



Dante's Invention

James Burge

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The young Dante Alighieri was a self-absorbed poet who composed rarefied verse about the nature of love. While medieval Florence descended into turmoil, he seemed entirely uninterested by anything other than Beatrice, the girl he had loved since they were both children. Fate had to work very hard to make him write his great work, 'The Divine Comedy'. This is the story of how it did so. Dante's progress through the world of Florentine feuds, corruption and betrayal led eventually to exile and condemnation to death. As he began to turn his attention to the world around him he became convinced that only knowledge and understanding could save humankind from its own folly. Eventually he produced a fictional account of a cosmic journey from Hell to Heaven which weaved connections between the intense love he felt inside him, the cruelty he saw around him and the force that drives the universe. The Divine Comedy has been in print ever since printing was invented and is a work of breathtaking, almost cinematic imagination. the Comedy speaks from the strange and distant world of the medieval mind but it has resonances for anyone today who is concerned about how things are and how they ought to be. Interweaving Dante's imaginary journey through the cosmos with the real story of his life, James Burge reveals how a love-struck Florentine teenager evolved into il Sommo Poeta (the Supreme Poet).

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