

H. A. Kelly

Dante Studies

1. *Tragedy and Comedy from Dante to Pseudo-Dante*. Berkeley: UC Press, 1989. Reprint: Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004.

Analyzes Dante's ideas of tragedy and comedy from his genuine works, especially *De vulgari eloquentia*. Tragedy for him is any work on a noble subject in high diction and style, like the *Aeneid* and his own lyrics. Comedy uses a range of subjects and styles, like his *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. In contrast, the *Epistle to Cangrande*, written in Dante's name, is obviously not by Dante (hence, Pseudo-Dante), since it has completely different definitions of tragedy and comedy. Another give-away is that the epistolary sections do not follow the *cursus* (prose-style) of Dante's genuine epistles. *Cangrande's* ideas are copied from Guido de Pisa's commentary on Dante, based on Boethian commentators; tragedy begins in prosperity and ends in misery, while comedy has the opposite plot movement. Dante's older son Jacopo had a Dantean understanding, while the younger son Pietro followed the Boethian notions, as did Boccaccio and other commentators on Dante.

2. *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages*. Cambridge University Press, 1993. Paperback edition, 2005.

A history of the word "tragedy" and the various ideas or meanings attached to it over the ages, as well as the kinds of dramatic or literary works that were called tragedies. It moves from Aristotle, who considered any serious story to be a tragedy, even with a happy ending (he admired the plot of Euripides's *Iphigenia among the Taurians* even more than that of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*), through Roman notions and practices, to the concepts found in the Middle Ages, ranging from that of Averroes ("praise of virtue"), to Albert the Great ("recitation of the foul deeds of degenerate men"), and Dante (superior subject and style). Particularly influential was the plot definition of William of Conches and other commentators on Boethius (from happy start to sad end), which was inherited by Chaucer. Ends with surveys of medieval works designated as tragedies in France, Italy, Spain, and England.

"Dante and His Commentators," pp. 144-57.

Dante retrofits his lyrics as tragedies: pp. 144-46.

3. "Interpretation of Genres and by Genres in Medieval Literature," in *Interpretations: Medieval and Modern*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti, J. A. W. Bennett Lectures, no. 7: Perugia, 6-8 April 1992 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1993, pp. 107-122).

Interpretation of genres: author has generic idea when writing; e.g. Chaucer calling *Troilus* a tragedy, Dante calling *Inferno* a comedy. Interpretation of genres: imposing genre on a work; e.g., Dante considering his lyrics to be tragedies. Examines genre ideas of Aristotle, Isidore, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, etc., Dante, Boccaccio, Mussato, etc., Chaucer, etc., Spanish authors.

4. *Chaucerian Tragedy*. Cambridge: Brewer, 1997. Paperback edition, 2000.

"Tragedy" was a comparatively rare word in the Middle Ages, and Geoffrey Chaucer was the first vernacular author anywhere to call his own works tragedies, namely, the stories that later became the *Monk's Tale*, and the *Troilus and Criseyde*. For the former, he drew on Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum*, but, contrary to general opinion, Boccaccio did not have any idea of considering his accounts to be

tragedies. Chaucer gained his notion of tragedy from the characterization in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* that tragedies lament misfortunes, and Nicholas Trevet's gloss that tragedies tell of prosperity that ends in wretchedness. He recognized his early experiments as unsatisfactory, compared to the "little tragedy" of *Troilus*. John Lydgate explains his views of ancient acted tragedy in his *Troy Book*, but expands upon Chaucer's example of the *Monk's Tale* in the *Fall of Princes*, while Robert Henryson drew on Chaucer's precedent in *Troilus* for his *Testament of Cresseid*. It was the more prosaic former approach that proved especially influential in the sixteenth century, in the very popular continuation of Lydgate, *The Mirror for Magistrates*.

Deals with Dante, passim.

5. **"Cangrande and the Ortho-Dantists,"** *Lectura Dantis* nos. 14-15 (1994) 61-95.

Responds to criticisms of my *Tragedy and Comedy*, especially Robert Hollander's *Dante's Epistle to Cangrande* (1993).

6. **"Reply to Robert Hollander,"** *Lectura Dantis* no. 14-15 (1994) 111-115.

Answers Hollander's "Response" (pp. 96-110), and reiterates my position: The *Cangrande* section contradicts Dante's views of tragedy and comedy, but Dante may have written the first three paragraphs, which are in his cursal style, but not the noncursal fourth paragraph, or the noncursal epistolary end of *Cangrande*.

7. **"Epistle to Cangrande Updated,"** *Dante Notes*, September 28, 2018:

<https://www.dantesociety.org/node/131>

Responds to the discovery that Andrea Lancia around 1343 saw the *Epistle to Cangrande* or a part of it. If so, the Compiler must have put it together around 1340, but there are other possibilities. The fact remains that Dante had a virtue-based idea of tragedy, not disaster based, which is still true at the end of *Paradiso*. Further cursus analyses confirm earlier conclusions.