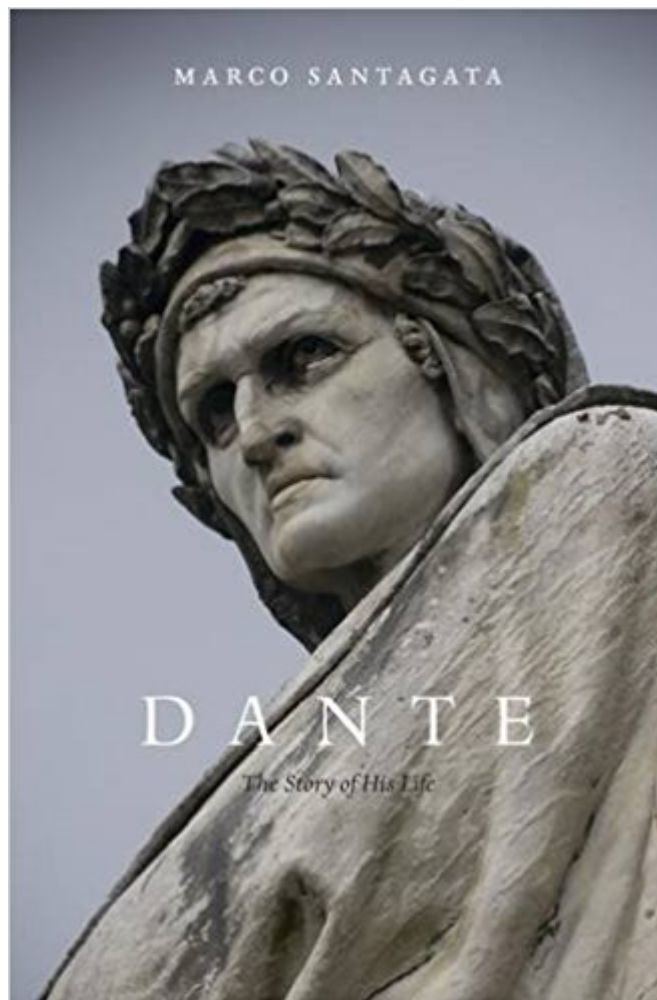


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# Dante: The Story Of His Life



## Synopsis

Marco Santagata's *Dante: The Story of His Life* illuminates one of the world's supreme poets from many angles—writer, philosopher, father, courtier, political partisan. Santagata brings together a vast body of Italian scholarship on Dante's medieval world, untangles a complex web of family and political relationships for English readers, and shows how the composition of the *Commedia* was influenced by local and regional politics. Santagata traces Dante's attempts to establish himself in Florentine society as a man of both letters and action. He raises the intriguing possibility that Dante translated an illness, thought by some to be epilepsy, into an intensely physical phenomenology of love in the *Vita Nova*. Most importantly, Santagata highlights Dante's constant need to readjust his political stance—his involvement with the pro-Papacy Guelph faction as well as his network of patrons—in response to unfolding events. Linking these shifts to the changing ethical and political convictions expressed in the *Commedia*, Santagata reveals the paradoxical achievement of Dante's masterpiece: a unified, universal poem nonetheless intimately entwined with the day-to-day dealings of its author. The most striking facet of Dante's personality was a belief in his unique destiny. In every aspect of his life—his birth under the sign of Gemini, falling in love with Beatrice, banishment from Florence—Dante glimpsed the shadow of his fate. This idea, cultivated by the poet in his youth, grew into the conviction that God had invested him with the prophetic mission of saving humanity.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Definitely recommended, it will make my best non-fiction of the year list for sure. (Tyler Cowen Marginal Revolution 2016-03-26) To the ranks of the best popular biographies of the great Florentine poet Dante Alighieri is added Marco Santagata's Dante. [Santagata] tells it with a fiercely learned calm and energy throughout. As with all first-rate author biographies, the book will propel readers straight back to Dante's own works, which is right where they should end up in any case. (Steve Donoghue Open Letters Monthly 2016-04-03) Full of useful information and explanations of a very complicated time, well worth reading for its bold claims and wealth of historical evidence, this book constructs a novel, strong reading of Dante as political actor. (Alison Cornish, University of Michigan) Both specialized readers and the general public will benefit from this account of Dante Alighieri's life as a man of letters and of political action. A welcome addition to the catalogue of intellectual biographies of Dante available in English. (Simone Marchesi, Princeton University) A superb intellectual biography of Dante. (Ian Thomson The Tablet 2016-05-05) This sumptuous volume by Marco Santagata offers the reader a richly documented and often gripping account of the development, peregrinations, and shifting fortunes of the celebrated poet Durante (Dante) Alighieri. (Diana Glenn Australian Book Review 2016-05-01) Santagata does a thorough and highly engaging job of bringing politics and social pressures of 13th-century Florence to the page in this very readable biography that doesn't scrimp on scholarly research. Even more fascinating is the way the author reveals Dante's intense interest in political systems, philosophy, and in the makeup of the universe, all shown to be at the very heart of the imposing poetic figure. (Herman Sutter Library Journal (starred review) 2016-04-15) Santagata has written a book that any reader interested in Dante will find absorbing, richly informative and very thought-provoking. With their well-known fondness for literary biography, [English readers] will surely be grateful for this bold, vigorous and invigorating account of Dante's life and times. (Prue Shaw Times Higher Education 2016-05-12) It is lively and a pleasure to read. (Simon West The Australian 2016-05-07) This substantial work incorporates all the most recent Dantean scholarship. There is much to chew upon, since Dante lived at the very center of his city's political life. Santagata, thoroughly steeped in the politics and genealogies of the period, gives the best account I have ever read of Dante in his historical context. You will never read an account clearer than Santagata's. Nor will you read a more convincing description of how Dante changed his mind, quite fundamentally, about the political issues which confronted him (Pope vs Emperor) and the deep religious questions which underpin his work. This is a wonderful book. Even if you have not read Dante you will be gripped by its account of one of the most extraordinary figures in the history of literature, and one of the most dramatic periods of European history. If you are a Dantean, it will be your invaluable companion

forever. (A. N. Wilson *The Spectator* 2016-05-21) Reading Marco Santagata's fascinating new biography, the reader is soon forced to acknowledge that one of the cornerstones of Western literature [The Divine Comedy], a poem considered sublime and universal, is the product of vicious factionalism and packed with local scandal. It's the biography's evocation of the factional world of the time and the values sustaining it that throws light on the great poem and helps us to read it with fresh awareness. Elegantly translated by Richard Dixon, Santagata's biography avoids the quarrels among critics that sometimes dominate Dante studies. (Tim Parks *London Review of Books* 2016-07-14) Santagata has written an impressive new biography that takes into consideration every bit of reliable and semireliable information available to us about Dante's life, from his birth in Florence in 1265 to his death in Ravenna in 1321. If you are looking for the most thorough, factually based account of Dante's life and times to date, Santagata is your man. (Robert Pogue Harrison *New York Review of Books* 2016-10-27) Santagata not only constructs an impressively detailed account of Dante's actual life but uses that account to interpret and make sense of the Comedy. The result is a remarkably innovative probing of his life and work. (Peter Hainsworth *Times Literary Supplement* 2016-10-14) This biography will be most useful and enjoyable to those who already have a familiarity with the Comedy and want a more nuanced view of its place in Italian history. Santagata's book is a catalogue of contingencies, which will both introduce the reader to the political situation of the Italian peninsula in Dante's time and show how that context assists us in reading the poem. (Kyle Skinner *New Criterion* 2016-09-01) Marco Santagata's *Dante: The Story of His Life* deconstructs the great poet with humor, aplomb and deep learning. I have never read any book which makes such complete sense of the vital continuum between Dante the man, and the projected self of the *Convivio*, *Vita Nuova* and *Commedia*. There is much humor in Santagata's exposure of the violent contradictions in Dante's character, all set against the background of his times. If you have a tendency to muddle Guelfs and Ghibellines, look no further than this lucid book. (A. N. Wilson *Times Literary Supplement* 2016-11-23)

Marco Santagata is Professor of Italian Literature at the University of Pisa.

This outstanding book, originally published in Italy in 2012, English translation published in the U.S. in 2016 by Harvard, represents an outstanding synthesis of available source materials about Dante and his life and times. It is a wealth of intelligent discussion and presented in a highly readable translation that will be of benefit both to Dante specialists and general readers. I have not noticed any of the alleged errors mentioned in the one negative review, which I think is inaccurate at

best. Santagata is an accomplished, prolific and popular Dante scholar. Of course it is not easy to present the kind of conventional narrative biography to which many readers are accustomed, simply because there is relatively little material on which to predicate such a narrative. Dante lived more than 700 years ago, after all. Nevertheless, this book is exceptionally well-researched and insightful. That is saying a lot, as the sheer quantity of Dante scholarship, which exists in many languages and collections, is truly daunting. The inferences the author draws from available information are eminently reasonable: he does not indulge in unwarranted speculation or invent conversations as some biographers do even in cases where source material is abundant. He also presents various inferences, including those propounded by other scholars, to provide perspective and locate his approach among the competition. I also found that if there was some minor skipping about from the strictly chronological, it was obvious from the context and the language itself what was going on. The idea that a biography must plod slavishly along in a strictly chronological fashion without regard for such matters as context or background, elucidation or illustration, is simply silly. The one-star review is palpably unreasonable and unfair. Among the most prominent features of this study is that it demonstrates how closely Dante reflected the events of his life in what he was writing at the time. As an exile with no steady income, he was constantly looking for ways to support himself while also seeking opportunities to influence public affairs and fulfill his artistic and intellectual ambitions. Given the volatile circumstances of life in Italy during those times, he faced constant challenges in meeting these objectives. Santagata offers rich insights into the context that informed Dante's writings. He is not giving us a conventional introduction to Dante's writings. Santagata and others have dealt elsewhere with those. The Italian version of this book, which I also have, has some additional materials and is formatted differently from the English version but I understand Santagata has mentioned that he feels the book was actually improved by this translation, which appears to be superb. In short, I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in Dante and his times, or in Italy and its history.

This new biography of Dante rewards the reader with a crisp, thorough, and unvarnished account of the poet's life. Professor Santagata's breadth of knowledge and command of historical information highlight Dante's well-deserved fame as one of the greatest figures in Western literature. At the same time, as though restoring a great work of art, he pulls back the veil of fame and shows us the struggles and tragedies that shaped Dante's life and his work. One comes away from the reading with deeper appreciation for Dante and a renewed respect for his vision, his integrity, and his principle. A valuable resource for any student of Dante, this text will be

enjoyed by anyone seeking to know more about the man Italians respectfully call Il Sommo Poeta (Our Supreme Poet).

Excellent, easy read of Dante's historical background or environment.

Unconventional, but brilliant and not likely to be equaled for some time I wouldn't think.

some knowledge of Dante's work is necessary for a full appreciation of this translation.

A very thorough recounting of Dante's life story - which is hard to determine from direct historical sources as we are talking 700 years ago and a person in exile and constantly moving for his own safety and as the politics dictated. This very well researched work pieces together Dante's life, though there are still gaps and still vague periods, by using second and third hand source materials etc and piecing things together that way. What is very interesting is how his life experiences, the personal and very much the political are reflected in his written works. Will be hard to really appreciate this work without a fairly good exposure to his writings - especially the Commedia. You certainly get a better understanding of why certain real-life characters of the period, appear in certain ways in the Commedia. Through the period of writing Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso; Dante did not balk at doing complete U-turns on specific people or family groups based on shifting allegiances through his tumultuous life. Not an easy read - but very rewarding if you love his works and wanted to know more about the man, the historical context and the roles he played - and how he managed to produce one of humanity's greatest creative works. An overriding impression after reading is: Shakespeare had it so easy !!

Rather than being a chronological account of Dante's life, this book has a multitude of time shifts. It also frequently loses its focus on Dante. It is full of grammatical errors such as dangling modifiers, diction errors and subjects and verbs that do not agree. Despite the inclusion of quite a few interesting tidbits, it is a failure. Harvard University Press, particularly the copy editor who worked on this book, ought to have done much better.

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