

Dante (in English)

ITAS 263-01



(Domenico Da Michelino, *Dante and his Poem*)

M./Th. 1.30-2.40pm, GRH 338

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Office hours: 3-4pm, Mondays and Thursdays; or by appointment at other times.

Course Description

In this course we will read the whole of Dante's Divine Comedy, one of the greatest works of European literature, almost unparalleled in terms of the scope of its author's imagination and intellect. We will follow Dante on his journey through the three realms of the afterlife: the descent into Hell, the climb up the mountain of Purgatory, and the final ascent to Paradise. We will reflect upon the meaning of the encounters he has with so many historical and contemporary figures from his own time and consider the ways in which the text of the Divine Comedy constructs a vision of the otherworld that is intimately bound up with the question of what it means to be a human being also in this life, on earth.

As with the study of all medieval texts, in approaching Dante's Comedy, you will be invited to enter a different kind of world from the one you are used to, and a new way of thinking. You will be introduced to the history, politics, philosophy, and theology of the 13th- and 14th-century Florence of Dante's time, as well as to the rich literary qualities of the poem itself, which have kept readers returning to Dante's poem again and again. Studying Dante also opens up fascinating insights into many other areas of literature, from the Middle Ages to the modern period. Through reading and engaging with the complexity of the Divine Comedy, you will be developing your skills of critical inquiry and learning how to think about a text both on its own terms and in relation to the literary, cultural and historical contexts in which it was written.

In order to cover all the material in this course, it is essential that you DO THE PRESCRIBED READING ON TIME and COME TO CLASS PREPARED TO ASK QUESTIONS and PARTICIPATE IN DISCUSSION.

Required texts:

Dante, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: volume 1: Inferno*, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez (Oxford University Press, 1997)

The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: volume 2: Purgatorio, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez (Oxford University Press, 2004)

The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: volume 3: Paradiso, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Virgil, *Aeneid* VI [ER]

Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 4.7-22 [ER]

Recommended texts:

The Cambridge Companion to Dante, ed. by Rachel Jacoff, 2nd Edition (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

All texts listed above are available at the Wellesley Bookstore, or – in the case of Electronic resources [ER]– online in our Sakai project folder.

You may also find Singleton's commentary of the poem helpful in:

The Divine Comedy, trans. by Charles S. Singleton (Princeton University Press, 1970-75), available at the reserve desk of the Clapp library.

Other Useful Resources:

Princeton Dante Project: <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/>

Dartmouth Dante Project: <http://dante.dartmouth.edu/>

Danteworlds: <http://danteworlds.laits.utexas.edu/>

The Princeton Dante Project has the complete works of Dante in translation available online in searchable text.

The Dartmouth Project includes an extensive set of English commentaries on every canto of the Comedy, and individual lines.

Danteworlds is an interactive, multimedia resource that combines text and images to recreate Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. This website contains a useful glossary of key terms and episodes by canto and can help orient you to the very rich literary and cultural contexts in which Dante was writing, from the Classics to Scripture to contemporary politics at Dante's time.

Secondary Readings:

During the course of the semester, I expect to assign a limited number of secondary readings to help orient you to key episodes in the poem, and their critical reception. The books from which these readings will be taken are as follows (all available at the reserve desk of the Clapp library):

Teodolinda Barolini, The Undivine 'Comedy': Detheologizing Dante (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) and Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the 'Comedy' (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984)

John Freccero, Dante: The Poetics of Conversion, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986)

Peter S. Hawkins, Dante: A Brief History (Malden, MA; London: Blackwell, 2006)

Robin Kirkpatrick, Dante: The Divine Comedy (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

Richard Lansing and others, The Dante Encyclopedia (New York: Garland, 2000)

John A. Scott, Understanding Dante (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2004)

Class Preparation:

Below is the **SCHEDULE FOR OUR DISCUSSIONS**, with the assignments for each class. You should prepare for class in the following way:

1. **READ THE PRESCRIBED CANTOS** along with the commentary by Durling-Martinez. You may also find the additional commentary in Singleton helpful (see above). However, try to form your own idea and understanding of the text through analysis and close reading before embarking on secondary readings.
2. Use the **STUDY QUESTIONS** to each canto (to be distributed in class and available on sakai) to help guide you in your reading, and to assist you with the **PREPARATION OF NOTES** and diagrams.
3. Think about the questions you find hard to resolve and why those difficulties in interpretation might exist.
4. **BRING ANY QUESTIONS YOU HAVE TO CLASS** and be prepared to talk about your impressions of the canto(s) when asked.
5. Use your spirit of intellectual inquiry as a critical tool for probing the depths of Dante's text. **EVEN WHEN YOU THINK YOU'VE 'GOT IT', KEEP LOOKING!** You will be rewarded for your efforts.

GRADING:

This is a **graded course**.

Your **final letter grade** for this course will be determined from the percentages below:

| | |
|---|-----|
| Written assignments (2 in total: 1 short paper, 1 article critique) | 20% |
| 2 Take home exams, 1 Final Take home exam | 60% |
| Class participation, including contribution to class presentation | 20% |

Written Assignments (2-3pp in length) will consist of the close reading of Dante's meeting with Brunetto Latini (*Inf.* 15) and an article critique.

2 Take home exams and a Final take home exam: There will be one exam on each of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, and a final exam on *Paradiso*. Each exam will consist of two questions: a commentary on 30 lines of the poem and an essay on a topic central to the canticle just studied. Clear instructions will be given with each exam.

Class participation involves active participation in class discussions, not just your presence in class. For the **class presentation**, which you will do as part of a group, you will collaborate with your peers.

This course has a SAKAI PROJECT SITE, where you will find copies of additional materials and resources:

<https://sakai.wellesley.edu>

Log in using your Wellesley domain name/password

Attendance policy: Due to the intensive nature of this course, it is very important that you come to each class, so that you do not fall behind. Attendance will be recorded and your class participation grade will suffer if you are absent without good reason. If you have a legitimate reason to miss a class, please email me *at least* 24 hours in advance to inform me of this.

Late policy: If you require an extension, you must contact me *at least* 24 hours in advance of the due date. Extensions will only be granted for good reasons, such as serious illness or family emergency. Having a lot of work to do for other courses is not a good reason. Late papers and exam submissions will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade for every 24 hr period within which they are late (e.g. submitting a paper within the 24hrs following the deadline would take an A- paper to a B+ and so on).

If you have a *disability* and need disability-related accommodations, you are encouraged to work with Jim Wice, the Director of Disability Services (if you either have a physical disability or are uncertain whether you do) to arrange those accommodations. Jim's office is located in the Pforzheimer Learning & Teaching Center in Clapp Library. See:

<http://www.wellesley.edu/DisabilityServices/DShome.html> for information.

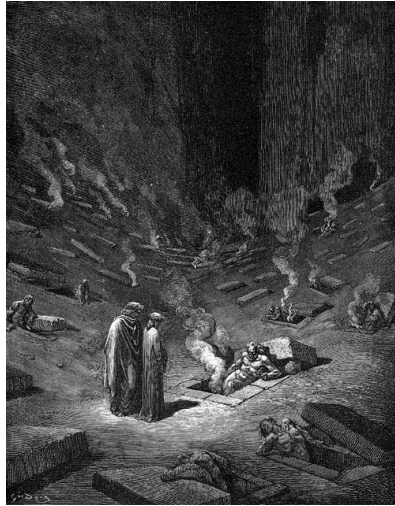
DANTE (IN ENGLISH)

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Week 1:

Sept. 1 **Dante's Life and World:** Approaching the *Divine Comedy*

I. INFERNO: DELVING INTO DARKNESS



Week 2:

Sept. 5 LABOR DAY: no classes

Sept. 7 MONDAY SCHEDULE
Lost in the Dark Wood

Inf. 1-3; Begin reading *Aeneid* VI [ER]

Think about how the poem begins. Consider how it establishes the nature of, and motivation for, Dante's journey through the afterlife and the defining characteristics of his poem. *How* does it imply we should read the Comedy?

Sept. 8 **Dante and Virgil**

Inf. 4; *Aeneid* VI [ER]

What is the nature of the relationship between Dante and Virgil so far established? How do you expect it to develop? What is your view of Virgil's fate and Dante's treatment of him and the other virtuous pagans?

1 page comparative analysis of Dante's and Virgil's 'leaf simile' in Inf. 3 and Aen. VI [this assignment will be ungraded]

Week 3:

Sept. 12

Dante and Francesca

Inf. 5. Where are your sympathies in canto 5 and why? How does the way in which the text is written complicate ours (and the pilgrim's) initial response to Francesca?

Writing due: 1 page comparative analysis of Dante's and Virgil's 'leaf simile'

Sept. 15

Politics: Dante and Florence

Inf. 6-10. We will talk about how politics becomes intrinsic to the poem's drama. We will focus on Inf. 6 and 10. The essay by Najemy in the Cambridge Companion to Dante is excellent on Florentine politics.

Short paper on Inf. 15 assigned.

Week 4:

Sept. 19

Lower Hell: The Circles of Violence

Inf. 11-15. Canto 11 lays out the structure of Hell and the categories we use to think about it. We will concentrate our discussion on cantos 13 and 15. What tensions can you identify in the presentation of the sinners Dante meets there?

Short paper on Inf. 15 due. Look at the relationship between Dante and Brunetto Latini. What makes it difficult for us to decide how Dante feels about Brunetto?

Sept. 22

Malebolge [Evil Pouches]: Into the Depths of Hell

Inf. 16-22. Focus on Dante's presentation of Geryon and on Dante's attitude to the Papacy (in Inf. 19). Many modern critics think of Geryon as a figure of the poem itself and its complex intermingling of fiction and truth. Can you see why?

Week 5:

Sept. 26

More Malebolge: Perverse Metamorphoses

Inf. 23-25. Our discussion will focus on the presentation of the thieves in Inf. 24-25. What claim does Dante make for the newness of his poetics here? What special quality do his metamorphoses have? Why is it that Ovid and Lucan must 'be silent'?

Sept. 29

The Dangers of Shipwreck: Ulysses

Inf. 26-28. We will focus on canto 26. Think about Dante (pilgrim and poet) and Ulysses: similarities and differences. Why might this sinner get so much space? What concerns – which are also Dante’s own – does the figure of Ulysses bring to the fore?

Week 6:

Oct. 3

Class visit to Special Collections, Clapp Library. This is a unique opportunity for you to see early and illustrated editions of Dante’s Comedy and other works, and to learn about manuscript and print culture.

Oct. 6

‘Bestial Signs’ and The Pit of the Universe

Inf. 29-34. We will focus on Dante’s encounter with Ugolino and its implications for the poem as a whole. Why and how are Ugolino and the story he tells such a grotesque and horrific embodiment of sin? How does his punishment fit the crime? How does this episode prefigure the encounter with Satan?

Take home exam on Inferno distributed, due on Oct 17.

II. PURGATORIO: REDEEMING LOVE



Week 7:

Oct. 10-11

FALL BREAK: NO CLASSES

Oct. 13

Dead Poetry Rises Again: The Shores of Purgatory

Purg. 1-3

Reading Due: Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 4.7-22 [ER]

Analyse the episode of Dante's meeting with his childhood friend Casella in canto 2 alongside the passage from Augustine's *Confessions*.

What do they imply about the nature of the relationship between memory and desire in *Purgatorio*? Focus especially on Casella's song and Cato's rebuke.

Week 8:

Oct. 17

Ante-Purgatory: Waiting Rooms

Purg. 4-9

Ante-purgatory is effectively a creation of Dante's. What is distinctive about this space? What does it suggest about the nature of purgation and redemption for the souls in Purgatory?

Take home exam on Inferno due.

Oct. 20

Entrance to Purgatory Proper

Purg. 10-12. God's 'art' and the Terrace of Pride.

Why should Dante linger so long on this terrace? What major issue is being explicated upon here? Of which ritual elements does purgation consist? What differences can you identify between the structure of Purgatory and that of Hell in these cantos?

Reading due: Schnapp, 'Introduction to *Purgatorio*' in Cambridge Companion

Article Critique assigned

Week 9:

Oct. 24

Ordering Love

Purg. 13-19. These are the some of the most philosophical cantos of the poem. What is the major subject of the philosophical discussions? How is it that love can be the motive force of all human action, both good and bad? What is the implication of this for our understanding of the poem and especially the Purgatorio?

Oct. 27

'Through you I was a poet, through you a Christian': The Meeting with Statius

Purg. 20-22

What is the relationship between Virgil, Dante, and Statius in this part of the poem? What does it indicate about the relative salvific and poetic value of each of their texts? How, in particular, does it underscore the tragedy of Virgil's fate?

Article Critique Due

Week 10:

Oct. 31

Poets in Purgatory

Purg. 23-27

What does Dante's treatment of the poets he meets on the terrace of lust suggest about the status and function of love poetry and the lyric? How is it related to his own poetic practice in the Divine Comedy? How does Dante, once again, 'come out on top'?

Take home exam on Purgatorio distributed, due Thurs 10 November

Nov. 3

Paradise Regained: The Reunion with Beatrice

Purg. 28-33. Focus on Canto 30.

What is the significance of Beatrice's arrival in Eden with respect to the meaning of the Divine Comedy as a whole? How can we reconcile the mystical pageant, which heralds her return, with her identity as the woman Dante loved in his youth? What is the significance of Virgil's disappearance and Beatrice's taking over as Dante's guide?

III. PARADISO: FLYING ON THE WINGS OF DESIRE



Week 11:

Nov. 7

Rising to Paradise

Par. 1-2

Reading due: Jacoff, 'Introduction to *Paradiso*', in Cambridge Companion

What claims does Dante make about the nature of the paradisiacal journey?
How will Dante involve the reader in that journey and what warning does he give?

Nov. 10

The Earth's Shadow

Par. 3-9

This part of heaven is set apart from the rest. Why? What special function does Piccarda have in clarifying the form and structure of Dante's Paradiso, and what understanding of the experience of beatitude emerges from what she says?

Take home Exam on Purgatory Due.

Class Presentations on Cacciaguida assigned.

Week 12:

Nov. 14

Heaven of the Sun

Par. 10-14

Focus on cantos 11-12. How are we encouraged to view them as an ideal diptych (pair?) What is significant about Dante choosing St Thomas Aquinas to tell the story of St Francis, and Bonaventure that of St Dominic? How in speaking of 'one', do they speak of 'both'?

Class time set aside to work on Cacciaguida presentations

Nov. 17

Dante and Cacciaguida

Par. 15-18. Concentrate on canto 17. What is its significance for Dante's writing of his 'sacred poem'? What traumatic event does Cacciaguida prophesy and what possible pay off/compensation will Dante receive?

Class presentations on this episode

Consider in particular the related themes of Dante's exile and poetic authority in this episode.

Week 13:

Nov. 21

Heavenly Enunciations/Annunciations

Par. 18-22

What view of divine justice emerges from the Eagle's speech in cantos 19-20? What is in itself striking about this Eagle and the way it is described?

Nov. 22-27

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 14:

Nov. 28

CLASSES RESUME

Dante's Theological Exam

Par. 23-26. Focus on cantos 23 and 25. How can canto 23 be viewed as a prefiguration of the final vision? How does canto 25 establish Dante's hopes for his own poem and that of its author?

Dec. 1

Turning the Universe Inside Out: The Primum Mobile

Par. 27-29

How are we being asked to view the universe inside out here? What do we learn about the angelic hierarchies and how is the question of the angels related to the question of humankind?

Week 15

Dec. 5

Face to Face with God: The Empyrean

Par. 30-33

What supreme challenge faces Dante-poet at this point? How does the text attempt to overcome it?

I will give you your final take home exam on Paradiso, due Dec. 16.

Dec. 16

FINAL TAKE HOME EXAM to be submitted in SAKAI drop folder by 4.30pm.