

ITALIAN 6120: Dante's *Inferno* and parts of *Purgatorio*

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Office hours: MWF 11:10—12:10, and by appointment after 12:20

Course Objectives:

Dante's masterpiece lends itself to study from an almost infinite number of perspectives. In fact, after the Bible, the *Divine Comedy* has generated more commentaries than any printed text. The main objective of this course is a “close reading” of selected cantos from the *Inferno* and the *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. This course is given in Italian, and all the readings are available in bilingual editions.

Required Readings:

You will be asked to read both the *Inferno* and the first half of *Purgatorio*, the accompanying commentary and notes to each canto 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, as well as on reserve in the Main Library. Of the numerous bilingual editions, these two are affordable, readable, accurately translated, and contain excellent notes and commentary.

I have placed on reserve in the library these two textbooks and several important works of Dante criticism and scholarship, some of which I will assign during the semester (e.g. the chapters from John Freccero's *The Poetics of Conversion* that correspond to the cantos we will discuss in class).

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:

The following broad, study questions will serve as a spring board for our discussions in class; please try to answer them for each canto that I assign:

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?

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 the relationship between the material and the spiritual? How does Dante relate the sins that emphasize the material aspects of this world (e.g. the sins incontinence—lust, gluttony, avarice, prodigality, anger and sloth) to the spiritual values that they have destroyed?

4) 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?

5) 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?

6) 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?

7) 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. Thirty percent of your final grade reflects your performance during classroom discussions and your ability to analyze the assigned texts.

Papers:

I will ask you to write a 1700—2000 word essay due **Friday, March 9th**, and a 3500—4000 word term paper due on **Monday, April 30th**. 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 how a poet like William Blake used Dante in his work (including his illustrations of the *Divine Comedy*), or the way a prose writer like Jorge Luis Borges used Dante in *Ficciones*. If you prefer looking at Dante's influence on the figurative arts, you can analyze an illustration or two by an artist such as Botticelli or Dali, and see how the illustration(s) reflect(s) the artist's own interpretation of the *Commedia*.

Exams:

The final exam is scheduled for **Wednesday, May 7th, 8:00—11:00 am**. 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.

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 your papers: all papers must be typed and triple-spaced.

10% Final examination: **Wednesday, May 7th, 8:00—11:00 am.**

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.