

Took, John, *Dante*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. 608 pages. Hardcover, \$31.69.

Dante Aligheri has remained a fixture in many examinations of the Renaissance. However, Professor John Took proposes a more nuanced examination of his life in his 2020 work, *Dante*. In this one-of-a-kind biography, Took avoids getting preoccupied with the broad strokes conflating the timeless nature of the works with the poet himself. The author, instead, is more interested in the internal struggles and dialogue Dante faced. Took's *Dante* should be read on two levels: the main purpose of the book is to tease out those nuanced analyses of the poet's thought process and struggle. On another level, Took is holding a mirror to the typical types of biographies produced of Dante. To the author, scholars have spent so much time examining the specific works and interpretations, we are missing a large part of the narrative.

The author begins his examination of the poet by outlining a chapter of "Historical Considerations." Took immediately sets the tone of the biography for the reader as a work entrenched in the historiographical landscape of Dante. In order to accomplish his goals of a revolutionary biography, Took brings the reader into the world in which Dante was born by examining the ideological background of the world we find the poet. The author spends time examining how the city of Florence changed from the Guelphs and Ghibellines, the Blacks and the Whites, and the Descent and Demise of Henry VII.

Took also highlights the changes and struggles Dante faced by examining the different phases of the poet's career through the lens of Dante's "literary hinterland." These under-examined works highlight shifts in Dante's global paradigm. Took follows this with an exhaustive look at Dante's career from *La Vita Nova*, to the *Convivio*, and ending in political letters such as the *Monarchia*. By using this path, Took is able demystify the poet's thought

process, which works to highlight how he would position his works as a conversation with the general concept of the world around him.

Professor Emeritus of the University College at London, Took is somehow able to condense such a quantity of information on the poet. It is clear that Took's analysis is the standard upon which Dante should be examined. Took's expertise allows him to place the reader into the internal struggle of Dante with ease. One of the only critiques of the work is that, in order to appeal to the largest academic audience, Took's work should be paired with an external examination of Dante's world and the other actors that fill the space.

Took did not write *Dante* for the average reader. This intellectual micro-historical perspective on the poet is best viewed by two spheres of Danteists. The first is the graduate level course work examination. How Took is able to place the reader into the struggle Dante faced can provide invaluable insight for aspiring academics looking to find the nuanced understanding of the poet. When paired with histories with a larger perspective, the reader can gain even more insight. On another level, Took uses *Dante* as a means to highlight the deficiencies in the current academic literature. It is not enough to say Dante wrote *La Divina Commedia*, we should be viewing the work through the poet's eyes as a conversation with the world of an intellectual in exile. This work should be an essential part of any academic looking dive deeper than surface interpretations of the poet's work.

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