

LT358 The *Divine Comedy* Today

Seminar Leader: Francesco Giusti
Course Times: Tue & Thu 17:30-19:00
Email: f.giusti@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: By appointment



Divina Commedia, XIV sec., Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, detail
(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Firenze,_divina_commedia,_xiv_sec.,_cod._tempi_1,_02.JPG)

Course Description

Celebrations for the 700th anniversary of Dante's death (1321–2021) are in preparation all over the world. This attests to the long-lasting cultural significance that his *Divine Comedy* still holds not just in the European canon, but in a globalizing world. The enormous influence and dissemination of this medieval poem is evident in its variegated reception in contemporary literature, cinema, music, and in the visual and performing arts. The *Divine Comedy* can be, and has long been, considered as a representative embodiment of authority in the European tradition. This course, instead, asks whether Dante's "masterpiece" could also offer breaches in which the ideal Western subject cracks open and shows its problematic constitution in a never fully accomplished process of formation. By looking at figurations of desire, bodily performances, temporal entanglements, negotiations of authorship, and multicultural sources, the *Divine Comedy* may become much less monolithic — and Dante a less dogmatic figure — and offer a space for discussion in which contemporary readers can conjoin their diverse perspectives, interests, and experiences. In this course, students will closely explore a selection of canti from the *Divine Comedy* (in English translation) in their historical context and the multifaceted picture of the medieval world(s) that they present to the reader. In addition, they will discuss the transcultural aspects of the poem and its reception in contemporary culture. From J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy novel to artworks and installations by Alfredo Jaar and Vasily Klyukin, Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise has offered a model of engagement with the world, immersive experience of the human condition, and critical reflection on the present.

Requirements

Students are required to attend all classes, to come to class prepared and with the relevant materials and textbooks. Participation consists in contributing productively to class discussion in a respectful manner, and in demonstrating a sound knowledge of the texts assigned.

Course Readings

Online resources will be used:

- Digital Dante (Columbia University): <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/>
- Dante Lab (Dartmouth): <http://dantelab.dartmouth.edu/>
- Princeton Dante Project: <https://dante.princeton.edu/pdp/>
- Dante Today: <https://research.bowdoin.edu/dante-today/>

All other readings and visual materials will be shared on Google Classroom.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Please note that attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. Late arrival or leaving during class time will count as an absence. Missing more than 30% of all sessions may result in failing the course. Please consult the Student Handbook, Section 2.8, for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SPRING 2021: If you cannot attend class because of a COVID-19 related issue, online alternatives will be made available, including remote participation, asynchronous options, and/or alternative assignments (video presentations or recorded dialogues with other students). If necessary, guest seminars will be held via Zoom. Any further forms of remote participation that become necessary during the semester will be communicated via email. During any online session it is strongly encouraged to have your camera on.

Assignments

The course activities include student presentations, which constitute a significant part of the participation grade.

Midterm essay (2000 words), due **23:59 Saturday, March 20**

Final essay (3000 words), due **23:59 Friday, May 21**

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

Participation 30%
Midterm essay 30%
Final essay 40%

Schedule

Week 1 - Immersion

Tuesday, February 2 – Inferno 1

Lino Pertile, "Introduction to *Inferno*," in *Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 67-90

Thursday, February 4 – Inferno 2

Robert Hollander, "Canto II: Dante's Authority," *Lectura Dantis: Inferno*, ed. by Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 25-35

Week 2 - Hell

Tuesday, February 9 – Inferno 3

Teodolinda Barolini, "Medieval Multiculturalism and Dante's Theology of Hell," in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp. 102-21

Thursday, February 11 – Inferno 4

Amilcare A. Iannucci, "Inferno IV," *Lectura Dantis*, 6 (1990), Special Issue: *Lectura Dantis Virginiana*, pp. 42-53

Week 3 - Hell

Tuesday, February 16 – Inferno 5

Elena Lombardi, *The Wings of the Doves: Love and Desire in Dante and Medieval*

Culture (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), pp. 132-174

Thursday, February 18 – Inferno 6

Simone Marchesi, “‘Epicuri de grege porcus’: Ciaccio, Epicurus and Isidore of Seville,” *Dante Studies*, 117 (1999), pp. 117-31

Week 4 – Hell

Tuesday, February 23 – Inferno 10

Guest Seminar: Manuele Gragnolati (Sorbonne Université/ICI Berlin)

Thursday, February 25 – Inferno 13

Leah Schwebel, “The Pagan Suicides: Augustine and *Inferno* 13,” *Medium Ævum*, 87.1 (2018), pp. 106-132

Week 5 – Hell

Tuesday, March 2 – Inferno 15

Gary Cestaro, “Queering Nature, Queering Gender: Dante and Sodomy,” in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), pp. 90-103

Thursday, March 4 – Inferno 26

Giuseppe Mazzotta, “Poetics of History: *Inferno* XXVI,” *Diacritics*, 5.2 (1975), pp. 37-44

Week 6 – Hell

Tuesday, March 9 – Inferno 27

Robert Pogue Harrison, “Comedy and Modernity: Dante's Hell,” *MLN*, 102.5 (1987), pp. 1043-1061

Robin Kirkpatrick, *Dante's Inferno: Difficulty and Dead Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 291-362 (excerpts)

Thursday, March 11 – Inferno 28

Karla Mallette, “Muhammad in Hell,” *Dante Studies*, 125 (2007), pp. 207-224

Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 228-235

Week 7 – Hell

Tuesday, March 16 – Inferno 32-33

John Freccero, “Bestial Sign and Bread of Angels: *Inferno* XXXII and XXXIII,” in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 152-166

Thursday, March 18 – Inferno 34

Dino S. Cervigni, “The Muted Self-Referentiality of Dante's Lucifer,” *Dante Studies*, 107

(1989), pp. 45-74

Midterm essay due 23:59 Saturday, March 20

Week 8 – Purgatory

Tuesday, March 23 – Purgatorio 1-2

Manuele Gragnolati, “Gluttony and the Anthropology of Pain in Dante’s *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*,” in *History in the Comic Mode*, ed. by Rachel Fulton and Bruce W. Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 238-250

Thursday, March 25 – Purgatorio 5-7

Claire E. Honess, “Divided City, Slavish Italy, Universal Empire,” in *Vertical Readings in Dante’s “Comedy”*, 1, ed. by George Corbett and Heather Webb (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2015), pp. 119-142

Spring Break (March 29 – April 5)

Week 9 – Purgatory

Tuesday, April 6 – Purgatorio 10-12

Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 122-141

Thursday, April 8 – Purgatorio 25-26

Zygmunt G. Barański, “Purgatorio XXV: Creating Poetic Bodies,” in *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio: Literature, Doctrine, Reality* (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2020), pp. 325-346

Week 10 – Purgatory

Tuesday, April 13 – Purgatorio 28-30

Patrizia Grimaldi Pizzorno, “Matelda’s Dance and the Smile of the Poets,” *Dante Studies*, 112 (1994), pp. 115-32

Thursday, April 15 – Purgatorio 31-33

John A. Scott, “Beatrice’s Reproaches in Eden: Which ‘School’ Had Dante Followed?,” *Dante Studies*, 109 (1991), pp. 1-23

Week 11 – Paradise

Tuesday, April 20 – Paradiso 1-2

Rachel Jacoff, “Introduction to Paradiso,” in *Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 107-124

Thursday, April 22 – Paradiso 3-4

Richard H. Lansing, “Piccarda and the Poetics of Paradox: A Reading of Paradiso III,”

Dante Studies, 105 (1987), pp. 63-77

Week 12 – Paradise

Tuesday, April 27 – Paradiso 8-9

Rachel Jacoff, “The Post-Palinodic Smile: Paradiso VIII and IX,” *Dante Studies*, 98 (1980), pp. 111-122

Thursday, April 29 – Paradiso 16-17

Claire E. Honess, “Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante’s Commedia*, ed. by Zygmunt G. Barański and Simon Gilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 192-207

Week 13 – Paradise

Tuesday, May 4 – Paradiso 21-22

Zygmunt G. Barański, “‘Reflecting’ on the Divine and on the Human: Paradiso XXII,” in *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio: Literature, Doctrine, Reality* (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2020), pp. 135-162

Thursday, May 6 – Paradiso 30-31

Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 218-256
Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 263-269

Week 14 – Paradise

Tuesday, May 11 – Paradiso 32-33

Ronald L. Martinez, “Dante ‘buon sartore’ (*Paradiso* 32.140): Textile Arts, Rhetoric, and Metapoetics at the End of the *Commedia*,” *Dante Studies*, 136 (2018), pp. 22-61

Thursday, May 13 – Federal Holiday

Week 15 – Completion Week

Final essay due 23:59 Friday, May 21