ON THE NET

Dante: Digital and on the Web

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INTRODUCTION

Language programs have tended to shift away from the focus on the classical literary studies that dominated university language majors for so long. Opening up the profession to *small "c"* culture and language study for other purposes strengthens our programs. Literary studies, however, continue to be a major interest of many who are passionate about their language. Great works continue to draw new specialists into the field and serve to bring the history of a language, its people, and their culture to life. Literary works serve as examples of the power and beauty of language at its best. Helping to make such texts more accessible to learners, the Web can make use of hypertext and multimedia to provide context that is so often lacking for those without the general background knowledge that a good reader is assumed to possess.
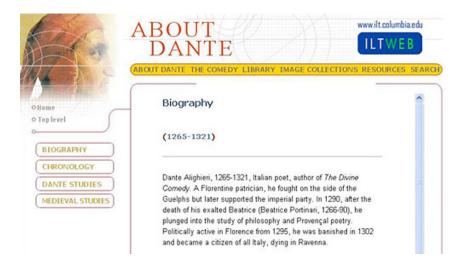
DIGITAL DANTE

Digital Dante, a project supported by the Institute for Learning Technologies at Columbia University, is one example of an effort to treat classical texts with a modern perspective and make them available through communications technologies to a much wider audience.
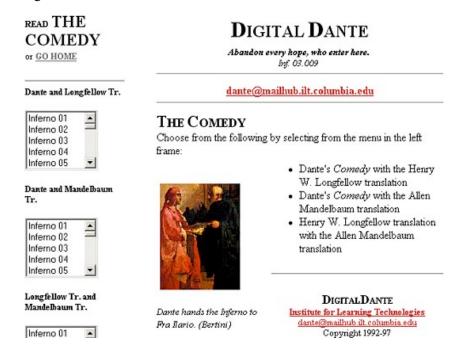
About the Project: This descriptive overview, found under the **Resources** heading (http://dante.ilt.columbia.edu/new/net/) explains the Digital Dante Project, identifying it as an online, multimedia Dante-related academic resource that presents traditional elements of scholarly research through new technological means, specifically digital technology. The work treated is *The Divine*

Comedy, and the main translation used for the project is that of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The project seeks to provide multimedia supplementary materials to those studying the original text, enabling readers to envision the poet's meaning in an expanded and multi-dimensional way. By taking advantage of the technologies currently available, this project presents a *21st century illuminated manuscript* of Dante's masterpiece. Indeed, the project is described as a *multimedia translation* of Dante's text. Though the integration of multimedia is not extensive yet, at the time of this writing, the features of the site that are already in place are quite interesting for anyone studying Dante.

About Dante: Includes a short biography and chronology of Dante's life. This section also provides links to Web sites for Dante Studies and Medieval Studies.

The Comedy: The project presents *The Divine Comedy* in its original form, along with translations by Longfellow and also by Allen Mandelbaum. One may chose to view the original with a translation by Longfellow, the original with a translation by Mandelbaum, or both translations together without the original text.

This presentation of the translations, one above the other, allows for easy comparison with the original or between translations. The texts are annotated with hyperlinks to a text box at the bottom of the page. These notes contain comments about the wording, symbolism, related works, personages, historical notes, etc. This text box can be resized for easier access.
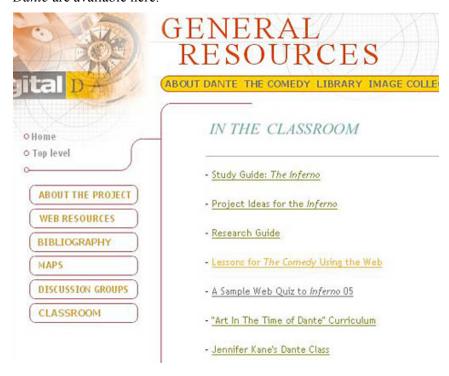

Longfellow (1867), Inf. 01.001

The action of the poem begins on Good Friday of the year 1300, at which time Dante, who was born in 1265, had reached the middle of the Scriptual threescore years and ten. It ends on the first Sunday after Easter, making in all ten days.

There is a second column for annotations, but this does not appear to have any links at the time of this writing. We assume that this is intended for the multimedia annotations described in the project overview. This presentation of the *Comedy* is already a very powerful tool for studying the text. The implementation of HTML frames is a bit inconsistent in this section, causing windows to sometimes appear where they are not expected or new information to appear in frames where they do not seem to be intended. But this seems a minor problem.

In the Classroom: The **General Resources** section includes a set of resources for use in the **Classroom**. Study and research guides, lessons plans, as well as a sample syllabus for a class on *Art in the Time of Dante* are available here.
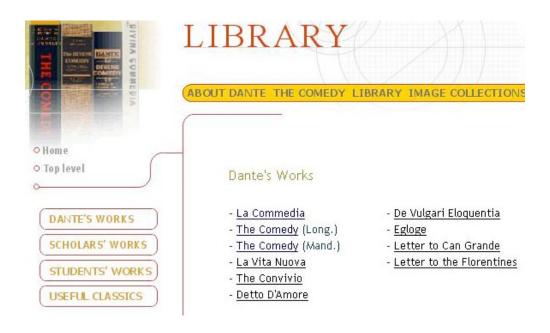
There is some overlap between sections as the **Web Resources** and **Maps** are accessible from multiple locations in the site. The Web Resources are a lengthy index detailing all hyperlinks on the site.

Bibliography: A rather extensive bibliography for Dante studies is offered. It includes scholarly works, translations, and references to selected films and videos.

Image Collections: Here one finds images inspired by Dante's work, reflecting historical and literary events. Other images are illustrative of artistic interpretation—both medieval and modern—of the action and description of *The Divine Comedy*. In addition, slides from the John Beall collection document, among other things, structures and architecture germane to the time (e.g., Dante's house in Florence). These images are a rich source for interpretation and discussion of the work itself, as well as the social and historical background of the times. **Maps** by various artists give renditions of Dante's inferno, purgatory, and paradise. The structures of these three places are also given.
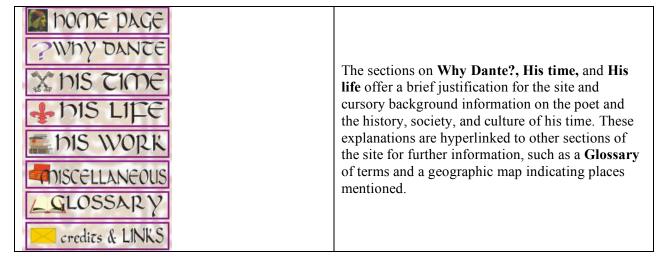

The Library: This section includes other works by Dante, links to works Dante read and consulted (e.g., the Aeneid), scholarly references, and some student papers on topics salient to the The Divine Comedy.

DANTE ALIGHIERI ON THE WEB

This site is another example of an effort to use technology in order to make classical texts available to the public and provide a context in which the works can be read and understood. This site, maintained by an individual rather than being an institutional project, offers information about the poet, Dante Alighieri, his life, works, and time period. It is a labor of love by Carlo Alberto Furia in the Computer Science Department at the Politecnico di Milano—which just goes to prove that interest in the humanities is everywhere. His home page has a running commentary about improvements and additions to his site as well as suggestions for optimization of browser settings for proper viewing of the pages.

	The sections on **Why Dante?, His time,** and **His life** offer a brief justification for the site and cursory background information on the poet and the history, society, and culture of his time. These explanations are hyperlinked to other sections of the site for further information, such as a **Glossary** of terms and a geographic map indicating places mentioned.

The section on **His work** contains links to information about all of Dante's works. His works in Italian as well as in Latin are included. All of these texts are available in the *Texts Download Area* in the following formats: HTML, RFT, Text only, and PDF and LaTeX source.

The **Miscellaneous** portion of the site contains FAQs, a section on Dante's Events, information on Dante's burial and the disposition of his corpse, a Quotations page where quotes are grouped by topic, an art gallery with illustrations of *The Divine Comedy*, and even a page commenting on the connection between Dante and the movie *Hannibal,* with references to the poet contained therein. In the *Audioclips* portion of this section, sound files are available to aid the reader in the proper pronunciation of the titles of the works.

CONCLUSION

These sites begin as sources of Dante's texts, but they use the power of the Web's multimedia and hypertext features to connect the reader to the background knowledge that contributes so much to the connection that the authors clearly feel with *The Divine Comedy*. By sharing this connection with other readers, they are not just teaching a text, they are communicating a passion.