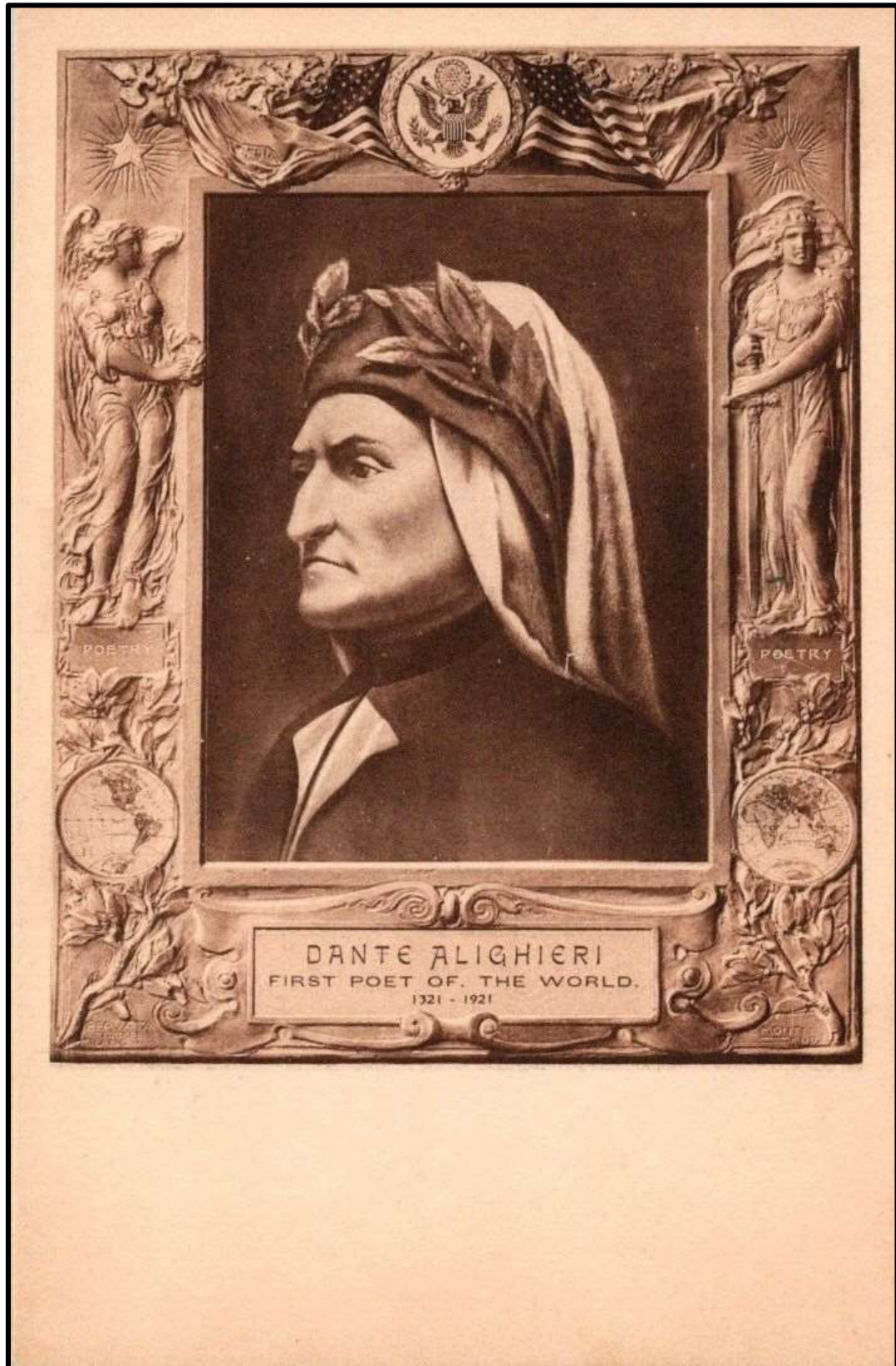
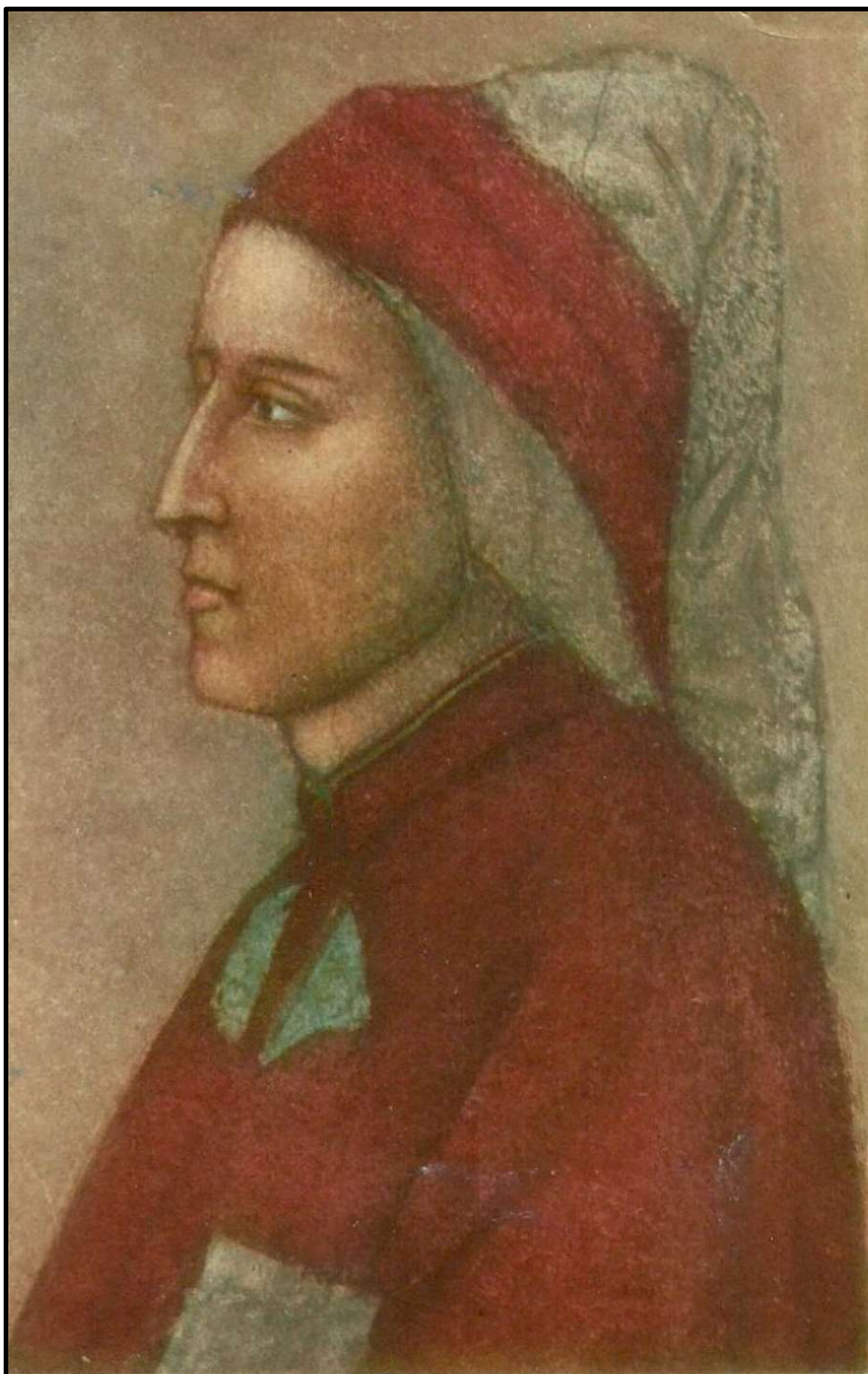


**Dante Alighieri (1265-1321)**



In any census of the Valhalla of the world's best writers, Dante Alighieri is guaranteed a place near--or at--the summit. Yet, despite his fame, there is no certain image of the poet. Some believe that Giotto painted his friend's likeness as a part of a fresco in the Podesta Chapel in the Bargello Palace in Florence, but even that image is not supported by assured documentation.



RITRATTO DI DANTE - Giotto

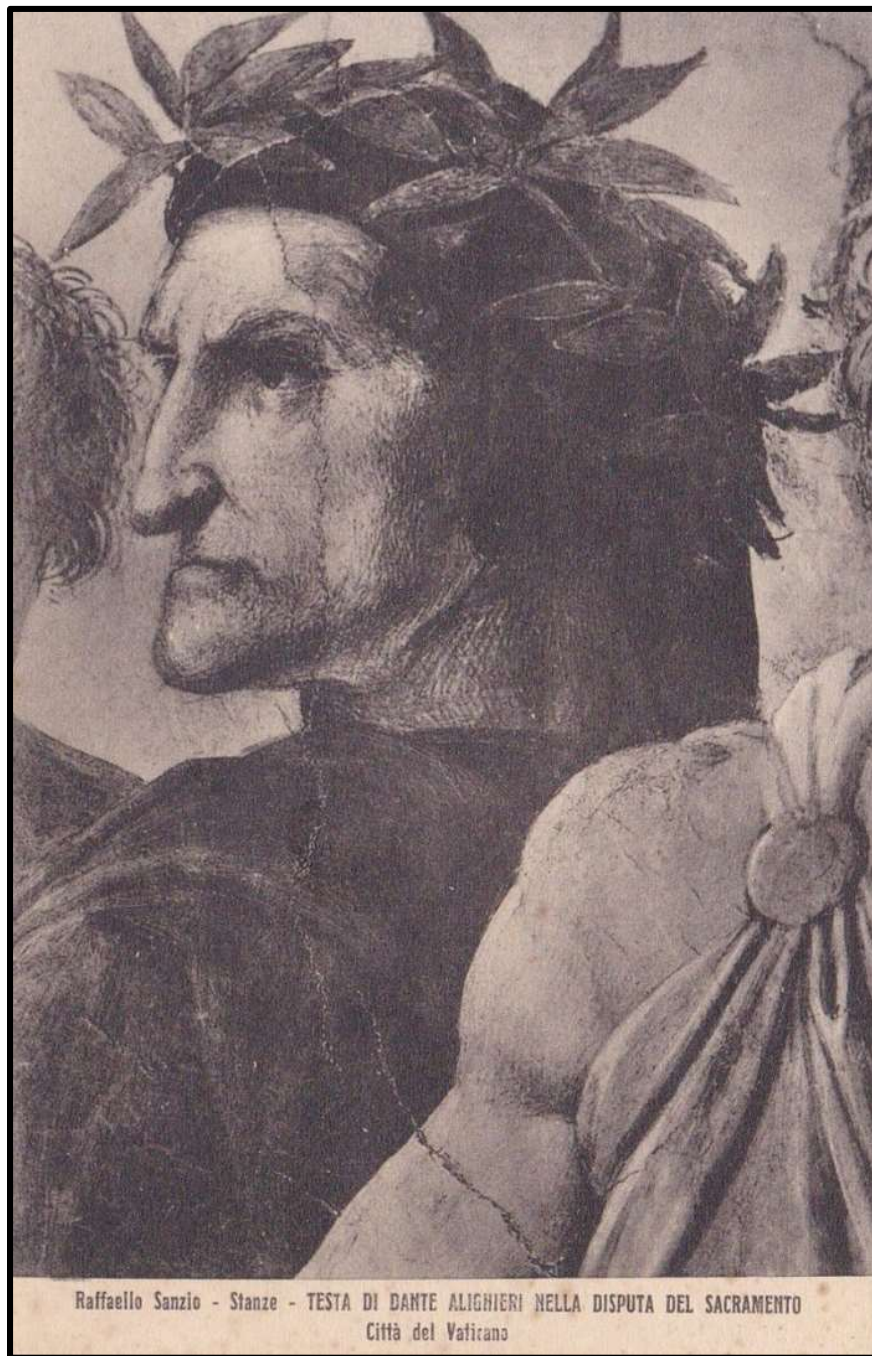
*Postcard, ca 1920, of the purported likeness of Dante, painted by Giotto about the year 1335. While there is no written documentation verifying the identity of the sitter, indications are strong that this is the only likely portrait of the famous poet. The image is part of a larger fresco in the Podestà Chapel in the Palazzo del Bargello in Florence, Italy. Giotto and Dante were friends, so this rendering may be the painter's way of commending Dante to posterity. For his part Dante had earlier immortalized his pal Giotto in the Purgatorio section of The Divine Comedy with the lines:*

*"In painting Cimabue thought he held the field,  
and now it's Giotto they acclaim –  
the former only keeps a shadowed fame".*

Dante's visit to the Podestà chapel while Giotto was frescoing the walls did yield a legendary *bon mot*: Dante complained to Giotto that he could not understand how such a gifted painter of beautiful people could produce such ugly children, to which Giotto replied, speaking of his progeny, "Oh, that's because I created them in the dark!"

Dante has commanded such respect that some of Italy's greatest visual artists, living centuries after his demise, were emboldened enough to portray him in (usually) elevated or aristocratic settings. Raphael and

Luca Signorelli are but two of the most renowned painters to have done so:

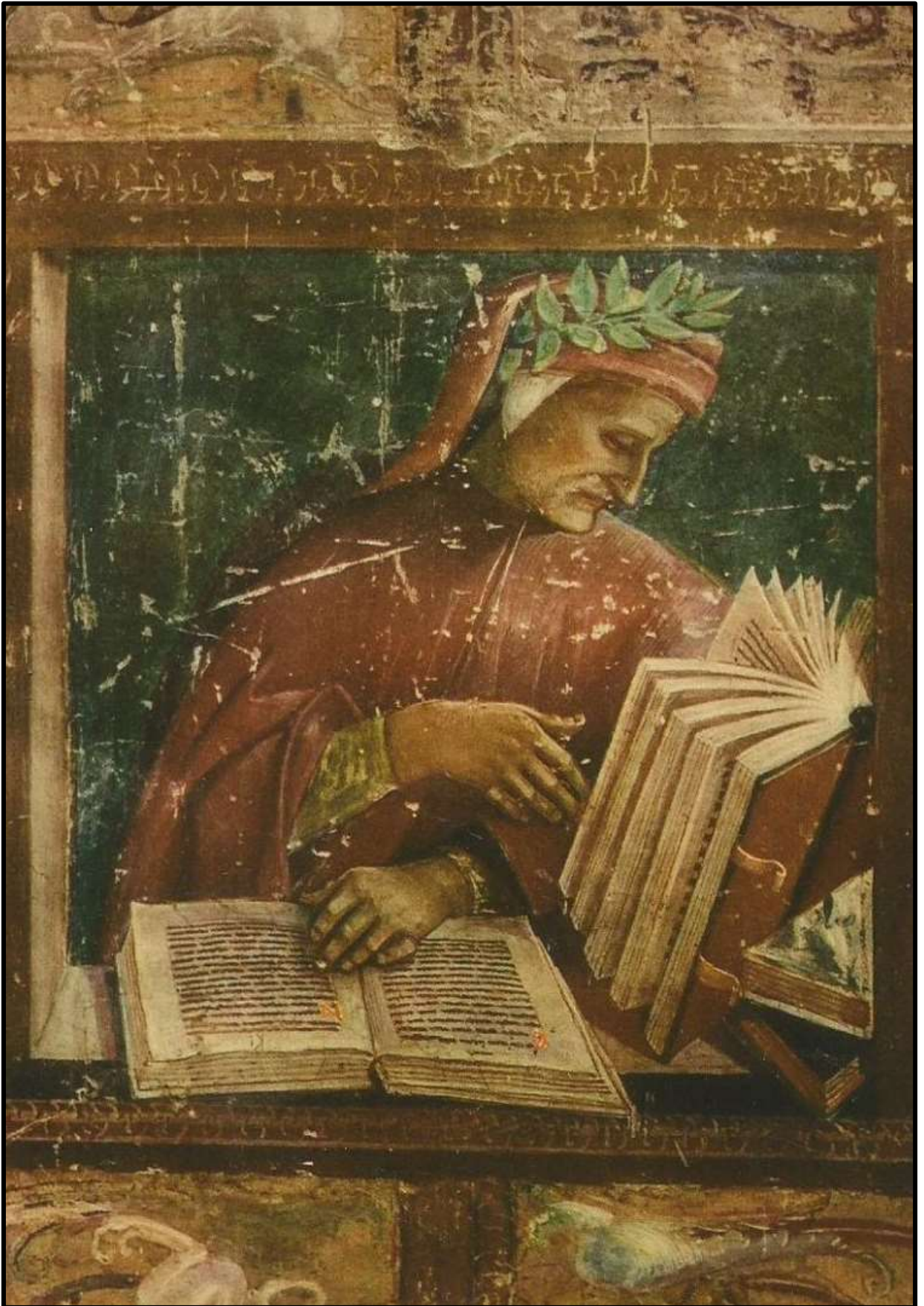


*Like Giotto, the painter Raphael (1482-1520) portrayed Dante (in a large Vatican fresco) in the company of several other famed authors including Virgil, Ovid, Sappho, and Horace. As well as the image seen above (the postcard dates to about 1903), Raphael made*

*portraits in this same fresco of authors nearer to him in time: Ariosto, Boccaccio, Dante, and Petrarch. The overall painting is usually referred to by its location, the Stanza della Segnatura. The work surmounts a large doorway. Raphael presents a vision of Apollo seated on Mount Parnassus. He is surrounded by those authors divinely inspired by the Muse of Poetry. The two postcards which follow were published ca 1910.*



*Here is Raphael's second guess at the physical appearance of Dante (left), Homer (centre), and Virgil (right). These literary giants are featured in a fresco in the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican.*







*These two ca 1912 postcards (above) of Dante are details from a gigantic fresco series in the Cathedral of Orvieto in Italy painted by one of the greats among Italian Renaissance painters, Luca Signorelli (1441-1523). Many of the narrative scenes of the widely admired fresco were directly inspired by Dante's poem "The Divine Comedy". This likeness is one of two portrayals of Dante painted by Signorelli at Orvieto. The fresco also contains portraits of other long-deceased poets revered at the time: Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Virgil. Each of these literary portraits is surrounded by scenes from the work of the respective authors.*

Centuries after his death Dante is still associated in the public mind with Florence, the city of his birth—and Florence does all it can to reinforce that association--and does all it can to have the world forget what a mistake it made when, in October 1301, it exiled the author from the city for life. He never set foot in Florence again. For failing to pay a fine imposed on him for alleged corruption while in political office, and for failing to appear in court to face other charges, the Florentines later gave him a death sentence *in absentia*.

Only after his banishment from Florence, and his years of residing as the house guest of various noble patrons, did Dante begin his most famous work, *The Divine Comedy*. In 1311 Florence offered amnesty to most exiles banished for their political activity—but

Dante was on a small list of those who remained particularly despised by the city's rulers, despite his rising fame internationally as an author. Thus, his lifetime ban remained in place. Despite pleadings by Florentine admirers of the poet's writing, in 1315 the City Fathers of Florence reiterated their refusal to budge on the matter of Dante's expulsion. Indeed, the authorities that year renewed the death penalty, specifying that he would be beheaded if he were ever caught within the confines of Florence. Not until more than a hundred years later did the attitude of the Florentine civil authorities soften, and it is not until the 1400s, the start of the High renaissance, that visual artists in Florence were allowed to paint images of the poet in public places in the city.



*Even as late as 1450 it was still considered provocative to paint a portrait of Dante within the borders of Florence. Andres del Castagno (1419-1457), one of the city's best known artists by the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> c., probably created the first of these politically-daring likenesses. In the Villa Carducci in Florence, then the private residence of a wealthy family, Castagno made frescoes of a series of illustrious persons of whom Dante was one. This postcard above provides a detail from Castagno's portrait (below), both cards issued ca 1913.*



DANTES DI ALEGIERIS FLORETINI



*Edition Attié*  
**EGLISE SAINT-JULIEN-LE-PAUVRE.**

*Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), d'après la Reinture d'André del Castagno.*  
 Dante vint à Paris vers l'an 1300. Il fit ses études théologiques dans les écoles de la rue du Fouarre et logea (d'après M. P. Gauthiez), dans les bâtiments du Prieuré de Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre.

*Dante travelled to Paris in 1309 to pursue theological studies at the University. While living on the Left Bank he attended Mass and he prayed regularly at a modest nearby church called Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre. At a date yet to be determined (but likely 15<sup>th</sup> c.) an unknown artist made a remarkably accurate copy of del Castagno's portrait in Florence. Since the development of photographic postcards around 1900, Parisian publishers have been issuing thousands of copies of the painting to accentuate the poet's connection to the City of Light. This card was printed in France about 1903.*

Another well-known imaging of Dante, this by Domenico di Michelino (1417–1491), shows the writer holding a copy of his *The Divine Comedy* while standing with a cityscape of Florence behind him, the background heightened by imaginings of Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory, a tripartite segmenting clearly inspired by the three main divisions of *The Divine Comedy*. The postcard below of this 1465 painting, a fresco on a major wall of the Florence Cathedral, has been a popular subject with Italian postcard publishers since the invention of the medium. This postcard below dates to ca 1915.







*In 1894 the Italian painter Oreste da Molin (1856-1921) created this highly Mannerist portrait of Dante. The current whereabouts of the work are unknown. It was reproduced in postcards as early as 1910, the approximate date of this example.*



Musée du Luxembourg. René de SAINT-MARCEAUX  
La Jeunesse de Dante

*In the latter half of the nineteenth century in Europe the most important place to exhibit contemporary art was the annual Salon in Paris. Artworks shown at the Salon were selected beforehand by jurors who represented all that was proper, respectable, and clearly descended from the traditions established by the Old Masters—no Impressionist nonsense or fiddling with tradition for these Salon jurors. Commercially-astute artists at the Salon would hire professional photographers (weeks before the opening of the exhibition) to take pictures of their work, the photos, in the years after ca 1898, made into postcards ready to be given to potential buyers at the Grand Opening and on subsequent days of the Salon. The postcard above of a sculpture of Dante as a Young Man stems from that practice. The sculptor, Rene de Saint Marceaux (1845-1915), was acclaimed in his day for his skillful if conventional portraits in stone of his contemporaries, as well as of animals—thus making his portrait of Dante exceptional among his oeuvre. Saint Marceaux made one further important literary-centred work: he carved the huge marble statue of Alexander Dumas, fils which stands in Place do General Catroux in Paris. The postcard below of that Dumas monument dates to shortly after the unveiling in 1906.*