

HIST 329: Dante: Hell, Heaven & Florence

Instructor: Prof. Louis I. Hamilton

Office: Honors Hall 210

Office Hours: Thursdays, 4:30-6:30 and by appointment

Course Description:

This course considers one of history's most influential authors. We will take the spiritual journey from hell to heaven and consider it in Dante's medieval intellectual, literary and political context. The close examination of these contexts will equip us to understand the many levels of allegorical meaning in the epic poem.

The class employs a geographic database as a tool for literary analysis. First created for this course in 2006, this method remains at the forefront of the growing field of digital humanities. We will add to the database that maps Florence in the Age of Dante. The purpose is to help us construct the logic of Dante's allegory by applying technology to traditional approaches to the text. This will allow us to create a less static, less indexical model of poetic meaning in Dante. This will enable you to read the poem with greater immediacy. Students are not expected to have prior proficiency in medieval history or these digital humanities methods. Constructing and visualizing the database will allow you to understand and explore the spiritual, political, and artistic topography of Dante's Florence. In turn, it will allow you to understand the multiple levels of meaning within one of the great themes of the poem (justice, spiritual vision, love, repentance, grace, pilgrimage, social division, human nature, the meaning of politics, etc.) This will be the subject of your final essay.

Course Objectives:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. Identify the key authors and aspects of the development of vernacular poetry in medieval Europe.
2. Identify and describe the social, intellectual, religious and built urban contexts of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Florence.
3. Correlate these developments and contexts to Dante Alighieri's epic poetry in these contexts.
4. Write effective essays that describe the critical questions and methods of the secondary scholarship and evaluate a range of medieval sources, including chronicles, tax and property records, rituals, academic discourse, and poetry so as to offer their own analysis.
5. Construct a geographic database to contextualize and describe a diverse range of sources.
6. Demonstrate information literacy appropriate for an upper-level undergraduate: including (1) locating, retrieving and evaluating information necessary for a college-level argumentative essay; (2) organizing, synthesizing and communicating that information orally in class, as well as in clear, persuasive prose; and (3) producing drafts, critiques of drafts, and a finished essay that employs principles consistent with the ethical and legal uses of information.

Prerequisites: HUM 102 with a grade of C or higher, and a course fulfilling the History and Humanities GER 200 level course with a grade of C or higher.

Required Books:

Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso*. Tr. by Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam, 1980-1982).

-----, *The New Life / La Vita Nuova* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2006).

John Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575* (Oxford: Wiley & Sons, 2006).

Dino Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence*. Tr. by Daniel E. Bornstein (Philadelphia: U Penn. Press, 1986).

Additional required readings will be provided.

Grading:

Participation: 20%
Database (addition of data; data visualization; discussion): 10%
Analysis of secondary source article* (3pp): 10%
Topic and Bibliography: 10%
Florence Mapping Project *in situ*: 10%
Draft Essay: 5%
Critique of Draft (3pp): 10%
Final Project (3,333-3,900 words): 25%

Extra Credit: Up to 3 bonus points applied to final essay for use of foreign language materials (secondary or primary).

Up to 5 bonus points applied to final overall grade for 3D model of buildings from “Chained View” (depending on buildings chosen, restrictions apply! - see Prof. Hamilton before proceeding).

Grading Scale for Course Grade

A = 89.9 to 100
B+ = 86.9 to 89.8
B = 79.9 to 86.8
C+ = 76.9 to 79.8
D = 59.9 to 69.8
F = 59.8 to 0

Academic Integrity:

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: <http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>. Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu

Accommodations:

New Jersey Institute of Technology is committed to making students with disabilities full participants in its academic and other programs, services and activities through the provision of reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities.

Students that require special accommodations Disabilities Service Policy Students with disabilities who are otherwise qualified and are college able will receive reasonable accommodations to support their special needs. Students must self-identify to the Disabilities Services office to qualify to receive services. NJIT is in full compliance with the Regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

If you are in need of accommodations due to a disability please contact Chantonette Lyles, Associate Director of the Office of Accessibility Resources & Services (OARS), Fenster Hall Room 260 to discuss your specific needs. A Letter of Accommodation Eligibility from the OARS authorizing your accommodations will be required. Information about accessibility resources and services and forms to initiate accommodation are available at <https://www.njit.edu/studentsuccess/general-information>.

Assignments:

WEEK I: INTRODUCTION to the course syllabus, Dante, Florence and Dante's influence

Unreal City,

Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,

I had not thought death had undone so many.

-T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

"...he likes Italy, he would like to learn Italian. I would be pleased to teach him Italian. ...

The Canto of Ulysses. Who knows how or why it comes into my mind."

-Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*

Stone on stone. Hard cobblestones, oil lamps.... Natives down the street. All dead. All walking slowly towards their lives.

Already, each Sunday forever. The man was a minister. His wife was light-skinned with freckles. The church was tall

brown brick and sophisticated. ...On W. Market St. in winters the white stripe ran down the center of my thoughts on the

tar street. The church sat just out of shadows and its sun slanted down on the barbershops.

-Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), *The Systems of Dante's Hell*

WEEK II (Jan. 23): FLORENCE: Social structures

Readings for discussion

History of Florence: Elite Families, 5-35; *History of Florence*: The Popolo, 35-62

Jan. 26 – Article selection due (limit 3 students per article: first come, first serve). Email louis.i.hamilton@njit.edu

WEEK III (Jan. 30): BUILT ENVIRONMENT as a means of analysis:

Readings for discussion:

Please read the introduction to the "spatial turn" and then the sections on History, Religion, and

Literature from the University of Virginia's Scholars Lab: <http://spatial.scholarslab.org/spatial-turn/>

Read the intro. to and familiarize yourself with Carmody, "Project for a Map" (Canvas)

History of Florence: Early Conflicts of Elite and Popolo, 63-95

Compagni, *Chronicle*: Prologue, Book I, 4-30

Feb. 2 – Select Items from Compagni and Dante for Geographic Database. Email louis.i.hamilton@njit.edu

WEEK IV (Feb. 6): FLORENTINE ECONOMY & POWER

Readings for discussion:

History of Florence: Domestic Economy and Merchant Empires to 1340, 96-123

Compagni: Book II, 33-61

History of Florence: The Fourteenth-Century Dialogue of Power, 124-55

Compagni: Book III, 63-101

WEEK V (Feb. 13): POETRY: The "sweet new style"

Readings for discussion:

The "dolce stil nuovo" Guido Cavalcanti, selections

John M. Najemy, "Dante and Florence," *Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 80-99.*

Dante, *La Vita Nuova*

Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante and the Lyric Past," *Cambridge Companion*, 14-33.*

WEEK VI (Feb. 20): THE EPIC POEM

Readings for discussion:

Dante, *La Vita Nuova*

Inferno, I-III

Freccero, "Introduction to *Inferno*," *Cambridge Companion*, 172-91.*

Story Map additions and preliminary analysis due

WEEK VII (Feb. 27): HELL

Readings for discussion:

Inferno, IV-IX

Inferno, IX-XII

Dante's Method and the Bible: The Letter to Can Grande

<http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/cangrande.english.html>

Recommended: Bernard of Clairvaux, selection from sermons on the *Song of Songs* (Canvas)

WEEK VIII (March 5): HELL

Readings for discussion:

Inferno, XIII-XVIII

Alison Morgan, "Topographical Motifs of the Other World," *Dante & Medieval Other World*, 11-50.*

Inferno, XIX-XXIX; esp. XXII, XXVII

March 11: Topic and Bibliography Due

FRIDAY MARCH 8: Depart for Rome

SATURDAY MARCH 9: FLORENCE

You will be assigned groups of 4 or 5 based. Based on your projects

SUNDAY MARCH 17: Depart for Newark

WEEK IX (March 19): HELL

Readings for discussion:

Inferno, XXX-XXXIV

Aquinas, Selections on Nature, Justice, Sacrament (Canvas)

WEEK X (March 26): PURGATORY

Readings for discussion:

Purgatorio, I-XVII

Purgatorio, XVII-XXVIII

Schnapp, "Introduction to *Purgatorio*," *Cambridge Companion*, 192-207.*

WEEK XI (April 2): PURGATORY TO PARADISE

Readings for discussion:

Purgatorio, XXIX-XXXIII

Paradiso, I-X; esp. III, X

WEEK XII (April 9): PARADISE

Readings for discussion:

Paradiso, XI-XXI; esp. XIII, XIV, XVI, XXI

Jacoff, "'Shadowy prefaces': an introduction to *Paradiso*," *Cambridge Companion*, 208-25.*

Paradiso, XXII- XXIX; esp. XXIII-XXVI

Draft Essay Due

WEEK XIII (April 16): PARADISE

Readings for discussion:

Paradiso, XXX-XXXIII
Paradiso, XXX-XXXIII

WEEK XIV (April 23): DRAFT & CRITIQUES
Critique of Draft Due

WEEK XV (exam week): **FINAL DRAFT**