The Lectura Dantis is among the most traditional modes of studying Dante’s Commedia. This series undertakes a new approach to conducting canto by canto studies of the poem, in keeping with the tradition, while simultaneously engaging in an innovative way with the work’s vast illustration history. Important Dante scholars with a diversity of methodological and conceptual backgrounds will contribute chapters focused on a cantos of their choice in which they conduct a close reading of that canto while also engaging with selections of its illustrations, exploring the manners in which the images relate to the text, and even, how the images have informed their readings of the text. Such an approach has never before been taken up on a systematic fashion. The series will continue until all 100 cantos have been covered. A student or scholar of Dante will thus have, in the end, a chapter to consult on any given canto that explores its visually-oriented qualities. In direct relation to the Commedia, this series sheds new light on selected illustrations and illustrators, and on the poem’s ekphrastic tendencies. More broadly, this series will demonstrate a wide variety of models for engaging with illustrated literature, of use to scholars working on any well-illustrated literary work. It thus fits into broader interests, in theory and/or practice, concerning the relations between images and texts that has in recent years been of noteworthy interest to art historians and literary scholars.
A new approach to the traditional Lectura Dantis:

Dante scholars study selected cantos while also taking into consideration the illustrations of those cantos, thus engaging with illustrations as interpretation, and further considering the Commedia from the perspective of its ekphrastic nature.

This volume contains an unprecedented meeting of two major traditions, each of which are forms of careful engagement with Dante’s Commedia: the Lectura Dantis, initiated by Giovanni Boccaccio in the fourteenth century, consists of a canto by canto study of Dante’s poem. The history of Commedia illustration has equally deep roots, as illuminated manuscripts of the text were being produced within decades of the work’s completion in 1321. While both of these traditions have continued, mostly uninterruptedly, for more than six hundred years, they have never been directly brought together. In this volume, Dante scholars take on a single canto of the Commedia of their choosing, reading not just the text, but also exploring the illustrations of their selected text to form multifaceted and multi-layered visual-textual readings. In addition to enlivening the Lectura Dantis, and confronting the illustrated tradition of the poem in a new fashion, these studies present a variety of approaches to studying not just the Commedia but any illustrated literary work through a serious inquiry into the words themselves as well as the images that these words have inspired.

Matthew Collins holds a PhD from Harvard University’s Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. He has published, among other things, on the reception history of Dante’s Commedia in illuminated manuscripts, drawings, and early printed illustrations, as well as late literary receptions of the work, including the influence of Dante on Giacomo Leopardi and Bob Dylan.

The Lectura Dantis is an interpretive tradition initiated by Giovanni Boccaccio in the late fourteenth century in which one reads and comments on Dante’s Comedy on a canto-by-canto basis. This volume, the first of a series, unprecedentedly merges the Lectura with another longstanding interpretive tradition: the illustration of Dante’s work, beginning with manuscript illuminations created in the near immediate wake of the poem’s completion in 1320 or 1321. In this Visual Lectura Dantis, scholars select a canto and engage in some intrinsic fashion with images that intertwine with it. In addition, three artists in this volume provide their creative perspectives on the process of developing visual representations of the poem. In Reading Dante with Images, authors thus develop and apply methods for inquiring into the multimedial quality of literary illustration—or, more broadly stated, they confront and/or develop paradigms of visual and verbal relations.

Matthew Collins

Experimenting with Traditions
K. P. Clarke
Inferno I: Openings and Beginnings
Gianni Pittigli
Inferno IV: Una fiera crudele e tanto diversa. Cerbero Illustrated in the Early Manuscripts and Incunabula of the Divine Comedy
Michael Pavo
Inferno IX: Heuristics in Easy Beds
Peter S. Hawkins
Inferno XII: Imagery on Fire
Christian Dupont
Inferno XI: The Power of Grief
Michele Argiro
Purgatorio 2: The Angel on the Water
Dario del Puppo
Purgatorio 5: An Experimental Visual Interpretation
Arielle Saiber
Paradiso 28: Entruthing the Image
Sandor Bbek
Accidental Dantista: Los Angeles is Not Hell, New York is Not Paradise
Robert Reynolds
Una selva oscura: Multiple and Metaphor
Barry Moser
On Illuminating the Divine Comedy