

LA VITA NUOVA “THE NEW LIFE”



DANTE ALIGHIERI

A Translation into English by

A. S. KLINE

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Please direct sales or editorial enquiries to:

tonykline@poetryintranslation.com



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IN MEMORY OF JEAN



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👁️ I INTRODUCTION 👁️



In that part of the book of my memory before which little can be read, there is a heading, which says: *‘Incipit vita nova: Here begins the new life’*. Under that heading I find written the words that it is my intention to copy into this little book: and if not all, at least their essence.



Dante (Study for Dante’s Dream), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 – 1882)

II THE FIRST MEETING WITH BEATRICE



ine times already since my birth the heaven of light had almost revolved to the self-same point when my mind's glorious lady first appeared to my eyes, she who was called by many Beatrice (*'she who confers blessing'*), by those who did not know what it meant to so name her. She had already lived as long in this life as in her time the starry heaven had moved east the twelfth part of one degree, so that she appeared to me almost at the start of her ninth year, and I saw her almost at the end of my ninth. She appeared dressed in noblest colour, restrained and pure, in crimson, tied and adorned in the style that then suited her very tender age.

At that moment I say truly that the vital spirit, that which lives in the most secret chamber of the heart began to tremble so violently that I felt it fiercely in the least pulsation, and, trembling, it uttered these words: *'Ecce deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur michi: Behold a god more powerful than I, who, coming, will rule over me.'* At that moment the animal spirit, that which lives in the high chamber to which all the spirits of the senses carry their perceptions, began to wonder deeply at it, and, speaking especially to the spirit of sight, spoke these words: *'Apparuit iam beatitudo vestra: Now your blessedness appears.'* At that moment the natural spirit, that which *lives in the part where our food is delivered, began to weep, and weeping* said these words: *'Heu miser, quia frequenter impeditus ero deinceps!:* Oh misery, since I will often be troubled from now on!

From then on I say that Amor governed my soul, which was so soon wedded to him, and began to acquire over me such certainty and command, through the power my imagination gave him, that I was forced to carry out his wishes fully. He commanded me many times to discover whether I might catch sight of this most tender of angels, so that in my boyhood I many times went searching, and saw her to be of such noble and praiseworthy manners, that certainly might be said of her those words of the poet Homer: 'She did not seem to be the daughter of a mortal man, but

of a god'. And though her image, that which was continually with me, was a device of Amor's to govern me, it was nevertheless of so noble a virtue that it never allowed Amor to rule me without the loyal counsel of reason in all those things where such counsel was usefully heard.

But because it might seem fiction to some to dwell on the passions and actions of such tender years, I will leave them, and passing over many things that might be derived from the sample from which these were taken, I will come to those words that are written in my memory under more important heads.

III YEARS LATER SHE GREETS HIM



When so many days had passed that exactly nine years were completed since the appearance of this most gracious being I have written of above, it happened, on the last of these days, that this marvellous lady appeared to me, dressed in the whitest of white, between two gracious ladies who were of greater age: and passing through a street she turned her eyes to the place where I stood greatly fearful, and, with her ineffable courtesy, that is now rewarded in a greater sphere, she greeted me so virtuously, so much so that I saw then to the very end of grace. The hour at which her so sweet greeting welcomed me was exactly the ninth of that day, and because it was the first time that her words deigned to come to my ears, I found such sweetness that I left the crowd as if intoxicated, and I returned to the solitude of my own room, and fell to thinking of this most gracious one.

And thinking of her a sweet sleep overcame me, in which a marvellous vision appeared to me: so that it seemed I saw in my room a flame-coloured nebula, in the midst of which I discerned the shape of a lord of fearful aspect to those who gazed on him: and he appeared to me with such joy, so much joy within himself, that it was a miraculous thing: and in his speech he said many things, of which I understood only a few: among them I understood this: *'Ego dominus tuus: I am your lord.'*

It seemed to me he held a figure sleeping in his arms, naked except that it seemed to me to be covered lightly with a crimson cloth: gazing at it very intently I realised it was the lady of the greeting, she who had deigned to greet me before that day. And in one of his hands it seemed to me that he held something completely on fire, and he seemed to say to me these words: *'Vide cor tuum: Look upon your heart. And when he had stood for a while, he seemed to wake her who slept: and by his art was so forceful that he made her eat the thing that burned in her hand, which she ate hesitantly.*



The Salutation of Beatrice, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 - 1882)

After waiting for a little while his joy was all turned to bitter grief: and, so grieving, he gathered that lady in his arms, and it seemed to me that he ascended with her towards heaven: from which I experienced such anguish that my light sleep could not endure it, and so was broken, and was dispersed. And immediately I began to reflect, and discovered that the hour in which this vision appeared to me was the fourth of that night: so as to be manifestly clear, it was the first hour of the nine last hours of night.

Thinking to myself about what had appeared to me, I decided to make it known to many who were famous poets of the time: and as it was a fact that I had already gained for myself to some extent the art of speaking words in rhyme, I decided to shape a *sonetto*, in which I would greet all those faithful to Amor: and begging them to interpret my vision, I wrote for them what I had seen in my sleep. And then I began this *sonetto*, that which begins: *A ciascun'alma presa e gentil core.*

To every captive soul and gentle heart
into whose sight this present speech may come,
so that they might write its meaning for me,
greetings, in their lord's name, who is Love.
Already a third of the hours were almost past
of the time when all the stars were shining,
when Amor suddenly appeared to me
whose memory fills me with terror.
Joyfully Amor seemed to me to hold
my heart in his hand, and held in his arms
my lady wrapped in a cloth sleeping.
Then he woke her, and that burning heart
he fed to her reverently, she fearing,
afterwards he went not to be seen weeping.

This sonnet is divided in two parts: so that in the first part I greet and demand reply, in the second I signify what must be replied to. The second part begins with: '*Già eram*: Already (a third)'. There were replies from many to this sonnet and of differing interpretation: among those who replied was one whom I call the foremost of my friends, and he wrote then a sonnet, that which begins: '*Vedeste, al mio parere, onne valore*: You saw, it seems to me, every virtue.'

And this was virtually the beginning of the friendship between him and myself, when he knew that it was I who had made the request of him. The true meaning of that dream was not then seen by anyone, but now it is clear to the most unknowing.

👁️ IV THE EFFECTS OF LOVE ON HIM 👁️



From that vision onwards my natural spirit began to be obstructed in its operation, because my spirit was completely dedicated to thoughts of that most graceful one: so that in a little while I reached so frail and debilitated a condition, that many friends were anxious about my appearance: and many full of malice put themselves about to know about me things that I wished above all to hide from others. And I, aware of the ill requests they made about me, replied, by the will of Amor, who directed me in accordance with reason's counsel, that it was Amor who had brought me to this.

I spoke of Amor, because I bore so many signs of him in my face, that they could not be concealed. And, when they asked me: 'For whom has Amor so distressed you?' gazing at them I smiled, and said nothing to them.

❧ V THE SCREEN LADY ❧



ne day it chanced that this most graceful lady was seated in a place where words were heard concerning the queen of glory, and I was in a position from which I could see my blessedness: and between her and me in a straight line sat a gentle lady of most pleasant appearance, who looked at me frequently, amazed by my gaze, which seemed to end with her.

Then many were aware of her look, and in a while were certain of it, so that, in leaving the place, I heard it spoken after me: ‘See how that lady has distressed his person’ and being named, I realised that he was speaking of her who had been placed in the straight line that started at the most graceful Beatrice, and ended at my eyes. Then I was greatly comforted, assured that my secret had not been revealed to others by my gaze that day.

And immediately I thought of making of this lady a screen before the truth: and I pretended to it so often in so short a time that my secret was believed known by most of the people who speculated about me. I screened myself with this lady for some months and years: and to better allow others to believe it, I created certain little things for her in verse, which it is not my intention to write down, unless they mainly set out to treat of that most graceful Beatrice: and therefore I will forget them all except one that I wrote which can be seen to be in praise of her.

VI HE COMPOSES THE *SERVENTESE* OF THE
SIXTY LADIES



say that during the time that lady was the screen for so great a love, so great on my part, there came to me the will to want to record the name of that graceful one and accompany it with many names of women, and especially the name of the gentle lady. And I took the names of the sixty most beautiful ladies of the city, in which my lady had been placed by the highest Lord, and I composed a letter in the form of a *serventese*, a poem of praise, which I will not write down: and I would not have mentioned it if it were not to say that composing it, a marvellous thing occurred, that the name of my lady was not allowed to stand in any other place than that of ninth among the names of those ladies.

👉 VII THE SCREEN LADY'S DEPARTURE 👈



he lady by means of whom I had concealed my wishes for so long had to leave the city I mentioned above, and travel to a distant region: because of this, I, greatly troubled by the loss of the beautiful defence I had acquired, was much discomforted, more than I myself would have believed before. And thinking that if I did not write sorrowfully enough about her departure people would more quickly be aware of my pretence, I decided to create a lament as a *sonetto*: which I will write down, since my lady was the direct cause for certain words that are in the *sonetto*, as is apparent to anyone who understands it. And so I wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: ‘*O voi che par la via.*’

O you who on the way of Love go by,
listen and see
if there is any grief, as grave as mine:
and I beg you only to suffer me to be heard,
and then reflect
whether I am not the tower and the key of every torment.
Amor, indeed not for my slight worth
but through his nobility
placed me in a life so sweet and gentle,
that often I would hear it said behind me:
‘God, for what virtue
does this heart own so much delight?’
Now I have lost all my eloquence
which flowed so from love’s treasure:
and I am grown so poor
in a way that speech barely comes to me.
So that I desire to be like one

who to conceal his poverty through shame,
shows joy outwardly,
and within my heart am troubled and weep.

This *sonetto* has two main parts: in the first I mean to call on those loyal to Amor in the words that Jeremiah the prophet spoke: ‘*O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte si est dolor sicut meus*: O all you who pass this way, listen and see, if there is any grief like mine,’ and to beg them to allow me to be heard: in the second part I say where Amor had placed me, with an intention opposite to that which the outer extremes of the *sonetto* reveal, and I tell what I have lost. The second part begins at: ‘*Amor non gia*: Amor indeed, not.’

☞ VIII DANTE'S POEM ON THE DEATH OF ☞
BEATRICE'S COMPANION



fter the departure of that gentle lady it pleased the lord of angels to call to his glory a woman, young and of very gentle aspect, who had been a great grace to the city I spoke of: whose lifeless body I saw lying amongst a crowd of ladies, who were weeping most piteously. Then, remembering that I had seen her before accompanying the most graceful lady, I could not hold back tears: so weeping I decided to speak a few words about her death, in tribute to the fact that I had once seen her with my lady.

And I touched on this a little in the last part of the words I wrote, as is clearly apparent to those who understand. And then I wrote these two *sonetti*, the first of which begins: '*Piangete, amanti,*' and the second: '*Morte villana.*'

Weep you lovers, since Love is also weeping,
and hear the reason that makes him full of tears.
Amor feels ladies calling on Pity,
revealing a bitter sorrow in their eyes,
because the villain Death in gentle heart
has set his cruel machinations,
destroying what the world has given praise to
in gentle lady, all except honour.
Hear how Amor has honoured her,
who in his true form I saw lamenting
bending above the lifeless image:
and often gazing upwards to the heavens,
where the gentle soul had already fled,
that was a lady of such joyful semblance.

This first *sonetto* is divided into three parts: in the first part I call on and beg those loyal to Amor to weep and I say that their lord is weeping, and I say 'hear the reason that makes him full of tears' so that they might be more ready to listen to me: in the second I narrate the cause: in the third I speak of the honour that Amor paid this lady. The second part begins with: '*Amor sente*: Amor feels,' the third with: '*Audite*: Hear.'

Death the villain, enemy of pity,
ancient mother of sorrows,
justice incontestable and grave,
since you have given matter for the grieving heart
because of which I go pensive,
my tongue will weary blaming you.
And if by grace I can make you beg,
I will be forced to speak
of your guilt for all vile evils,
not because they are unknown to people,
but to make more extreme
those who go to love for nurture.
From the world you have driven courtesy
and virtue, that causes praise in women:
in joyful youthfulness
you have lightly destroyed loveliness.
I will not tell you who this lady is
except by naming her true qualities.
He who does not deserve grace
may no more hope to have her company.

This *sonetto* is divided into four parts: in the first part I call on Death by certain of his true names: in the second, speaking to him, I tell the reason why he moves me to blame him: in the third I revile him: in the fourth I turn to speak to an unspecified person, though he is specified by my intention. The second begins with: '*poi che hai data*: since you have given': the third with: '*E s'io di grazia*: And if by grace': the fourth with: '*Chi non merta salute*. He who does not deserve grace.'



The Pious Lady on the Right (Study for Dante's Dream)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 – 1882)

IX DANTE'S JOURNEY: THE NEW SCREEN LADY



A few days after the death of this lady something happened which forced me to leave the above city and travel to that region where the gentle lady was who had been my screen, though the destination of my journey was not as far as where she was. And although I was in the company of many, at least outwardly, the travelling displeased me so much that my sighs could scarcely relieve the anguish my heart felt, because I distanced myself from my blessedness.

And so the sweetest lord who ruled over me through the virtue of my most graceful lady appeared in my imagination like a traveller simply dressed, in coarse cloth. He seemed to me dejected, and gazed at the ground, except when he seemed to me to turn his eyes towards a beautiful and clearest of running streams, which ran along the way I was going.

It seemed to me that Amor called my name and said these words to me: 'I come from that lady who has long been your screen, and I know that her return will not be for some time, and so I have with me that heart which I made you leave with her, and I carry it to a lady who will become your defence, as she was.' And he named her name to me, so that I knew her well. 'But take care, if you repeat any thing of these words I have mentioned to you, that it be in such a way that no one discerns by them the false love you have shown, and which you must show to another.'

And speaking these words he departed my imagination quite suddenly for the most part, as it seemed that Amor merged himself with me: and somewhat changed in my appearance, I rode on that day thinking deeply and accompanied by many sighs. After that day I began this *sonetto*, which begins: '*Cavalcando*'.

Riding the other day along a track,
thinking of the journey I disliked,
I found Amor in the middle of the way
in the simple dress of a traveller.
In his countenance, wretched, he seemed to me
as if he had lost a ruler-ship:
and he came sighing thoughtfully
not seeing anyone, with head bowed low.
When he saw me he called me by name,
and said: 'I come from a distant place
from where your heart was according to my wish:
and bring it back to serve new pleasures.'
Then I took from him so great a part
that he vanished, and I did not see how.

This *sonetto* has three parts: in the first I say how I met Amor and how he seemed to me: in the second I say what he said to me, thought not completely for fear of revealing my secret: in the third I say how he vanished. The second begins with: '*Quando mi vide*: When he saw me': the third: '*Allora presi*: Then I took.'

☞ X BEATRICE REFUSES TO GREET HIM ☞



fter my return I set out to search for the lady that my lord had named to me on the road of sighs: and in order to speak briefly of it, I say that in a short time I made her my screen, so much so that too many people speculated about it, beyond the bounds of courtesy: because of that it often made me greatly pensive. And for that reason, namely the outrageous rumours that seemed to viciously defame me, that most graceful being, she who was the slayer of all vices and the queen of all virtue, passing by, refused me her sweet greeting, in which all my blessedness existed.

And leaving the present subject somewhat, I want to make clear how her greeting worked within me virtuously.

☞ XI THE EFFECTS ON HIM OF HER GREETING ☞



say that when she appeared, in whatever place, by the hope embodied in that marvellous greeting, for me no enemy remained, in fact I shone with a flame of charity that made me grant pardon to whoever had offended me: and if anyone had then asked me anything my reply would only have been: 'Love', with an aspect full of humility.

And when she was on the point of greeting me, a spirit of love, suppressing all the other spirits of the senses, made the weak spirits of vision scatter, and said to them: 'Go and honour your lady', and it remained so in their place. And whoever had a desire to know Love, could have done so by watching the trembling of my eyes.

And when this most graceful one made things well by greeting me, it was not that Love so came between us that it could cloud in me the unbearable blessedness, but almost by overpowering sweetness it came to be such that my body, which was then wholly under its sway, often moved like a heavy and inanimate object. So it is clearly seen that all my blessedness, which often surpassed and overfilled my capacity, lay in her greeting.



The Salutation of Beatrice (on Earth and in Heaven)
Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 - 1882)

👁️ XII HE DREAMS OF THE YOUNG MAN DRESSED 👁️
IN WHITE



ow, returning to the subject, I say that after my blessedness was denied me, I met with such sadness that leaving the crowd I went to a lonely place to bathe the ground with bitter tears. And when this weeping had relieved me a little I shut myself in my room where I could grieve without being heard: and there, begging pity of the lady of courtesy, and saying: ‘Love, help your faithful one’, I fell asleep weeping like a beaten child.

It happened that about the middle of my sleep I seemed to see a young man dressed in the whitest of white sitting next to me in my room, and, deeply thoughtful in his aspect, he gazed at me where I lay: and when he had gazed a while it seemed to me he called to me sighing, and said these words: ‘*Fili mi, tempus est ut praetermittantur simulacra nostra*: My son, it is time to set aside our pretences.’ Then it seemed to me that I knew him, because he called to me as he had many times called to me in my dreams: and regarding him it seemed to me that he was weeping piteously, and seemed to be waiting for some word from me: so that, taking heart, I began to speak to him so: ‘Lord of nobility, why do you weep?’ And he said these words to me: ‘*Ego tanquam centrum circuli, cui simili modo se habent circumferentiae partes: tu autem non sic*: I am as the centre of a circle, to which the parts of the circumference have a similar relation: you however are not so.’

Then, thinking about his words, it seemed to me he had spoken very obscurely: so that I forced myself to speak and said these words: ‘What is it, lord, that you say to me so obscurely?’ And he replied to me in the common tongue: ‘Do not demand more than is helpful to you.’ And so I began then to discuss the greeting which had been denied me, and I asked the reason: to which the reply came from him to me: ‘Our Beatrice heard from certain people, speaking of you, that the lady whom I named to you on the road of sighs, has met with some discourtesy from you: and so this

most graceful one, who is the opposite of all discourtesy, did not deign to greet your person, fearing you might show discourtesy.

Since it is a fact that in truth your secret is partly known to her through lengthy observation, I wish you to say certain words in verse in which you will declare the power I have had over you through her, and how you were hers, wholly, from your childhood. And for that demand testimony of him who knows, and say how you beg him to tell her of it: and I, who am he, will tell her freely: and in this way she will come to know your will, knowing which she will unpick the words of the informants. Make those words act as a go-between so that you do not speak to her directly: which is not appropriate: and do not send them anywhere without me, where they might be heard by her, but have them adorned by sweet music, in which I can reside at all the times when I am needed.⁷

And saying these words he vanished, and my dream was broken. When I reflected on it, I found that this vision appeared to me in the ninth hour of the day: and before I went out of my room I decided to make a *ballata* in which I would carry out what my lord had commanded me: and later I made this *ballata*, that begins: '*Ballata, i' voi*'.

Ballad, I would have you find Amor,
and go with him before my Lady,
so that my cause, that you sing,
my lord can speak of with her.
You go, ballad, so courteously,
that without companions
you may dare to go anywhere:
but if you wish to travel safely,
first find Amor,
since maybe it is not wise to go without him:
for she who is the one who must hear you,
if it is as I think, is truly angered with me:
if you are not accompanied by him,

you will be taken lightly, with dishonour.
With sweet sounds, when you are with her,
begin these words,
after you have sought her pity:
‘My Lady, he who sent me to you,
wishes, if it please you,
that if he has an excuse, I may present it.
Love is one, who through your beauty,
will make him, if you wish, change his aspect:
so if it made him gaze at another,
think you, it did not change his heart.’
Say to her: ‘My Lady, his heart is fixed
with so firm a faith,
that all his thought is set on serving you:
he was yours at first, and could not waver.’
If she does not believe you,
tell her to ask Amor, who knows the truth:
and at the end make a humble prayer,
that if it displeases her to pardon him,
let her send word, and order me to die,
and her servant will show true obedience.
And say to him, who is the key to pity,
before you take your leave,
that he knowing it plead my cause well:
‘By the grace of my sweet notes
stay you there with her,
and for your servant plead, as you will,
and if she pardon him through your prayer,
let her show an aspect of sweet peace.’
My gentle ballad, if you please,
choose the moment that will bring you honour.

This *ballata* is divided into three parts: in the first part I say where it should journey, and I encourage it to travel more safely, and I say what company it should be in if it wishes to go safely and without any danger: in the second I say what it needs to make known: in the third I license it to go when it wishes, recommending its movements to the embrace of fortune. The second part begins with: '*Con dolce sono*: With sweet sounds': the third with: '*Gentil ballata*: Gentle ballad.'

Someone might raise an objection against me and say that it is not known whom I address in the second person, since the ballata is no more than the words that I wrote: and so I say that I intend to resolve this doubt and clarify it later in this little book regarding an even more difficult passage: and then let him who doubts understand, or let him who wishes to object do so at that time.

☞ XIII THE WAR OF CONFLICTING THOUGHTS ☞



fter the vision above, having already written the words that Love had commanded me to write, many diverse thoughts began to contend and struggle within me, each one almost unanswerable: amongst these thoughts four seemed most to disturb my peace of mind. One of them was this: Love's ruler-ship is good because he draws the intent of his faithful away from all evil things. The next was this: Love's ruler-ship is not good because the more faith his faithful demonstrate towards him the heavier and more grievous are the moments he must endure. The third was this: the name of love is so sweet to hear that it seems impossible to me that his true effects can be anything other than sweet, since it is known that names derive from the things named, as it is written: '*Nomina sunt consequentia rerum*: Names are consequent on things.' The fourth was this: the Lady, for whom love constrains you so, is not like other ladies whose hearts are easily swayed.'

And each of these so contended in me, that I became like he who does not know which road to choose for his journey, and who wants to go and does not know which way to go: and if I thought to try and find the common path among them, in which all of them might meet, it was a way most inimical to me, it was to call on and throw myself into the arms of Pity. And remaining in this state, I felt the desire to write words of verse: and then I wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: '*Tutti li mei penser*'.

Every one of my thoughts speaks of Love:
and they have in them such great variance,
that one makes me wish for his ruler-ship,
another claims that his worth is nothing,
another by hoping brings me sweetness,
another makes me weep constantly,
and they only agree in asking pity,

trembling with the fear that is in the heart.
Therefore I do not know which theme to choose:
and wish to speak, and know not what to say:
so that I find myself in a lover's maze!
And if I wish to make them all accord,
I am forced to call on my enemy,
my lady Pity, and ask her to defend me.

This *sonetto* can be divided into four parts: in the first I speak and declare that all my thoughts are of Love: in the second I say that they are diverse, and I describe their diversity: in the third I say in what way they seem in accord: in the fourth I say that wishing to speak of Love, I do not know which to choose as my theme, and if I wish to choose them all I am forced to call on my enemy, my lady Pity: and I say 'my lady' as a disdainful mode of speech. The second part begins with: '*e hanno in lor*: and they have in them': the third with: '*e sol s'accordano*: and they only agree': the fourth with: '*Ond'io non so*: Therefore I do not know'.

👉 XIV DANTE FAINTS AT THE MARRIAGE SCENE 👈



fter the war of divergent thoughts it chanced that this most graceful one came where many gentle ladies were gathered: to which place I was led by a friend, thinking to give me great delight, by showing me the place where so many ladies were displaying their beauty. So I, scarcely knowing where I was being taken, and trusting in the person who had conducted his friend to the extremity of life, said to him: ‘Why have we come to these ladies?’ Then he said to me: ‘To allow them to be worthily served.’

And the truth is that they were gathered in the company of a gentle lady who had been wedded that day: and so, following the custom of the city, it was necessary for them to keep her company the first time she sat at table in her husband’s house.

So I, believing that it would please this friend, decided to stay and attend upon the ladies in her company. And at the moment of my decision I seemed to feel a strange tremor start under my left breast and spread suddenly through all the parts of my body. Then I say I quietly leaned back against a fresco that ran round the walls of the house: and fearing lest others might be aware of my trembling, I raised my eyes, and gazing at the ladies, I saw the most graceful Beatrice among them.

Then my spirits were so scattered by the force that Love gained finding himself so near to the most graceful lady, that only the spirits of sight remained alive: and even they remained lost to their visual organs since Love wished to stand in their noblest of places to see the miraculous lady. And though I was other than at first, I grieved greatly for these little spirits who were lamenting loudly and saying: ‘If he had not shot us out of our place, we could have stayed to see the marvel of this lady as all our other parts have stayed.’

I say that many of those ladies aware of my transfiguration, then began to wonder, and then speak mockingly of me with this most gentle one: at which my friend, innocent of this in all good faith, took me by the hand, and led me from the sight of those ladies, then asked what troubled me.

Then, somewhat rested, and my mortal spirits revived, and those scattered returned to their possession, I said these words to that friend: 'I have set foot in that region of life where it is not possible to go with any more intention of returning.' And parting from him I returned to my chamber of tears: in which, weeping and shame-faced, I said to myself: 'If my lady knew of my condition, I do not believe she would mock my person, in fact I believe she would inwardly feel much pity.'

And whilst in this state of weeping, I decided to speak words in which, speaking to her, I would explain the cause of my transfiguration, and say that I well knew that it was not known, and that, if it were known I believed that pity would be stirred in others: and I decided to speak desiring that it might come by chance to her ears. And then I wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: '*Con l'altre donne*'.

With the other ladies you mock my looks,
and do not think, lady, why it is
that I am seized by such a strange appearance
when I gaze upon your beauty.
If you knew, Pity could not be
held from me in the usual way,
that Amor, when he finds me so close to you,
gains so in boldness and temerity,
that he sets upon my frightened spirits,
and some he kills, and some he scatters,
till only he remains to gaze at you:
so that I change to another form,
but not so that I cannot then still hear
the wail of those tormented scattered ones.



The Pious Lady on the Right (Study for Dante's Dream)
Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 - 1882)

I will not divide this *sonetto* into its parts, since the division is only made to clarify the sense of the thing so divided: so as this thing is such that in the telling the logic is clear enough, it does not need dividing. It is true that among the words in which the logic of this *sonetto* is shown, are written some obscure words, those where I say that Love kills all my spirits, and those of sight remain alive, except they flee their organs of vision. And this obscurity is impossible to explain to one who is not in a similar manner one of Love's faithful: and to those who are it is obvious what clarifies the obscure words: and so it is no use for me to clarify that obscurity, since my words of clarification would be pointless, and indeed superfluous.

👉 XV THE REASON WHY HE CONTINUES TO TRY 👈
AND SEE HER



fter the strange transfiguration I had an insistent thought, one that scarcely left me, indeed it continually seized me, and it reasoned with me like this: ‘Since you acquire this shameful aspect when you are near this lady, why do you try to catch sight of her? Suppose you were asked that by her: what answer could you give in reply, taking it that all your wits were free when you replied to her?’

And another humble thought echoed this, and said: ‘If I did not lose my wits, and felt free enough to be able to reply, I would tell her that as soon as I imagine her miraculous beauty, so quickly the desire to see her seizes me, which is so powerful, that it slays and destroys whatever in my memory could rise against it: and so my past sufferings do not restrain me from trying to catch sight of her.’

So, moved by these thoughts, I decided to speak certain words, in which I might excuse myself for this reprehensible thought, explaining also what happened to me near her: and I wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: ‘*Ciò che m’incontra*’.

All I encounter in my mind dies,
when I come to gaze on you, sweet joy:
and when I am near you, I feel Love
who says: ‘Run, if you care about dying’.
The face shows the colour of the heart,
that, fainting, leans for support:
and in the vast intoxicating tremor
the stones beneath me cry: Death, death.
They commit a sin who see me then,
if they do not comfort my bewildered soul,

if only by showing that they care for me,
through pity, which your mocking killed,
that is descried in the dying vision
of eyes that have wished for death.

This *sonetto* is divided in two parts: in the first I give the reason why I do not hold myself from going near to this lady: in the second I say what happens to me from going near her: and this second part begins with: '*e quandi' o vi son presso*: and when I am near you.' And also this second part can be divided in five, according to the five differing subjects: in the first I say what Love, counselled by reason, says to me when I am near her: in the second I show the state of my heart revealed in my face: in the third I say how I come to lose all confidence: in the fourth I say what sin they commit who do not show pity for me, since it would be some comfort to me: in the last I say why others should have pity, and that is because of the pitiful look that fills my eyes: this pitiful look is destroyed, that is does not appear to others, by this lady's mockery, which draws to similar action those who perhaps might well see that piteousness.

The second part begins with: '*Lo viso mostra*: the face shows': the third with: '*e per la ebrietà*: and in the vast intoxicating': the fourth with: '*Peccato face*: They commit a sin': the fifth: '*per la pietà*: through pity'.

☞ XVI HIS STATE ON BEING IN LOVE ☞



fter I had written this sonetto, I had the will to write yet another in which I would say four more things about my state, which it seemed to me I had not yet made clear. The first of these is that many times I was troubled, when my memory stirred my fancy to imagine what Love was doing to me. The second is that Love often attacked me so savagely that nothing was left alive in me except thoughts that spoke of my lady: the third is that when the war of Love battled in me like this I was moved all pale as I was to see this lady, believing that sight of her would defend me in this war, forgetting what happened to me when I approached such gentleness. The fourth is how that sight of her not only failed to defend me but finally discomfited what little life I had. And so I wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: ‘*Spesse fiate*’.

Often it is brought home to my mind
the dark quality that Love gives me,
and pity moves me, so that frequently
I say: ‘Alas! is anyone so afflicted?’:
since Amor assails me suddenly,
so that life almost abandons me:
only a single spirit stays with me,
and that remains because it speaks of you.
I renew my strength, because I wish for help,
and pale like this, all my courage drained,
come to you, believing it will save me:
and if I lift my eyes to gaze at you
my heart begins to tremble so,
that from my pulse the soul departs.

This *sonetto* is divided into four parts, in accord with the four things spoken of within it: and since they are explained above, I will not comment except to distinguish the parts by their beginnings: so I say that the second part begins with: '*ch'Amor*': since *Amor*': the third with: '*Poscia mi sforzo*': I renew my strength': the fourth with: '*e se io levo*': and if I lift'.

👁️ **XVII HE CEASES TO ADDRESS HER IN VERSE** 👁️



When I had written these three sonetti, in which I spoke to that lady, since they told almost everything about my state, I believed I should be silent and say no more, since it seemed to me I had explained sufficiently about myself, although, silent from then on in speaking to her, I was compelled to adopt new material, nobler than before. And since the occasion for the new material is pleasant to hear, I will speak of it, as briefly as I can.

👁️ XVIII HE TAKES PRAISE OF BEATRICE AS HIS 👁️
NEW THEME



As it was a fact that many people had guessed the secret of my heart from my face, certain ladies, gathered together in order to take delight in each other's company, well knew my heart, since each of them was there often when I was discomfited: and I passing near them, as if led by fortune, was called to by one of these gentle ladies.

The lady who had called to me was a lady of very sweet speech: so that when I had reached them, and saw clearly that my most graceful lady was not with them, I was reassured enough to greet them, and ask their pleasure. The ladies were many, among whom certain were laughing amongst themselves: others were gazing at me waiting to hear what I should say: others again were talking among themselves.

Of these one, turning her eyes towards me and calling me by name, said these words: 'What is the point of your love for your lady, since you cannot endure her presence? Tell us, since the point of such love must surely be a very strange one.' And when she had spoken these words, not only she, but all the others, seemed by their faces to wait for my reply.

Then I spoke these words to her: 'My lady, the point of my love was once that lady's greeting, she whom perhaps you know, and in that rested the blessedness, which was the point of all my desires. But since she was pleased to deny it me, my lord Love, in his mercy, has set all my blessedness in that which I cannot lose.'

Then those ladies began to speak amongst themselves: and as we sometimes see rain falling mixed with beautiful snowflakes, so I seemed to hear their words emerge mixed with sighs. And when they had spoken a while among themselves, that lady who had spoken to me at first still said to me these words: 'We beg you to tell us, where is your blessedness.'

And I, replying to them, said this: 'In those words that praise my lady.' Then she who had spoken to me replied: 'If you were speaking truth to us, those words you have written to explain your condition would have been composed with a different intent.'

So I, thinking about those words, almost ashamed, parted from them, and went along saying to myself: 'Since there is such blessedness in those words that praise my lady, why have I spoken in another manner?' And so I decided to take as the theme of my words forever more those which sung the praises of that very graceful one: and thinking about it deeply, it seemed to me I had taken on a theme too high for me, so that I dared not begin: and I remained for several days with the desire to write and in fear of beginning.

☛ XIX HE WRITES A FIRST *CANZONE* IN PRAISE OF ☛
BEATRICE



fter this while I was walking along a path by which a stream of clearest water ran, I felt so strong a will to write that I began to think of the form I should use: and I thought that in speaking of her it would not be right if I composed without speaking to ladies in the second person, and not to all ladies, but only to those who are gentle and not merely feminine.

Then I say that my tongue spoke as if it moved by itself, and said: 'Ladies who have knowledge of love.' These words I stored in my mind with great delight, thinking to use them for my opening: so then, returning to the city, thinking for several days, I began a *canzone* with that opening, ordered in a way that will be seen in its divisions. The *canzone* begins: '*Donne ch'avete?*'

Ladies who have knowledge of love,
I wish to speak with you about my lady,
not because I think to end her praises,
but speaking so that I can ease my mind.
I say that thinking of her worth,
Amor makes me feel such sweetness,
that if did not then lose courage,
speaking, I would make all men in love.
And I would not speak so highly,
that I succumb to vile timidity:
but treat of the state of gentleness,
in respect of her, lightly, with you,
loving ladies and young ladies,
that is not to be spoken of to others.

An angel sings in the divine mind
and says: 'Lord, in the world is seen
a miracle in action that proceeds
from a spirit that shines up here.'
The heavens that have no other defect
but lack of her, pray to their Lord,
and every saint cries out mercy.
Pity alone takes our part,
so that God speaks of her, and means my lady:
'My Delights, now suffer it in peace
that at my pleasure she, your hope, remains
there, where one is who waits to lose her,
and will say in the Inferno: "Ill-born ones,
I have seen the hope of the blessed."'

My lady is desired by highest Heaven:
now I would have you know of her virtue.
I say, you who would appear a gentle lady
go with her, since when she goes by
Love strikes a chill in evil hearts,
so that all their thoughts freeze and perish:
and any man who suffers to stay and see her
becomes a noble soul, or else he dies.
And when she finds any who might be worthy
to look at her, he proves her virtue,
which comes to him, given, in greeting
and if he is humble, erases all offense.
Still greater grace God has granted her
since he cannot end badly who speaks with her.

Amor says of her: 'This mortal thing,
how can it be so pure and adorned?'
Then he looks at her and swears to himself
that God's intent was to make something rare.
She has the colour of pearl, in form such as
is fitting to a lady, not in excess:
she is the greatest good nature can create:
beauty is proven by her example.
From her eyes, as she moves them,
issue spirits ablaze with love,
which pierce the eyes of those who gaze on her then,
and pass within so each one finds the heart:
you will see Love pictured in her face,
there where no man may fixedly gaze.

Canzone, I know that you will go speaking
to many ladies, when I have sent you onwards.
Now I have made you, since I have raised you
to be Love's daughter, young and simple,
to those I have sent you, say, praying:
'Show me the way to go, since I am sent
to her of whom the praise is my adornment.'
And if you do not wish to go in vain,
do not rest where there are evil people:
try, if you can so do, to be revealed
only to ladies or some courteous man,
who will lead you there by the quickest way.
You will find Amor will be with her:
recommend me to him as you should.



Beatrice (Study for Dante's Dream)
Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 - 1882)

This *canzone*, so that it may be better understood, I will divide more intricately than the other poems above. And so I will first define three parts: the first part is a prelude to the following words: the second is the subject I treat of: the third is like a servant to the preceding words. The second begins with: '*Angelo clama*: An angel sings': the third with: '*Canzone, io so che*: *Canzone* I know that'.

The first part is divided in four: in the first I say to whom I wish to speak about my lady, and why I wish to speak: in the second I say what state I seem to be in when I think of her virtue, and what I would speak of if I did not lose courage: in the third I say how I believe I must speak of her in order not to be held back by diffidence. in the fourth, restating to whom I intend to speak, I give the reason why I speak to them. The second begins with: '*Io dico*: I say': the third with: '*E io non vo' parlar*: And I would not speak': the fourth: '*donne e donzelle*: ladies and young ladies'.

Next where I say: '*Angelo clama*' I begin to treat of this lady. And I divide this part in two: in the first I say what is known of her in Heaven: in the second I say what is known of her on Earth, with: '*Madonna è disiata*: My lady is desired'. This second part is divided in two: so that in the first I speak of her regarding the nobility of her spirit, saying something of her active virtues that proceed from her spirit: in the second I speak of her regarding the nobility of her body, saying something about her beauty, with: '*Dice de lei Amor*: Amor says of her'. This second part is divided in two: as in the first I speak of certain beauties which belong to her whole person, in the second I speak of certain beauties which belong to distinct parts of her person, with: '*De li occhi suoi*: From her eyes'. This second part is divided in two: for in the one I speak of her eyes, which are the source of love: in the second I speak of her mouth, which is love's end. And so that all evil thought may be dispersed here and now, remember you who read, that it is written above that my lady's greeting, that which arose from the movement of her mouth, was the end of my desires, while I could receive it.

Next where I say: '*Canzone, io so che tu*: *Canzone*, I know that you' I add a stanza almost as a handmaiden to the others in which I say what I desire of my *canzone*: and since the last part is easy to understand I will not trouble

to divide it further. I agree that to understand this *canzone* further it would be necessary to employ more minute divisions: but anyone who has insufficient wit to be able to understand it from the divisions made will not displease me if they leave it alone, since I am afraid I have certainly communicated its meaning to too many, by the divisions I have made, if it comes about that many are able to hear it.

XX HE IS REQUESTED TO SAY WHAT LOVE IS



fter this *canzone* was circulated for a while amongst people, as it happened that one of my friends heard it, his will moved him to beg me that I should tell him what Love is, having, perhaps from the words he heard, a greater faith in me than was merited. So, thinking that after treating of that subject it would be good to say something of Love, and thinking that my friend would be pleased, I decided to write a verse in which I would treat of Love: and then I wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: '*Amore e 'l cor gentil*'.

Love and the gentle heart are one thing,
as the wise man puts it in his verse,
and each without the other would be dust,
as a rational soul would be without its reason.
Nature, when she is loving, takes
Amor for lord, and the heart for his home,
in which sleeping he reposes
sometimes a short, sometimes a longer day.
Beauty may appear, in a wise lady,
so pleasant to the eyes, that in the heart,
is born a desire for pleasant things:
which stays so long a time in that place,
that it makes the spirit of Love wake.
And likewise in a lady works a worthy man.

This *sonetto* is divided in two parts: in the first I say of him what he is potentially: in the second I say of him how the potentiality fulfils itself in actuality. The second begins with '*Bieltate appare*: Beauty may appear'. The first divides in two: in the first I say in what object this potentiality exists: in

the second I say how this object and this potentiality come into being, and how the one enshrines the other as form content. The second begins with: '*Falli natura*: Nature takes'. Then where I say: 'Beltate appare' I say how the potentiality fulfils itself in actuality: and firstly how it fulfils itself in a man, then how it fulfils itself in a lady, with: '*E simil face in donna*: And likewise in a lady works'.

☞ XXI HOW BEATRICE WAKENS LOVE ☞



fter I had treated of Love in the above verse, I had the will to desire to write again, in praise of this so graceful lady, in which I would show how Love is wakened through her, and not only wakened where he is sleeping, but where he potentially is not, she, working miraculously, making him come to be. And then I wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: ‘*Ne li occhi porta*’.

In her eyes my lady bears Love,
by which she makes noble what she gazes on:
where she passes, all men turn their look on her,
and she makes the heart tremble in him she greets,
so that, all pale, he lowers his eyes,
and sighs, then, over all his failings:
anger and pride fleeing before her.
Help me, ladies, to do her honour
All sweetness, all humble thought
are born in the heart of him who hears her speak,
and he who first saw her is blessed.
How she looks when she smiles a little,
can not be spoken of or held in mind,
she is so rare a miracle and gentle.

This *sonetto* has three parts: in the first I say how my lady fulfils what is potential in actuality through that most noble part, her eyes: and in the third I say how she does the same through that most noble part, her mouth: and between these two parts is a brief part, which is almost a demand for help from the preceding and following parts, and begins with: ‘*Aiutatemi, donne*: Help me, ladies’. The third begins with: ‘*Ogni dolcezza*: All sweetness’.

The first is divided in three: in the first part I say how virtuously she makes noble all she sees, and that is as much as to say that she brings love into existence potentially where he is not: in the second I say how she brings love to actuality in the hearts of those whom she sees: in the third I say how her power operates virtuously on their hearts. The second begins with: '*ov'ella passa*: where she passes': the third with '*e cui saluta*: and in him she greets.'

Next where I say: '*Aiutatemi, donne*' is shown to whom it is my intention to speak, calling on ladies to help me honour her. Then where I say: '*Ogne dolcezza*' I say the same as I said in the first part, in respect of two movements of her mouth: one of which is her speech so sweet, and the other her marvellous smile, except that I do not say what effect the latter has in other's hearts, because the memory cannot retain it or its effect.

XXII THE DEATH OF BEATRICE'S FATHER



ot many days after this, as it so pleased the glorious Lord who did not deny death even to himself, he who was the father of this miracle who was seen to be this most noble Beatrice, in truth himself ascended from this life into glory.

It is the case that such a parting is saddening for those who are left behind, and are friends of the one who has gone from them: and there is no more intimate friendship than between a good father and a good daughter, a good daughter and a good father: and this lady was of the highest degree of goodness, and her father, as many believe and it is true, was to a high degree a good man: it is clear that this lady was filled with the most bitter of sorrows.

And because it is customary, following the manners of that city, for lady with lady, and gentleman with gentleman, to gather at such mourning, many ladies gathered where this Beatrice wept piteously: so that I, seeing some of the ladies returning from her, heard them talking about that most beautiful lady, and how she grieved: among their words I heard it said: 'Certainly she weeps so, that anyone who gazes at her would die of pity.'

Then those ladies passed by: and I was left in such sadness that many tears bathed my face, such that I covered my face with my hands many times: and if it were not that I waited to hear more of her, since I was in a place where most of the women who left her would pass, I would have hidden myself as soon as the tears overpowered me.

So I remained in that same place, other ladies passing close by me, among whom I heard these words mentioned as they went: 'Who of us can ever be happy again, who have heard the piteous speech of this lady?' After them other ladies passed, who went by saying: 'This man is one who weeps no less then if he had seen her, as we have.' Still others said of me: 'Look at this man: who does not seem to be himself, he is so changed!'

And so as these ladies passed, I heard words about her and myself, in

the manner I have written. Afterwards, thinking of them, I decided to write verses, considering I had a fitting reason for speech, in which I would compose all that those ladies had mentioned: and since I would have liked to have questioned them if it were not reprehensible to do so, I arranged the matter as if I had questioned them and they had answered.

And I made two *sonnettos*: in the first I question, in the way I wished to question: in the other I speak their reply, taken from what I heard them say, as if they had answered so. And I began the first: '*Voi che portate la sembianza humile*', and the other: '*Se tu colui c'hai trattato sovente*'.

You who bear a humble look,
with eyes cast down, displaying sadness,
where do you come from that your colour
seems to have changed to that of pity?
Have you seen our gentle lady
bathing the face of Love with tears?
Tell me, ladies, what my heart tells me,
since I see you going by so nobly.
And if you come from all that sorrow,
I beg you to stay with me a while,
and how it goes with her, do not hide from me.
I see that your eyes are full of tears,
and I see you return so transfigured,
that my heart trembles at having seen.

This *sonnetto* is divided in two parts: in the first I call to and ask of these ladies if they come from her, saying I believe it to be so, since they return so ennobled: in the second I beg them to speak to me of her. The second begins with '*E se venite*: And if you come from?'. After it is the other *sonnetto*, as I have said before.

Are you him that so often spoke
of our lady, talking to us alone?
You well resemble him in voice,
but the face seems to us another man's.
And why do you weep so bitterly,
who from yourself stir pity in others?
Did you see her weeping, that you cannot
hide your sorrowing mind within?
Let us weep and go by sadly
(who tries to comfort us commits a sin),
for in her weeping we have heard her speak.
She has a face so filled by pity,
that he who wished to gaze on her
weeping, would fall dead before her.

This *sonetto* has four parts, in accord with the four modes of speech of the ladies on whose behalf I reply: and as they are set out clearly enough above, I do not intend to spell out the content of each part, but only indicate them. The second begins with: '*E perché piangi*: And why do you weep': the third: '*Lascia piangere noi*: Let us weep': the fourth: '*Ell'ha nel viso*: She has a face.'

👁️ XXIII DANTE'S VISION OF BEATRICE'S DEATH 👁️



few days after this it happened that a grievous illness affected a certain part of my body, from which I continually suffered for nine days from the most bitter pain: this made me so weak, that I was forced to stay like one who could not move. I say that on the ninth day, feeling almost intolerable grief, a thought came to me that was about my lady.

And when I had thought of her a while, I returned to thinking about my weakened existence: and seeing how fragile our strength is, even in health, I began to weep about our miserable state. Then, sighing deeply, I said to myself likewise: 'Of necessity it must be that some time the most graceful Beatrice must also die.'

And it threw me into such intense bewilderment that I closed my eyes, and began to be tormented by imagining this, like a delirious person: so that at the start of the wanderings of my imagination, the faces of certain women with dishevelled hair appeared to me, who said to me: 'You will surely die': and then, after these women, diverse other faces appeared to me, terrible to look on, that said to me: 'You are dead'.

So, my imagination beginning to wander, I came to a place not knowing where I was: and it seemed to me I saw women, weeping, with dishevelled hair, going through the street, in extreme sadness: and the sun seemed to me to be darkened, so that the stars showed themselves of a colour such that I judged they were weeping: and it seemed to me that birds flying in the air fell dead, and there were massive tremors.

And marvelling in this fantasy, and very fearful, I imagined that a friend came to me saying: 'Do you not know? Your miraculous lady has departed this world.' Then I began to weep most piteously, and I did not only weep in imagination, but wept with my eyes, bathing them in real tears. I imagined I was gazing at the sky, and I seemed to see a multitude of angels who were returning to their place, and in front of them they had the whitest

of little clouds. It seemed to me these angels were singing gloriously, and the words of their singing I seemed to hear were those of: '*Osanna in excelsis*: Hosanna in the highest': and I could hear no more.

Then it seemed to me that my heart, where there was so much love, said to me: 'It is true, our lady lies dead.' And at this I seemed to go to gaze on the body in which that most beautiful and noble spirit had lived: and the wanderings of my imagination were so intense that dead lady was shown to me: and it seemed to me that women covered her, her head that is, with a white veil: and it seemed to me that her face has such a look of humility, that she seemed to say: 'I am gazing on the source of peace.'

In this imagining I felt so much humility at seeing her, that I called Death, and said: 'Sweetest Death, come to me, and do not be cruel to me, for you must have become gentle, after being in such a place! Now come to me, who desire you greatly: and you will see that I already wear your colours'.

And when I had seen the sad offices completed that are usually performed for the bodies of the dead, it seemed I returned to my room, and there I seemed to gaze at the sky: and my imagination was so intense that, weeping, I began to say in my true voice: 'O most beautiful soul, how blessed is he who beholds you!' And while I was speaking these words, with a painful anguish of tears, and calling to Death to come to me, a young and gentle lady, who was beside my bed, thinking that my tears and my words were solely from grief at my infirmity, began to weep herself, with great fearfulness. So that other women who were in the room realised that I wept because of the distress that they saw created in her: so making her, who was closely related to me, leave me, they came to me to wake me, thinking that I was dreaming, and said: 'Sleep no more' and 'Do not be troubled'.

And by their speaking this powerful imagining was broken off, at the moment that I was about to say: 'O Beatrice, you are blessed!' and I had already said the words: 'O Beatrice!' when I opened my eyes, suddenly, and realised that I had been imagining. And though I spoke her name, my voice was so broken by sobbing that I felt these ladies had not understood.

I was very much ashamed, but through Love's counsel I turned my face

towards the ladies. And when they saw me, they began to say: 'He looks like a dead man' and said amongst themselves: 'Let us see if we can comfort him'. At which they said many things to soothe me, and questioned me about the reason for my fear. When I felt somewhat comforted, realising it had been a fantasy, I said to them: 'I will say what came to me' and I told them what I had seen from beginning to end, but withholding the name of the most graceful lady.

Afterwards when I had recovered from my illness, I decided to write some verses about these things, as it appeared appropriate to my theme. So I wrote this *canzone* which begins with: '*Donna pietosa*' the ordering of which is made clear in the explanation that follows.

A lady, youthful and piteous,
greatly graced with human gentleness,
who was there where I called to Death,
seeing my eyes full of pity,
and listening to my empty words,
was moved by fear to intense weeping.
And other ladies who were made aware
of my state by her who wept with me,
made her go away,
and pressed about me to comfort me.
One said: 'Do not sleep',
and one said: 'Why are you troubled?'
Then I left off my strange fantasy
calling out the name of my lady.

My voice was so full of grief
and broken by the anguish of my weeping,
that the name was only heard in my heart:
and with all my aspect filled with shame
that was so apparent in my face,
Love made me turn towards them.
They saw my colour to be such,
that they thought me like the dead:
'Alas, let us comfort him'
they prayed, humbly, one then the others:
and often said:
'What have you seen, that you have lost courage?'
And when I was a little comforted,
I said: 'Ladies, I will tell you.

Lying there, thinking of my fragile life,
and seeing how slight its substance is,
Amor began to weep where he lies in the heart:
at which my spirit was so distressed
that sighing I said in my thoughts:
"Truly it will be, that my lady dies."
Then I was so filled by distress,
I closed my eyes heavy with that evil,
and so scattered
were my spirits, they all went wandering:
and then imagination,
roaming wildly and far from truth,
showed me women's faces hurrying by
that cried to me: "You will die, you will die."

Then I saw many fearful things,
in the empty dream that I had entered:
I seemed to be in a place I did not know,
and saw women going by in the street, dishevelled,
some full of tears, and some giving cries,
that flew like fires of sadness.
Then it seemed to me little by little
the sun darkened and the stars appeared,
and wept one to another:
the birds fell as they flew through the air,
and the earth trembled:
And a man appeared pale and hoarse,
saying to me: "What? Have you not heard the news?
Your lady is dead, who was so lovely."

I lifted my eyes, bathed in tears,
and saw, what seemed like manna raining,
angels returning to the sky,
and a little cloud went before them,
behind which they all cried: "Hosanna":
and if they had said more, I would tell you.
Then Amor said: "I will hide nothing from you:
come and see our lady, lying".
This fantastic dream
carried me to see the dead lady:
and when I was brought there,
I saw that ladies covered her with a veil:
and she had a look of true humility,
that it seemed as if she said: "I am at peace."



Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice
Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 - 1882)

I became so humble in my grief,
seeing such humility there in her,
that I said: "Death, I hold you so sweet:
now you will be a gentle thing,
since you have entered in my lady,
and will possess pity and not disdain.
See how I so much long to be
yours, that I resemble you in feature.
Come to me, as the heart begs you."
Then I departed, all the mourning done:
and when I was alone,
I said, gazing to the highest regions:
"Blessed is he, lovely soul, who sees you!"
Then you woke me, out of mercy.'

This *canzone* has two parts: in the first I say, speaking to an unknown person, how I was roused from a vain fantasy, by certain ladies, and how promised to tell them of it: in the second I say what I told them. The second part begins with: '*Mentr'io pensava*: Lying there, thinking'. The first part is divided in two: in the first part I say what certain ladies, and one of them especially, said and did because of my fantasy, and before I had returned to a normal condition: in the second part I say what they said to me when I had left that delirium: and that part begins with: '*Era la voce mia*: My voice was'

Next where I say: '*Mentr'io pensava*' I say how I told them that dream. And in this there are two parts: in the first I relate my dream in order: in the second, saying at what moment they woke me, I hint at my gratitude to them: and this part begins with: '*Voi mi chimaste*: Then you woke me'.

👁️ XXIV HIS SONETTO TO GUIDO CAVALCANTI 👁️



fter this vain imagining, it happened one day that, while I was sitting somewhere thinking, I felt a tremor beginning in my heart, as if I was in the presence of that lady. Then I say that a vision of Love came to me: and he seemed to come to me from the place where my lady lived, and it seemed to me that he said in my heart, joyfully: ‘Think blessedly of the day that I seized on you, because you ought to do so.’ And indeed my heart seemed so joyful, that it did not seem to be my heart, in this new state.

And not long after these words, that my heart spoke to me with the tongue of Love, I saw a gentle lady coming towards me, who was famous for her beauty, and who had long been my best friend’s lady. And the name of this lady was Giovanna, except that because of her beauty, as others believe, she was also named Primavera (*Spring, the first greenness*): and called so. And after her, as I gazed, I saw the miraculous Beatrice come by.

These ladies passed near me one after the other, and it seemed that Love spoke in my heart, and said: ‘The first is named Primavera, only because of what happened today: since I inspired the originator of the name to call her Primavera, she who first passes (*prima verrà*), on the day that Beatrice shows herself to the imagination of her faithful one. And if you also consider her first name, it also says ‘she who first passes’, since Giovanna comes from Giovanni (John) who preceded the true light, saying: “*Ego vox clamantis in deserto: parate viam Domini*: I am a voice crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord”’.

And after that it seemed to me that he said these words also: ‘Anyone who considers carefully would call Beatrice Love for the great similarity she has to me.’ Later, reflecting, I decided to write to my best friend in verse (withholding certain words it seemed best to withhold), believing that his heart still marvelled at the beauty of this gentle Primavera: and I wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: ‘*Io mi senti’ svegliar.*’

I felt a stirring in my heart
of a spirit of love which slept:
and then I saw Love coming from afar
so happy, that I scarcely recognised him,
saying : ‘Now think only to honour me’:
and he was smiling at every word.
And while my lord was standing by me,
I, gazing at the road that he had come,
saw lady Vanna and lady Bice
approaching the place where I was,
one miracle behind the other:
and as my mind repeats it to me,
Amor said to me: ‘That lady is Primavera,
and this lady has Love’s name, so resembling me.’

This *sonetto* has a number of parts: the first of them says how I felt a familiar tremor stirring in my heart, and how Love seemed to appear to me from afar, happy and in my heart: the second says how it seemed to me that love spoke to me in my heart, and how he looked to me: the third says how, when he had been with me a while, I saw and heard certain things. The second part begins with: ‘dicendo: “*Or pensa*”’: saying: “ Now think”’: the third with: ‘*E poco stando*: And while’. The third part is divided in two: in the first I say what I saw: in the second I say what I heard. The second begins with: ‘*Amor mi disse*: Amor said to me.’

☞ XXV HIS JUSTIFICATION OF HIS ☞
PERSONIFICATION OF LOVE



It might be that a person might object, one worthy of raising an objection, and their objection might be this, that I speak of Love as though it were a thing in itself, and not only an intelligent subject, but a bodily substance: which, demonstrably, is false: since Love is not in itself a substance, but an accident of substance.

And that I speak of him as if he were corporeal, moreover as though he were a man, is apparent from these three things I say of him. I say that I saw him approaching: and since to approach implies local movement, and local movement *per se*, following the Philosopher, exists only in a body, it is apparent that I make Love corporeal.

I also say of him that he smiles, and that he speaks: things which properly belong to man, and especially laughter: and therefore it is apparent that I make him human. To make this clear, in a way that is good for the present matter, it should first be understood that in ancient times there was no poetry of Love in the common tongue, but there was Love poetry by certain poets in the Latin tongue: amongst us, I say, and perhaps it happened amongst other peoples, and still happens, as in Greece, only literary, not vernacular poets treated of these things.

Not many years have passed since the first of these vernacular poets appeared: since to speak in rhyme in the common tongue is much the same as to speak in Latin verse, paying due regard to metre. And a sign that it is only a short time is that, if we choose to search in the language of *oc* and that of *si*, we will not find anything earlier than a hundred and fifty years ago.

And the reason why several crude rhymesters were famous for knowing how to write is that they were almost the first to write in the language of *si*. And the first who began to write as a poet of the common

tongue was moved to do so because he wished to make his words understandable by a lady to whom verse in Latin was hard to understand. And this argues against those who rhyme on other matters than love, because it is a fact that this mode of speaking was first invented in order to speak of love.

From this it follows that since greater license is given to poets than prose writers, and since those who speak in rhyme are no other than the vernacular poets, it is apt and reasonable that greater license should be granted to them to speak than to other speakers in the common tongue: so that if any figure of speech or rhetorical flourish is conceded to the poets, it is conceded to the rhymesters. So if we see that the poets have spoken of inanimate things as if they had sense and reason, and made them talk to each other, and not just with real but with imaginary things, having things which do not exist speak, and many accidental things speak, as if they were substantial and human, it is fitting for writers of rhymes to do the same, but not without reason, and with a reason that can later be shown in prose.

That the poets have spoken like this is can be evidenced by Virgil, who says that Juno, who was an enemy of the Trojans, spoke to Aeolus, god of the winds, in the first book of the Aeneid: '*Aeole, namque tibi: Aeolus, it was you*', and that the god replied to her with: '*Tuus, o regina, quid optes, explorare labor: mihi jussa capessere fas est*: It is for you, o queen, to decide what our labours are to achieve: it is my duty to carry out your orders'. In the same poet he makes an inanimate thing (Apollo's oracle) talk with animate things, in the third book of the Aeneid, with: '*Dardanidae duri*: You rough Trojans'.

In Lucan an animate thing talks with an inanimate thing, with: '*Multum. Roma, tamen debes civilibus armis*: Rome, you have greatly benefited from the civil wars.'

In Horace a man speaks to his own learning as if to another person: and not only are they Horace's words, but he gives them as if quoting the style of goodly Homer, in his Poetics saying: '*Dic mihi, Musa, virum*: Tell me, Muse, about the man.'

In Ovid, Love speaks as if it were a person, at the start of his book titled *De Remediis Amoris*: Of the Remedies for Love, where he says: '*Bella mihi*,

video, bella parantur, ait: Some fine things I see, some fine things are being prepared, he said.

These examples should serve to as explanation to anyone who has objections concerning any part of my little book. And in case any ignorant person should assume too much, I will add that the poets did not write in this mode without good reason, nor should those who compose in rhyme, if they cannot justify what they are saying, since it would be shameful if someone composing in rhyme put in a figure of speech or a rhetorical flourish, and then, being asked, could not rid his words of such ornamentation so as to show the true meaning. My best friend and I know many who compose rhymes in this foolish manner.

☛ XXVI HIS FURTHER PRAISE OF BEATRICE ☛



his most graceful lady, of whom I have spoken in preceding words, found so much favour among people, that when she passed along the street, they ran to catch sight of her: which filled me with marvellous joy. And when she was near anyone, such purity filled his heart that he did not dare to raise his eyes, or to respond to her greeting: and of this, having experienced it, many might give witness to those who did not credit it.

She went crowned and clothed with humility, showing no arrogance because of what she saw or heard. Many, when she passed, said: ‘She is no woman, but one of the most beautiful of Heaven’s angels.’ And others said: ‘She is a marvel: how blessed is the Lord, who can create such miracles!’

I say that she appeared so gentle and so full of all that was pleasing, that those who gazed at her comprehended in themselves a pure and soothing sweetness, that they could not describe: nor was there anyone who could gaze at her without immediately sighing.

These, and more marvellous things, arose from her virtues: so that thinking of it, wanting to repeat my style of praising her, I decided to write verse in which I would reveal her miraculous and excellent effect, so that not only those who could physically see her, but others might know of her what words can show. Then I wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: ‘*Tanto gentile*’.

So gentle and so pure appears
my lady when she greets others,
that every tongue trembles and is mute,
and their eyes do not dare gaze at her.
She goes by, aware of their praise,
benignly dressed in humility:
and seems as if she were a thing come
from Heaven to Earth to show a miracle.
She shows herself so pleasing to those who gaze,
through the eyes she sends a sweetness to the heart,
that no one can understand who does not know it:
and from her lips there comes
a sweet spirit full of love,
that goes saying to the soul: 'Sigh.'

This *sonetto* is so simple to understand, from what is said above, that it needs no division: and so, leaving it, I say that my lady came into such grace that not only was she honoured and praised, but through her many were also honoured and praised. Then, seeing this, and wanting to reveal it to those who had not seen it, I decided to write further verses that would make it known: and I then wrote this next *sonetto* that begins: '*Vede perfettamente onne salute*'

They have seen perfection of all welcome
who see my lady among the other ladies:
those who go by with her are moved
to render thanks to God for lovely grace.
Her beauty is of such virtue,
that no envy can arise from it,
but makes them go clothed with
nobility, with love and with loyalty.
The sight of her makes all humble:
and does not only make her appear pleasing,
but all receive honour through her.
And she is so gentle in her effect,
that no one can recall her to mind.
who does not sigh in sweetness of love.

This *sonetto* has three parts: in the first I say among which people that lady seemed most miraculous: in the second I say how gracious was her company: in the third I say what things her power brought about in others. The second part begins with: '*quelle que vano*: those who go by': the third with: '*E sua bieltate*: Her beauty is'.

This last part is divided in three: in the first I say what she brought about in ladies, that is through their own selves: in the second I say what she brought about in them in the eyes of others: in the third I say how not only in the ladies, but in everyone, and not only in her presence but in remembrance of her, she worked miraculously. The second begins with: '*La vista sua*: The sight of her': and the third with: '*Ed è ne li atti*: And she is so'.



The Pious Lady on the Left (Study for Dante's Dream)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 - 1882)

☞ XXVII HER EFFECT ON DANTE ☞



fter this I began to think one day about what I had written of my lady, that is in the two preceding sonetti: and realising in my thoughts, that I had not written about what she was bringing about in me at the present moment, it appeared to me that I had spoken inadequately. And so I decided to write verse in which I would say how I seemed to be sensitive to her effect, and how her virtue affected me: and not believing that I could say it in a brief *sonetto*, I then started a *canzone*, which begins: ‘*Si lungiamente*’.

So long has Love held power over me
and accustomed me to his lordship,
that as he seemed harsh to me at first,
so now he seems sweet in my heart.
And so when he takes away my courage,
and my spirits seem to fly away,
then I feel throughout my soul
such sweetness that my face pales,
and then Love holds such power over me,
that he makes my spirits go speaking,
and always calling on
my lady to grant me greater welcome.
That happens to me whenever I see her,
and is so humbling, no one can understand.

XXVIII WHAT HE WILL SAY CONCERNING THE
DEATH OF BEATRICE



Quomodo sedet sola civitas plena populo! facta est quasi vidua domina gentium. How solitary lies the city filled with people! it has become as a woman widowed, in the world.’

I was still composing this *canzone* and had completed the stanza given previously, when the Lord of Justice called this most gentle one to glory under the sign of that queen, the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose name was held in greatest reverence in the words of this blessed Beatrice.

And although it might perhaps be right at present to say something of her departure from us, it is not my intention to say anything for three reasons: the first is that it is not part of my present theme, if one considers the introduction that opens this little book: the second is this, even if it were part of the present theme, my tongue is not sufficiently knowledgeable to treat of it as it should be treated: the third is this, even if one or the other were not the case, it is not fitting for me to treat of it, because treating of it would require me to praise myself, which is the most reprehensible thing one can do: and therefore I leave it to be treated of by another commentator.

However, since the number nine has appeared a number of times in my previous words, and it appears that this is not without meaning, and it seems that in her departure this number played a large part, it is fitting to say something as it seems necessary to my theme. So I will first say what part it played in her departure, and then I will give some reasons why this number was so closely tied to her.

☞ XXIX THE NUMBER NINE ☞



say that, following Arabic usage, her most noble spirit departed from us in the first hour (*6am*) of the ninth day of the month (the *nineteenth*): and following Syrian usage she departed from us in the ninth month of the year (*June*), because their first month is *First Tixryn* which is October to us: and following our usage she departed from us in that year of our era, that is of the years of Our Lord, in which the perfect number (*ten*) had been completed nine times in the century in which she lived in this world, and she was a Christian of the thirteenth century (*1290*).

As to why this number was so closely tied to her, this might provide a reason: since, following Ptolemy and following Christian truth, there are nine revolving heavens, and following common astrological opinion these heavens must affect what is beneath them according to their aspects together, this number was closely linked to her in order to show that at her birth all the nine revolving heavens were in perfect accord.

This is one reason: but thinking more subtly, and following infallible truth, this number was she, herself: I say it symbolically, and I will explain it so. The number three is the root of nine, because, without any other number, of itself it creates nine, as can be clearly seen in that three times three is nine.

Therefore if three is of itself the only maker of nine, and the only maker from itself of miracles is threefold, that is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are three and one, that lady was accompanied by this number nine to reveal that she was a nine, that is a miracle, of which the root, that is of the miracle, is solely the miraculous Trinity.

Perhaps a more subtle person could find in it a more subtle reason: but this is the one that I see, and that pleases me most.

XXX HIS LETTER TO THE RULERS



fter she had departed this life, the whole city was left as though widowed, shorn of all dignity: so that I, still weeping in the desolate city, wrote to the rulers of the Earth something of its condition, taking the beginning from the Prophet Jeremiah which says: *‘Quomodo sedet sola civitas: How solitary lies the city.’*

And I say this so that no one might wonder why I have written it previously, almost as an introduction to the new theme that follows it. And if anyone wants to criticise me for this, that I do not write the words that followed that quotation, I will excuse myself in that I intended from the first to write nothing except in the common tongue: so that, since the speech that follows that which is quoted is all in Latin, it would be against my intentions to write it. And likewise it is the intention of my best friend for whom I write this, also, that I should write it only in the common tongue.

☞ XXXI HIS *CANZONE* MOURNING BEATRICE ☞



hen my eyes had wept for some while, and were so affected that they could no longer relieve my sadness, I thought I would like to relieve it with some words of sorrow: and so I proposed making a *canzone* in which in the midst of weeping I would speak of her through whom such sadness was destroying my soul: and I started then a *canzone*, which begins: ‘*Li occhi dolenti per pietà*: The grieving eyes in pity.’ And so that this *canzone* may seem more destitute at its end, I will divide it before I transcribe it: and I will use this style from now on.

I say that this mournful little *canzone* has three parts: the first is an introduction: in the second I speak of her: in the third I speak sorrowfully to the *canzone*. The second begins with: ‘*Ita n’è Beatrice*: Beatrice has gone’: the third with: ‘*Pietosa mia canzone*: My sorrowful *canzone*.’

The first is divided in three: in the first I say why I am moved to speak: in the second I say I say to whom I would speak: in the third I say of whom I would speak. The second begins with: ‘*E perché me ricorda*: And so remembering’: the third with: ‘*e dicerò*: and I will speak’.

Then where I say: ‘*Ita n’è Beatrice*’, I speak of her: and within this there are two parts: first I say why she was taken from us: after that I say how others weep at her leaving, and I begin that part with: ‘*Partissi de la sua*: It parted from her’.

That part is divided in three: in the first I say who does not weep for her: in the second I say who does weep: in the third I speak of my state. The second begins with: ‘*ma ven tristiza e voglia*: but sadness and grief come’: the third with: ‘*Dannomi angoscia*: Anguish grants me’.

Then where I say: ‘*Pietosa mia canzone*’, I speak to the *canzone* itself, indicating which ladies it should go to, and take its place among them.

The grieving eyes for pity of the heart
have so suffered the pain of tears,
that having conquered none remain.
Now, if I wish to ease their sadness,
that leads me step by step to death,
I must speak to find my help.
And so remembering how I spoke
of my lady, while she was alive,
sweet ladies, freely with you,
I do not wish to speak with others,
unless they have the gentle hearts of women:
and I will speak of her, weeping,
since she has gone suddenly to Heaven,
and has left Love grieving with me.

Beatrice has gone to the highest Heaven,
to the realm where the angels have peace,
and stays with them, and has left you ladies:
no quality of coldness took her,
or of heat, as it is with others,
but it was only her great gentleness:
since light from her humility
pierced the skies with so much virtue,
that it made the Eternal Lord marvel,
so that a sweet desire
moved him to claim such greeting:
and called her from the heights to come to him,
since he saw our harmful life
was not worthy of such a gentle one.

It parted from her lovely person,
filled with grace, the gentle spirit,
to be glorious in a worthy place.
Who does not weep for her, when speaking of her,
has a heart of stone, so evil and so vile,
that no good spirit can enter there.
The base heart does not have enough wit
to imagine anything of her,
so grievous weeping does not come to him:
but sadness and grief come
with sighs, and a death by weeping,
stripping the soul of every comfort,
to him who sees continually in his thoughts
what she was, and how she has been taken.

Anguish grants me a deep sighing,
when the thought in my grave mind
recalls her for whom my heart is broken:
and often when I think of death,
such a sweet desire comes to me,
that it transmutes the colour of my face.
And when that idea becomes truly fixed in me,
I know such pain in every part,
that I start up with the grief I feel:
and become such
that shame hides me from others.
Then weeping, lonely in my grieving,
I call to Beatrice, and say: 'Are you truly dead?'
and while I call, I am comforted.

Weeping with grief and sighing with anguish
my heart wearies me when I find myself alone,
so that anyone hearing me would pity:
and what the state of my life is, since
my lady is gone to her new world,
there is no tongue that knows enough to say:
and so, my ladies, even if I wished,
I could not tell you truly how I am,
since this bitter life so torments me:
which is so humbling,
that all men seem to say to me: 'I abandon you,'
on seeing my deathly pale lips.
But what I am that my lady sees,
and I still hope for mercy from her.

My sorrowful *canzone*, now go weeping:
and find the ladies, and young ladies,
to whom your sisters
used to bring delight:
and you, who are the daughter of my sadness,
go disconsolate to be with them.



The Kiss (Study for Dante's Dream), Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 – 1882)

☞ XXXII HIS POEM FOR ONE OF BEATRICE'S ☞
BROTHERS



When this *canzone* was complete, one came to me who, in the levels of friendship, is a friend who stands immediately after the first: and he was so closely related by blood to that glorious lady, that no one was closer to her. And after speaking to me for a while, he asked me if I would write something about a lady who had died: and disguising his words so that he seemed to speak of someone else, who was known to be dead: so I, realising that he spoke solely of that blessed one, said to him that I would do as his request demanded.

Afterwards, thinking of it, I decided to write a *sonetto* in which I would grieve a little, and send it to that friend of mine, so that it seemed that I had made it for him: and I then wrote this *sonetto* which begins: '*Venite a intender li sospiri miei*: Come and listen to my sighs'. It has two parts: in the first I call on Love's faithful to hear me: in the second I speak about my state of misery. The second begins with: '*li quai disconsolati*: which disconsolately'.

Come and listen to my sighs,
you gentle hearts, as pity begs you:
which disconsolately force their way,
and if they did not, I would die of grief:
since my eyes would be flowing,
more times than I would wish,
alas! with weeping so for my lady,
that weeping for her weighs on the heart.
You will often hear them calling
to my gentle lady, who was taken
to a world worthy of her virtue:

and sometimes they will vilify this life
in the person of a grieving spirit
desolate of her sweet greeting.

XXXIII HE ALSO WRITES TWO STANZAS OF A
CANZONE FOR HIM



hen I had written this *sonetto*, thinking about him to whom I intended to give it, as if composed for him, I saw that it appeared a bare and impoverished service to someone so close to that glorious one. And so, before I gave him the *sonetto* above, I wrote two stanzas of a *canzone*, one truly for him, and the other for myself, although both the one and the other appear to be written for the same person, to anyone who does not look at them carefully: but anyone who looks at them carefully can see that different people are speaking, since one does not call her his lady, while the other clearly does.

I gave him the above *sonetto* and the *canzone*, saying that I had written them solely for him. The *canzone* begins: '*Quantunque volte: Whenever*', and has two parts: in the one, that is in the first stanza, this dear friend, close to her, laments: in the second I lament myself, that is in the other stanza, which begins: '*E' si raccoglie ne li miei: And there is heard in my*'. And so it is clear in this *canzone* two people lament, the one laments as a brother, the other as a servant.

Whenever, alas! I remember
that I may never again
see that lady for whom I so grieve,
so much grief is gathered in my heart
by the grieving mind,
that I say: 'My spirit, why do you not go,
since the torments you suffer
in this world, which grows so hateful to you,
bring such great thoughts of dread?'
Then I call on Death,

as to a sweet and gentle refuge:
and I say: 'Come to me' with such love,
that I am envious of all who die.

And there is heard in my sighs
a sound of pity,
which calls on Death endlessly:
to him all my desires turned,
when my lady
was taken by his cruelty:
since the joy of her beauty,
withdrawing itself from our sight,
became a spiritual loveliness
that through the Heavens sent
the light of love, that greets the angels,
and their high intellects makes
subtly marvel, she is so gentle.

☛ XXXIV A YEAR LATER DANTE DRAWS THE ☛
FIGURES OF ANGELS



On the day when the year was completed in which that lady became a citizen of eternal life, I was sitting in a place where, recalling her, I was designing an angel on certain little panels: and while I was drawing, I turned my gaze, and I saw near me men to whom honour was due. And they were watching what I was doing: and, from what they said later, they were standing there some time before I was aware of them.

When I saw them, I rose, and greeted them saying: ‘Another was with me in my mind, so I was dreaming’. When they had left I returned to my work, that of drawing angelic figures: and creating them there came to me the thought of writing verse, as an anniversary, and writing them to those who had come to see me: and I then wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: ‘*Era venuta*: There came’ which has two versions of the opening, and therefore I will divide it according to the first, and mention the alternative.

I say that according to the first version this *sonetto* has three parts: in the first I say that this lady was already in my memory: in the second I say how Love affected me as a result: in the third I speak of the effects of Love. The second begins with: ‘Amor, che: Love, that’: the third with: ‘*Piangendo uscivan* for: They went weeping from’

This part divides in two: in the one I say that all my sighs went out speaking: in the second I say that some spoke different words to the rest. The second begins with: ‘*Ma quei*: But those’.

The second version is divided in the same way, except that in the first part I say when my lady came into my memory, and I do not say this in the other version.

First version:

There came into my mind
the gentle lady who through her virtue
was placed by the highest Lord
in the Heaven of humility where Mary is.

Second version:

There came into my mind
the gentle lady whom Love weeps for,
at the moment when her virtue
drew you to gaze at what I made.

Amor, who felt her in his mind,
was woken in my ravaged heart,
and said to my sighs: 'Go now':
so that each departed sadly.
They went weeping from my chest
with a voice that often brings
woeful tears to my sad eyes.
But those that issued with the greatest pain,
came saying: 'O noble intellect,
it was a year ago you leapt to Heaven.'



The Boat of Love, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 – 1882)

☞ XXXV THE LADY AT THE WINDOW ☞



Some time after that, since it happened that I was in a place where I remembered time past, I paused thinking deeply, and with sad thoughts, so much so that it made me seem to have an aspect of terrible distress. So that, aware of my trouble, I lifted my eyes to see if others had seen it.

Then I saw a gentle and very lovely young lady, who was looking at me so pitifully from a window, showing so much in her face that all pity seemed concentrated in her.

Since, when it happens that the miserable see compassion for themselves in others, they are moved to weep more quickly, as though pitying themselves, I then felt my eyes begin to want to weep: and then, fearing to reveal my unhappy life, I withdrew from that lady's sight: and later I said to myself: 'It cannot be other than that the most noble love lives within that lady'.

And so I decided to write a *sonetto*, in which I would speak of her, and contain in it everything that is narrated in this account. And since this account is clear enough, I will not divide it. The *sonetto* begins with: '*Videro li occho me?*'

My eyes saw how much pity
was apparent in your face,
when you gazed at the attitude and form
that I often appear in through grief.
Then I understood that you would know
the nature of my hidden life,
so that I felt fear in my heart
of showing my misery in my eyes.
And taking myself away from you, I felt
that the tears rose from my heart,

Dante Alighieri

which were summoned by your look.
Then I said to my sad spirit:
'It must be that Love lives within this lady
who makes me go weeping so.'



The Lady at the Window, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 - 1882)

XXXVI HIS FURTHER POEM TO THE LADY AT
THE WINDOW.



It so happened afterwards that whenever this lady saw me, she appeared with a pitiful face and pallid colour as if from love: so reminding me often of my most noble lady, who always showed herself with a similar colour. And indeed, often, not being able to weep or express my sadness, I went to see this compassionate lady, sight of whom seemed to draw the tears from my eyes. And so I felt the will to write words once more, speaking to her, and I wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: '*Color d'amore*. The colour of love': and is clear without needing to be divided, because of the preceding account.

The colour of love and the semblance of pity
no woman's face has more miraculously
shown, from often seeing
gentle eyes or grievous weeping,
than yours, when before you
you can see my sorrowing mouth:
such thoughts come to my mind through you,
I cannot hold my heart firm in its distress.
I cannot keep my wasted eyes
from gazing at you continually,
because of their desire for weeping:
and their will increases seeing you,
so that they are all consumed by that wish:
but in your presence they cannot shed tears.

☞ XXXVII HE IS CONCERNED AT HIS OWN ☞
BEHAVIOUR



came to such a pass through sight of this lady, that my eyes began to delight in seeing her too much: so that I often became angry in my heart, and rebuked myself as a base person. And more often still I reviled the vanity of my eyes, and said to them in my thoughts:

‘Once you used to make everyone who saw your sad condition weep and now it seems you wish to forget that, because of this lady who gazes at you: who only gazes at you in so far as she grieves for the glorious lady for whom you used to weep: but do what you will, since I will remind you of her, accursed eyes, since your tears must have no cease, this side of death.’

And when I had spoken in this way, to my eyes, within my thoughts, sighs and anguish greatly assailed me. And so that this war in me should not remain locked within the miserable man who experienced it, I decided to create a *sonetto*, and to describe within it this terrible state. And I wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: ‘*L’amaro lagrimar*: The bitter weeping’.

It has two parts: in the first I speak to *my eyes* as my heart spoke to me: in the second I remove all doubt, clarifying who it is who speaks in this way: and this part begins with: ‘*Così dice*: So speaks’. Perhaps it could well be divided further, but this would be pointless, since it is rendered clear by the preceding commentary.

‘The bitter weeping that you made,
oh eyes, through the long seasons,
made that other person weep
with pity, as you have seen.
Now it seems to me you would erase it,
if I for my part were negligent,
and did not trouble you with every reason,
reminding you of her whom you mourn.
Your vanity makes me reflect,
and tremble so, that I am full of fear
at the face of a lady that you gaze on.
You should not be, unless you die,
forgetful of that lady who is dead.’
So speaks my heart, and then it sighs.

XXXVIII THE STRUGGLE OF THE HEART AND
THE SOUL



he sight of that lady created such a strange state in me that I often thought of her as a person who pleased me too much: and I thought of her like this: ‘That is a gentle lady, beautiful, young and wise, and perhaps she appears by Love’s will, so that my life can be at rest.’

And often I thought more lovingly, until my heart consented to it, that is to my reasoning. And when I had consented, I reflected on it, as if moved by reason, and said to myself: ‘God, what thought is this, that tries to console me in this vile way and hardly lets me think of anything else?’

Then another thought arose, and said to me: ‘Now you have been in such great tribulation, why do you not want refuge from such bitterness? You see that this is Love’s inspiration, who brings love’s passions before us, and it arises from that gentle place from which do those of the eyes of the lady who has shown us such pity.’

So, having often struggled with myself like this, I wished then to speak some words: and since in the war of my thoughts those which spoke of her conquered, it seemed to me that I should speak of her: and I wrote this *sonetto*, which begins: ‘*Gentil pensiero*: Gentle thought: and I say ‘*gentile*’ in respect of its speaking of a gentle lady, which otherwise would be most reprehensible.

In this *sonetto* there are two parts of me, in accord with how my thought was divided. The one part I call the heart that is passion: the other I call the soul that is reason: and I say what one says to the other. And that it is fitting to call passion the heart, and the reason soul, is clear enough to those whom it pleases me to have understand this. It is true that in the preceding *sonetto* I take the part of the heart against the eyes, and that seems contrary to what I am saying now: and so I say that even there I intend the heart to represent passion, since my desire to remember my most gentle

lady was still greater than to see the other, though I had some passion towards her, yet it seemed trivial: so it is clear that the one speech is not counter to the other.

This *sonetto* has three parts: in the first I begin to say to that lady how my desire turns completely towards her: in the second I say how the soul, that is reason, speaks to the heart, that is passion: in the third I say how it replies. The second part begins with: '*L'anima dice*: The soul says': the third with: '*Ei le risponde*: It replies'.

Gentle thought that speaks of you
often comes to live with me,
and reasons about love so sweetly,
that it makes the heart agree with it.
The soul says to the heart: 'Who is this,
who comes to console our mind,
and is his power so great,
that other thoughts cannot stay with us?'
It replies: 'Oh thoughtful soul,
this is a little spirit, love's messenger,
that brings before me his desires:
and his life, and all his virtue,
rises from the eyes of that pity
which was so troubled by our suffering.

☞ XXXIX HIS VISION OF BEATRICE IN GLORY ☞

There rose up against this adversary of reason, one day, about the ninth hour, a strong imagining in me, so that it seemed I saw that glorious Beatrice in that crimson garment in which she first appeared to my eyes: and she seemed to me young, of the same age as when I first saw her. Then I began to think of her: and remembering her, in the order of time past, my heart began to repent sorrowfully of the desire by which it had allowed itself to be so basely possessed, for some days, against reason's constancy: and when this wrong desire had been scattered, all my thoughts returned to her, the most gentle Beatrice.

And I say that from then on I began to think of her with all my remorseful heart, so that sighs often revealed it: in such a way that they all, as they rose, spoke what my heart was saying, that is the name of that most gentle one, and how she had left us. And many times it happened that a thought would have so much sadness in it that I forgot what and where it was.

Through this renewal of my sighing, my lapsed weeping renewed itself in such a way that my eyes seemed two objects that only desired to weep: and it often happened that through long continuation of weeping, a purple colour ringed them, which appears in some of the sufferings of others. So it seems that their vanity was fittingly rewarded: so much so that from then on I could not gaze at anyone who looked at me if they might draw out a similar effect.

Then, wishing this unhappy desire and vain temptation to appear as overcome, so that the verses I had written before might create no doubts, I decided to create a *sonetto* in which I would include the essence of this account. And then I wrote: '*Lasso! per forza di molti sospiri*: Alas! Through the power of many sighs' and I said 'lasso' because of my shame in this, that my eyes had been so inconstant. I will not divide this *sonetto*, since it is clear enough from my account.

Alas! Through the power of many sighs,
that are born of the thoughts in my heart,
the eyes are conquered, and have no virtue
to gaze at anyone who looks at them.
And they are now become two passions
for weeping and revealing sorrow,
and they grieve so much that Love
rings them with the crown of suffering.
These thoughts, and the sighs I sigh,
become so anguished in my heart,
that Amor lies near death, with grieving look:
since they have in this sadness of theirs
that sweet name of my lady written,
and many words about her death.

✎ XL HIS POEM ADDRESSING THE PILGRIMS ✎
TRAVELLING TO ROME



After this tribulation it happened, at the time when many people go to see that blessed image which Jesus Christ left us as an imprint of his most beautiful countenance, which my lady gloriously sees, that some pilgrims were passing by on a road which runs almost through the centre of the city where that most gentle lady was born, and lived, and died.

These pilgrims, it seemed to me, went along very pensively: so, thinking about them, I said to myself: 'It seems to me these pilgrims are from a distant place, and I do not think they have even heard of my lady, and know nothing about her: indeed their thoughts are of other things than those here, so that they perhaps think of distant friends, of whom we know nothing.'

Then I said to myself: 'I know that if they come from a nearby place, they would be somewhat distressed passing through the centre of this grieving city.' Then I said to myself: 'If I could detain them a little, I would make them weep before they left this city, since I would speak words that would make everyone weep who heard them.'

So, as they passed from sight, I decided to compose a *sonetto*, in which I would make plain what I said within myself: and so it would appear more piteous, I decided to write it as if I had spoken to them: and I wrote this *sonetto* which begins: '*Deh peregrini che pensosi andante*: O pilgrims who go thinking'. And I said '*peregrini*' in the general sense of the word: since 'pilgrims' can be understood in two senses, in one case generalised, and in the other specific: in general to the extent that whoever travels from their country is a pilgrim: in particular in that no one is a pilgrim unless they go to or from the shrine of Saint James.

And it should be known that correctly there are three titles for the people who go in the service of the Almighty: they are called palmers if they

go overseas, since they often bring back palm leaves: they are called *pilgrims* if they go to the shrine of Saint James in Galicia, since the sepulchre of Saint James was further away from his country than any other apostle: they are called *romeos* if they go to Rome, which is where those I call pilgrims were going.

I have not divided this *sonetto*, since it is clear enough from my account.

O pilgrims who go thinking,
perhaps of things not present,
do you come from so far a place,
as your faces demonstrate,
that you do not weep when you pass
through the centre of the grieving city,
like those people who do not know
any part of its heavy sorrow?
If you will stay to hear my wish,
surely my heart of sighs tells me
that you will then travel weeping.
It has lost its blessed Beatrice:
and the words a man can say of her
have the power to make others weep.

👁️ XLI HIS POEM FOR THE TWO GENTLE LADIES 👁️



Some time later two gentle ladies begged me to send them some of my poems: so thinking of their nobility, I decided to send them those and to create a new one, which I would send to them with the rest, in order honourably to fulfil their request. And I then wrote a *sonetto*, that told of my state, and sent it to them with the preceding *sonetto* and with one that began: ‘*Venite a intender*. Come that you may understand’.

The *sonetto* that I then composed begins: ‘*Oltre la sfera*: Beyond the sphere’ and contains five parts. In the first I say where my thought travels, naming it by the name of one of its effects. In the second I say why it ascends, that is what makes it do so. In the third I say what it sees, that is a lady honoured above: and I call it then a ‘pilgrim spirit’, since it ascends spiritually, and stays there for a while like a pilgrim who is out of his own country.

In the fourth I say that it sees her as such, that is of such qualities, that I cannot understand them, that is to say that my thought leaps towards the qualities she has to a level that my intellect cannot comprehend: because it is a fact that our intellect fails before those blessed spirits as the eyes do before the sun: and so the Philosopher says in the second book of the *Metaphysics*.

In the fifth I say that although I cannot understand that place my thought has been drawn to, that is towards her miraculous qualities, at least I know this, that the thought is solely about my lady, since I hear her name often in my thoughts: and at the end of this fifth part I say ‘*donna mie care*: ladies dear to me’ to make it known that I speak to ladies.

The second part begins with: ‘*intelligenza nova*: new intelligence’ the third with: ‘*Quand’elli è giunto*: When it is near’: the fourth with: ‘*Vedela tal*: Seeing her such’: the fifth with: ‘*So io che parla*: I know it speaks’.

Perhaps it might be divided more subtly, and made more subtly comprehensible: but it may pass with these divisions, and therefore I do not continue to divide it further.

Beyond the sphere that circles most widely
passes the sigh that issues from my heart:
new intelligence, that Love
weeping instills within it, drives it upwards.
When it is near where it desires,
it sees a lady, who receives honour,
and is a light, that by its splendour
the pilgrim spirit can gaze upon her.
Seeing her such, when it says so to me,
I do not understand, it speaks so subtly
to the grieving heart, which makes it speak.
I know it speaks of that gentle one,
since it often mentions Beatrice,
so that I know it truly, ladies dear to me.

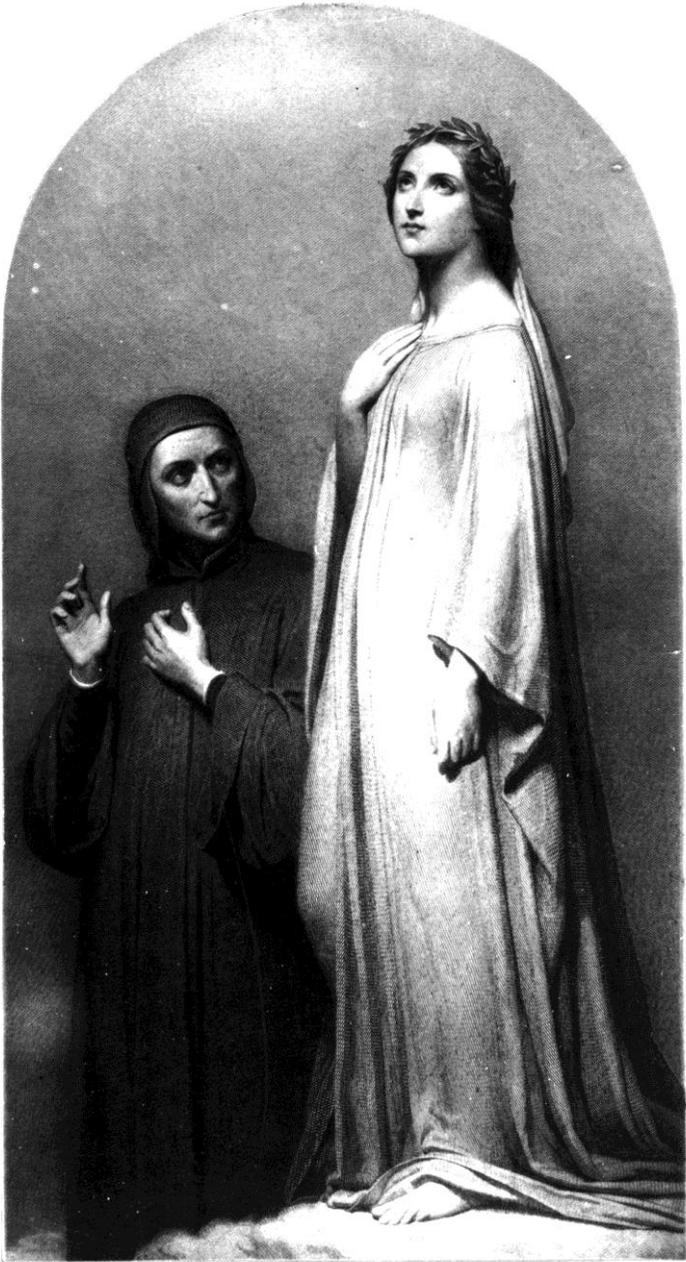
☞ XLII THE FINAL VISION ☞



fter writing this *sonetto* a miraculous vision appeared to me, in which I saw things which made me decide to write nothing more of this blessed one until such time as I could treat of her more worthily.

And to achieve this I study as much as I can, as she truly knows. So that, if it pleases Him by whom all things live, that my life lasts a few years, I hope to write of her what has never been written of any woman.

And then may it be pleasing to Him who is the Lord of courtesy, that my soul might go to see the glory of its lady, that is of that blessed Beatrice, who gloriously gazes on the face of Him *qui est per omnia secula benedictus*: who is blessed throughout all the ages.



Dante and Beatrice, Ary Scheffer (The Netherlands 1795 - 1858)

Courtesy of the Rijksmuseum

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👉 ABOUT THE AUTHOR 👈

Born in 1265 in Florence, from which he was banished in 1302, dying in Ravenna in 1321, Dante set the Divine Comedy in the year 1300, when he was thirty-five years old and ‘in the middle of our mortal life’. The setting allows him to utilise the past symbolically, exploit the present politically, and anticipate the future in simulated prophecy.

The *Commedia* throughout reflects his love for ‘Beatrice’ whom he first saw at a young age in a church in Florence, and who came to represent for him Intellectual and Spiritual Beauty. The story of his love for her, her early death, and his inspiration to write the *Commedia* are told in his prose work *La vita nuova*, The New Life, of 1294.

While never returning to Florence after his banishment, the city remained a crucial focus of his thoughts and memories, and while eating the ‘bitter bread’ of exile his meditations on that city, on Beatrice, and on the moral challenges of his age, led as he had promised in *The New Life*, to this great work, of explanation, aspiration, and ultimately spiritual exaltation.



Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 - 1882)

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Anthony Kline lives in England. He graduated in Mathematics from the University of Manchester, and was Chief Information Officer (Systems Director) of a large UK Company, before dedicating himself to his literary work and interests. He was born in 1947. His work consists of translations of poetry; critical works, biographical history with poetry as a central theme; and his own original poetry. He has translated into English from Latin, Ancient Greek, Classical Chinese and the European languages. He also maintains a deep interest in developments in Mathematics and the Sciences.

He continues to write predominantly for the Internet, making all works available in download format, with an added focus on the rapidly developing area of electronic books. His most extensive works are complete translations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*.