

RICE UNIVERSITY
Spring, 2006
English / MDST 310: Dante
Dr. Jane Chance
TTH (2:30-3:45)
D1 Distribution Course



A close reading of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, with attention to the meaning of words, images, symbols, figures, structures, the significance of a canto within the respective cosmic hierarchy, the overall meaning of a book, and with reference to the political and religious controversies of the time in Florence, Italy, and medieval Europe.

Note: Graduate students can sign up for this course as an English Department Graduate Directed Reading (15-25 page seminar paper required in lieu of short papers).

TEXT: John Sinclair, ed. and trans. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, 3 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1939), PB.

--*Inferno* (1983) ISBN 0195004124 \$11.76

--*Purgatorio* ISBN 0195004132 \$12.76

--*Paradiso*, ISBN 0195004140

RECOMMENDED:

Rachel Jacoff, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*. (Cambridge University Press). \$22.95 ISBN 0521427428 PQ4335.C36 1993

On Reserve: *L'inferno* (1910), dir. Francesco Bartolini, with music by Tangerine Dream (71 mins.) [PN1997 .I4659 2004](#)

SYLLABUS:

Week 1

Jan. 12 INTRODUCTION. DANTE'S WORKS AND LIFE: HIS TWO LOVES.
Read Guiseppe Mazzotta's "Life of Dante," in Jacoff, *Cambridge Companion to Dante*, pp. 1-13

Week 2

PART I. THE CLOSED HEART: THE *INFERNO*
(INTRODUCTION)

Jan. 15 Showing of Francesco Bartolini's *L'inferno* (1910), at the Media
Center 3 p.m.
Jan. 17 *Inf.* 1-2: The Dark Forest
Read John M. Namejy, "Dante and Florence," in Jacoff, pp. 80-99
Jan. 19 *Inf.* 1-2: The Role of Vergil
Image, Symbol, Allegory: Read the *Letter to Can Grande*
on the Four Levels of Interpretation (hand-out)
Read John Freccero, "Introduction to Inferno," in Jacoff.
Pp. 172-91

Week 3

Jan. 24 *Inf.* 3-8.66: Upper Hell (Incontinence).
Read "Maps and Charts" and "Astronomy and Chronology"
(handout)
Jan. 26 *Inf.* 8.67-11: The City of Dis, a Crisis, and Circle Six (Turning
from the Truth)

Week 4

Jan. 31 *Inf.* 12-16: The Violent
Feb. 2 *Inf.* 17-21: Malebolge (Fraud)--The First Four Trenches (Bolge)

Week 5

Feb. 7 *Inf.* 22-26: Malebolge--Bolge Five to Eight
Feb. 9 *Inf.* 27-30: Malebolge--Bolge Eight to Ten

Week 6

Feb. 14 *Inf.* 31-34: The Cold Heart of Hell
Feb. 16
Feb. 17 Exercise on Hell Due.

PART II. CLIMBING THE SEVEN-STORY MOUNTAIN: THE
PURGATORIO

Week 7

Feb. 21 *Purg.* 1-5: The Beach (Ante-Purgatory)
Read Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Introduction to Purgatorio," in Jacoff,
pp. 192-207
Feb. 23 *Purg.* 6-9: The Beach; The First Garden and the Gate (Visual

- Feb. 24 Structure of the *Purgatorio*
Midterm Examination (on the *Inferno*) due @ 9 a.m. Ten specific items or identifications. E-exam (Honor Code applies)
- Week 8*
- Feb. 28 *Purg.* 10-14: The First and Second Stories--Learning Humility (Pride) and Generosity (Envy)
- Mar. 2 *Purg.* 15-19: The Third and Fourth Stories--Learning Peace (Wrath) and Zeal (Sloth)
- Week 9*
- Mar. 7 *Purg.* 20-25.108: The Fifth and Sixth Stories--Learning Mastery over Money (Avarice), Food and Drink (Gluttony)
- Mar. 9 *Purg.* 25.109-27: The Last Story--From Lust to Love, The Sacred Garden, the Earthly Paradise
Music in the *Purgatorio*: Songs of the Trecento and Videocassette, "To Sing and to Play"
- Mar. 13-17 Mid-term break
- Week 10*
- Mar. 21 *Purg.* 28-33: The Pageant in the Earthly Paradise, the Meeting with Beatrice, Freedom and Peace.
- Mar. 23 Video on *The Medieval Universe: The Stars and the Planets*
- PART III. THE ASCENT THROUGH THE HEAVENS: THE *PARADISO*
- Week 11*
- Mar. 28 The *Paradiso*: Introduction.
Par. 1-5.87: Fidelity and Failing--the Moon.
Read Rachel Jacoff, "Shadowy Prefaces": An Introduction to *Paradiso*," in Jacoff, pp. 208-225
- Mar. 30 *Par.* 5.88-9: Men and Women of the World, and Lovers--Mercury and Venus
- Week 12*
- April 4 *Par.* 10-14.78: Students and Teachers--the Sun.
- April 6 Spring Recess
- Week 13*
- April 11 *Par.* 14.79-18.51: Soldiers, Family Ties--Mars
- April 13 *Par.* 18.52-23: Rulers and World Powers—Jove
- Week 14*
- April 18 *Par.* 24-29: Dante's Final Examination in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars and Heaven Itself: A Backward Look
- April 20 *Par.* 30-33: The People of God and the Vision of God in Glory

April 21 Second Examination Due @ 9 a.m.

Week 15

April 25

April 27

April 28 Final Paper Due @ 9 a.m.

REQUIREMENTS: Three short (3-5 pp. minimum) papers, midterm and second examinations.

Feb. 17 Exercise on the *Inferno*. Trace a symbol through one episode in Hell and analyze its meanings (3-4 pp.) Choose, for example, a color, sound, light, heat, fire, posture, motion, etc. Underline each appearance in your episode. Try to see patterns in its use. What does it suggest about the nature of Hell (or of life)?

Feb. 24 Midterm Examination (on the *Inferno*). Ten specific identifications drawn from class discussion, the text, or the readings, on which you will write short essays.

April 21 Second Examination. 10 specific identifications from the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* on which you will write short essays.

April 28 Final paper on the whole of *The Divine Comedy*. Write a paper on a topic of your choosing (10-12 pp.) Some of these essays may be suitable as entries in the annual competition of the Dante Society in America (see *Dante Studies* and the description attached).

CONFERENCES: Office Hours: 4-5:00 TTh and by appointment
Office: 235 Herring Hall
Office Phone: x2625
Fax: 713-348-5991

The Dante and Charles Hall Grandgent Prizes

“Since 1987 the Dante Society of America has offered an annual prize of one hundred dollars for the best student essay in competition on a subject related to the life or works of Dante. The Dante Prize of two hundred fifty dollars is offered for the best essay submitted by an undergraduate in any American or Canadian college or university, or by anyone not enrolled as a graduate student who has received the degree of A.B., or its equivalent, within the past year. In addition, the prize of five hundred dollars, the Charles Hall Grandgent Award, is offered for the best essay submitted by an American or Canadian student enrolled in any graduate program.

All submissions, both undergraduate and graduate, must be made by e-mail attachment of a file in either Word or WordPerfect and sent to the Dante Society at sad@dantesociety.org. Files should have the extension .doc or .rtf if saved in Word, .wpd

if saved in WordPerfect. No hardcopy submissions will be accepted. Undergraduate essays should be no longer than 5,000 words in length, graduate essays no longer than 7,000 words in length, including bibliographies and any other material. The deadline for submission is June 30 of each year.

Each writer should provide a cover page (as the first page of the file) giving the writer's name, local, permanent and e-mail addresses, the title of the essay, the essay category, and the writer's institutional affiliation. The writer's name should not appear on the essay title page (to follow the cover page) or any other page of the essay since the essays are submitted anonymously to the readers. Quotations from Dante's works should be cited in the original language and the format of an essay should conform to either the Chicago or MLA Style Sheet guidelines."

Results will be announced in the fall issue of the Society's *Newsletter* and in the annual issue of *Dante Studies*; the submitted text is not returned to authors. The Society reserves the right to make no awards in any one year.

Previous Dante Prize Winner Examples:

Peter Borton (Yale), "Bestiality, Sin and Poethood: The Taming of Geryon in the *Inferno*, Canto 17"

Martha Toll (Yale), "A study of Music in Dante's *Divina Commedia* as Prothalamion"

Felice Visceglia (Princeton), "The *Divina Commedia* as Prothalamion"

Steven J. Rowan (U. of Connecticut), "The Problem of Redemptive Identity in the Canto of the Three Florentines"

Charles Hall Grandgent Award Winner Examples:

Robert Giacone (Harvard), "Ugo Capeto e Dante"

Donald Gilman (U. of N. Carolina), "Classical Convention and Dante's Concept of Poetic Inspiration"

Disability Notice:

1. Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential. Students with disabilities will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Ley Student Center.
2. Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this course is encouraged to contact me after class or during office hours. Additionally, students will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Ley Student Center.

3. If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me to discuss your needs. Additionally, you will need to register with the Disability Support Services Office in the Ley Student Center.