

ITALIAN 4120: Dante's *Divina Commedia* (Fall 2008)

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Office hours: MWF by appointment after 12:20

Prerequisites:

ITAL 4120 is a seventh semester Italian course which has as its prerequisite *one* of the following: ITAL 4010, 4050, 4060, or 4070. This course will be taught in Italian; students who do not have the prerequisite may encounter difficulties. There is an honors option available for honors students; please let me know during add/drop if you are interested in pursuing it.

Course Objectives:

Dante's masterpiece lends itself to study from any number of perspectives. After the Bible, the *Divine Comedy* has generated the largest number of commentaries of any printed text. The main objective of this course is a "close reading" of selected cantos from *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* in order to discover the subtle nuances of meaning in the text. We will also study the literary genres, forms, and conventions that make up these texts, and discuss the intellectual, historical, theological and cultural background needed to understand this important work of world literature.

Required Readings:

Selected cantos from Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy: Inferno*, edited and translated by Robert Durling (Oxford University Press, 1996), and from *The Divine Comedy: Purgatorio*, edited and translated by Robert Durling (Oxford University Press, 2004). Both books are available at the University Bookstore and Off-Campus Bookstores. Of the numerous bilingual editions, these two are affordable, readable, accurately translated, and contain excellent notes and commentary.

There are also several web sites on Dante that you may find useful. The best known site is the Dartmouth Dante Project (the first URL listed below). It contains the largest number of online commentaries on Dante's works, especially on the *Divina commedia*. The Princeton Dante Project (the second URL listed below) contains bilingual texts of all of Dante's works, along with other useful material.

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

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

<http://www.princeton.edu/%7Edante/dante2.html>

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

Study Questions & Classroom Discussions:

For each canto we discuss in class, I will email you study questions specific to that canto. You will be assigned one or two of those questions to answer in class. In addition to these questions, you should also try to answer the following general questions for each of the cantos we discuss in class:

1) Why is each sinner placed in that particular circle of Hell or Purgatory? Is the type of sin associated with that particular circle the only reason why s/he ended up there? To what extent is the generic sin associated with each circle of Hell a metaphor for something more sinister than what meets the eye? For example, are the souls in the circle of sodomites damned just because they were unrepentant gay men? Or is their homosexuality symbolic of something else?

2) What is significant of the sinner's "contrapasso" (punishment) in that particular circle of Hell or Purgatory? What is the relationship between the sin and its punishment? How does the punishment fit the sin? What is the symbolic and metaphoric nexus between crime and punishment? What could each sinner have done to avoid her/his fate in the hereafter?

3) What is significant about the actual message each soul communicates to Dante-the-pilgrim? How does the soul communicate that message? What is significant about the circumstances under which each soul is allowed to communicate to Dante? How is the message that each soul gives Dante relevant to his and to our understanding of both the imminent world and the transcendent world?

4) When we look at *Purgatorio*, compare the sins of the souls in Purgatory with the corresponding sins of their damned counterparts in *Inferno*. Why are the former saved and the latter damned? Is it simply a matter of repentance? What are some of the connections Dante establishes between Hell and Purgatory? Why? What are the similarities and differences between Purgatory and the world of the living? Why?

5) How do you suppose Dante-the-poet (the author of the *Divine Comedy*) wants his readers to view Dante-the-pilgrim (the protagonist in *Divine Comedy*)? What is the relationship between the two in any given canto?

6) What is the relationship between Dante and Virgil, both as characters in the *Divine Comedy* and as authors in their own right?

You are expected to come to class prepared and to actively participate in our classroom discussions. Since a good part of the work you do for this course is reflected in your classroom performance, you will be graded for your ability to analyze the texts, your oral/aural skills, and your performance during classroom discussions. You are expected to come to class prepared and to actively participate in all the classroom discussions. Students with prolonged absences due to illness, injury, a family emergency, etc. are required to contact either me immediately. If you do not, you may be withdrawn from the course. In the event that you miss a class, you are responsible for keeping up with the assignments and for returning to class prepared (you may want to get the phone number of several classmates so that you can find out from them what you missed in class). As for any course you take at UGA, you are expected to study two hours outside of class for every hour of classroom instruction.

Papers:

You will write two papers during the semester: a 1000 word essay in Italian due **Wednesday, October 22nd**, and a 2000 word research paper due on **Monday, December 1st**. For each essay you will get two grades: one for the first draft, one for the rewrite. Both grades carry equal weight. Turning in a paper late will result in a lower grade.

Instructions for writing this paper, the criteria used for evaluating and grading it will be emailed to you. You may adopt any critical or scholarly approach you wish for your term paper, so long as it follows the basic instructions I will email to you. Your term paper topic does **not**

have to deal solely with Dante's *Divine Comedy*. You may, for example, discuss the way a poet such as William Blake used Dante in his work (including his illustrations of the *Divine Comedy*), or the way a prose writer like Borges used Dante in *Ficciones*. If you prefer looking at Dante's influence on the figurative arts, you can analyze Botticelli's or Dali's illustrations of the *Commedia* (e.g. how their illustrations reflect their interpretation of the *Commedia*).

Exam:

The final exam is on **Friday, December 12th at 12:00-3:00**. If you cannot take the exam on that day, you should not take this course. A student with three final examinations scheduled within the same calendar day or two examinations at the same time may petition to reschedule one exam to a different time or day. The following web site will explain how to do this:

<http://www.curriculumsystems.uga.edu/FinalExamConflicts/FinalExamConflicts.html>.

The final will consist of two parts: the first part will contain a passage from a canto to analyze and interpret, and the second will consist of an essay topic. You are allowed to use a dictionary for parts 1 and 2, and a dictionary and textbooks for part 2.

On December 5, class will meet in 113 Gilbert Hall to do the online course evaluations.

Final Grade:

Your grade for each of the following categories takes into account your ideas, interpretations, and analyses of the assigned readings, and your ability to express them in Italian.

30% Class participation.

60% Average of all your papers (including rewrites). All first drafts should be **triple-spaced**, with one and a quarter inch margins on both sides so that I can make corrections. .

10% Final examination (Friday, December 12th at 12:00-3:00, in our classroom).

The Department of Romance Languages has adopted the following numeric values (on a scale of 1 to 100) for the plus/minus grading system that has been adopted at UGA:

Numeric grade	Letter grade	GPA
100-93	A	4.0
92-90	A-	3.7
89-87	B+	3.3
86-83	B	3.0
82-80	B-	2.7
79-77	C+	2.3
76-71	C	2.0
70-68	C-	1.7
67-60	D	1.0
60-0	F	0

Academic Honesty Policy:

All academic work must meet the standards contained in *A Culture of Honesty*. Each student is responsible to inform themselves about those standards before performing any academic work. Students are not allowed to receive or attempt to receive any assistance (including human or computer translators) in the preparation of any assignments, examinations, essays, oral reports or

similar assignments to be submitted for a grade. All cases of suspected academic dishonesty are referred to the Office of the Vice President for Instruction (542-0432). More information is available in *A Culture of Honesty* that can be found at: <http://www.uga.edu/~vpaa>

Students with a disability or an emotional hardship:

Students with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations in order to participate in the course activities or meet course requirements should contact me as soon as possible. Students with documented learning disabilities are served through the Disability Resource Center: <http://www.drc.uga.edu>. Students with an emotional hardship may want to contact the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs (542-3564), or CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services) at the University Health Center (542-2273).

This course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary. Please note: no smoking, food, drinks or chewing gum in class.