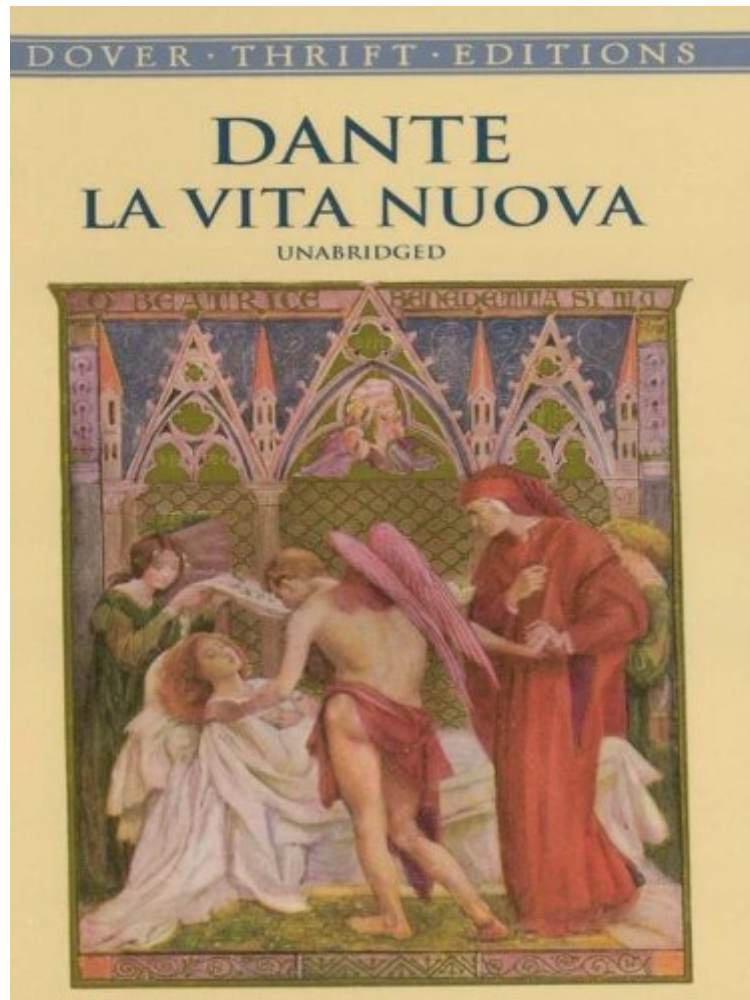


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La Vita Nuova (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

This celebration of the poet's passionate love for his immortal Beatrice weaves together rapturous sonnets and canzoni with prose commentaries and an autobiographical narrative. A predecessor to *The Divine Comedy*, *La Vita Nuova* (The New Life) also serves as an ever-relevant treatise on the art and technique of poetry.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Anyone who has read Dante's legendary "Divine Comedy" will know of his passion for a woman named Beatrice, who was his tour guide through heaven. But that is only the tip of the iceberg, as "La Vita Nuova (The New Life)" shows in detail. This exquisite little book describes Dante's passion for Beatrice, and the emotional rollercoaster he went through as a result. This is Dante's unsung, more intimate masterpiece. "La Vita Nuova" is a series of poems and anecdotes centering around the life-changing love of Dante for a young woman named Beatrice. The two first met when they were young children, of about eight. Dante instantly fell in love with her, but didn't really interact with her for several years. Over the years, Dante's almost supernatural love only increased in intensity, and he poured out his feelings (grief, adoration, fear) into several poems and sonnets. During an

illness, he has a vision about mortality, himself, and his beloved Beatrice ("One day, inevitably, even your most gracious Beatrice must die"). Beatrice died at the age of twenty-four, and Dante committed himself to the memory of his muse. It would be a hard task to find another book overflowing with such incredible love and passion as "La Vita Nuova"; it's probably the most romantic book I have ever seen. Dante's feelings might seem creepy or stalkerish by modern standards, because Dante and Beatrice were never romantically involved. In fact, both of them married other people. But at the time, courtly love was considered the best, purest kind there is, and Dante's emotions are a perfect example of this.

Genuine romance and passion is missing from most books, either fiction or nonfiction, and I don't think I've ever come across both in such quantity as there is in "La Vita Nuova" ("The New Life"), the unsung masterpiece of poet Dante Alighieri, author of the classic *Divina Comedia*. "La Vita Nuova" is a series of poems and anecdotes centering around the life-changing love of Dante for a young woman named Beatrice. The two first met when they were young children, of about eight. Dante instantly fell in love with her, but didn't really interact with her for several years. Over the years, Dante's almost supernatural love only increased in intensity, and he poured out his feelings (grief, adoration, fear) into several poems and sonnets. During an illness, he has a vision about mortality, himself, and his beloved Beatrice ("One day, inevitably, even your most gracious Beatrice must die"). Beatrice died at the age of twenty-four, and Dante committed himself to the memory of his muse. It would be a hard task to find another book overflowing with such incredible love and passion as "La Vita Nuova"; it's probably the most romantic book I have ever seen. It's brief and only includes one part of Dante's life overall, but it's a truly unique love story. Dante and Beatrice were never romantically involved. In fact, both of them married other people. But Dante's love for Beatrice shows itself to be more than infatuation or crush, because it never wanes -- in fact, it grows even stronger, including Love manifested as a nobleman in one of Dante's dreams. There is no element of physicality to the passion in "La Vita Nuova"; Dante talks about how beautiful Beatrice is, but that's only a sidenote.

Anyone who thinks that humans are rational creatures has probably never been in love or witnessed somebody else helplessly encased in its ineffable throes. Once in it, bizarre things happen and the mind acts in ways that acrobatically defy logic. The object of affection may even overtly possess hideously unflattering qualities, but nonetheless the obsession persists. Friends and family murmur about the often embarrassing or ridiculous behavioral changes in their once normal companion.

Others may give suspicious sidelong glances towards the afflicted. Some have used the analogy of insanity to describe the feeling and, for those with direct experience, this probably seems perfectly reasonable. Whatever psychological and physiological needs underlie this condition, few will deny its debilitating power. This wonderfully dreadful condition has apparently existed for centuries. One piece of evidence appears in Dante Alighieri's little book "La Vita Nuova" from 1295. Whether its story of passionate infatuation that turns into painful excruciating love counts as biographical, fictional or semi-fictional, or even semi-autobiographical, remains largely speculative. The object of Dante's intense affection in the book, Beatrice Portinari, did actually exist and she did pass away in 1290 at age 24. Her tomb still stands at Santa Margherita de' Cerchi church in Florence. "La Vita Nuova" appeared five years later and so the possibility definitely exists that Dante really did feel the overwhelming and all consuming desire he relates so convincingly. That Beatrice later appears as a guide in Dante's magnum opus, the Divine Comedy, adds further credibility to the claim. Regardless, this earlier and far shorter work doesn't qualify as a comedy.

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