

DANTE 700

Online Anthology



DANTE
700

FACULTY OF
**MEDIEVAL
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Competition Aims

The year 2021 marked the 700th anniversary of the death of the Italian poet Dante Alighieri. The University of Oxford launched the Dante 700 Competition in celebration of this anniversary with the aim of introducing Dante and his work to students of all ages.

We received a range of exciting entries from all ages groups and are delighted to be able to present the winners in this online anthology.

Students were asked to enter either a visual or written response to select cantos or to give an open response to any part of Dante's *Commedia*. As such, this anthology is divided into the following prize categories: Ulysses (KS1-2), Lucifer (KS3/4), Limbo (KS4/5), and 'open responses).

Resources from the competition for KS1-5 are still available online through the TES Resources sharing platform. Search for 'Dante 700'.

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Special thanks goes to Moleskine for their donation of prizes and support of this competition.

Who is Dante Alighieri?

Dante Alighieri was born in 1265 in Florence and died in 1321 in Ravenna. He is most famous for his poetry but he also wrote about the Italian language, politics, and philosophy.

He lived in Florence (Firenze) where he had an important political role, but in 1301 he was accused of fraud and was exiled from his home town. Dante was distraught about his exile and often referred to himself as an *exul immeritus* (“undeserving exile”).

The Divine Comedy

The *Commedia* (*Comedy*) is Dante’s most famous poem. It is sometimes referred to as *The Divine Comedy*, but this epithet was added after Dante’s death. It is a long, epic poem in medieval Italian in which Dante describes his journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise.



Domenico di Michelino, 'The Comedy Illuminating Florence' (1465)

The poem is made up of 100 *canti* (songs) in total and is divided into 3 sections: Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. There are 34 *canti* in *Inferno*, 33 in *Purgatorio*, and 33 in *Paradiso*. The poem was begun after Dante’s exile around 1306-7, but the fictional date of Dante’s journey through the afterlife is Easter 1300 (before his exile).

Dante's Language

Dante's writing was very important for the development of the Italian language (like Chaucer and Shakespeare were for English). He spoke the Tuscan dialect* which became a literary language used by well-educated people and finally became the basis for what we know as modern standard Italian. He also came up with lots of neologisms*, especially in the *Commedia*, which have stayed in the Italian language today. Dante's identity as a Florentine and a Tuscan plays a big part in his poetry.

Because the Tuscan dialect was the basis for modern standardised Italian, many of the words from Dante's writings are similar to modern Italian.

Have a look at the tables which compare Dante's Medieval Italian with Modern Italian and Chaucer's Medieval English with Modern English:

Modern English	Chaucer's English	Modern Italian	Dante's Italian
faith	fey	fede	fede
to know / recognise	kennen	sapere / conoscere	sapere / conoscere
wife	wyf	moglie	moglie
suddenly	sodeynly	subito	sùbito

*neologism = a newly coined word or expression. Shakespeare is credited with many neologisms in English.

*dialect = a particular form of a language that is spoken by people in a certain geographical region or in a certain social group. Many dialects are still spoken in Italy today, though they are endangered.

Why Still Bother with Dante?

Dante's poetry (especially the *Commedia*) was extremely influential for European literature and art. Many famous writers and poets were inspired by his writing, from the medieval writers like Geoffrey Chaucer and Giovanni Boccaccio to modernist writers like T.S. Eliot and Samuel Beckett.

Many artists illustrated his *Commedia* or were inspired by it. For example, William Blake, Salvador Dalí and Gustave Doré.

If you've heard anything about Dante, you've probably heard of his *Inferno*. References to this part of his poem frequently appear in popular culture. Have a look at some of the examples below.

Dante's *Inferno* in the Netflix series 'Hannibal'.

There are several references to Dante's *Inferno* in the *Hannibal* books, films and new TV series. More generally, an obsession with Dante's *Inferno* is often used to establish a dark, murderous character in films or books. For example, the 2016 film 'Limehouse Golem'.

***Inferno* by Dan Brown**

The most recent book in the *Da Vinci Code* series, subsequently turned into a film in 2016. The film draws heavily on Sandro Botticelli's map of Hell which is based on information from Dante's *Inferno*.

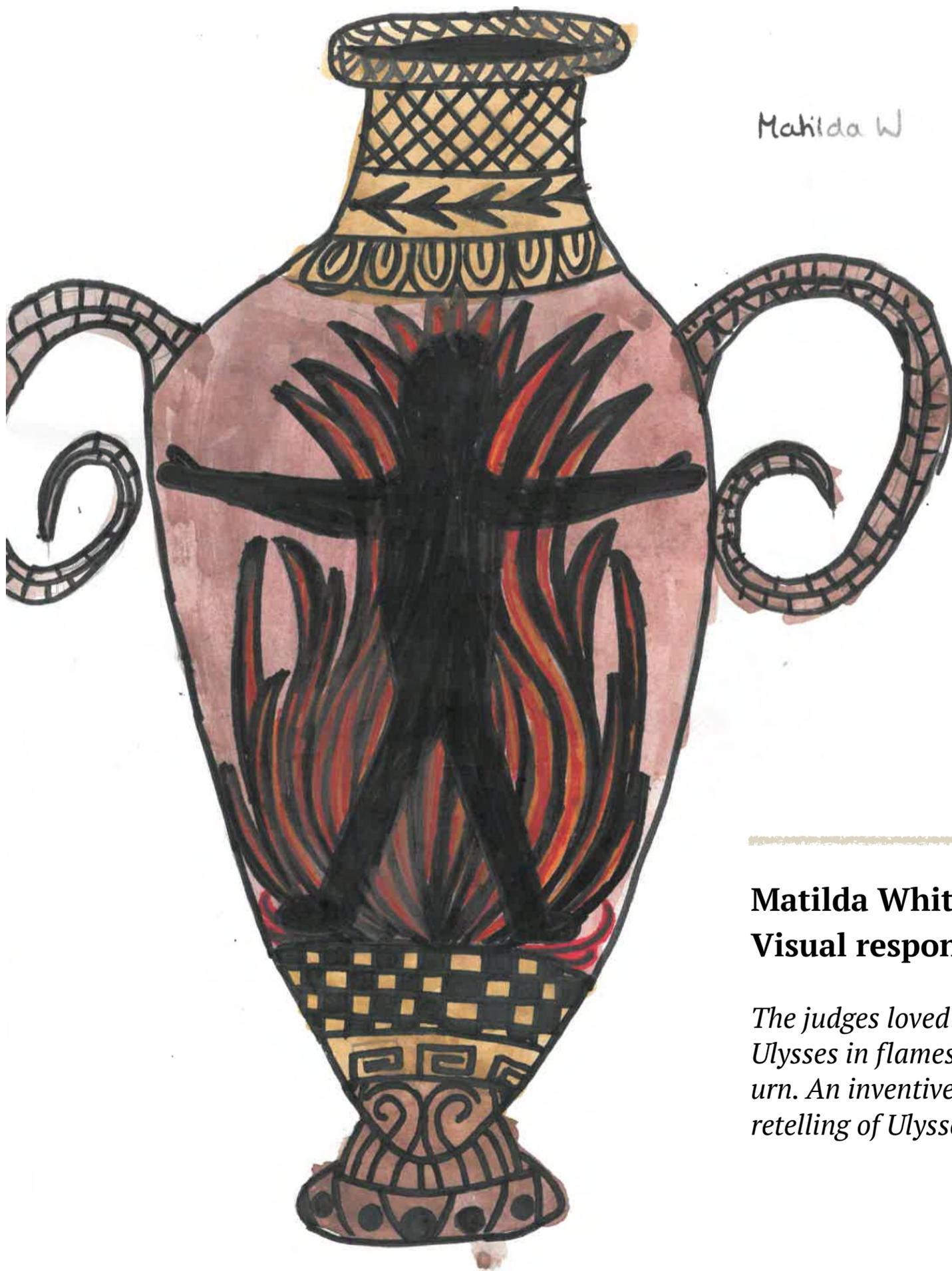
***Inferno* the video game**

Dante's *Inferno* was also the subject of a 2010 video game developed by Visceral Games. Though the game does not follow the poem very closely (for example, Dante is a Templar Knight during the Third Crusade [1189-1192]), the story of a journey through Hell and some of the encounters with monsters reflect the *Commedia*.

Shane McCrae, *A Fire in Every World*

Dante is still inspiring poets today! Shane McCrae is a contemporary American poet who has written a Dantean poem in three parts entitled *A Fire in Every World*. It begins with a long section entitled 'Purgatory/ A Son and a Father of Sons' from *In the Language of My Captor* (2017) and was continued in 'The Hell Poem' (*The Gilded Auction Block* [2019]) before the last section, *Sometimes I never Suffered* (2020).

Ulysses (KS2-3)



Matilda W

Matilda White, year 6
Visual response

The judges loved Matilda's depiction of Ulysses in flames in the style of a Grecian urn. An inventive combination of Dante's retelling of Ulysses and Homer's myth.

Lucifer (KS3-4)

His

L eathery, featherless wings are an

U nbearable sight to see. He

C runches on people sent to live

I n hell. Just like them, Lucifer is

F orever trapped there,

E ncased in ice as punishment for

R evolting against God.

Jack Cotton, year 9

Written response

Jack's typographical poem cuts to the heart of Dante's representation of Lucifer in Inferno 34 and uses enjambement very effectively.

Selasi Amenyio, year 8
Written response



Lucifer Lucifer Demon of hell
How far have you fallen through all these floors An Ugly Creature with wings of ice
3, Heads 3 mouths 1 tail and a fright
Lucifer Lucifer Demon of hell,
How have you now fallen from the heavens above To Burn with sinners is your eternity.
The three men you hold
Brutus, Judas and Cassius
What deed could they have done to end up with you
On the bottom level where you flap your wings
it is felt by all
a breeze of sadness flies through your fiery inferno of a home

Selasi's short poem engages creatively with Dante's representation of Lucifer, including details about his appearance, the souls he punishes and his fall from Heaven. Repetition is used effectively and creatively to address Lucifer and the closing line captures the juxtaposition between Lucifer frozen in ice and the other fiery circles in Hell.

In the first circle of hell
are those who died unbaptised
not tortured but imprisoned in
a castle far from Heaven.

In the second circle of hell
are those who were overcome
by lust, their souls eternally
buffeted by a raging storm.

In the third circle of hell
are those who were overcasters
or greedy, their souls
forced to lie in vile slush
made by eternal icy rain.

The fourth is greed and
fifth is anger. Sixth for
heresy and 7th violence.

Eighth for fraud is 10
bolgias for every way
people have deceived others.

And finally there's
the ninth where Satan
himself is trapped in ice,
reserved only for the
most treacherous of people.

Tarin Houston, year 9

Written response

Tarin's piece on the circles of Hell concludes with Lucifer's place at the bottom of it. This work demonstrates a clear understanding of Dante's imagined structure of Hell and has a swift rhythm which carries the reader along.

Holly Filer, year 8

Visual response

Holly's 3D, visual response offers creatively shows the juxtaposition between good and evil which is captured in the figure of Lucifer, and, particularly in his fall from Heaven. The inclusion of three heads and ice cubes references Dante's portrayal of Lucifer, but she also blurs these elements with a more modern depictions of evil and the devil.



Limbo (KS4-5)

The Pagan

May I not love the earth alone,
The creation that he hath wrought?
The seeds of faith were badly sown.
For of his heav'n had ne'er I thought.

Should I not see the vaulted sky,
With its plumes of silvery smoke,
A sacred temple floating by,
Of which no prophet ever spoke?

And the rough cliffs and the mountains
Were judges too, without constraint.
Why should they not absolve my sins
As well as any supine saint?

Brave Man alone amidst the dirt,
Invites my ardent faith and awe.
Yet is he not a man of hurt,
Tough sinew, sweat, and bloodied gore.

What knows this heav'nly father then,
Of honest work and calloused hands,
Which feel the beating heart of men
Amidst the wreck of dismal lands.

Must I to that strange heav'n give thanks,
And to its dusty gates resign.
Whilst winding brooks and river banks
Flow founts of tender thoughts divine.

Though meek I wept before his throne,
Once death had played his grisly part,
Alas! No space for gods unknown
Is left in this my humble heart.

So came I to this verdant place.
By mercy spared all pain, instead
Through listless hours of vacant space,
I long to be where angels tread.

Now, Virgil comes to tell my fate,
To one for whom 'tis not too late.
Yet how can I forsake my hell,
Whilst loving Love of Earth as well.

Freddy Chelsom, year 12, Written response

Freddy's poem demonstrates impressive use of rhyme and a formal poetic structure. Told from the perspective of a pagan left in Limbo, this poem captures the tragic aspect of Dante's depiction of the pagans in Inferno 4. The details of the 'verdant place', 'vacant space' and a temple 'of which no prophet ever spoke' engage very well with Dante's Limbo of the pagans.

Open Responses

TERZA RIMA SONNET- DANTE TO VIRGIL

Canto 30- *Purgatorio*

Heavens descend with their noble embrace,
This boundless lost love I cannot contain.
Divine beauty within glows from her face.

Her sweet command gently condemns my pain-
Weep not, she speaks, forget all woes and tears.
Bereft of your loss, my head hangs in shame.

Her love shines as a guiding light through spheres,
Her trust absolves silent sins of my heart-
Yet still I mourn the star that shone through fear.

Towards the pagans' place of rest he starts,
Alas, not once was he blessed with God's grace.
My true father, seek ease as our paths part.

Farewell, my friend, your loss I must suppress,
My seat steadfast, I pray one day you're blessed.

**Zara Jessa, year 11,
Written response**

Zara uses the terza rima rhyme pattern in English to create an imaginative sonnet describing Dante's reaction to Virgil's departure towards the end of Purgatorio.

Dante 700

Virtuous destiny tied Virgil stands separated from paradise
Crying out at heaven's pearly gates
For all the merits in the world could not save a man distanced from God

Soulless and afraid, their spirits yell out for reverence
There they lie, damned for all eternity by a nameless, faceless deity
Instead, they found their gods in nature, the observable world

Revelling in the world that revealed itself to them
Worshipping even the violence and bitterness of their lives
Calling out to the kings of rosy fingered dawn

But tell me, if they had cried out in anguish, repenting for their sins
Begging for mercy, tearing at their skin in shame of their actions
Would He have come to save him?

Does every decision have a definite answer?
Why can't a sinner be saved?
Why must they be divided from everyone else

Virgil will remain in limbo
Because when he looked to the skies there was
nothing but stars
And when they ask why they're shut out from the
gates of Eden

Will the answer be an echo, or will it come at all?

Eden Murphy, year 10 Written response

Eden's poem engages with the tragic fate of the pagans and in particular, Virgil. The poem picks up on a number of key elements from Inferno IV, but also resonates with a number of moments in Purgatorio when Virgil guides Dante up to the summit of the mountain before having to return to Limbo.

Cara Bossom, year 10

Written response

Cara gives an overview of the technique of personifying emotions as is found in Dante's Vita Nova. She explains her motivations behind experimenting with this technique by writing her own poem about meeting Fear where Dante meets Love.

An English translation of Cara's opening paragraph and of Dante's sonnet has been added here.

lo fortifica a tal punto che Dante lo eleva allo statuto del suo "Signore". L'Amore appare ovunque come spirito di passione, segnando il cammino del suo rapporto con Beatrice.

Nel sonetto nove, Dante dipinge l'interazione con Amore in una strada, dove lui gli parla, da fantasma e manda il suo cuore in un viaggio "a servir novo piacere".

Ho voluto sperimentare personalmente con questo espediente e scrivere io stessa un sonetto, influenzato dal Sonetto 9 di Dante. Ho scelto la paura come emozione di base, per vedere se un tale contrasto potesse funzionare in un contesto moderno.

Ho seguito esattamente la sua struttura metrica e ritmica, e finirò con la stessa descrizione del sonetto con cui Dante finisce.

The New Life

A recurring theme in Dante Alighieri's Vita Nuova is the personification of human emotions, more specifically, the personification of Love. It is a phenomenon which goes back to Greek Literature, and later, to Latin literature in which common emotions, like jealousy, were elevated to the divine. Social virtues were similarly raised up, as for example with Justice. These gods were then worshiped for their influence on certain aspects of life or for the role they played in certain pieces of literature.

Dante constantly reuses Love as a figure to whom he addresses his sonnets. He guides him, he gives him strength to the extent that Dante elevates him to the rank of his 'Lord'. Love appears everywhere as a spirit of passion, marking and directing his relationship with Beatrice.

In the ninth sonnet of the Vita Nova, Dante describes his interaction with in a street where Love speaks to him as a spirit and sends his heart on a journey 'to find a new delight'.

I wanted to experiment with this device and to write my own sonnet, influenced by Sonnet 9 by Dante. I chose fear as an emotion to see if such a contrast might function in a modern context. I have followed the metric and rhyme structure of Dante's sonnet exactly. I will also finish with the same description of the sonnet which Dante provides.

La Vita Nuova

Un tema ricorrente in La Vita Nuova di Dante Alighieri è la personificazione delle emozioni umane; più specificamente dell'Amore. È un fenomeno che risale alla letteratura greca, e più tardi, latina, dove questi sentimenti comuni, come la Gelosia, venivano elevati al rango di divinità, ciò si faceva anche alle qualità sociali, ad esempio la Giustizia. Queste divinità erano poi adorate per la loro influenza su alcuni aspetti della vita e il loro impatto sulla narrativa di certa letteratura.

Dante riutilizza costantemente Amore come una figura a cui rivolge i suoi sonetti. Questo lo guida,

Paura:

Tremante lungo binari del treno,
sentirmi libera a testa vuota,
osservavo La Paura nascosta
sotto la sedia, sorriso osceno.
Lo sguardo che bruciava per l'animo
mentre si accosta con andatura
frenetica; raccogliendo occhi ma
senza vergogna, privo di tormento.
Ha guidato le sue labbra nella
mia guancia, sputando mio nome:
"Ti seguirò ovunque ti nascondi,
perché siamo uno in ogni mondo,
schiacciandoti con perché e percome."
E vivrò all'ombra di quel fantasma.

Questo sonetto ha tre parti: nella prima parte racconto come mi trovò la paura e come apparve; nella seconda racconto di nuovo ciò che mi ha detto, rivelando la mia stessa angoscia tormentosa; nella terza espongo come si è messo al mio fianco, per plasmare la mia vita con la sua presa. La seconda parte inizia, "Ha guidato"; la terza: "E vivrò".

Amore:

Cavalcando l'altr'ier per un cammino,
pensoso de l'andar che mi sgradia,
trovai Amore in mezzo de la via
in abito leggiere di peregrino.
Ne la sembianza mi pareva meschino,
come avesse perduta signoria;
e sospirando pensoso venia,
per non veder la gente, a capo chino.
Quando mi vide, mi chiamò per nome,
e disse: «Io vegno di lontana parte,
ov'era lo tuo cor per mio volere;
e r'ècolo a servir novo piacere».
Allora presi di lui sì gran parte,
ch'elli disparve, e non m'accorsi come.

Questo sonetto ha tre parti: ne la prima parte dico sì com'io trovai Amore, e quale mi pareva; ne la seconda dico quello ch'elli mi disse, avegna che non compiutamente per tema ch'avea di scoprire lo mio secreto; ne la terza dico com'elli mi disparve. La seconda comincia quivi: Quando mi vide; la terza: Allora presi.

*Riding along a road the other day—
abstracted, rattled, feeling loath to go—
I saw Love, dressed in tattered clothes as though
a wanderer, walking toward me on the way.
His mannerisms made him look astray,
his mastery gone; his countenance didn't show,
since he was walking with his head bent low
to ward off glances, sighing in dismay.
When he saw me, he called my name on cue,
and said: "I'm coming from a distant place,
where your heart was since it is mine by right.
I send it now to serve a new delight."
And then I took so much of him in place,
he vanished from my sight before I knew.*

This sonnet has three parts: in the first part I tell about how I found Love and how he looked; in the second I relate what he said to me, although not completely for fear of revealing my secret; in the third I tell how he vanished from sight. The second part begins, "When he saw me"; the third, "And then I took."

Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nova*, trans Andrew Frisardi (Northwestern University Press, 2012)
Available online: <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/text/library/la-vita-nuova-frisardi/>

Useful Links

Online resources:

The text of the Divine Comedy: <http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu>

Dante Worlds: <http://danteworlds.laits.utexas.edu>

Citings and Sightings of Dante today: <https://research.bowdoin.edu/dante-today/>

World of Dante: <http://www.worldofdante.org>

Digital Dante: <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu>

Princeton Dante Project: <https://dante.princeton.edu/pdp/>

Manuscripts and early printed editions of the Divine Comedy

Holkham misc. 48: https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/catalog/manuscript_6276

Yates Thompson 36: http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Yates_Thompson_MS_36

Illustrations from Early Printed Editions: <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/image/digitized-images/>

