



Dante in Love: The World's Greatest Poem and How It Made History

Harriet Rubin

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Dante in Love is the story of the most famous journey in literature. Dante Alighieri, exiled from his home in Florence, a fugitive from justice, followed a road in 1302 that took him first to the labyrinths of hell then up the healing mountain of purgatory, and finally to paradise. He found a vision and a language that made him immortal.

Author Harriet Rubin follows Dante's path along the old Jubilee routes that linked monasteries and all roads to Rome. It is a path followed by generations of seekers -- from T. S. Eliot, Sigmund Freud, Primo Levi, to Bruce Springsteen. After the poet fled Rome for Siena he walked along the upper Arno, past La Verna, to Bibiena, to Cesena, and to the Po plain.

During his nineteen-year journey Dante wrote his "unfathomable heart song," as Thomas Carlyle called *The Divine Comedy*, a poem that explores the three states of the psyche. Eliot, a lifelong student of the Comedy, said, "Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them, there is no third."

Dante in Love tells the story of the High Middle Ages, a time during which the artist Giotto was the first to paint the sky blue, Francis of Assisi discovered knowledge in humility and the great doctors of the church mapped the soul and stood back to admire their cathedrals. Dante's medieval world gave birth to the foundation of modern art, faith and commerce.

Dante and his fellow artists were trying to decode God's art and in so doing unravel the double helix of creativity. We meet the painters, church builders and pilgrims from Florence to Rome to Venice and Verona who made the roads the center of the medieval world. Following Dante's route, we are inspired to undertake journeys of discovering ourselves.

In the vein of *Brunelleschi's Dome*, *Galileo's Daughter* and *Wittgenstein's Poker*, *Dante in Love* is a worldly and spiritual travelogue of the poet's travels and the journey of creativity that produced the greatest poem ever written.

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