

ENG 321 Dante's *Divine Comedy* in Italy, or "the journey of our lives"

Prof. Katy Stavreva

Class site at <http://blogs.cornellcollege.edu/danteinitaly>

Course Description and Goals

There is no more inspiring way to read the *Divine Comedy* than in his beloved Florence – the city where he learned about theology, poetry, philosophy, politics, friendship, and love, the city that exiled him when he found himself on the losing side of politics, the city to which he longed to return, but never did. In our own ways, through our readings, commentaries, and creative work, we will bring Dante back to Florence, and then, as we start climbing Mount Purgatory, we will bring him with us first to Ravenna, the city that gave him shelter and eternal resting place, and then to Rome, the center of his imperial political vision. We will tend to the sound, stories, and imagery of Dante's poetry while visiting sites that nourished his creative imagination: forbidding towers, town halls, dazzling churches, ancient sarcophagi, city walls, graceful piazzas, triumphal arches. Throughout, we will engage in the medieval practice of *contemplative reading*: putting the poem in conversation with art, music, history, social observations.

The overarching goal of this course is to practice reading the *Commedia* through the lens of Italy, and Italy through the lens of the *Commedia*. To this end you will:

- develop your skills at analyzing Dante's ambitious, multi-faceted poetic program in the first two canticles of the *Commedia*;
- learn how to understand and appreciate the medieval period and its world view from the *Commedia* and the sites we visit;
- practice ongoing reflection in writing in a public-humanities manner, developing brief, insightful, engaging analyses and interpretations of the experience of reading Dante's poem in Italy;
- in your final assignment, bridge the divide between analytical and creative interpretation of Dante's complex and socially engaged poetry.

This course supports the Educational Priorities and Outcomes of Cornell College with emphases on knowledge, inquiry, communication, and intercultural literacy.

Books and Materials

Required:

Dante, *Inferno*, trans. Mandelbaum, ISBN 978-0553213393
Dante, *Purgatorio*, trans. Mandelbaum, ISBN 978-0553213447
Nick Havely, *Dante* ISBN 978-0631228530 or e-edition
Alta Macadam, *Blue Guide Tuscany*, ISBN 978-1905131266
Pocket size notebook for taking notes on museum visits and tours

Recommended:

Rick Steves' Rome 2013, ISBN 978-1612383736

Assignments and Evaluation

1. **Energetic Participation and Culturally Sensitive Behavior (20%):** In every venue, energetic listening and cultural sensitivity are assumed. You are expected to attend and be prepared for every event and class meeting; honor the needs of the group; arrive at destinations on time having read the material assigned for the site/day; treat with politeness and unselfishness all peers and people involved in helping you on the trip; pay active attention to the scheduled tours; and respect the guidelines and codes of Cornell College and of those we encounter on our way (#9 and #10 of “The Ten Commandments for Group Study Abroad”).

Because this trip is off-campus and some factors are beyond our control, complications can include last-minute changes of schedule, potential conflicts with roommates, exhaustion from a busy schedule, or slower turn-around time than is usual on graded submissions. You will have an easier time if you are tolerant of potential irritants and ready to resolve any conflicts quickly and thoroughly. Being flexible can also mean that you are ready to enjoy happy accidents. Remember #7 and #8 of “The Ten Commandments for Group Study Abroad”!

This part of your final grade is pass/fail. Should behaviors seriously undermine the educational goals of the group (these may include but are not limited to inappropriate behavior related to drinking, absenteeism, or belligerence) I have the authority to send you home.

2. **Blogging with Dante (30%):** Your blog is a record of some high points of your journey through Dante’s *Commedia* as filtered through observations of Italian life and your experiences of historic sites and medieval art in Italy. It should include at least **ten posts** (not counting the one about your expectations), each of them engaging with a few choice lines from the poem (one to three *terzinas*). The lines must be properly quoted; it is your choice where in the blog post to include the quotation. Explain your choice of the poetic excerpt: what has brought it to your attention (topic, tone, imagery, philosophical stance, character trait, ethics, etc.).

The rest of the post should do one of two things:

- draw connections between Dante’s poem, on the one hand, and, on the other, observations about social interactions, attitudes, institutions, ideas, designs, etc. that you have observed on the trip. Entering a new culture, you’re ideally positioned to observe what may have been taken for granted in more familiar circumstances. A cultural comparativist approach is fine, but be sure to explicate the Italian experience;
- draw connections between Dante’s poem and historical events, art, architecture, or music dating from the Italian Middle Ages or the Renaissance (use your book and notes to develop this content).

In addition to the quote from the *Commedia* and your reflection, blog posts **must include a relevant visual component** (photo, map, web link), precisely captioned and/or cited. **The posts should be categorized** as “contemporary connections,” “historical connections,” or

both. Approximate length of a well-developed entry would be about **350-400 words**. Your blog should include posts of **both categories**, although I'm not particular about the balance.

Finally, create a **page** (not a post) in your blog that is essentially a long list: books, music, exhibitions that you encounter; historical and cultural events you want to learn more about when you return to the U.S.; restaurants you want to return to; poems and fine art you discover; addresses of places you visit, etc. Add to it regularly.

Bonus points for engaging with insights from the blogs of fellow class members, whether by commenting on blog posts that you connect with, or by referencing them.

Hint: carry a small notebook on walking tours and to events, so that you can take short-hand notes to yourself about what you'd like to remember, then use this information in the blog.

Evaluation: I will evaluate the blog in two rounds: on 1st Sunday, to give you a sense of how well you're doing on the first few blog posts, and again on 3rd Sunday.

An A quality blog is marked by 1) lively, engaging explanation of your choice of poetic fragment; 2) detailed and vivid description of the relevant social/cultural phenomenon, artifact, building, or historical event(s), with proper citations; 3) sustained reflection on the connections between the poetry and what you have learned during the site tours or your own cultural insights; 4) a decent list of sites and insights for future exploration. **In a blog of B quality**, the choice of poetic fragment is briefly established and the social/cultural phenomena, historical, artistic etc. facts are well recounted, but are not as detailed as in A-blog and/or not precisely referenced. Reflection may be missing in some entries or may be perfunctory; the list of sites and insights for future exploration is perfunctory. **A C quality blog** has the required number of entries, but two or more posts are thinly detailed, sporadic, or superficial. The list of sites and insights for future exploration is missing or is rudimentary. **D and F blogs** will have the same problems as C journals but to a greater degree.

3. **Midterm on the *Inferno* (20%):** This open-book exam (2nd Saturday) will include short answers on key issues of the canticle, referencing relevant passages; character identification; and a short answer on the topography and/or architecture of hell as compared to the Tuscan landscape and urban architecture.
4. **Digital Storytelling Project (30%):** This critical-creative project is the result of your holistic, intense dialogue with a personally meaningful passage from Dante's poem, putting to the task analytical rigor, heart, and imagination (a modern variation of medieval contemplative reading). It is your personal appropriation of a passage from the *Commedia*, as short as a *terzina*, and as long as a self-contained dramatic or narrative unit from a *canto*.

The project shares the tri-partite structure of the poem:

- a. It starts with a transcription of the passage – in a font and color that suggest to your reader something about its content/point. Next, annotate the passage. Think of the

annotations as gathering the riches of the text: those offered by Dante (sounds; characters from Scripture, classical texts, and history; narrative and figurative puzzles; use of irony or compassion) and those offered by you (the personal response to what Frank Ambrosio describes as “the poet’s confession, witness and testimony”).

- b. The second step is a short (4-5 min long) digital video, in which you build creatively on the poetic segment, art for art. Think carefully about your goals for your audience: what do you want them to take away from your video? The video should include the passage from the *Commedia* (the choice of language/s is up to you) in audio or scripted format, although you should feel free to break up the passage, repeat lines, and intercut them with other text and/or sound. Your video can contain stills (photographs, scans, typographic collages) as well as moving images. It should finish with credits. You will record all your audio and visual material in Italy, geotagging it and keeping precise records. Early in our Italian travels, you will also develop a proposal and screenplay and get feedback on them. The editing will take place on 4th Monday and Tuesday, at Cornell.
- c. The final step of this tri-partite project is a brief artist’s statement (3-4 pages) explicating your goals and creative choices in the digital film. In this section, reflect also on the way that the topic of your video is treated in the other canticle of the *Commedia*. For instance, if your video focused on a passage from *Inferno*, how does its theme/character/image get transformed in *Purgatorio*?

The projects will be unveiled at the festive finale on 4th Wednesday. All projects will be archived electronically on the course web site.

Timeline: see the schedule below.

Policies

Safety and Discipline. Carry your emergency tri-fold card at all times and follow instructions there in case of emergency or natural disaster. Always carry on you the handout about the EIIA insurance, a government issued ID (copy of your passport is OK), and your student ID.

Drug use is illegal in Italy. Consequences will involve expulsion from the course; if arrested, legal action will be taken in Italian courts.

Excessive drinking that impairs decision-making can have serious personal consequences (date rape, abduction, arrest) and is counteractive to engaged course participation. It will not be tolerated.

Behavioral problems, such as 1) the violation of course rules and/or Italian laws, 2) behavior that is disruptive to the class, or 3) behavior that is dangerous to oneself or others, will be addressed as follows:

- Students will first receive a verbal warning from the professor;
- Repeat instances will result in a second written warning, which effectively places the student on probation;
- In cases of extreme behavioral problems, which may include violation of the law or other dangerous behavior, students will be immediately dismissed from the class even if this is

a first offence. The return trip will be organized by the Office of International and Off-Campus Studies at the student's own expense.

- Tardiness to class counts as misdemeanor, so does missing trains. Students will be individually responsible for expenses caused by their own tardiness.

Attendance. Class attendance is assumed; you are individually responsible to cover missed topics and exercises. Always bring your copy of our assigned reading to class. **Repeated tardiness, missing more than one class meeting, or showing up without the necessary class materials** will lower your final grade by one increment for each additional absence (e.g., from B+ to B). **Field trips** are class meetings.

E-mail communication. Obviously, we don't want to be chained to e-mail while in Italy, where e-mail would function as a back-up means of communication, and as a way of distributing some handouts and supplementary materials (as announced in class). Talk to me before or after class, during field-trips, dinners, or schedule a tea/café appointment. If you e-mail me, please indicate the course title (or number) in the subject heading of your e-mail.

Blogs and creative projects submission. As we may not have entirely reliable internet access, I will accept hand-written or printed versions of your blog entries for the first round of evaluation. All blogs entries must be uploaded by the second evaluation round. Creative projects must be uploaded on the course blog site.

Academic Honesty. The official College policy stipulates:

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in the Catalogue (<http://www.cornellcollege.edu/catalogue/academic-info/academic-honesty.shtml>).

For all written assignments for this class use Modern Language Association style to document other people's ideas. If you are ever in doubt about how to credit a source, ask me.

Accessibility. Students who need accommodations for learning disabilities must provide documentation from a professional qualified to diagnose learning disabilities. For more information see <http://www.cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml> . Notify me of your needs on the first day of class.

Electronic devices and food. Turn off your cell phone and put it away before class. You may bring your laptop or tablet to class, but unless I ask a specific student to look up some piece of

information, or unless you have a documented disability that necessitates its use, your laptop should remain closed during class. Taking notes in your notebook during class and field trips keeps you focused; reviewing them is an excellent way to prepare for the exams. You may bring a drink to class, but not food (gelato is food). This policy is meant to secure your undivided attention and thoughtful contributions to the class.

Schedule

(never written in stone; bring to class to record changes)

Mon 4-17 9-11-ish AM (Cole 212): Introduction to the *Commedia*; how to read a canto and the allegorical principle, *Inferno* 1; introduction to blogging with WordPress (Brooke Bergantzel). Read the assignment for afternoon class over lunch break.

1-3-ish PM (Cole 212, **bring your smart phones!**): introduction of final digital storytelling project; instruction elements of digital video and the development process (Brooke Bergantzel); discussion of contemplative reading, *Inferno* 2, and Havely, chapter on “Seeking Guidance” (129-33)

Tue 4-18 Depart for Florence (by way of Minneapolis and Paris) at **11:15 AM** on Delta 3471 from Cedar Rapids Airport (overnight flight). **Airport shuttle departure at 8:45 AM sharp from the Commons Circle**. Refer to the flight itinerary in your e-mail and check for flight updates the day before.

Wed 4-19 11:20 AM Arrive at Peretola Airport, Firenze. Transfer to Istituto Gould. **1-2 PM** Safety/neighborhood orientation. Read *Inferno* 3; Havely, “From the Baptistry to the Ponte Vecchio.” **5-8 PM** Tour of the medieval city and “Ben arrivati a Firenze!” dinner.

Thur 4-20 Leave Istituto Gould at **12:40** for **1-2:30 PM** [Santa Maria Novella](#) visit (student ID). To prepare for [Santa Maria Novella](#) visit (student ID), read Havely, “Learning in Florence” (9-13), “Pagan Culture” (67-74), *Blue Guide* 53-55, *Inferno* 4. **3:30-5 PM** Istituto Gould: class on *Inferno* 5 and Havely, “Love and the Noble Heart” (180-82); *Inferno* 6 and Havely, “From Florence to San Godenzo” (14-24).

Fri 4-21 9:30 AM-12:30 PM: City of Dis walk with class on *Inferno* 7, 8, 9. Read also *Blue Guide*, “800-1200: the emergence of the city states,” and “1200-1400: the rise of Florence” (8-11). Depart from Istituto Gould at 9:15 to start the walk in [Piazza S. Trinita](#). Walk finishes with a visit of [Palazzo Davanzati](#) (*Blue Guide* 40-41). **2:30-4:30 PM:** Visit of the [Accademia Gallery](#) (*Blue Guide*): timed entry, bring student cards; departure from Istituto Gould promptly at 2 p.m.

Sat 4-22 Day trip to Pisa (*Blue Guide* 24-25; 433-50, student ID). **7:45 AM** departure from Istituto Gould for SMN train station. Regional fast train 3111 departs at 8:28 AM, arrives at Pisa Centrale at 9:28 AM. 10:30 tour of [Piazza dei Miracoli](#) in Pisa (Duomo, Baptistry, Camposanto) followed by class discussion of *Inferno* 10, 11, 12 after lunch (**bring your book!**). Return to Florence on one’s own (trains to SMN every half hour until 9:30 PM) to catch the International Handicraft Trade Fair in Fortezza da Basso;

alternatively, stop over in [Lucca](#) or [Pistoia](#) for a brief afternoon visit with prof. on the way back. **Develop a proposal for your digital film and share with professor by 10 p.m.**

Sun 4-23 Free day.

Mon 4-24 9:30-11:30 AM: Class on *Inferno* 13, 15, 16, 17 and Havelly “Geryon: the image on the edge” (159-63). **12:30 PM** departure from Istituto Gould for a two-night stay in Fiesole (Villa Bonelli). Afternoon visit of the [archeological museum and area](#) (student ID).

Tue 4-25 9:30 AM departure from Villa Bonelli for [Convento di San Francesco](#) (steep hill climb), then class on *Inferno* 18-22 and Havelly “Hearing and Seeing (63-66) and “Simonist Succession: Popes in Dante’s Hell” (146-49) *al fresco*, weather permitting. **Afternoon:** work on your screenplay.

Wed. 4-26 9 AM Return to Istituto Gould in Florence. **10:30 AM – noon** visit of [Santa Croce](#) (student ID). **2-4 PM** class on *Inferno* 24-25 and 26-27, along with Havelly “*Inferno*: a cruel sea” (192-96) in Boboli/Bardini Gardens, weather permitting. **Turn in your screenplay by 5 p.m.**

Thur 4-27 9 AM: Departure from Istituto Gould for **day trip to [Monteriggione](#)** (*Blue Guide* 298-99) and **Siena** (*Blue Guide* 219-46; visits of [San Domenico](#), [Duomo](#), [Piazza del Campo](#) and [Palazzo Pubblico](#)), with lunch at a *fattoria* in the Tuscan countryside. Be ready for discussion of *Inferno* 28-29 and 31. Return to Florence at about 6 PM. Discussion of screenplays over dinner.

Fri 4-28 9:30-noon class on *Inferno* 32-33, meeting in front of the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo (Piazza Duomo). Visit of the [Museo](#), [Battistero](#) (*Blue Guide* 45-50). The cumulative ticket gives you 48 hours after entering the complex to climb [Giotto’s Bell Tower](#) and [Brunelleschi’s Dome](#) (booking for timed entry is needed). You can enter the [Duomo \(Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore\)](#) any afternoon. Discussion of screenplays over lunch/afternoon coffee.

8:30-10 PM *The Three Tenors* (opera arias accompanied by a chamber ensemble of mandolin, cello, and piano) at [S. Stefano al Ponte Vecchio](#) (depart Istituto Gould at 8 PM).

Sat 4-29 9:30-11:30 AM: Midterm exam on *Inferno*, Istituto Gould.

1:15 PM meet in front of the statue of Machiavelli for 1:30 entrance in [the Uffizi Gallery](#) (*Blue Guide* 13-15, 29-32; bring it along).

Sun 4-30 Free day. Rest up, gather footage, and read up before the all-night celebration of La Notte Bianca, the first night of the summer. The streets of Florence will be alive with music, dance, flash mobs, and many museums (including [Palazzo Vecchio](#)) will be open and free after 6:30 PM.

Mon 5-1 noon to 2 PM class on *Purgatorio* 1, 2, 6 with Havely, “The Garden of the Empire” (38-43).

2:30 PM historical parade from [Palagio di Parte Guelfa](#) to [Piazza della Signoria](#) for the Trofeo Marzocco flag-throwing display (on your own).

4:30 PM Meet at [Porta San Niccolò](#) for a climb up to [S. Miniato al Monte](#) (*Blue Guide* 76-78), for Vespers with Gregorian chants.

Tue 5-2 6:45 AM departure from Istituto Gould for 7:29 train to Ravenna from SMN.

Arrival in [Ravenna](#) at 10:16 AM, where we will drop off our bags at Hotel Astoria, but may not be able to check in. (Do your reading tomorrow.)

2-6 PM tour of Ravenna’s glorious sites: [S. Vitale](#), [Sant’Apolinnare Nuovo](#), [Mausoleo di Galla Placidia](#), [Battistero Neoniano](#), [San Francesco](#) and [Dante’s tomb](#). Class dinner at 8 PM.

Wed 5-3 8:30 AM departure from Hotel Astoria to Rome by private minibus. Discussion en route of *Purgatorio* 10, 11, 12, and Havely, “The New Style” (115-23) and “Divine art in Purgatory” (166-71). Approximate arrival at Hotel Smeraldo in Rome at 1 PM.

2:30 PM departure from hotel for Imperial Rome guided tour: Colosseum, Forum, Capitoline Hill, the Arches of Constantine and of Titus, finishing with a tour of San Clemente (layers of Roman history). Bring your copy of *Purgatory*. Tour ends approximately at 7:15 PM.

Thur 5-4 10:30-12:30 AM Morning class on *Purgatorio* 13, 15, 16 and Havely, “Between Two Cities” (139-43). **3 PM departure from hotel Smeraldo** for an afternoon visit of [Galleria Borghese](#) followed by Rome at Dusk tour (approximate end at 7:30 PM): the [Pantheon](#), [Trevi Fountain](#), [piazza Navona](#), [via del Corso](#), Caravaggio, Bernini, and yes, gelato). **Do not bring any backpacks or large bags!**

Fri 5-5 7 AM departure from hotel for **7:45 AM** VIP access to [Sistine Chapel](#). No entry without student ID; strict dress code, very small bags only. Private tour of the [Vatican Museums](#) and [Saint Peter’s Basilica](#), culminating with a climb of its dome. Approximate end-time: noon.

7 PM: “Arrivederci, Roma!” class dinner in [Campo de’ Fiori](#) (meet at hotel).

Sat 5-6 8:15 AM departure from Hotel Smeraldo for Fiumicino Airport for flight Delta 233 to Detroit, departing at 11:15 A.M. Arrive Cedar Rapids Airport on Delta 4761 at 9:18 PM. Van to campus. **Finish editing your blog by 5 p.m. on Sunday, 5-7**, when blog evaluation starts.

Mon 5-8 9:30-11:30 (Cole 212) Discuss *Purgatorio* 19, 21, 22 and Havely, “Renewing the church: beginnings and endings” (150-54). **Noon-3:** film editing (as needed). **1-3 PM** (Cole 310):

Tue 5-9 9:30-11:30 (Cole 212): Discuss *Purgatorio* 29-33. **Noon-3:** film editing (as needed).

Wed 5-10 9:30-noon (Cole 212): “we emerged to see – once more – the stars”: celebratory unveiling of **digital storytelling projects**.