**Seminario del Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari dell’Università di Padova. Corso Magistrale e Scuola Dottorandi**

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**Dante in the USA: A Survey of Contemporary American Critical Perspectives on the *Divine Comedy*.**

**May 15, 2017. MEETING 1**

* **Part I. Introduction to the Seminar**

**-What is ‘Dante in the USA’?**

‘Dante in the USA’ is a complex phenomenon touching on several aspects of American life: from academic life all the way to entertainment.

**-What aspect of ‘Dante in the USA’ is this seminar about?**

This seminar is going to address the academic aspect of ‘Dante in the USA’

**-What else is this seminar about?**

This seminar has three general goals:

1. understand and critically reflect on the American academic discourse on Dante’s *Divine Comedy*;

2. face the various challenges of learning in a foreign language.

* **Part 2. Understanding the contemporary, American critical perspective on Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Translation, reference works & websites**

**-How much does the American academic discourse on the *Divine Comedy* owe to the translation of the poem into American-English?**

Translation has played a crucial role in the development of an American critical perspective on Dante’s poem. Translating the *Divine Comedy* into American-English continues to be a relevant matter in the USA today, even almost one-hundred and fifty years after the first American translation.

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/05/27/what-the-hell>

Specifically on the topic of translation of the *Divine Comedy*:

<http://www.amazon.com/Divine-Comedies-Millennium-Ronald-Rooy/dp/9053566325>

**What are some major concerns behind a translation of the *Divine Comedy*?**

Generally, translations of the *Divine Comedy* are concerned with prosody, accuracy of translation and with its overall attractiveness to the reader.

**-What other considerations can one make on the basis of some notable American translations of the *Divine Comedy*?**

A quick survey of American translations of the *Divine Comedy* suggests:

1.that translating efforts may have different priorities;

2. that such efforts have been continuing over the last one-hundred and fifty years.

**List of English translations of the *Divine Comedy* discussed in class:**

1. first English translation in the US (1867), by Henry W. Longfellow, in blank verse and iambic pentameter.

<https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Divine_Comedy>

2. Lawrence Binyon (1933-43) retains the tercet form, AND interlocking rhyme of the *terza rima* !!!

3. Robert Pinsky's: translation of the *Inferno* (1995) in blank verse, retains the tercet form

(<http://www.cpp.edu/~jelerma/dante/>)

4. Charles Singleton’s translation (prose)

5. Robert and Jean Hollander (blank verse).

6. Marcus Sanders with illustrations by Sandow Birk, 3 volumes (2003-05). Among the most recent translations, this one is particularly interesting for its attempt at modernizing Dante’s poem.

7. Mary Jo Bang, Clive James (published within the past year 2013-14)

N.B. Remember that translations of the *Divine Comedy* generally **do not** retain the interlocking rhyme scheme (ABA, BCB, CDC, …), Some of them retain the tercet form, but are in **blank verse** (versi sciolti). The difficulty with retaining the true *terza rima* form is the much smaller number of rhyming words in the English language. This is why the English language tends to be a little more tolerant with rhymes. A good example is the ‘rhyme’ “myself” / “rough” is in the first tercet of Pinsky’s translation. A translation retaining the true *terza rima*, however, would have to deploy a true rhyme as Lawrence Binyon does:

MIDWAY life’s journey I was made aware

       That I had strayed into a dark forest,

       And the right path appeared not anywhere. (*Inf*.1, 1-3)

**Interested in comparing different translations of the first tercet of the poem?**

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem-alone/245738?iframe=true>

EXAMPLES

**-Example from Henry W. Longfellow’s translation:**

<https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Divine_Comedy>

Mid**way** up **on** the **jour**ney **of** our **life**

I **found** my**self** with**in** a **fo**rest **dark**,

For **the** straight-**for**ward **path**way **had** been **lost**. (*Inf*. 1, 1-3)

**-Example from Robert Pinsky’s translation**

<http://www.cpp.edu/~jelerma/dante/>

Midway on our life's journey, I found myself

In dark woods, the right road lost. To tell

About those woods is hard—so tangled and rough (*Inf*. 1, 1-3)

Additional suggested readings (not mandatory …just for fun):

Matthew Pearl, *The Dante Club*:

<https://books.google.it/books?id=6jN3m2gyb7QC&dq=The%20Dante%20Club&source=gbs_book_other_versions>

**Reference works / websites.**

**-On what other means does the American critical perspective on Dante’s poem rely?**

**Reference works:**

* Paget Toynbee, *A Dictionary of Proper Names and Notable Matters in the Works of Dante* (1968) (sort of Encicolpedia Dantesca)
* Charles. S. Singleton, *The Divine Comedy*. Italian text, verse transl. and commentary, 6 vols, Princeton NJ, Princeton UP, 1970-75 (the most authoritative commentary of Dante’s DC)
* Richard Lansing, *Datnte’s Encyclopedia* (a valuable tool for specific bibliographic sources)

**Dante websites:**

* Dartmouth College:

<https://dante.dartmouth.edu/>

* Columbia University:

<http://dante.ilt.columbia.edu/>

* Princeton University:

<http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/index.html>

* University of Virginia

<http://www.worldofdante.org/index.html>

* Bowdoin College

<http://research.bowdoin.edu/dante-today/about/>

**-What may be observed about reference works and websites devoted to Dante?**

1. that there is **a wealth** of information (about the DC and other works by Dante), which is available to the American reader in printed and digital form.
2. that the information **is professional and reliable**, even that which is provided on websites, most of which are affiliated to a university.
3. that the information has a **wide range** (especially in Dante websites): from general information all the way to highly specialized information, for scholarly analysis. This in turn suggests a **wide target audience**, including the passionate reader, the student, and the scholar of Dante.
4. that the information provided is often not merely factual, it is also **interpretive**.

**How is all this allowing us to better understand the American critical perspective on Dante’s *Divine Comedy*?**

Translation, reference-works and websites allow us to better understand the particular kind of **mediated approach** to Dante’s poem that characterizes the American critical perspective on the *Divine Comedy*. In short, they are the **measure** of the particular **mediated approach** to Dante’s poem that is typical for the US.

We may synthesize such approach as follows:

🡺 **reader** ---translations, reference works, websites, criticism---**text**

This makes for an approach to Dante’s poem that is VERY different from our approach.

KEY WORDS FOR MEETING 1

PART 1

survey = rassegna

critical perspectives = orientamenti del dibattito accademico

interpretive approach = approccio interpretativo

Dantean = dantesco nel senso più stretto del termine

Dantesque = dantesco nel senso più generico del termine

enrich = arricchire

stir = smuovere ciò che tende a stagnare

to be under the influence = essere influenzato

a good grasp of = una buona padronanza

PART 2

large-scale = esteso

steady output = produzione continua

set the stage for = creare le condizioni per

reference works = dizionari e enciclopedie

tool = strumento

authoritative = autorevole

scholar = studioso

scholarly analysis = analisi scientifica

intertextuality = intertestualità

reliable = sicuro, attendibile

target audience = utenza

a wealth = abbondanza

affiliated = affiliate

to frame = inquadrare o definire

to delve = immergersi

verse translation = traduzione in versi

prose translation = traduzione in prosa

to owe to = dovere, nel senso di essere in debito

to attempt = tentare

concern = oggetto di considerazione

rhyme scheme = rima

interlocking rhyme = rima alternata

signature = firma (segno di riconoscimento)

blank verse = versi sciolti

prosody = prosodia

accuracy = precisione

attractiveness = attrattiva

in the aftermath of = all’indomani di …

to sustain = mantenersi, nel senso di durare

in the aftermath of = all’indomani di …