

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO  
Department of World Languages & Literatures  
Spring 2018

COURSE TITLE  
**ITALIAN 130 Italian Civilization**  
The Dialogue Form Its Origins and European Context

Fulfills GE Area C 2 requirements  
and 3 units toward the Italian Minor

CATALOG DESCRIPTION: The focus is on Italian civilization in a Mediterranean context. The course will allow students to develop a critical understanding of the dialogue in the context of Italian and Western Civilization, from its origins in Ancient Egypt and Greece, to its flowering in the Renaissance and its return during the Enlightenment, to its endurance in modern times. The issues to be emphasized are philosophical and literary movements in their historical contexts. We will study Socratic dialogue and other related genres, the dialogue as a typical Renaissance form with a variety of perspectives (feminine, poetic, satirical, etc.), the Enlightenment thinkers in Italy and France and their modern heritage.

COURSE HOURS: Lecture: Mondays and Wednesdays: 3:00-4:15 PM

COURSE LOCATION: Mariposa 2032

COURSE INSTRUCTOR: Professor Barbara Carle

OFFICE HOURS: Mariposa 2057, M W 4:30-6:00  
and by appointment

REQUIRED TEXTS: Some texts will be available from my webpage in PDF format. Three books may be purchased at the bookstore.

-D'ARAGONA, TULLIA, (1510-1556) *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love* edited and translated by Rinaldina Russell and Bruce Merry (e-book)

-DARIO FO, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, Methuen Drama, ISBN-10: 0413156109/  
ISBN-13: 978-0413156105 (English version)

- DARIO FO, *Morte accidentale di un anarchico*, Edited by Jennifer Lorch, Manchester University Press, ISBN 0-7190-3848-0

-Bernard Le Bouvier de FONTENELLE (1657-1757), *Dialogues*, trans. Ezra Pound (1885-1972) (PDF)

- Giacomo LEOPARDI (1798-1837) from the *Operette morali (Essays and Dialogues)*, translated by Introduction and Notes by Giovanni Cecchetti, University of California Press, 1982. (Bookstore)

- LEVI, Primo (1919-1987), *Se questo è un uomo, Survival in Auschwitz*, A Touchstone Book, Simon & Schuster, 1996 (Library for the Italian the English paperback will be available at the bookstore or may be ordered) ISBN 0-684-82680-1 (Italian Minors should purchase the Italian text)

-LUCIAN, (125-180 circa CE) *Dialogues of the Dead*, trans. Fowler (PDF format)  
OR Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead/ Dialogues of the Sea-Gods/ Dialogues of the Gods/ Dialogues of the Courtesans*. Loeb Classical Library, no. 431 (English and Greek Edition) ISBN-10: 0674994752 |Publication Date: January 1, 1961 (Bookstore)

- RAME, FRANCA and DARIO FO, *Il problema dei vecchi* (Italian only for Italian minors, pdf will be made available)

-PLATO, (427 B.C.E.-347 B.C.E.) *Dialogues*, trans. WHD Rouse, 1984, A Mentor Book, Penguin, excerpts (PDF)

RECOMMENDED TEXTS: A Thesaurus (to help you vary your vocabulary), an English Handbook (for grammar, syntax and style) and a good English dictionary and

*Naples Declared* by Benjamin Taylor, Penguin Books, 2012.

EXTRA CREDIT OPTION IN ENGLISH: Read one or both books by ELIF SHAFAK, Turkish American Writer: *BLACK MILK, THE ARCHITECT'S APPRENTICE*. Write a one page summary of each along with a page of quotations or a significant passage from the text.

PREREQUISITES: NONE

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Identify diverse foreign authors who have been read and discussed in class and a sampling of their works. Identify different genres of literary and philosophical dialogue and therefore demonstrate comprehension of aesthetic/cultural values and historical periods. Answering questionnaires, a midterm, and a final will help to accomplish this objective. Students will learn how to write a literary/philosophical dialogue.

*These objectives will allow you to achieve several specific general education goals. Among them: being able to understand a genre-- which is the cornerstone of Western civilization and democracy. This genre is a powerful means of furthering the understanding of cultural, philosophical, ethnic, and religious diversity. While acquiring methods of critical analysis necessary to read and write dialogues*

*you will develop in depth cognizance of Greek and European (non Anglo-Saxon, i.e., French and Italian) intellectual heritage and literary history.*

This course will allow you to meet all of the following GE Learning Objectives:

- A. Demonstrate knowledge of the conventions and methods of the study of the humanities.
- B. Investigate, describe, and analyze the roles and effects of human culture and understanding in the development of human societies.
- C. Compare and analyze various conceptions of humankind.
- D. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the historical development of cultures and civilizations, including their animating ideas and values.

GRADING BREAKDOWN:

20% Regular attendance (200 points)  
10% Participation in class and group discussions, readings (100 points)  
20 % Written work (questionnaires) (questionnaires=200 points possible)  
50 % Midterm, Final and Final Dialogue (500 points)

A 1000-900 points  
B 899- 800 points  
C 799-700 points  
D 699-600 points  
F 599 and below

**\*\*\*ATTENDANCE POLICY:** Regular attendance is essential to succeed in this class. More than three unexcused absences WILL affect your final grade. **If you are late more than three times this will count as one absence. Each class missed will result in 10 point reduction. After the 8<sup>th</sup> absence you will automatically fail the course.**

**\*\*\*REQUIREMENTS:**

- 1) Your grades will be based on your attendance, participation, questionnaires, a midterm, final test and a final dialogue.  
*There is a GE writing component to this course: Questionnaires, midterm, test, and dialogue all include essay and dialogue writing.*
- 2) Please be punctual and remain in class during the entire class period. Leaving class before the end of the hour is disruptive. If you are late for than three times this will count as one absence.
- 3) No Cell phones allowed in class. No food or drink, coffee or water is

allowed. Please turn off cell phones for entire class period.

4) Allow 24 up to 48 hours for replies for e-mail queries. Expect written work to be corrected within one week, or sooner.

5) No late work will be accepted after May 18 2018 unless proper medical documentation is offered.

----→ **Italian** Minors: You will read two works in Italian, *Operette morali* by Giacomo Leopardi and parts of all of *Se questo è un uomo* by Primo Levi, and *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* by Dario Fo. You need to see Prof.ssa Carle to discuss specific guidelines and work. You will be required to write periodic summaries in Italian on your readings.

You will receive questionnaires *in italiano* to help you with this.

#### CSUS POLICY REGARDING ACADEMIC HONESTY:

Students are responsible for:

1. Understanding the rules that preserve academic honesty and abiding by them at all times. This includes learning and following particular rules associated with specific classes, exams, and course assignments. Ignorance of these rules is not a defense to a charge of academic dishonesty.
2. Understanding what cheating and plagiarism are and taking steps to avoid them. Students are expected to do this whether working individually or as part of a group.
3. Not taking credit for academic work not their own. ***Do not use internet analyses, dialogues nor google translator. This equals academic dishonesty. Wikipedia is an unreliable source.***
4. Not knowingly encouraging or making possible cheating or plagiarism by others.

Reasonable Accommodation Policy: If you have a disability and require accommodations, you need to provide disability documentation to Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD). For more information please visit the SSWD website (<http://www.csus.edu/sswd/>). They are located in Lassen Hall 1008 and can be contacted by phone at (916) 278-6955 (Voice) (916) 278-7239 (TDD only) or via email at [sswd@csus.edu](mailto:sswd@csus.edu). Please discuss your accommodation needs with me after class or during my office hours. Flu Season: If you are sick, sneezing, DO NOT COME to class. Documented medical absences are excused.

TYPES OF WRITING: You will engage in several types of writing in this class: MIDTERM TEST, questionnaires on various authors, FINAL TEST AND A FINAL PAPER: A DIALOGUE.

For the midterm and final tests you will have the choice of writing a two-page essay on dialogues or writing a three-page dialogue. If you choose to write about dialogues your essays should be related to the text you are reading. You should quote the text, refer to specific passages, and react to the writing itself, not just the ideas you think it expresses. You must read closely, read and reread before reacting. You should never react to any text without quoting it or referring to specific passages. Keep quotations brief. Always pay close attention

to grammar, choice of words (always choose the most appropriate words), clarity of sentences and neatness. NO SLOPPINESS IS ACCEPTABLE.

FINAL PAPER: On the last day of class you will be expected to hand in a 3 to six page dialogue. You may choose to imitate authors studied or to invent your own style. Your dialogues should be organized, coherent, and structured. You should choose a theme, develop it and reach some sort of conclusion, albeit on the lack of being able to agree. These will be graded. No revisions will be possible.

### SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

*This syllabus will be updated and modified in its online form if necessary--  
depending upon the pace and needs of the class.  
Please consult online syllabus periodically even after you have printed this one.*

#### Week 1 January 22

Monday: Introduction to the course: the first dialogues

Ancient Egypt and Greece, Origins of the Dialogue Form (Egypt and Mesopotamia)

Three main forms of the dialogue: Eristic, Heuristic and Pedagogical

Wednesday: Origins of the Dialogue Form

Socratic Dialogue Reading: Socratic dialogue, Plato's Ion (PDF)

#### Week 2 January 29

Satire and transgressive views

M Lucian, Satire and transgressive views, Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead*, Read I-X

Available also at:

<http://www.theoi.com/Text/LucianDialoguesDead1.html>

W Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead*, XI-XX

#### Week 3 February 5

M Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead*, XXI-XXX

If you need to look up names and characters of Greek mythology and history go to:  
<http://www.mythindex.com/greek-mythology/P/Palinurus.html>

W The Dialogue as a typical Renaissance form The Renaissance in Italy

Tullia D'Aragona: *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*

Week 4 Feb. 12

M Tullia D'Aragona and Women Writers in Renaissance Italy: *Le poetesse*

See Link from Prof. Carle's webpage Italian Women Writers

W Women Writers in Renaissance Italy: *Le poetesse*

Week 5 Feb. 19

Fontenelle/Ezra Pound *Dialogues of the Dead*

The Dialogue in post Renaissance France

M Fontenelle, "Dialogues," I-V.

W Fontenelle, "Dialogues," VI-VIII

Week 6 Feb. 26

M Film by Mario Martone: *Il giovane favoloso*, 2014 (Film about Leopardi's life and works)

W Film discussion and conclusion, Brief introduction to the thought of Diderot

Week 7 March 5

M The Heritage of the Enlightenment and the Classics in Romantic Italy

Giacomo LEOPARDI, Read *Introduction and History of the Human Race*

W Leopardi *Parini's Discourse on Glory, Dialogue between Hercules and Atlas*

Week 8 March 12

M *Dialogue Between Fashion and Death*

W *Announcement of Prizes by the Academy of Syllographs*

TAKE HOME MIDTERM DISTRIBUTED

Week 9 March 19-31 SPRING BREAK NO CLASS

Week 10 April 2

M Leopardi, *Dialogue Between a Sprite and a Gnome* MIDTERM TEST DUE

W *Dialogue Between Malambruno and Farfarello*

Week 11 April 9

M Leopardi *Dialogue between Nature and a Soul*

W *Dialogue Between the Earth and the Moon*

Week 12 April 16

Leopardi

M *Parini's Discourse on Glory*

W *Dialogue Between Frederic Ruysch and his Mummies*

Week 13 April 23

M *Dialogue Between Christopher Columbus and Pedro Gutierrez*

W *In Praise of Birds*

Week 14 April 30

M *The Copernicus*

W *Dialogue between Plotinus and Porphyry*

Week 15 May 7

M Dario Fo, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*

W Dario Fo

Week 16 May 14

Finals

Final exam based on all readings, date and place to be announced  
Final dialogue-due by May 18, 2018. Should be submitted via e-mail,  
or left under my office door in 2057 Mariposa Hall.

## Possible definitions of dialogues

Three definitions we will use:

1. pedagogic dialogue: there are two speakers or several, but one speaker leads the discussion and brings the other to a particular point of view.
2. eristic dialogue: the two speakers discuss at length each presenting a different point of view, but no conversion occurs, no one's point of view changes as a result of their exchange of ideas. Eristic dialogue is a paradox. It pretends to resemble a form of communication but in fact shows that communication cannot take place.
3. heuristic dialogue: it is not simply transmitting information or teaching by amusing, but a collective production of meaning. In this sense heuristic dialogue is a place where truth is sought but never definitively established. Each speaker carries equal weight. No single speaker necessarily reveals the author's own opinion on a subject--if indeed the author has one. This dialogue is a way of transcending subjectivity through collective reasoning and of attaining a vaster perspective and a more critical view of one's own limitations.

(For more on these definitions please see: *Le Dialogue*, Suzanne Guellouz, Presses Universitaires de France, 1992, pp. 90-93)

Typical elements of Platonic dialogues: questioning, definition, induction, maieutics, and irony.

- maieutics-Socratics through questioning is able to bring out a person's latent ideas into clear consciousness. In Greek this word also means to act as a midwife, that is to give birth to something....

- induction- the process of inferring or verifying a general law or principle from the observation of particular instances, an instance of this, a conclusion thus reached.



## Discussion Questions

1. Ion is a rhapsode, or someone who presents the work of such poets as Homer. According to Socrates in the dialogue, what are the advantages of being a rhapsode? What, according to Socrates, are the disadvantages? On what bases does Socrates seem to be making these judgments?
2. Socrates criticizes Ion for being able to speak with seeming knowledge about Homer, but not about any other poets. Find the passages where Socrates alleges this defect in Ion's understanding. What seems to be the basis for Socrates' criticism? Is there something defective about all of Ion's knowledge, including his seeming knowledge about Homer? What is defective about this knowledge?
3. Socrates claims that rhapsodes and poets are "inspired" and "impelled" to perform and create their work. Note the usage of these terms and their variants throughout the relevant paragraphs. What does Socrates seem to mean by "inspiration" in this context? Why does he seem to think such "inspiration" is not admirable? Do you agree with Socrates that "inspiration" is inferior to other human activities?
4. Socrates and Ion seem to agree that rhapsodes, poets, and their audiences are not in their "right minds." What do they seem to mean by this? For Socrates, is this an indication of what's wrong with the arts? Do you agree that the arts are "emotional" or "irrational"? What other language does Socrates use to convey this idea? Do you agree with Socrates that this is a defect of the arts?
5. Throughout the dialogue, Socrates speaks of the "art" (profession/skill/techne) of the pilot, the physician, the carpenter, the fisherman, the charioteer, etc. What does he seem to mean by "art" in this usage? How is it different from the activities of the rhapsode, musician, and the poet?
6. Socrates sketches a hierarchy of knowledge in which the knowledge of the rhapsode or the poet is always inferior to the knowledge of other practitioners. What is the basis for his argument? Do you agree that the knowledge of the artist is always inferior? How would you answer Socrates' argument? Ion (circa 390 B.C.E.)

## Second group of Discussion Questions

1. What analogy dominates Socrates' discussion of the relationship between the poet, the rhapsode, and the audience? What conclusion does this analogy illustrate about the true source of poetic inspiration and power? (41, 43 for example, general question)
2. Why does Socrates say that rhapsodes and poets do not speak "by mastery" of any art, as Ion insists? How, on 41, does Socrates characterize poets? (40-41)
3. What must the poet first lose, according to Socrates, that a poem might be composed? (42)
4. Why does Socrates call the poets "interpreters" and the rhapsodes who recite them the "interpreters of interpreters?" (42)
5. Defend Ion the alazon (wanderer or dupe) against the arguments of the eiron (ironic, clever character) Socrates: what argument can you make against the claim that poets

and rhapsodes are not masters of any art? What possibilities is Socrates ignoring here? (general question)

5. What type of dialogue is this and why? pedagogic, eristic, or heuristic? Explain your reasoning.

Third and Final Discussion points and questions:

1. Divide the dialogue into three main parts.

Remember that the opening exchanges constitute a sort of prologue and that the first part begins after this when Socrates changes the subject.

a. Prologue or introduction: the beginning until 530, shortly before where Socrates changes the subject (Many thanks. I'll make leisure to hear it some time, but...)

Point 1. Can you recite other poets as well?

A. From the above quotation until Socrates' first conclusion reached through induction:

[Soc.] Then, my dear friend, can I be mistaken in saying that Ion is equally skilled in Homer and in other poets, since he himself acknowledges that the same person will be a good judge of all those who speak of the same things; and that almost all poets do speak of the same things?

Point 2. You cannot recite other poets nor can you claim to know the profession or skill of poetry, since poets are not *technes*, they are "possessed" and divinely inspired.

B. From Ion's response to this question to his response to Socrates' second conclusion, i.e. rhapsodes are possessed when they recite:

[Ion] That is good, Socrates; and yet I doubt whether you will ever have eloquence enough to persuade me that I praise Homer only when I am mad and possessed; and if you could hear me speak of him I am sure you would never think this to be the case.

Point 3. Ion refuses to accept that he is mad when he recites, so Socrates proceeds to show that neither he nor the poets have any real knowledge, they are merely "transmitters," as in the magnet and ring analogy of part B, of divine Inspiration.

C. Neither the poet nor the rhapsodes have true knowledge, therefore Ion is either A. a fraud and a cheat (since he claims to have knowledge of many things, all those of which Homer speaks) or B. divinely inspired.

[Soc] Then which will be a better judge of the lines which you were reciting from Homer, you or the charioteer?

[Ion] The charioteer. Where in the dialogue does Socrates explain in greater detail the analogy of the rings? At the end of the middle, of part B.

1. Can you find specific passages in which the following occur? questioning, definition, induction, maieutics, irony.

2. Does Ion usually agree or disagree with Socrates?

3. Does Socrates bring out latent ideas of Ion, in other words, does Socrates show Ion that he thinks a certain way, even though Ion does not realize it?

4. How would you define the conclusion?

5. What do you learn about Homer's great works in this dialogue?

6. Does the dialogue make the distinction between poetry, fiction, that is, invention, and reality? Does Ion understand the difference between art (poetry, invention) and reality?

Lucian

*Dialogues of the Dead*

Some definitions and Guiding Questions

**CYNICS.** A school of philosophers, so called either because Antisthenes the Athenian, their founder (born 444. B.C.E.) and a pupil of Socrates, taught in the gymnasium called the Cynosarges, or else because their mode of life was regarded as no better than that of a dog (cyn-). Diogenes, Crates, Menippus, and (in his own time) Demonax, are mentioned by Lucian as favourable specimens of the school. Their ideal may be said, to have been plain living and high thinking; virtue is the only good; the essence of virtue is self-control; pleasure is an evil if sought for itself. The Cynics were said to be cosmopolitan, individualist, and outspoken. Some claimed their repulsive personal negligence, and their free use of their philosophic staves as offensive weapons. These supposed traits are often mentioned almost stereotypically.

**DIOGENES.** 412-323 B.C.E. His father was a banker of Sinope. He went to Athens and became a philosopher of the Cynic school, which see, as a disciple of Antisthenes. He is often portrayed as having lived in a tub.

**MENIPPUS.** A Cynic philosopher, originally a slave, of Gadara in Coele-Syria. His date is placed about 60 B.C.E. It is probable that Lucian was much indebted to the writings of Menippus, which are now lost, though an imitation of them is still preserved in the Menippean Satires of Varro. Among the titles of his works are *A Visit to the Shades*, *Wills*, and *Letters of the Gods*. He appears frequently as a character in Lucian's dialogues.

Guiding Questions to Lucian's Dialogues

The attitude of Menippus will change throughout the course of the dialogues.

Can you see how? Compare dialogues 2, 4, and 6.

How is Socrates seen in these dialogues?

Who seems to better fit the definition of a cynic? Diogenes or Menippus?

Does Menippus see positive qualities in the underworld?

Do Menippus and Diogenes ever converse together?

Is there anything which Menippus does not mock?

How are the philosophers portrayed in these Dialogues? The famous heroes such as Hercules (Heracles)? The famous historical characters Alexander the Great and his father Phillip?

1. Who are the speakers?
2. What “system” are they targeting?
3. Is there a vaster theme to the dialogue?
4. What passage best represents the dialogue’s themes?

#### The Fates, the Moirai

1. Clotho (the youngest), chooses the thread
2. Lachesis (chooser of lots) chooses the types of destiny, fate
3. Atropos cuts the thread, decides when we die

## Guiding Questions for all dialogues

1. Who are the characters and how much do you know about them? Are they shades of men or women? Were they kings, philosophers, etc? Are they gods or fantastical, mythological characters? To what extent do the characters themselves determine or set the tone and outcome of the dialogue?
2. Where is the dialogue set and is this important?
3. What is the tone? serious, playful, ironic, mocking?
4. Is there a dominant theme or subject which emerges? Or does the subject change?
5. How would you describe the imagery?
6. Are there more questions or is there an exchange of ideas?
7. Can you find examples of maieutics, irony, induction?
8. What type of dialogue is this? Is it an example of Menippean satire or does it share elements of Platonic dialogue? Is it serious or tragic?
9. Does the dialogue make a particular point? deconstruct a commonplace idea? make an ironic comic or project a particular point of view?
10. Does it suppose a certain philosophy? If so how would you define it? Does the dialogue seek truth or reflect the author's point of view?
11. Quote an exchange from this dialogue which you found remarkable or unusual or which made you laugh or see the subject from another point of view.
12. How would you define the style of this dialogue? Are there words or images that repeat?

## Guiding Questions for Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*

1. Who are the characters? Can you comment on their accomplishments and historical contexts?
2. What is the first and main question posed by Tullia at the beginning of the dialogue?
3. Are there any references made to women and their role in philosophy in the opening exchanges?
4. Find specific examples of humor, wit, and irony in these exchanges.
5. Are the terms "love" and "to love" defined? How specifically?
6. Explain the method of reasoning Varchi adopts. What is a syllogism? What is the scholastic method?
7. How does Tullia define love?
8. What is the first conclusion reached?
9. Why does Tullia reject Varchi's first conclusion?
10. What proofs does she have that love comes to an end?
11. Does Tullia then proceed to question Varchi in Socratic style?
12. Does Tullia remind Varchi of the Aristotelian principle regarding infinity?
13. What do logic and the scholastic method prove?
14. What are the two main types of love according to Tullia?
15. Specifically what are the three questions Varchi poses regarding love?
16. What does Tullia imply about Platonic love?
17. Where do we find references to writers we have read? Who are they?
18. What type of dialogue is this in your opinion?

## Domande guida per tutti i dialoghi per i **Minor d'italiano**

1. Chi sono i personaggi? Quante informazioni ci sono su ogni personaggio? Sono ombre, fantasmi o donne o uomini? Furono re, filosofi, ecc? Sono degli dei o sono personaggi mitologici cioè fantastici? Fino a che punto i personaggi stessi determinano il tono e lo svolgimento del dialogo?
2. Dove ha luogo il dialogo? Il contesto o il posto fisico è importante?
3. Come definisci il tono? serio, giocoso, ironico? satirico?
4. C'è un tema dominante o un argomento specifico che emerge dalla conversazione? Cambia l'argomento del dialogo?
5. Come caratterizzi o definisci le immagini? Come sono?
6. Ci sono delle vere domande? C'è un vero scambio di idee?
7. Puoi trovare esempi di ironia, maieutica, induzione?
8. Che tipo di dialogo è questo? È un esempio di *satira menippea*? È fatto come un *dialogo platonico*? È serio o tragico?
9. Trasmette un messaggio particolare il dialogo? Decostruisce un'idea banale o stereotipica?
10. Suppone una filosofia precisa il dialogo? Quale? Cerca la verità o riflette il punto di vista dell'autore?
11. Citare uno scambio di battute che ti ha colpito o che ti è sembrato insolito o che ti ha fatto ridere o vedere l'argomento da un altro punto di vista.
12. Infine come definiresti lo stile di questo dialogo? Ci sono parole, frasi o immagini che si ripetono?

Questions on *Conversation Between D'Alembert and Diderot*, 1769-70 (Published in *D'Alembert's Dream*, 1830) (page references to *Diderot's Dialogues*, translated with intro by Francis Birrell, Capricorn Books, 1969)

1. What is so difficult for D'Alembert to accept and why?
2. With what has this "thing" been replaced?
3. If feeling, better translated as "sensibility" is a general essential quality of matter, D'Alembert reasons, should a stone "feel" that is, possess sensibility? How does Diderot answer this question?
4. What new question is born of this?
5. What basic distinction is drawn by Diderot in responding to the question? (page 24)
6. How does Diderot proceed to respond to the original question: Should the stone have sensibility? (page 26)
7. How does D'Alembert react to Diderot's "passage"?
8. In order to reinforce this material concept of creation, whose creation is playfully relived? What theory is Diderot rejecting? (p. 27) Why? (p. 28)
9. How does Diderot resolve the egg or the chicken dilemma?(p. 28)
10. How does he describe the passage from a feeling being (one with sensibility) to a thinking being? How does he explain the origin of consciousness? (pp. 29-30)
11. What is D'Alembert's reservation to this explanation? (p. 30)
12. What analogy does Diderot use to dispel D'Alembert's doubt? (pp.31-32)
13. What is the main idea in Diderot's long speech (pages 32-34)
14. What is D'Alembert anxious to do at the end?

## Guiding Questions to Leopardi's *Dialogues and Essays*

*Operette morali* (piccole opere sui costumi, piccole opere vere, morale della favola, senza idee preconcepite, pregiudizi, operette che decostruiscono le illusioni)

### *Parini's Discourse on Glory*

1. Who was Parini? What does he say about the myth of glory? Cap. 1, pp. 200-01
2. Can a writer, even an outstanding one, expect recognition from many? Why? cap. 2, 205-07
3. How can one become truly capable of judging the writings of others? cap 2, 207-8
4. Where does our great respect for many authors come from? cap. 2, p 212
5. When people read, do they tend to read the text or simply feel their own reactions to it? In other words are they reading the text or themselves? cap. 3, 215
6. Why do many excellent writings remain neglected or unappreciated by readers? cap. 3 215-17
7. Why do mediocre texts tend to be overvalued? cap. 3 p 219
8. What qualities are necessary in order to truly appreciate a work of literature? cap. 4, p 223
9. Why do literary texts close to perfection please more upon the second reading? cap. 5, 227
10. Who appreciates a text more? Contemporary readers or later readers? cap. 5, 235
11. Why do people keep reading according to Parini? cap 6, 237
12. Why are many philosophic texts accused of being obscure? cap. 7, 241
13. How do certain works come to be appreciated? cap. 8, 245
14. Why are poetry and philosophy the most neglected disciplines in the world? cap. 9, 257
15. If a writer cannot hope for glory, can he hope to become famous after his death? cap 10, 261  
Can he count on posterity? cap. 11, 261
16. What must a brilliant person of imagination like Leopardi himself, or any person of intelligence do, despite all of these obstacles? cap 12, 269



*Guiding Questions to History of the Human Race (Operette morali, Leopardi)*

1. How is the golden age of man described? 23
2. What causes this age to end and why? 25
3. What “remedy” does Jove (Zeus) provide? 27
4. Does this remedy work? 29
5. What new custom do people adopt when a child is born? 31
6. Are the mythical Deucalion and Pyrrha able to “regenerate” the human race? 31
7. How does Leopardi characterize the human race’s basic tendencies? 31
8. Jove offers a second series of remedies. Describe them. 33-36
9. Do all of these distractions satisfy the human race? Which new “idol” is introduced? 37  
What happens again? 37
10. With the encouragement of “Wisdom” which new “idol” does the human race demand over and over again? 39-40
11. How does Jove react to these demands? 43 How does Jove resolve to punish the human race for its ingratitude once and for all? 43
12. Truth reveals different realities to the gods and to mankind. Explain the difference. 43
13. Describe the things truth will take away from the human race. 47
14. After seeing the human race in such misery which consolation do the gods allow from time to time? 49-55 How is this “consolation” described?
15. To which dogma does the conclusion refer indirectly? Why is this reference indirect? 55

*Guiding Questions to Dialogue Between Hercules and Atlas*

1. Which changes do Hercules and Atlas remark in the earth
2. How was it previously? What does this change imply?
3. Why did the earth stop giving any signs of motion long ago?
4. What does Atlas expect the earth to do momentarily?

5. From what type of (playful) perspective is the earth viewed in this dialogue? In whose hands is it? How caring are these hands?
6. Why do the gods treat the earth as a plaything?
7. How did men used to fight? How do they fight now?
8. What is the message of this dialogue?
9. Find at least 5 references to mythological figures and comment.
10. Find at least three examples of poetic prose and or metaphors.

*Dialogue between Fashion and Death*

1. Define the meaning of “caducity” (“Caducità” in italiano).
2. What do seeming opposites, Death and Fashion have in common?
3. What areas of life concern Fashion?
4. What “games” does Fashion play comparable to Death?
5. Describe the power of Fashion.
6. What is the “Palio”?
7. Find at least ten similar verbs or words Leopardi uses to describe Fashion.
8. What are the negative aspects of Fashion? What are the positive aspects of Death?
9. Together what do they keep doing that may be considered positive?
10. To what is Death paradoxically compared?
11. Do you know which famous poem of Leopardi compares two critical life experiences to siblings as well?
12. What sort of dialogue is this? Heuristic, eristic, or pedagogic?

*Announcement of Prizes by the Academy of Syllographs*

1. What are syllographs? Did such an academy ever exist?
2. Besides announcing a contest and prizes, what else does the opening announcement accomplish?
3. How does it define Leopardi's age? How do men live according to this definition? How do the academy feel about the future of machines in the course of time?
4. What new sorts of machines will be invented?
5. How will machines impact mankind?
6. What are the three prizes for?
7. What is the relevance today of Leopardi's essay?
8. Do such machines exist? What types of robots have you encountered?
9. Select the passage, which, in your opinion, best represents Leopardi's point in this operetta.

*Dialogue between a Sprite (un folletto) and a Gnome (uno gnomo)*

1. Can you define what a Sprite is? and a gnome?
2. Why does the author choose these two characters for the dialogue? What sort of characters are they in comparison to those of other dialogues read?
3. What has taken place and what effect, if any, does this event have?
4. Comment on the tone and literary devices used in this dialogue.
5. Is there a sort of "dark humor" in this dialogue?
6. What things does mankind enter into his "catalogue of possessions"?
7. Does the human race know all there is to know according to these characters?
8. What sort of dialogue is this?

*Dialogue between Malambruno and Farfarello*

1. What does Malambruno desire?
2. Why is it not possible for him to attain it?
3. How is Leopardi's theory of pleasure applied to this operetta?
4. Why, when people experience pleasure will it not be true pleasure?
5. Does the absence of happiness mean unhappiness?
6. Does unhappiness ever cease? How and when?
7. What is the message? Or what commonplace idea or illusion is dismantled?

*Dialogue between Nature and a Soul*

1. What does the Soul ask of Nature?
2. To what degree does the soul tend toward happiness?
3. What is the connection between greatness of soul and unhappiness?
4. According to this dialogue, do people usually make full use of their capacities? Quote passage.
5. What is one, of the major troubles, befalling the human race?

*Dialogue between the Earth and the Moon*

1. Do you perceive any irony in the types of questions posed by the Earth? How would you describe these questions?
2. How would you characterize the Earth's attitude? Does it change in the course of the dialogue?
3. This dialogue lists a series of clichés or stereotypes and preconceived ideas. What are they?
4. What is the main message of this dialogue? What themes does it contain?
5. What sort of dialogue is it?

*Dialogue between Frederick Ruysch and his Mummies*

1. According to the mummies, does one feel pain at the moment of death? Even at the end of long and painful maladies?
2. To what does the mummy compare death?
3. What is the “message” or commonplace notion this dialogue deconstructs?
4. Why is it different from others read so far?

*Dialogue between Christopher Columbus and Pedro Gutierrez*

1. The voyage to unknown territories, although dangerous, has important advantages and introduces new perspectives. What are they, according to Columbus. Cite specific passages from the text.
2. What voyages today may compare with those of Columbus?
3. Which other activities or intellectual pursuits are similar to a voyage?

*In Praise of Birds (Elogio degli uccelli)* p. 353. Answer by quoting specific passages.

Structure of this *operetta*

1. Birds, what are they, and what effect do they have upon us? 352 Make a list of at least twenty positive verbs, adjectives, nouns, adverbs used to describe birds. 352-355. (Minors, fate l'elenco *in italiano*)
2. Comment on nature's wisdom in assigning to the same species of animals both song and flight, Find passage and quote it.
3. What essential quality do birds and human beings share?
4. Digression on laughter, its origins, rejection of which dogma, tolerance for legal drug use. 358-36
5. Why are birds so happy: external reasons 362-365, internal reasons, 364- 365, major Leopardian theme is treated at length. Which one?
6. Conclusion, what is stated about birds as creatures in general?
7. Afterthought: what wish/desire does the author/Amelio express?

1. Why are birds, according to Amelio, unlike other creatures?
2. What experience do they make possible for those who observe them?
3. Do birds sing only when they are in love?
4. Is the country (as opposed to the city) as natural as it appears?
5. Are birds affected by civilization?
6. What do birds give to human beings?
7. Which qualities do birds and humans share?
8. Who is most inclined toward laughter? What kind of person?
9. What came first laughter or tears?
10. How does Leopardi/Amelio define laughter?
11. What does he say about mankind's need to "inebriate" himself? What does he say which leads us to believe that if Leopardi were alive today, he would vote to legalize all drugs?
12. What is the difference between the joyfulness of birds and that of man?
13. Why are birds not subject to boredom?
14. What is man's normal state?
15. According to Amelio what internal gift do birds possess and what does it resemble?
16. What major Leopardian themes are developed in this operetta?
17. What conclusion does the author draw on birds?
18. Compare this essay or operetta with others read.

*The Copernicus*

1. Why has the Sun ceased revolving around the Earth?
2. How are poets and philosophers compared? Who is needed to “accomplish the task”? A philosopher or a natural scientist? Why?
3. How does the structure of this operetta differ with the others? Be specific.
4. Why was the belief that the Earth was at the center of the universe not unfounded? How was this belief linked to reality?
5. What types of effects will the change proposed by the Sun have on mankind?
6. What will the human race discover? What will it continue to believe?
7. What will happen to the other planets? How will the other stars react?
8. According to Copernicus, which quality might the Sun lose?
9. Does ambition motivate the Sun?
10. Does Copernicus believe that he can succeed in accomplishing the task?
11. Who will be “charred” for his beliefs?
12. Is the final remark serious or sarcastic? Why?



*Dialogue between Plotinus and Porphyry p. 443*

1. What position does Porphyry take and why? Find specific passages.
2. How would you define the position of Plotinus? Find specific passages.
3. Summarize the main points, and quote them, of Porphyry's long speech to Plato.
4. Are Plato's writings the object of Porphyry's speech? Why does Leopardi write on page 457: *These things I would say, if I believed that Plato were the author or the inventor of those doctrines, which I know well he was not [...]*
5. What does Plotinus say about Nature and suicide? Find specific passages.
6. How does Porphyry respond? See pp. 460-487. Is man still a natural being according to him? Does his primitive nature still exist?
7. Who has the last word? Does Porphyry respond to Plotinus' exhortation?
8. Define the genre of this dialogue, eristic, heuristic or pedagogic. Explain why.

*Song of the Great Wild Rooster*

1. Keeping in mind the manner in which he is described, what does the great wild rooster suggest or represent ?
2. What does Leopardi write concerning style at the beginning? Why is this important in our reading of the *operetta*?
3. How is the morning described?
4. What characteristics specifically make this piece poetic? What do you notice regarding the repeated questions? What effect is created by the fact that they remain unanswered? What elements of style and structure seem symmetrical and or harmonious?
5. Paradoxically what sustains life?
6. Comment this passage: *The very essence of things seems to have death as its real and only purpose. All that exists springs from nothingness, because what does not exist cannot die.* 375  
*Pare che l'essere delle cose abbia per suo proprio ed unico obbietto il morire. Non potendo morire quel che non era, perciò dal nulla scaturirono le cose che sono.* 374
7. According to this *operetta*, what is the purpose of nature?
8. To what is the end of the day compared?
9. Does each individual have the chance to feel or become truly conscious of his or her own powers?
10. What part of nature appears immune to decaying?
11. Is the universe itself, according to this piece, infinite?
12. Are there phrases, words, or images, which recall a well-known poem of Leopardi at the end of this *operetta*? Do you see a connection between the two?
13. Cite the words, images and other stylistic elements that give particular cosmic breadth to this text?

*Dialogue between Tristan and a Friend*

1. How did others explain Tristan's unhappiness?
2. To what does Tristan compare the human race?
3. Why does each person believe that his or her country is the best in the world?
4. What do most people believe in order to live?
5. How does Tristan characterize the human race?
6. Specifically, what does he reject?
7. What satisfaction, according to Tristan, does philosophy provide?
8. Upon what does everything, which makes life noble depend, according to him?
9. Why are modern people like children when compared to the ancients?
10. What does Tristan say about learning and knowledge?
11. Does Tristan believe knowledge is growing or not?
12. What effect does he say newspapers have?
13. What does he say about individuals?
14. What does he say about the readers of the Twentieth Century?
15. What does mankind want the level reached by civilization to accomplish for him?
16. Is there a difference between previous centuries and that of Tristan?
17. Why, according to Tristan, must all transitions be made slowly?
18. How will Tristan be remembered? Does he seem to care?
19. How does "Tristan" describe his own book?
20. Does he resign himself to unhappiness?
21. What does he long for and why?
22. Can you compare this dialogue with the *History of the Human Race*?