

## A Hell of a City: Dante's Inferno on the Road to Rome

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### DANTE'S WORKS

#### Rime (Rhymes):

D.'s lyrical poems, consisting of sonnets, *canzoni*, *ballate*, and *sestine*, written between 1283 [?] and 1308 [?]. A large proportion of these belong to the *Vita Nuova*, and a few to the *Convivio*; the rest appear to be independent pieces, though the *rime petrose* (or "stony poems," *Rime c-ciii*), so called from the frequent recurrence in them of the word *pietra*, form a special group, as does the six sonnet *tenzone* with Forese Donati: <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/rime.html> (Testo critico della Societa' Dantesca Italiana; Florence: Societa' Dantesca Italiana, 1960. Edited by Michele Barbi. Translated by K. Foster and P. Boyde.)

#### Vita nova (The New Life):

Thirty-one of Dante's lyrics surrounded by an unprecedented self-commentary forming a narrative of his love for Beatrice (1293?). D.'s *New Life*, i.e. according to some his 'young life', but more probably his 'life made new' by his love for Beatrice. The work is written in Italian, partly in prose partly in verse (prosimetron), the prose text being a vehicle for the introduction, the narrative of his love story, and the interpretation of the poems. The work features 25 sonnets (of which 2 are irregular), 5 *canzoni* (2 of which are imperfect), and 1 *ballata*: <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/vnuova.html> (Testo critico della Societa' Dantesca Italiana; Florence: Societa' Dantesca Italiana, 1960. Edited by Michele Barbi. Translated by Mark Musa.)

In the *Vita Nuova*, which is addressed to his 'first friend', Guido Cavalcanti, D. relates the story of his love for Beatrice, whom he first saw when he was nine years old; when he was 18 (i.e. in 1283) he received a greeting from her, after which he had a vision, whereon he composed his earliest known poetical composition, a sonnet. Later he records the death of Beatrice, and his own grief, and how after a time he received consolation from a young and beautiful lady, (whom in the *Convivio* [the Banquet] he will declare to be philosophy). But in the final chapters he returns to his love for Beatrice and concludes with the resolve, should he live, to say of Beatrice what was never said of any woman, something he will accomplish in the *Commedia*.

#### 1302: EXILE

#### Convivio (The Banquet):

**Unfinished** treatise in Italian, written in verse and prose, consisting of a philosophical commentary (not completed) on three of his *canzoni*, ca. 1303-1306/7. The *Convivio* was originally intended to be a commentary on fourteen of Dante's *canzoni*. This unfinished work consists of four books: a prefatory one, plus three books that each include a *canzone* and a prose allegorical interpretation or commentary of the poem that goes off in multiple thematic directions. The *Convivio* is a kind of vernacular encyclopedia of the knowledge of Dante's time; it touches on many areas of learning, not only philosophy but also politics, linguistics, science (cosmology), and history. The treatise begins with the prefatory book, or proem, which explains why a book like the *Convivio* is needed and why Dante is writing it in the vernacular instead of Latin: <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/convivio.html> (Edizione Nazionale

[Florence: Le Lettere, 1995]. Edited by Franca Brambilla Ageno. Translated by Richard Lansing; also by Anthony Frisardi.)

### **De vulgari eloquentia (On Vernacular Eloquence):**

**Unfinished** treatise on and defense of the use of the Italian vernacular in poems in the high or 'tragic' style, written in Latin. It features a linguistic history of humanity since creation, an examination of the fourteen dialects of Italy, and a consideration of the metre of the *canzone*, the latter portion of the work forming a fragmentary 'art of poetry.' The work was originally planned to consist of at least four books. In its unfinished state it consists of only two books; the first, which is introductory, is divided into nineteen chapters, the second, into fourteen, the last of which is incomplete, the work breaking off abruptly in the middle of the inquiry as to the structure of the stanza:

<http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/vulgari.html> (Testo critico della Società Dantesca Italiana; Florence: Società Dantesca Italiana, 1960. Edited by Pio Rajna. Translated by Steven Botterill.)

### **Commedia:**

Dates of composition: 1307/8-1321; *Inferno*, 1309(?); *Purgatorio*, 1313-14 (?); *Paradiso*, 1314-1321: D. places the date of the action of the poem in the Jubilee year 1300. Comedy is title given by D. to his poem: *Inf.* 16.128; *Inf.* 21.2. The form of the poem is triple, the three divisions corresponding with the three realms of the next world, Hell, Purgatory, Paradise. Each division or canticle (*cantica*) contains thirty-three cantos (with an introductory one to the first canticle). The opening canto of the *Inferno* forms an introduction to the whole poem, which thus contains 100 cantos, the square of the perfect number ten. These contain in all 14,233 hendecasyllables of "terza rima" (aba/bcb/cdc/ded/efe...[xyxy]): 4,720 verses in the *Inferno*; 4,755 in the *Purgatorio*; 4,758 in the *Paradiso*. The average length of each canto is 142.33 lines: <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/> (The English translation of the *Comedy* used on the Princeton Dante project is a new translation by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander. *Inferno* was published by Doubleday/Anchor in 2000, *Purgatorio* in 2003; *Paradiso* in 2007.)

### **Monarchia:**

Political treatise written in Latin prose on the relations between Church and Empire, probably written fairly late in Dante's career (1317?). D.'s treatise is a plea for the necessity of a universal temporal monarchy coexistent with the spiritual sovereignty of the pope. The work is divided into three books. In the first, D. treats of the necessity of monarchy; in the second, he discusses the question of how far the Roman people were justified in assuming the functions of monarchy, or the imperial power; in the third, he inquires to what extent the function of the monarchy, i.e. the Empire, depends immediately upon God: <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/monarchia.html> (Edizione Nazionale; Florence: Società Dantesca Italiana, 1965. Edited by Pier Giorgio Ricci. Translated by Prue Shaw.)

### **Epistole (Letters):**

Thirteen letters, written between 1304 and 1319, including a series in connection with the descent of the Emperor Henry VII of Luxembourg (v.-xii), have survived:

Epist. i. To Niccolò Albertini da Prato, Cardinal of Ostia, written after July 1304; Epist. ii. To Oberto and Guido, counts of Romena, nephews of Alessandro da Romena, written c. 1304; Epist. iii. To a Pistoian exile, written c. 1308; Epist. iv. To the Marquis Moroello Malaspina, written c. 1307; **Epist. v. To the princes and peoples of Italy, on the coming of the Emperor Henry VII, written in 1310; Epist. vi. To the people of Florence; Epist. vii. To the Emperor Henry VII; Epist. xi. To the Italian cardinals in**

**conclave at Carpentras after the death of Clement V, written after April 20 and before July 14, 1314; Epist. xii. To a Florentine friend, written in 1316; Epist. xiii. To Can Grande della Scala of Verona;** this letter, which forms a sort of introduction to the interpretation of the *Comedy*.

The authenticity of the last continues to be disputed (Epistle to Cangrande):

<http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/epistolae.html> (Testo critico della Societa' Dantesca Italiana; Florence: Societa' Dantesca Italiana, 1960. Edited by Ermenegildo Pistelli. Translated by Paget Toynbee.)

### **Questio de aqua et terra (Question of the water and the land):**

Lecture given by Dante in Verona on the relative levels of land and water on the surface of the globe.

The work, which is very brief, consists of twenty-four short chapters, and claims to be a report written by D.'s own hand of a public disputation held by him at Verona on Sunday, Jan. 20, 1320, wherein he determined the question, which had previously been propounded in his presence at Mantua, in favor of the theory that the surface of the earth is higher than that of the water due to God's providence (first cause) and the influence of the stars of the eighth heaven (effective cause):

<http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/questio.html> (Testo critico della Società Dantesca Italiana; Florence: Società Dantesca Italiana, 1960. Edited by Ermenegildo Pistelli. Translated by Philip Wicksteed.)

### **Egloghe (Eclogues):**

A four-composition exchange of Latin poems between Giovanni del Virgilio and Dante, ca. 1320. In 1318, Giovanni, a professor at the University of Bologna (styled 'Joannes de Virgilio' from his imitations of Virgil), addressed to D. a Latin poem in which he urges him to stop "casting pearls to swine" in the vernacular and to write poetic compositions in Latin. D. replied in a Latin eclogue, in which he himself figures under the name of Tityrus, Giovanni under that of Mopsus, and a friend (said to be Dino Perini) under that of Meliboeus (names borrowed from Virgil's *Eclogues*). Giovanni sent an eclogue in response, inviting D. to Bologna, to which D. replied in a second eclogue, written between Sept. 1319 and Sept. 1321, declining the invitation: <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/egloghe.html> (Testo critico della Societa' Dantesca Italiana; Florence: Societa' Dantesca Italiana, 1960. Edited by Ermenegildo Pistelli. Translated by Ph. Wicksteed & E.G. Gardner.

### **Il Fiore and Detto d'amore (attributable to Dante, c. late 1280s):**

"Il Fiore" is a late-13th century narrative poem in 232 sonnets based on the Old French "Roman de la Rose"; the "Detto d'Amore" is a free-wheeling version of many Ovidian precepts of love in 240 rhymed couplets. The elaborate allegory of the "Fiore" presents the complex workings of love, understood primarily as carnal passion, in the human psyche through the use of personifications of a wide array of characters who engage in various social (and bellic) interactions. The "Detto d'Amore" includes features of the perennial controversy between proponents of the pleasures of erotic passion and those who counsel pursuit of the sublime joys found solely in the exercise of reason. The importance of these two works lies in part on their possible attribution to the great Florentine poet Dante Alighieri: **Il Fiore:**

<http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/fiore.html> (Edited by Gianfranco Contini. Translated by S. Casciani & C. Kleinhenz.); **Detto d'Amore:** <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/detto.html> (Milan: Mondadori, 1984. Edited by Gianfranco Contini. Translated by S. Casciani & C. Kleinhenz.)

## Glossary

**Ballata:** In scholarly discourse since the 18th c., across the disciplines of lang. and lit., musicology, and folklore, a ballad is a narrative song set to a rounded—i.e., stanzaic—tune or a literary poem modeled on such songs. This stanzaic structure distinguishes the ballad from the sung traditional epic (a longer narrative set to a chantlike, nonstanzaic tune).

**Canzone:** In *De vulgari eloquentia (On Vernacular Eloquence)*, Dante defines the *canzone* as the most excellent It. verse form, the one that is the worthy vehicle for those “tragic” compositions that treat the three noblest subjects: martial valor, love, and moral virtue. Noting the intimate link between poetry and music (the term *canzone* comes from *cantio*, a song), Dante remarks that “although all that we put in verse is a ‘song’ [cantio], only *canzoni* have been given this name” (2.3.4).

**Eclogue:** The Virgilian example [Virgil’s *Bucolics (or Eclogues)*], focused *eclogue* to mean short dialogue or monologue with more or less oblique allegory of politics, erotics, and poetics, all presented in dramatic form (enabling their early and recurrent theatrical success) as speech by herdsmen (*pastores*), from which later came the name pastoral for a genre featuring shepherds.

**Hendecasyllable:** A line of 11 syllables, the hendecasyllable is significant in both the quantitative verse of Gr. and Lat. and in the accentual and syllabic prosodies of the mod. Romance langs.... Dante defined the hendecasyllable as the most noble line of Italian prosody, the one most suitable for the highest forms of poetic expression in the vernacular and, as such, the preferred line for the *canzone*, the most illustrious of lyric forms....

**Sestina:** The most complicated of the verse forms initiated by the troubadours, the *sestina* is composed of six stanzas of six lines each, followed by an envoi of three lines, all of which are unrhymed, and all decasyllabic (Eng.), hendecasyllabic (It.), or alexandrine (Fr.). The same six end words occur in each stanza, but in a shifting order that follows a fixed pattern: each successive stanza takes its pattern from a reversed (bottom-up) pairing of the lines of the preceding stanza (i.e., last and first, then next to last and second, then third from last and third).

**Sonnet:** (from It. *sonetto*, “a little sound or song”). A 14-line line poem normally in hendecasyllables (It.), iambic pentameter (Eng.), or alexandrines (Fr.), whose rhyme scheme varies despite the assumption that the sonnet form is fixed. The three most widely recognized versions of the sonnet, with their traditional rhyme schemes, are the It. or Petrarchan (octave: *abbaabba*; sestet: *cdecde* or *cdcdcd*) or a similar combination that avoids the closing couplet), the Spenserian (*ababbcbccdcdee*), and the Eng. or Shakespearean (*ababcdcdefefgg*).

**Tenzone:** A type of poetic composition that matured in Provence early in the 12th c., *tenso* consists of a verbal exchange largely in the form of invective expressed through the medium of *sirventes* or *coblas*.... In Italy, however, a *tenso (tenzone)* generally assumes the form of an exchange of sonnets between two (or more) poets on a specific topic. One general characteristic of the *tenzone* is the practice of responding *per le rime*, i.e., in the answering sonnet the poet would adopt the same rhymes used in the initial sonnet.

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