale a me neente.

[but the more I beseech you the further I seem to be from finding compassion in you, and I see that the kind of servant you want is someone who won’t long for you, but rather, will despise and mistrust you. Therefore my bewildement is justified, for I long to serve you — I must and I can — and in spite of my shortcomings I rack my brains to find a way; yet none of this gets me anywhere.]

This slight change of order better serves a steady movement outwards, from s. 25, lines 12–14, to s. 28, lines 1–2, and accentuates the shock effect of the proper name after the vague ‘ciascun om’ of s. 25, line 13. The deadlocked lover-poet of s. 25 is now Guittone himself. It is clear from the exact summary of the earlier
dilemma (ss. 21–4, 26–7) in s. 28, and his desire there to avoid the common dire experience, that Guittone saw the exchange of sonnets as an integral part of the second narrative cycle:

Mastro Bandino amico, el meo preghero
vòi ch'entendiate si ch'a onor vo sia.
Amare voglio e facemi mistero,
che non son degno, e'n gran ben n'avverria,
ché, senza ciò, aver onor no spero;
e pur d'ennamorar no ho bailia.
Unde sovente vivonde in pensero,
ché meraviglia sembrame che sia,
vedendo manti stanno innamorati,
ši che tutt'altro poneno in obbra,
en tale loco, u 'son sempre isdegnati.
Però vo prego m'assenniate via,
ch'a ciô mi guidi, a guisa de li amati,
ché credo bene aggiatene bailia. s. 28, 1–14

[Mastro Bandino, my friend, I want you to answer my plea in such a way as will do you credit. I desire and need to love someone of whom I am not worthy, but I'd achieve much good if I could, for without that love I have no hope of winning honour; yet I am unable to make her fall in love with me, and for this reason I am often distressed. For it seems to me incredible when I see many other men loving, to the exclusion of everything else, women who constantly spurn them. Therefore I beg you to show me the way that will lead me to become like those who are loved, for I am sure that this lies in your power.]

My earlier remarks about levels of self-consciousness point to certain conclusions one can draw from the last three sonnets in the second cycle. I would argue that if Guittone introduces a real correspondence at this point and relates it to the emotional problem explored in the preceding sonnets, he does so to give an illusion of biography to those earlier sonnets. The persona's anguish must be real and must be Guittone's, because now, in his own name, he seeks solace for it from another living poet. The primacy of narrative content, and Guittone's attempt to enter the person of his protagonist, affect the quality of the closing exchange itself, deleting some of the customary formalities and making the letters more lifelike. Guittone's reply (s. 30), is not 'per le rime', and his captatio benevolentiae in both sonnets is held to an absolute minimum, both features highlighting the message at the expense of the form. In the last poem of the cycle Guittone folds the real exchange of sonnet-letters back into the persona's story when he makes Bandino's counsel of restraint and secrecy, s. 29, lines 9–14, look like an actual acceptance, by the lady, of the persona's pleas:

Ormai sta solo e in loco celato,
e sol bellezza pensa e canoscenza
de la tua donna, ed altro non pensare.
D’amor ragiona, se se’ accompagnato;  
a le ’tu, o’ sta’ con ella, gioi né ’ntenza  
tutto cela: si porai amare. s. 29, 9-14
[For the meantime avoid company and conceal yourself, and fix your mind  
on your lady’s beauty and wisdom, to the exclusion of other thoughts. If  
you find yourself in company speak about love; but if you should be with  
her, hide your joy and love from her completely: this is how you will achieve  
love.]

Mastro Bandino, vostr’e d’Amor mercede,  
or aggiò ciò che tant’ho disiato,  
si che lo core meo non se crede  
esser de gioia mai apareggiato,  
pensando quanto è ’n lui d’Amor fede,  
e quanto è preso el suo servire in grato,  
e qual è quella donna en cui el crede,  
e com’ha pregio ’l suo ben acquistato s. 30, 1-8
[Mastro Bandino, thanks to you and to Love I now have what I so longed  
for, and my heart cannot believe that its joy was ever equalled when I con-  
sider how my heart now trusts Love and how its service has been so gladly  
received, and the quality of that lady it is devoted to, and how valuable is the  
good that it has gained.]

What was sought as advice in s. 28 becomes a way out of the impasse in ss. 21-7  
and the lover, now as Guittone himself, can at last return that devotion which  
the lady admitted in s. 20, lines 12–14.

It will be seen that Guittone handled his second cycle with more originality  
and expertise than the first. The opening stance is less naive and he breaks the  
stock dilemma by an attempt to realize and appropriate, in the public terms of a  
genuine literary correspondence, his persona’s ‘fatti d’amore’. The sentimental  
range is as restricted as before and merely reverses, in a different balance of  
sonnet numbers, the change from ‘dolor’ to ‘gioia’; but the authorial entries are  
more pronounced and the central static phase looks like a desperate bid to hold  
on to pure fin’ amors in the face of creeping cynicism and overt authorial  
control.

I have noted that both experiments are centred on the stance of the persona  
as a point of assimilation for Guittone himself. By consciously modulating the  
interaction of persona and poet with thematic content, Guittone seems to draw  
the anonymous persona of courtly lyric into his own person, and turns the  
static and isolated moments of troubadour poetry into simple, biographical  
narrative. He seems more confident in the second cycle, which is less jerky than  
the first in linear movement and quite unabashed in Guittone’s final claim to  
biographical identity with the narrative ‘I’. Yet both cycles betray conflicts  
between the poet and his literary inheritance which the narrative fails to resolve;  
conflicts which break out when the story-line changes direction or intensity  
and when the biographical claim is explicit. It also seems clear that Guittone’s
handling of fin' amors argument or teaching can provoke serious, if unwitting, authorial criticism of the fin' amors code, particularly of the erotic idealisation of the lady.

As experiments the cycles reveal two opposing tendencies in the early stages of Guittone's 'prima maniera'. On the one hand there is a growing detachment from primitive courtly idealism and an increasing awareness of later exploitation of the code. This amounts to the glimmering of an historical perspective of courtly lyric, and is a foretaste of his subsequent disenchantment with the amoral presumptions in that tradition. On the other hand there are germinal signs of an improving technical skill and a greater expressiveness in the 'provenzaleggianente' style, which follows Guittone's more confident self-projection as the persona of his sonnets. It is this latter development which will lead him to a more testing and extended experiment, more complex in its range of ideas, language and style than anything attempted so far. If Guittone switches to a bravura display of replicatio in s. 31, he is justified in narrative terms because as author he has just proved his identity with the lover-poet in the most unequivocal fashion. In this way the third cycle follows the second, with the authorial self-consciousness now translated directly into the verbal texture of the poetry. By the same token the dominant word play at the outset of the third cycle gives it the look of a literary programme rather than a narrative of events—a celebration not of 'madonna' nor of love for her but of the incantatory power of 'gioia' and 'noia' to express two contrasting states of soul. We shall see in the next chapter how Guittone proceeded from that dazzling incipit and with what success he conducted his most ambitious narrative experiment.