



The New Life

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Places Discussed

*Florence. North-central Italian city that in Dante's day was a medieval walled fortress enclosing about thirty thousand people, making for little privacy. Everyone would have known everyone else's business in Dante's Florence. Thus, the image of Dante at nine, and later at eighteen, being struck motionless and speechless by the sight of a beautiful girl on the streets of the city is not only effective emotionally but also plausible literally. The loci of Dante's sightings of Beatrice are never made specific. Even a scene obviously set in a church is described only as a place in which people are praying to the Virgin Mary. Dante's response to his glimpses of Beatrice always involves a change of place: He goes to his room, he is obliged to travel to another city, he finds a solitary place, or he walks down a path by a clear stream. Yet his focus always comes back to the streets of Florence, not because Florence is his home, but because it is Beatrice's.

Bibliography:

Foster, Kenelm, and Patrick Boyde, eds. and trans. *Dante's Lyric Poetry*, by Dante Alighieri. 2 vols. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1967. Includes the poems (but not the prose) of *The New Life*, accurate English prose translations, and extensive commentary on grammatical, syntactical, thematic, and philosophical points in the poems.

Harrison, Robert Pogue. *The Body of Beatrice*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. Interprets *The New Life* without recourse to the narrative glosses and interpretive guidelines that Dante embedded in the prose portions of his work. Rejects Charles Singleton's theologized reading of *The New Life* for an approach focusing on the tensions inherent in the mixture of poetry and prose that constitutes Dante's work.

Mazzaro, Jerome. *The Figure of Dante: An Essay on the "Vita Nuova."* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981. Studies not so much the literary content of *The New Life* as the degree to which Dante's poetry and prose reflect the poet's self-image and the changing society for which he wrote.

Musa, Mark, trans. *Vita Nuova*, by Dante Alighieri. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973. Excellent translation. Musa's essay traces themes and patterns in *The New Life*. Discusses Dante's various roles in the work: narrator, editor, protagonist.

Singleton, Charles S. *An Essay on the "Vita Nuova."* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977. The most influential American study of *The New Life* written in the twentieth century. Interprets Dante's work allegorically and as a prelude to his masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*.

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