

Dante in Translation

Italian 490

Spring 2018, Penn State University

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Welcome to **Dante in Translation**! Join us on Dante's journey through the realms of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise and face the same dilemmas and controversies he does in his *Divine Comedy*. What happens to us after death? What does it really mean to be a good person? Why do bad things happen to good people? Who is responsible for the evils of the world? How far should a person go for love? ... Participants in the course will encounter the spirits of the celebrities of Dante's time, immoral professors, popes, great soldiers, saints, and average medieval men and women. Here is the masterpiece of world literature that inspired Chaucer, Michelangelo, Galileo, Franz Liszt, James Joyce, Spencer Williams, Gustave Doré, Gloria Laylor, and countless others over centuries and in very different walks of life. Students will also read the *Vita Nuova*, written when Dante was in his 20s. It is the wistful story of his love for the unforgettable Beatrice and of how he decided what to do with his life. By the end of this course, successful students should have a critically sophisticated understanding of Dante's two most important literary works and the ability to compare and contrast Dante's hierarchical ethical scheme with other ethical paradigms (such as Aristotle's or the American code of justice). Students are invited to practice interpreting texts literally, allegorically, and anagogically; to come to a greater understanding of the demands and rewards of reading an example of "the classics"; and to consider the values/morals/responsibilities that shape their lives and ambitions from differing perspectives (religious/spiritual, ethical, legal, cultural). Prerequisite for the course: Junior standing or permission of instructor. No knowledge of the Italian language is expected.

Required Texts:*

- Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy*. Vol. 1: Hell, Vol. 2: Purgatory, and Vol. 3: Paradise.
- Dante Alighieri. *Vita Nuova*.

* Please note: I have ordered the Mark Musa edition of the *Vita Nuova* and the Robert Durling/Ronald Martinez volumes of the *Divine Comedy* as the REQUIRED texts and will use these editions in class and for any citations on quizzes. I have chosen Musa's translation primarily on the basis of its availability and economical price; the Durling/Martinez facing-page translation of the *Comedy* is outstanding and contains a right amount of helpful notes. (Musa's translation of both *The Divine Comedy* and *Vita Nuova* is also available in *The Portable Dante*; please note, however, that previous students have found this edition's relative lack of notes to be a serious impediment.) Other excellent translations of the *Comedy* include, but are not limited to, those by Charles S. Singleton, John D. Sinclair, and Robert Harrison. If you already have an unabridged English translation of the work with interpretive notes, you are welcome to use it instead. The important thing is that your edition contain the ENTIRE *Divine Comedy*. Various editions are available on reserve in Pattee Library for those wishing to compare translations before making a purchase. Please do not hesitate to ask for recommendations for e-reader editions or texts that are available for download to a computer, if you prefer digital formats. I do not recommend pre-1950 translations for a first reading of the *Comedy*.

Course Activities and Assessment:

The final grade (totaling 100 points maximum) is calculated according to the following six aspects:

1. **30 points. In-class quizzes** (10 points maximum for each of the three quizzes). These quizzes may consist of identifications of characters or otherworldly settings, contextualization of citations, multiple-choice, short answer, and/or fill-in-the-blank responses. The quizzes aim to assure that students are understanding enough breadth and detail of Dante's materials to prepare them for the more creative and critical projects of the course (the Dante 2018 Project and the Final Paper/Project). Please plan to bring blue books or lined paper and a pen on quiz days.
2. **25 points. Class participation.** I cannot stress enough how important it is to participate intelligently in class discussions. Consistently practicing your literary interpretive skills in a dynamic learning environment and articulating and defending your ideas are skills that will be rigorously emphasized in this course. Highest grades for this aspect will be given to those students who come to class well-prepared every time, having read the material for each class, and participate actively with a high degree of enthusiasm in discussions. You must volunteer to be counted and to receive credit for class participation. Grades for in-class exercises not mentioned in other course requirements will be calculated as part of class participation. In class participation, the most points (23-25) are generally earned by students who volunteer intelligent comments consistently. Points in the 16-22 range are typically earned by students who actively participate, but may be less thoughtful or less consistent in their contributions. Roughly 10-15 points are typically earned by students who are prepared and come to class, but make little or no contribution to discussions unless called upon by the instructor. Only 1-9 points are earned by students who come to class, but are not prepared and/or not engaged in class discussions. No points will be given to students who are chronically absent or tardy or who openly hinder class discussion in some way (such as by sleeping, using cell phones/other electronic devices, etc.).
3. **20 points. Final project/paper due Monday, April 30.** The final project typically consists of a creative work with accompanying critical analysis/interpretation inspired by the student's reading of Dante. The option to research and write a 10-15-page interpretive paper of Dante's work is permitted only in specific situations (i.e. as a chapter for an honors thesis, a writing sample for graduate school admissions, or as a submission for The Dante Society of America undergraduate prize) and must be approved by the instructor no later than March 1. Specific guidelines are available on the course website and will be discussed in class. NOTE: All students must submit a 1-page description of their proposed final project/paper on or before Thursday, March 22 (see below). There is no final exam during exam week for this course.
4. **15 points. Student report and presentation for "Dante 2018."** Pairs of students lead brief presentations/ discussions on a person -- real or fictional -- who exemplifies a contemporary ethical/political/moral vice (drug addiction, racism, hedge fund management, college apparel "sweatshop" manufacturers, etc.) NOT treated by Dante. See the "Dante 2018" guidelines for more details.
5. **5 points. One-page description of the final project.** Due on or before Thursday, March 22. Proofread all written work very carefully. Please include a title, medium, intended message, and source of your inspiration from Dante's work (for previously approved papers, please include a title, argument, and an outline of your research essay.).
6. **5 points. Individual conference.** Understanding the intellectual goals and interests of my students is important enough to me to ask that every student drop in during my office hours or make an appointment to talk with me for at least 15 minutes once before the end of the sixth week of class (that is before February 16). This activity is worth 5 points and cannot be "made up" if it is missed or delayed until the second half of the semester. During my conference with you, I am interested in learning what characters/topics in this course are of greatest interest to you and why, which aspects of the course are difficult or unclear to you and what I can do to assist your learning, what ideas you might have for your final project, how this course fits into your major/minor/broader university course curriculum, or any similar discussion topic of your choice. The only way to prepare for your conference is to have one or two topics in mind to bring up with me. Please note that maximum

points are unlikely to be earned by students who put off their individual conference until the last week, or by those who give the impression that they are only meeting with me because it is required.

Please note:

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at 814-863-1807(V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit the Office for Disability Services website at <http://equity.psu.edu/ods/>. In order to receive consideration for course accommodations, you must contact ODS and provide documentation (see the documentation guidelines at <http://equity.psu.edu/ods/guidelines/documentation-guidelines>). If the documentation supports the need for academic adjustments, ODS will provide a letter identifying appropriate academic adjustments. Please share this letter and discuss the adjustments with your instructor as early in the course as possible. You must contact ODS and request academic adjustment letters at the beginning of each semester.

Penn State University defines academic integrity as the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. All students should act with personal integrity, respect other students' dignity, rights, and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts (Faculty Senate Policy 49-10).

Italian 490 is designed to be an active and collaborative environment. Reading and discussion of Dante's *Vita Nuova* and *Divine Comedy* outside of class with others is an excellent way to deepen your understanding of the works. Students may share notes taken during class with other students. In fact, students who are absent from class should ask other students for class notes. However, all other written components of the course (final paper/project, the written component of the Dante 2018 project, the final paper abstract, and the in-class quizzes) must be individual, non-collaborative efforts. Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students who are found to be dishonest will receive academic sanctions and will be reported to the University's Judicial Affairs office for possible further disciplinary sanction.

Please see Faculty Senate Policy 42-27- Class Attendance and the Academic Policies and Procedures for Undergraduate Students (<http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/health/welcome/illnessVerification/>). A student should attend every class for which the student is scheduled and is responsible for all work covered in the course. In the event a student must miss an evaluative event (such as a quiz or the day of the student's own pair presentation day), the student must justify the absence. Legitimate, unavoidable reasons for absence on an evaluative event day are illness, injury, or family emergency. The student should discuss ways to make up the work during office hours before the event, if possible, but in any case within one week of the absence. Requests for missing an evaluative event due to reasons that are based on false claims may be considered violations of the policy on Academic Integrity (Policy 49-20). You are required to provide verification from University Health Services or outside clinicians for significant prolonged illnesses or injuries resulting in absences from classes.

In IT 490, fewer than three absences on non-evaluative event days does not negatively impact your participation grade. Please do not justify absences on non-evaluative event days unless you exceed three (then the justification procedure follows the abovementioned one for evaluative event days). Students are encouraged to contact a classmate for notes and to hand in written work at any time before the due date or via email to the instructor's email address before midnight on the due date, even if they must miss class on the deadline day. Written work that is handed in late automatically receives a lower grade.

For graduate students: Your requirements for this course are very different. Please see instructor for information no later than the second week of class.

Provisional Calendar

Module 1 / Week 1:

- Tuesday, Jan. 9. Introduction.
- Thursday, Jan. 11. Dante's Life & Works.

Module 2 / Week 2:

- Tuesday, Jan. 16. *Vita Nuova*, ch. 1-25.
- Thursday, Jan. 18. *Vita Nuova*, ch. 26-42.

Module 3 / Weeks 3-5:

- Tuesday, Jan. 23. *Inferno* 1-4.
- Thursday, Jan. 25. *Inferno* 5-8.
→ Dante 2018 project signups.

Week 4:

- Tuesday, Jan. 30. *Inferno* 9-13.
- Thursday, Feb. 1. *Inferno* 14-18.

Week 5:

- Tuesday, Feb. 6. *Inferno* 19-22.
- Thursday, Feb. 8. **In-class Quiz 1.**

Module 4 / Weeks 6-7:

- Tuesday, Feb. 13. *Inferno* 23-26.
- Thursday, Feb. 15. *Inferno* 27-30.
→ Friday, Feb. 16 is the final deadline to complete all individual conferences.

Week 7:

Tuesday, Feb. 20. *Inferno* 31-34.

Module 5 / Weeks 7-8:

- Thursday, Feb. 22. *Purgatory* 1-4.
→ Midterm participation grades posted.

Week 8:

- Tuesday, Feb. 27. *Purgatory* 5-9. _____
- Thursday, Mar. 1. *Purgatory* 10-14. _____

Spring Break

Module 6 / Weeks 9-10:

- Tuesday, Mar. 13. *Purgatory* 15-19. _____
- Thursday, Mar. 15. *Purgatory* 20-24. _____

Week 10:

- Tuesday, Mar. 20. *Purgatory* 25-28. _____
- Thursday, Mar. 22. *Purgatory* 29-33. _____
→ Final project descriptions due.

Week 11:

- Tuesday, Mar. 27. Review/Intro to Paradise.

- Thursday, Mar. 29. **In-class Quiz 2.**

Module 7 / Weeks 12-14:

- Tuesday, Apr. 3. *Paradise* 1-5.
- Thursday, Apr. 5. *Paradise* 6-11.

Week 13:

- Tuesday, Apr. 10. *Paradise* 12-17.
- Thursday, Apr. 12. *Paradise* 18-22.

Week 14:

- Tuesday, Apr. 17. *Paradise* 23-28.
- Thursday, Apr. 19. Finish *Paradise*/Review.

Week 15 and Finals:

- Tuesday, Apr. 24. **In-class Quiz 3.**
- Thursday, Apr. 26. Perspectives and optional presentations of work in progress (details to be discussed in class).
→ Final participation grades posted.

Midnight on Monday, APRIL 30:
FINAL PROJECTS DUE

