

Dante
ITAL 240

Instructor: Dino S. Cervigni; Office: Dey 141
Office hours: Tue. & Th.: 1:45-3:00
& by appointment.

Course Description:

It 240 intends to analyze Dante's *New Life* and some fundamental cantos of the *Divine Comedy* (*Hell*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*) within the context of their ancient sources and contemporary criticism and Dante's complete *oeuvre*.

Course Requirements:

1. Class attendance is mandatory. Each class presence counts 5 points (=140 points). For each unjustified absence the student is penalized progressively: 5 points for the first absence, 10 points for the second absence, 15 points for the third absence, etc. Three instances of tardiness constitute an absence. If you are tardy, it is your responsibility to inform the instructor after class. If you fail to do so, your tardiness is considered an absence.

2. 120 points for:

class participation;

brief unannounced quizzes on class assignment;

handwritten logbook with summary (50-80 words) of *New Life* and each canto of the *Divine Comedy* indicated in the syllabus. Be ready in each class to read or present your summary of one of the assigned cantos in front of the entire class.

3. Three essays: Each essay should be about 500 words (word count to be provided by student), and typewritten with double space and ample margins. Each essay should contain at least one footnote or endnote and the list of works cited according to the style of the Modern Language Association (MLA).

166 points per essay = 500 points. (Please keep a copy of all your written assignments on computer until the end of the semester.)

4. Final exam (240 points): The instructor will choose before the end of the semester one of the two following types of final exam:

- A) 10 essay questions (each to be answered with about 250 words) drawn from a list of topics discussed in class and assigned by the professor during the last week of classes.
- B) 5 essay questions drawn from a list of topics discussed in class and assigned by the professor during the last week of classes; on the day of the exam, the professor will choose 3 essay questions; the student will write an essay on two of them with about 500 words for each of them.

Important Note: Apply yourself diligently since the beginning of the semester, read carefully all assigned readings, and generously seek to go beyond the required assignments. You are encouraged to discuss class readings with your fellow students and your professors.

BE READY TO SIGN EVERY WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT WITH YOUR PLEDGE OF HONOR:

Writing is a very demanding task: it requires reading the primary sources very carefully, reflecting on the proposed topic, investigating some critical literature, and working on your essay at different times in order to compose a well conceived and carefully written paper.

An essay is an intellectual property. It is the duty of all writers to acknowledge the sources of their ideas, exact quotations, and words and phrases essential for their arguments they have borrowed from others. Writers are allowed to paraphrase important statements. In all the instances just mentioned, all writers must recognize the origin of their borrowings, typically within parentheses right after their borrowings or at the end of the sentence, and list the works cited at the end of the essay under the general list of works cited.

Quoting properly is the hallmark of a diligent and effective writer and student; acknowledging the sources of all quotations and borrowings is the virtue of the honest writer and student.

Grading:

Total points:

1,000-970 A

969-930 A-

929-900 B+

899-850 B

849-800 B-

799-750 C

749-700 D

Below 700 F

Required Textbooks:

- 1) Dante Alighieri. *Vita nuova*. English Translation by Dino S. Cervigni.
 - 2) Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Vols. 1 and 2. New York: Oxford UP.
- Recommended Dictionary: *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, latest edition.

On Reserve:

- R. W. B. Lewis. *Dante*. New York: Lipper/Viking, 2001.
 Ricardo J. Quinones. *Dante Alighieri*. Boston: Twayne, 1998.

Syllabus

1. Introduction: Dante (1265-1321):

The life, world, and works of Dante;
 Historical and political perspective;
 Theological and philosophical perspective;
 A composite approach.

2. *The New Life (Vita nuova)*. First axial moment: *Vita nuova* (paragraphs 1-4)

The structure of the text; prose, poetry, and gloss; chronotopes;
 The Dante-persona: the narrator, the copyist, the protagonist, the poet, the glossator;
 Beatrice: “the glorious lady of my mind”;
 the other characters;
 the nature of the narrated experience.

3. *The New Life*. The development of love (paragraphs 5-28)

Physical love: The male protagonist seeks Beatrice’s presence;
 The new matter: The male protagonist intends to praise Beatrice (VN 19);
 Beatrice’s imagined death (VN 23).

4. Second axial moment: *Vita nuova* (paragraphs 29-42)

From death to eternity; the event of the “compassionate woman at the window”; the pilgrimage on earth and to heaven;
 the last vision; the narrator’s resolution.

5. *Divine Comedy. Inferno 1: the Pilgrim’s silence and Virgil’s word*

The structure of the poem; the Dantean allegory; the Pilgrim’s silence; Virgil’s word; the Pilgrim’s act of naming:
 ““Are you that Virgil . . . ?””

6. *Inferno 2-3: Beatrice’s discourse and the origin of power*

The discourse of Beatrice;
 The crossing of the Acheron: the I-character’s swoon and the text’s silence.

7. *Inferno 4-5: Christ’s harrowing of Hell*

Inf. 4: The harrowing of Hell: Christ’s presence in limbo and in hell; the absence of Christ’s name in the *Inferno*; the Pilgrim and the poets: presence and absence.

Inf. 5: Francesca’s discourse: names, words, and silence; a sinner’s tale of love and the poet’s rewriting of previous texts; the swooning of the I-character.

8. *Inferno 6-7-8: Verbal rebukes and challenges*

Virgil’s Cerberus and Dante’s Cerberus; Ciaccio and *anagnorisis*; Pluto and language’s incomprehensibility; Phlegias and the crossing of the Stix; Filippo Argenti: *anagnorisis*, reticence, the name’s utterance.

9. *Inferno 9-10-(11): Virgil’s word and the messenger’s gesture*

The word of Virgil, the word and gesture of the messenger, the silence of the I-character; the messenger’s coming and its allegory;

Farinata, the I-character, and Cavalcante: *anagnorisis*, word, silence; politics and poetics;

Virgil’s discourse in canto 11: the structure of hell.

10. *Inferno 12-13-14: The parody of all bloody sacrifices*

Inf. 12: the Minotaur or the privation of the word; Virgil’s discourse, the centaurs’ guidance, and the I-character’s silence; the crossing of the Phlegethon.

Inf. 13: belief and disbelief; violence and speech; personality and language.

Inf. 14: Capaneus; the Old Man of Crete.

11. *Inferno 15-16-17: The parody of all bloody sacrifices and the return to chaos*

The pupil’s encounter with the master: *anagnorisis*, naming, silence, praise and condemnation; Florentine culture and politics; the cord and the text’s inscrutability; the descent on Geryon’s back and the Pilgrim’s fear and silence.

12. Inferno 18-19-20:

Lower hell: structure, style, and poetics; religion and politics; Virgil, Mantua and Mantua.

13. Inferno 21-22-23

Narrative and style; the devils, the sinners, and the pilgrims: the episode's farcical elements; naming and silence; Christ's absence and presence; Virgil's disconfirmation.

14. Inferno 24-25-26

Thievery and metamorphosis; Vanni Fucci and his self-naming; the Poet and his predecessors; Ulysses: the myth, the re-writing of the myth, the interpretation of Dante's re-writing.

15. Inferno 27-28-29

Guido and the story of a conversion; the sowers of discord: spirit and body; Bertran de Born; the falsifiers: metals, people, money, word.

16. Inferno 30-31-32: The tower of Babel

The falsifiers; the giants: speech, sin, and silence; the "evil hole" and the Poet's challenge.

17. Inferno 33-34: A Trinitarian parody

Count Ugolino;

Dante's Lucifer or the denial of the word.

The two pilgrims' parodic liturgy.

18. Purgatorio 1-2-3 (4-5): Toward a new language

The structure of Dante's Purgatory; the "resurrected" poetry; the function of Cato; the purifying ritual; the arrival of the new souls: the Angel vs. Charon; the souls' pause and Cato's rebuke.

19. Purgatorio 6-7-8

The rhetoric of silence, words, and names (*Purg.* 7); allegory (*Purg.* 8-9); The drama in the valley: temptation or salvation; the Pilgrim and the souls.

20. Purgatorio 9-10; Purgatorio 18:139-44; Purgatorio 19

The sleep and the dream; the Pilgrim's entrance into Purgatory proper: the rite.

Structure: Theoretical concept of structure;

The mimetic/imaginary/oneiric/visionary structure of the *Vita nuova* & *Comedy*.

Moral structure.

21. Purgatorio 20:124-51; 21-22-23-24

Statius, Virgil, and the Pilgrim; the salvation of pagans, and the function of poetry.

22. Purgatorio 25-26-27

The origin of speech: *Purg.* 25; reread *Purg.* 16, especially vv. 64-105; on poetry: *Purg.* 26: Guinizelli; the last dream (*Purg.* 27) and the earthly paradise; the "forests" in the *Comedy*.

23. Purgatorio 28-29-30

the earthly paradise and the unnamed lady (*Purg.* 28). Beatrice's speech and silence in the *Vita nuova*; Beatrice's discourse in *Inf.* 2 and in *Purg.* 30; Beatrice's first word in *Purg.* 30; Dante's name.

24. Purgatorio 31-32-33

Dante's refusal to confess, first, and, second, his confession (*Purg.* 30-31); the first river (*Purg.* 31); the last swoon (*Purg.* 31; cfr. *Inf.* 3) and the last sleep (*Purg.* 32). *Purgatorio* 33: the second river (*Purg.* 33) and the total renewal of Dante.

25. Paradiso 1-2-3: Introduction to the Paradiso: Dead poetry vs. resurrected poetry; the ascent through the heavens; the structure of paradise; Dante's vision.

26. Paradiso 6; Paradiso 7: Dante, the Empire, and Christ's salvation history; Beatrice and the function of Christ's sacrifice. *Paradiso* 11-12: The Church and the function of the Saints: St. Francis and St. Dominic.

27. Paradiso 14-15-16-17

Cacciaguada: History, language, prophecy, and poetry.

28. Paradiso 30-31

The Empyrean (canto 30); St. Bernard (canto 31)

the structure of the Empyrean (canto 32)

28. Paradiso 32-33

St. Bernard's prayer; the silent and imageless vision of the Trinity (canto 33).

Encyclopedias

The Dante Encyclopedia. Ed. Richard Lansing. New York: Garland, 2000.

Enciclopedia dantesca. 6 vols. Roma: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, 1970-78.

Paget, Toynbee. *A Dictionary of Proper Names and Notable Matters in the Works of Dante*. Ed. Charles S. Singleton. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1968. (Or. ed. 1898)

Journals on Dante:

* *L'Alighieri*

Annali d'italianistica (a journal of Italian studies with several articles on Dante)

Dante Studies

Deutsches Dante Jahrbuch

Lectura Dantis. A Forum for Dante Research and Interpretation [founded by Tibor Wlassics; no longer published after his untimely death in 1998]

Rivista di studi danteschi. Periodico semestrale. Salerno Editrice, Roma. [first issue: 1.1 (Jan.-June 2001)].

Includes: *Rassegna di studi danteschi, Recensioni, Schedario*.

Websites:

<http://danteworlds.lamc.utexas.edu> [on Dante's *Inferno*; very useful for undergraduates]

<http://www.danteonline.it> [in Italian; very useful]

<http://www.brandeis.edu/library/dante/> [bibliography of the Dante Society of America]

<http://www.mediasoft.it/dante/index.html> [with images]

<http://www.danteide.net/>

<http://www.italianstudies.org/comedy/index.htm> [a translation of the *Comedy* by James Finn Cotter]

<http://www.iath.virginia.edu/dante/> [primarily on the *Inferno*; with illustrations & text]

Dante's *Inferno* with the illustrations by Doré:

www.superdante.it

opera omnia of Dante:

<http://www.multiskill.it/dante/danteframe.html>

The original text of the *Divina Comedia*, critical text by G. Petrocchi, is available at the following: (Società dantesca italiana: the most comprehensive site on Dante)

<http://www.danteonline.it>

Basic text:

<http://world.std.com/~wij/dante/index.html>

This site includes notes:

<http://www.mediasoft.it/dante/>

You may listen the the entire *Inferno* (in the original language) at the following: Excellent site for Medieval studies:

http://members.aol.com/lieberk/welc_fr.html [through this site one can access the Dartmouth Dante Project: an online site containing virtually all Dante commentaries]

<http://www.accademiajr.it/> [Accademia Jaufre Rudel]

Miscellaneous:

<http://archivi.beniculturali.it>

<http://edit16.iccu.sbn.it> [censimento opere italiane sec. XVI]

<http://www.storia.unifi.it/RM/RM-Home.htm> [studi medievistici]

List of Abbreviations Used in Correcting Papers

Agr	error in agreement: check subject and verb, or noun and modifier
Apos	improper use of, or failure to use apostrophe
Awk	awkward: rewrite sentence
Dict	consult dictionary
Focus	concept needs sharper focus
Frag	sentence fragment: rewrite
Gen	recast sentence avoiding generalities
GR	mistake of grammar; rewrite
Impr	sentence, although not faulty, needs improvement
LC	use lower case characters
Link	sentences or paragraphs need more coherent link
Log	logic: check validity of argument
NC	concept is not clear: clarify and rewrite sentence
NN	not needed
No contrac	avoid contracted forms in formal papers
Not fact	not factual: statement contradicts text; reread text

Not pert	concept is not pertinent to topic
Not rel	concept, although pertinent, is not related to what precedes or follows
Num	spell out number; inconsistent use of numbers
Org	sentence or paragraph needs greater organization
Par	paragraph needs clarification, development, etc.
Plot	avoid plot summary; focus on concepts
Pct	improper use of punctuation
Quest	statement is questionable
Repet	repetition: concept has already been presented
Simpl	concept and sentence can be simplified
Sp	spelling error: check dictionary
SYN	mistake of syntax: rewrite
Ten	wrong tense or mode of verb: rewrite
UC	use upper case characters
^	word has been omitted
^ #	insert space
-	no space