

ITALGEN 153. DANTE AND THE MODERN IMAGINATION

Elizabeth Coggeshall

Spring 2012 MW 11:00am-12:30pm Building 460-334

Italian Discussion Section time TBD at first class meeting

Office hours MW 1:00-2:00pm and by appointment

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This course will read Dante's *Divine Comedy* alongside modern re-interpretations of it. In doing so we will analyze and evaluate Dante's hold on the modern imagination. How has the modern era co-opted Dante for its own purposes? Why does he continue to cast such a powerful spell over our contemporary imaginary? What about the *Comedy* speaks to us so profoundly? To what extent can we consider Dante a "modern" poet? How and where does he resist such a reading?

One of the main objectives in this course will be to arrive at an understanding of the relationship between texts and their translations, not only from one language to another but from one context or culture to another. We will see how a single text can open to multiple readings, and we will consider how texts read one another. We will achieve this objective through close, analytical reading of works in various genres (poetry, prose, theater, visual arts, film, music) and across various cultures and periods. We will discern the underlying assumptions of each text through careful analysis of its rhetorical strategies. Students will communicate their thoughts on these assumptions and strategies in different settings: classroom discussion, presentations, and both short- and long-form writing. Through the course of the quarter, we will develop a deep, critical sense of the continued influence Dante exerts over the Western imaginary.

Requirements:

NB: Grading: Students enter this course with varying degrees of experience and proficiency in critical reading and writing. Grades will be based on progress and commitment over the course of the quarter, rather than on any universal standard.

Attendance and participation (20%): attendance at all class meetings is essential, as is completing all reading assignments and participating in class discussion. To prepare a reading from the *Divine Comedy*, students should read the canto or cantos assigned for the day – in English or in Italian depending on language ability – as well as the notes on each canto. Each lesson will have a "primary canto", which will be the focus for discussion. I recommend reading this canto twice.

One-page question-response papers (30%): Students will be asked to produce weekly response papers commenting on any aspect of the text or texts prepared for class that week. Students may choose any question that interests them. For each response paper, students should think of a question that both gets to the heart of the text(s) and is answerable in one page. This takes practice! Question-response papers will be graded on a +, ✓, - scale and the final grade will be based on each student's progress over the course of the quarter. Papers should be submitted on **Tuesday** evening each week (before 11:59pm) to be considered on time. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Recitation (10%): one recitation of a verse selection of the student's choosing. Students may choose to recite any passage from the *Divine Comedy* or other poem from the syllabus (12 lines minimum). Recitations must be performed without notes and in the original language.

Presentation (10%): students will give 5-10 minute biographical presentations on one modern author, artist, playwright or filmmaker from the syllabus.

Final Paper (30%): 4-6-page paper on an example of Dante's impact on contemporary popular culture. Students will seek out examples of "pop Dante" – uses of Dante's text, title, or person in contemporary popular culture, American or otherwise – and will evaluate them according to a series of questions: how deep is the appropriation? How is Dante co-opted to suit the modern example's needs? What kinds of values does the modern example find in Dante, and how are these values communicated?

** Non-traditional research projects are also encouraged: possibilities will be discussed during the first class session. Students should begin to think about their projects early in the quarter, and 100-word abstracts will be due in Week 7.

Required texts: (available in Stanford bookstore)

Dante, *Inferno*, ed. and trans. Robert Durling (Oxford University Press, 1997)

Gloria Naylor, *Linden Hills* (Penguin, 1986)

Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (Grove Press, 1994)

** Additional readings will be distributed via Coursework. An email announcement will accompany any additional materials uploaded on the site.

** Important and useful critical readings on the *Divine Comedy* and its reception history have been placed on reserve at the Green Library Reference Desk. A list of these materials is available on the CourseWork website.

Useful Web Resources (links on CourseWork):

Dante Online (in Italian): http://www.danteonline.it/italiano/home_ita.asp

Dante Today: <http://learn.bowdoin.edu/italian/dante/>

Danteworlds: <http://danteworlds.laits.utexas.edu/>

The Dartmouth Dante Project: <http://dante.dartmouth.edu/>

The Princeton Dante Project: <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/index.html>

Italian Major Requirement and Italian Discussion Section: This course, paired with the weekly discussion section (conducted in Italian), satisfies the requirement in Dante Studies for the Italian major. Students wishing to use this course to satisfy their requirement must enroll in 5 units and must attend the additional weekly discussions. Preparation for and participation in these sessions will factor into the students' overall attendance grade.

Honor Code: All students are expected to abide by the Stanford Honor Code and Fundamental Standard. For further information consult the Judicial Affairs website:

www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/about/welcome.htm.

Students with documented disabilities: Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk; phone: 723-1066; web site <http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oea>.

SCHEDULE

- April 2 Introduction to course: the biography of the poet, the universe of the poem, "Dante Today".
- April 4 *Inferno* 1-4
- April 9 *Inferno* 5; John Keats, "A Dream, After Reading Dante's Episode of Paolo and Francesca"; Presentation: *Francesca da Rimini in the Visual Arts*
- April 11 *Inferno* 6-9; Film clip: Peter Greenaway, *A TV Dante: The Inferno, Cantos I-VIII* (BBC, 1989)
- April 16 *Inferno* 10-13
- April 18 *Inferno* 13; Film clip: Vincent Ward, *What Dreams May Come* (1998)
- April 23 *Inferno* 14-22; Film clip: Sandow Birk, *Dante's Inferno* (2008, toy theater film)
- April 25 *Inferno* 23-26
- April 30 *Inferno* 26; Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"; Primo Levi, "Il Canto di Ulisse"
- May 2 *Inferno* 27-30 RECITATIONS
- May 7 *Inferno* 27; T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"; Robert Harrison, "Entitled Opinions: Dante and Prufrock: A Coda" (radio program)
- May 9 *Inferno* 31-34
- May 14 *Inferno* 33; Gloria Naylor, *Linden Hills*, pp. 1-71
- May 16 Workshop with Arielle Saiber (Bowdoin College), creator of *Dante Today* website
ABSTRACTS DUE
- May 21 *Purgatorio* 1-5
- May 23 Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*
- May 28 NO CLASS: MEMORIAL DAY. OPTIONAL TRIP TO SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART (EXHIBIT: "TO HELL AND BACK: SANDOW BIRK'S DIVINE COMEDY")
- May 30 *Paradiso* 1, 30-33
- June 4 *Paradiso* 33; Jose Luis Borges, "The Aleph"
- June 6 Conclusions. NB: Class to be held at the CANTOR ARTS CENTER
- June 8 (Friday) FINAL PROJECTS DUE