ITAL 34300 / ITAL 71200

Dante’s Inferno

Combined undergraduate and graduate course

January 28, 2022 – May 24, 2022

Hunter College-CUNY

Department of Romance Languages

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Reflection

i. IL Objectives

We collaborated to integrate three concepts from the Framework into a course on Dante’s Inferno:

• Authority is Constructed and Contextual
• Information Creation as a Process
• Scholarship as Conversation

We wanted students to focus on elements of knowledge production in Dante’s time and our own. This was primarily accomplished via two library visits in which we asked students to examine analog and digital information sources for evidence of who was involved in their creation. In the first session students worked with medieval and early modern manuscript leaves and considered the manual and intellectual labor involved in their production. In the second session they looked at modern books, journals, and encyclopedias, reflecting on how they came to exist. Several further in-class and homework assignments reinforced key concepts from these sessions.

ii. Collaboration

We were equal partners throughout this collaboration, which began years ago with a conversation about a different course. This time, the instructor shared her course syllabus and assignments in advance, then we met to discuss how to integrate information literacy instruction into the course. The librarian was part of the Blackboard course site and had access
to all materials. The instructor was present during both library visits led by the librarian and chimed in where relevant. All assignments and activities were created with each other’s input.

iii. Class Composition

The class was composed of Italian major, minor, and MA students. Most students had written essays in Italian literature and other classes, but had not received information literacy instruction outside of general education coursework. For many, this was their first medieval Italian literature course, and the first time engaging with the vast bibliography on Dante’s *Inferno*, both in English and Italian.

We have found that many of our students are confident in their searching skills but struggle with concepts of authority and the scholarly conversation. For instance, they may have absorbed rules like “peer-reviewed journal articles are authoritative” and know how to find them, but lack a robust understanding of how, why, and for whom those journals are produced. They also express confusion about when and how other source types like encyclopedias might be appropriate for use at the college level. We addressed these issues throughout the semester, with a focus on Dante scholarship.

iv. Content and Design

Information literacy instruction supported the IL objectives listed above and the following course learning outcomes:

- engage in bibliographical research on Dante, using analog and online tools and resources
- formulate interpretations of the *Inferno* supported by evidence from the text and the critical literature, in discussion, oral presentations, and in writing

Our overarching principle was to connect information literacy instruction with disciplinary content, and we considered it an integral part of the course, not a one-off session. To that end, we created various activities that built on one another, scheduled at strategic points throughout the semester (see Syllabus / Schedule of Readings). After an initial discussion board assignment on what books are and who makes them, we focused our first library visit on book making during Dante’s time. We asked students to examine manuscript leaves and identify traces of how they were produced and used (Information Creation as a Process). As a follow-up homework assignment, students applied their new knowledge to digitized manuscripts of the *Inferno*.

The second library visit was focused on modern-day resources on Dante. Students located analog and digital sources at our library and examined them for evidence of who produced them (Authority is Constructed and Contextual; Information Creation as a Process). We also discussed the online resources listed in our Dante libguide. During a follow-up activity we compared different types of writing about Dante and their respective audiences, and reflected
on their suitability for student research (Authority is Constructed and Contextual; Scholarship as Conversation). We also reviewed examples of a specific genre of Dante criticism, the *Lectura Dantis*, an interpretation of one canto often followed by the recitation of the text. These assignments prepared students for their final presentation and paper, their own *Lectura Dantis*.

v. Student Impact and Assessment

By planning various information literacy assignments related to the course content throughout the semester, we successfully scaffolded the final assessments: the presentation and paper. Moreover, students reflected on their learning process at three points during the semester, which provided valuable insight into their progress, their understanding of course material, and their research and writing skills. Students shared that in the second library visit they had gained a better understanding of library databases, had learned how to consult Italian encyclopedias online, and were introduced to Dante bibliographies curated by professional organizations. As a result of the information literacy assignments and regular check-ins, every student selected relevant secondary sources for their final paper. In their final presentation, most summarized their research in clear and accessible language. One student wrote, “I learned a lot and truly enjoyed the exercise of the *Lectura Dantis*. It was great to learn how to read the *Commedia* and to provide a commentary. I also really liked seeing all the art and manuscripts at the library. Meaning, I really appreciate your efforts to diversify the way we can read the *Commedia.*”

vi. Instructional Impact

The instructor cannot imagine teaching another literature course without incorporating information literacy instruction. She realized how we sometimes take certain skills for granted when assigning research papers, and that connecting information literacy instruction with course content through scaffolded activities is the best way to hone critical thinking and interpretation skills. The librarian will use this course as an example when discussing potential collaborations with instructors in her liaison departments, English and Romance Languages.

vii. Reusability

While the materials we used for our information literacy instruction were chosen to match course content, we believe that our approach can be adapted for various courses and disciplines. Instructors can use their discretion in choosing relevant sources, either held in their institution’s library collections, or—in the case of rare materials like medieval manuscript leaves—freely available as digital facsimiles.
Overview of Course Syllabus ITAL 34300 (BA) / ITAL 71400 (MA) Dante’s Inferno

Instructor: Prof. Julie Van Peteghem    Email: jv41@hunter.cuny.edu

Schedule of Readings

Each unit or unità corresponds to a folder on Blackboard / Weekly Coursework. New folders become available on Wednesdays. Most units are one week long and conclude with our class on Tuesday evening. We are skipping two Tuesday classes (2/8 and 4/19) in observance of Hunter’s academic calendar. Most assignments are due the Monday before our class (11:59pm), but always check the unit overview for precise deadlines.

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Required Texts

**Recommended edition:**

e-book available via Hunter College libraries

**Other bilingual edition (recommended for MA students):**

e-version available via dantelab.dartmouth.edu

Resources

You can find additional online study and research materials under “Dante Resources” on our Blackboard course site. The Dante LibGuide will be an indispensable resource for all research: https://libguides.library.hunter.cuny.edu/dante.
Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students will be able to:

- discuss the main characters, themes, and events featured in the *Inferno*
- recognize and analyze formal (stylistic and rhetorical) features of medieval poetry
- recite medieval poetry with particular attention to pronunciation and phrasing
- engage in bibliographical research on Dante, using analog and online tools and resources
- formulate interpretations of the *Inferno* supported by evidence from the text and the critical literature, in discussion, oral presentations, and in writing

Mode of Instruction

This course is offered fully in person.

Course Structure

**Preparation**

In preparation for class on Tuesdays, you will read the assigned cantos, read/watch the related material, and complete the assignments — a short quiz and reading questions about the assigned cantos — by Monday 11:59pm. Sometimes there are additional assignments to complete, and they may have different deadlines. Always refer to the checklist and deadlines in the course unit. Most units correspond to one week, but there are a few exceptions.

I structured the activities in preparation for class in the order I recommend: first, read the *Commento Baroliniano* to get an introduction in English to the canto and its main themes and characters; then, watch my short videos in Italian that identify the key elements in each canto; read the cantos with particular attention to what you’ve learned so far; take the pre-class quiz to make sure you got these key concepts (and go back to the text if anything remains unclear); answer the reading questions; add any questions or comments you may have about a specific canto to its corresponding Padlet. Everyone learns in different ways, so work your way through the assignments in the way that makes most sense and is most helpful to you.

**Class meetings**

What may happen during our class meetings on Tuesdays: 1) in-depth discussion of a few passages in the assigned cantos; (2) follow-up discussion of the written assignments; (3) Q&A; (4) library visits; (5) presentations.

Evaluation

**Pre-class quizzes (due Mondays at 11:59pm)**

*ungraded | to be completed before deadline | can be repeated*

Each test consists of five multiple-choice questions about the assigned cantos. Once you’ve saved your answer, you cannot go back and change it. Once you’ve started the quiz, you must complete it. However, you can repeat the quizzes as many times as you like. These quizzes are
mainly intended as self-assessment: the questions are about the passages and concepts I consider most important. If you get a question wrong, you may want to go back to the text or the notes in your edition.

Take the quizzes open-book or not. Take them as many times as you wish. But you must complete the quiz at least once before the deadline. I’m not looking at your score: Blackboard will give you one, but it doesn’t count toward your final grade. The only condition – to keep on track with the readings – is to complete the quiz at least once before the deadline. Once published, the quizzes remain available for the entire semester.

Before the deadline you will be able to review your responses after you’ve finished and see if your answers were correct or not. After the deadline the correct answers will be posted.

**Domande di lettura (due Mondays at 11:59pm)**

*ungraded | feedback with rubric | to be completed before deadline | may have to resubmit *

For each unit, you will respond to questions about the assigned cantos. You can consult the additional materials provided for each canto (the *Commento Baroliniano*, my introductions, the notes in your editions, additional resources found via “Dante Resources”), but you need to formulate your answers in your own words. You will receive feedback on each response via a rubric and additional comments, if needed. Sometimes there will be different questions for BA and MA students, and this will be clearly indicated. **You will need to set aside enough time for these assignments, so don’t wait until the last moment to get started.** If you’re asked to resubmit your answer for content and/or language, you have until the following Monday 11:59pm to do so. If possible, review your answers as soon as possible after our class discussion on Tuesday.

**Other assignments (deadlines may vary)**

*ungraded | to be completed before deadline | may have to resubmit *

There will be a few additional assignments throughout the semester, mainly related to the final presentation and paper, and to the artistic responses to Dante’s poem. Instructions will be included in the course units.

**Final presentation**

*graded with rubric *

Each student will give a short presentation on a canto of the *Inferno* during our last class (T 5/17), our “Poetry Reading: An Evening in Inferno.” Preparatory tasks related to the final presentation will be included in the units. A timeline and more instructions will be posted on Blackboard as “Final Presentations and Paper.”

**Final paper - due M 5/23 11:59pm**

*graded with rubric*
You will develop your presentation into a written *lectura Dantis* of 8-10 pages (BA) / 10-12 pages (MA) in Italian, double-spaced. This is shorter than your usual final paper, because you have consistently written about Dante’s *Inferno* all semester (*domande di lettura*). A timeline and more instructions will be posted on Blackboard as “Final Presentations and Paper.” Preparatory tasks related to the final paper will be included in the units.

**Reflections and final “exam” - due S 5/22 11:59pm**

**self-graded / must be completed**

At three points of the semester (before and after the midterm week, and at the end of the course), I ask you to reflect on the work you’ve done in the course through a series of questions about the content and your understanding of the material. You will self-grade these reflections. For the first two reflections we will meet to further discuss upon your and/or my request, and we will meet virtually on our final exam date T 5/24 to discuss the final reflection.

**Final grade**

**quizzes (10%), domande di lettura (40%), other assignments (10%)**

In this course I focus on giving you feedback and time for revision and improvement, and don’t grade every single component and task. I do ask to complete the pre-class quizzes and *domande di lettura* before class in order to keep us all on track.

**Full credit:** You get full credit for completing the quizzes on time; for submitting answers to the *domande di lettura* that don’t require further revision on time; and for completing the other assignments without needing further revision on time.

**Life happens:** You can miss one pre-class quiz, three *domande di lettura* (from one unit or separate units), and one other assignment, and still get an A for each component. For each additional missed quiz, other assignment, and three *domande* your grade for that component will be lowered 1/3 of a letter grade.

**Final presentation (10%), final paper (15%)**

The final presentation and paper will be graded with a rubric.

**Reflections (15%)**

You will self-grade three reflections to be completed over the course of the semester and must meet with me virtually on T 5/24 to discuss the final reflection.
ITAL 34300/71200: Dante’s *Inferno*

Library Visit 1: Medieval Manuscripts

February 15, 2022

Lesson plan* (60 minutes)

Learning objectives

• Identify the makers of medieval manuscripts (authors, scribes, rubricators, illuminators, etc.)
• Analyze manuscript leaves for evidence of how they were produced and used

I. Pre-library visit reflection questions. Ask students to share answers to the following questions on a course discussion board

• What is a book?
• Why are books important?
• Who is involved in the making of books?
• What do you think a book looked like in Dante’s time?

II. Opener: In-class discussion of student responses to reflection questions (10 minutes)

Use this opportunity to raise questions about the differences (and continuities) in book production and knowledge production in medieval Europe and the modern world

III. Activity & discussion: Observe a medieval manuscript leaf† in groups of 3 or 4 (10-15 min.)

Questions for students (on slideshow)

• Who made this leaf and the book it comes from?
• What materials did they use?
• In what order was the object constructed?

IV. Viewing of “Making Manuscripts” short video (7 min.)


V. Activity & Discussion: Revisiting the manuscript leaf (15 min.)

Instructions for students (on slideshow): After having seen the video on the production of manuscripts, re-examine your leaf. Can you find evidence of the various steps in its production? Do you see traces of its makers and its user(s)?

VI. Full class discussion (10 min.)

Answer student questions, invite students to share interesting things they noticed

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* These activities were all conducted in Italian (except for the video), and have been translated here.
† For this exercise we used six 12th- to 16th-century manuscript leaves from a book of hours and missals created in Italy, France, and Germany. In the absence of similar materials, this exercise can be done with digital facsimiles of manuscript books or leaves that are freely available online from libraries and museums.
ITAL 34300/71200: Dante’s *Inferno*
Library Visit 2: Modern Sources
March 22, 2022
Group Worksheet\(^1\) (60 minutes)

Learning objectives

- Engage in bibliographical research on Dante, using analog and online tools and resources
- Identify the makers of modern scholarly sources (authors, editors, translators, publishers, scholarly associations, etc.)

Instructions

Form groups of 3-4 students. Each group should complete the tasks for parts I-III at the corresponding stations in the classroom. After each task, discuss the reflection questions. Type out your answers in the appropriate spaces in the group’s shared online document. We will discuss your answers as a class afterwards.

**Type the names of all group members here:**

I) BOOKS

A) Task

Find (1) an edition of the *Inferno* and (2) a book that serves as a secondary source for research on the *Inferno*. (You’ll find books by Dante starting with call number PQ4301 [on floor B2 of the library](#)). Bring these 2 books back to the classroom.

B) Reflection questions

1. How are books organized in the library?

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\(^1\) This worksheet and the class discussion were presented in Italian.
2. Which edition of the *Inferno* did you find? Who wrote the book? Where does the text come from? Who else had a part in making the book? What do you think each person contributed to the production of this book? 

3. Which secondary source did you find? Who wrote it? Who else had a part in making the book? What do you think each person contributed to the production of this book? 

II) ENCYCLOPEDIAS

A) Task

Find the entry for “Gerione” in (1) the online edition of the *Enciclopedia dantesca* and (2) the print copy here in the library.

B) Reflection questions

1. Who wrote this entry? 

2. Who made this encyclopedia? How did each person contribute to its production?

III) ACADEMIC JOURNALS

A) Tasks

1. Using *OneSearch* or a database, find an article on *Gerione/Geryon* published in an academic journal. It may help to refer to the *Dante libguide*.

2. Examine copies of the two print journals in front of you: *Studi danteschi* and *Dante Studies*. 
B) Reflection questions

1. Who made the electronic journal article you found?

2. Who made (and who makes) the journals *Studi danteschi* and *Dante Studies*? How did each person contribute to the journal’s production?

IV) DISCUSSION

1. What differences do you notice between the 3 source types (books, encyclopedias, academic journals)?

2. In your experience, was it easier to determine who created and published the electronic sources or the print sources?