



LT 330 DANTE'S *COMMEDIA* IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT
IES Abroad Siena

DESCRIPTION:

The course focuses on Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* as a fundamental text of Western civilization. The course considers the value of the *Commedia* within the history of literature, the relationship between author and historical context, as well as the transition from the Middle Ages to Humanism. In this course, a particular attention is paid to Dante's *Inferno* (Hell) in order to deal with the importance of this part of the *Commedia* also for our contemporary times. Alongside the commentary and analysis of an illustrative group of chosen cantos, the course covers the historical dynamics concerning Florence, including philosophical, biblical and theological investigations in order to illustrate the *Commedia* not as an isolated work of literature in itself, but as an 'encyclopedia'. Furthermore, the course connects the readings with the local context and the history of Siena.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: None

ADDITIONAL COST: None

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

Lectures (including PowerPoint projections), seminar discussions, and student presentations.

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Participation -10%
- Post 1 -5%
- Paper 1 -10%
- Midterm Exam -30%
- Post 2 -5%
- Paper 2 -5%
- Oral presentation -5%
- Final Exam -30%

Participation

Active class participation and class discussions

Post 1

4,000-character post on a forum about the concept of freedom in different cultures

Paper 1

3-4 page paper based on the comparison between two texts considered before the midterm exam (contingent on professor authorization)

Midterm Exam

Written midterm exam in the form of essay-style answers

Post 2

4,000-character post on a forum concerning the course-related trip

Paper 2



3-4 page paper on a topic chosen by student (contingent on professor authorization)

Oral Presentation

Oral presentation of Paper 2

Final Exam

Written final exam in the form of essay-style answers

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- have a substantial knowledge of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*;
- comment and analyze an illustrative group of chosen cantos for each of the three *cantiche*;
- recognize the value of the *Divine Comedy* as a fundamental text of Western civilization;
- know the most important sources of the *Divine Comedy* and understand how this masterpiece is a cultural link between the Middle Ages and Humanism;
- develop skills to critically evaluate Medieval culture.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Successful progress of the program depends on the full cooperation of both students and faculty members: regular attendance and active participation in class are essential parts of the learning process. Attendance at and participation in all class meetings are required. IES Abroad Siena allows a maximum of TWO excused absences per semester. Each additional absence will automatically result in a penalty of 2 percentage points off the final grade for each unjustified absence and 4 percentage points for a scheduled academic day trip. SEVEN absences per course (including 2 excused absences) will result in a failing grade for that course.

Furthermore, an absence on the date of scheduled tests, presentations or quizzes does not entitle you to recover/reschedule such tests. Failure to attend your midterm and/or final exam will result in an F grade on that paper/exam.

CONTENT:

Weeks	Content	Assignments
Week 1	1. Who was Dante Alighieri? His life and works. Historical and political background, especially of thirteenth-century Florence. The significance of Dante's <i>Commedia</i> in Italian culture and civilization. What is Dante Alighieri? The cultural mark of a man who both elaborates medieval culture and anticipates Humanism. The presence of medieval sources in Dante's formation, the anticipation of Humanism in his writings. The Classical and Christian heritages.	<i>Reading:</i> Lino Pertile, <i>Dante</i> , pp. 39-69.

Weeks	Content	Assignments
Week 2	2. Christianity in the Middle Ages: the figural point of view (see <i>Farinata and Cavalcante</i> by Erich Auerbach). The <i>Commedia</i> as the peak of the iceberg in a long series of journeys in the Otherworld between 'learned' culture and 'popular' culture from a historical perspective (see <i>The Learned and Popular Dimensions of Journeys in the Otherworld in the Middle Ages</i> by Jacques Le Goff). The poem's structure and its main sources. Dante's poem as a representation of medieval eschatology: Vices, Virtues, and the Concept of Expiation. The idea of Hell. Historical references (Guelfs and Ghibellines; battle of Montaperti; Black-White split); political discourse of the <i>popolo</i> and universal empire in the <i>Commedia</i> (see <i>Dante and Florence</i> and <i>A History of Florence. 1200-1575</i> by John M. Najemy).	<i>Readings:</i> - Erich Auerbach, <i>Farinata and Cavalcante</i>, pp. 174-202. - Jacques Le Goff, <i>The Learned and Popular Dimensions of Journeys in the Otherworld in the Middle Ages</i>, pp. 19-37. - John M. Najemy, <i>Dante and Florence</i>, pp. 80-99. - John M. Najemy, <i>A History of Florence. 1200-1575</i> (excerpt, pp. 70-72).
Week 3	3. Introduction to Dante's <i>Inferno</i>. Dante's structuring of <i>Inferno</i> and the strategy of pain. Textual analysis and interpretation.	<i>Reading:</i> <i>Inf.</i> I (selection).
Week 4	4. Textual analysis and interpretation. 5. Textual analysis and interpretation.	<i>Readings:</i> <i>Inf.</i> II and III (selections). <i>Inf.</i> IV and V (selections).
Week 5	6. Textual analysis and interpretation. 7. Textual analysis and interpretation.	<i>Readings:</i> <i>Inf.</i> VI and X (selections). <i>Inf.</i> XIII and XV (selections).
Week 6	8. Textual analysis and interpretation. 9. Textual analysis and interpretation.	<i>Readings:</i> <i>Inf.</i> XXVI, XXXII and XXXIII (selections). <i>Inf.</i> XXXIV (entire canto). - Submission of the paper based on the comparison between two texts considered before the midterm exam.
Week 7	10. Introduction to Dante's <i>Purgatorio</i>. The concept of Purgatory in medieval thought; when Purgatory was theorized and how. Textual analysis and interpretation. 11. Midterm Exam.	<i>Reading:</i> <i>Purg.</i> I (selection).
Week 8	Fall Break.	

Weeks	Content	Assignments
Week 9	12. Textual analysis and interpretation. 13. Textual analysis and interpretation.	<i>Readings:</i> <i>Purg.</i> II and III (selections). <i>Purg.</i> V and VI (selections). - Moodle activity: forum about the concept of freedom in different cultures.
Week 10	14. Textual analysis and interpretation. 15. Course-related trip: tour of the places of the <i>Commedia</i> in Siena.	<i>Readings:</i> <i>Purg.</i> XI and XIII (selections). - Moodle activity: forum concerning the course-related trip.
Week 11	16. Textual analysis and interpretation. 17. Textual analysis and interpretation.	<i>Readings:</i> <i>Purg.</i> XXIII and XXIV (selections). <i>Purg.</i> XXX (selection).
Week 12	18. Introduction to Dante's <i>Paradise</i> . The concept of Paradise and beatitude in Christian thought. Love, knowledge and the vision of God. Textual analysis and interpretation.	<i>Readings:</i> <i>Par.</i> I, II and III (selections).
Week 13	19. Textual analysis and interpretation. 20. Textual analysis and interpretation.	<i>Readings:</i> <i>Par.</i> VI, XI, XV and XVII (selections). <i>Par.</i> XXX, XXXI (selections) and XXXIII (entire canto). - Submission and oral presentation of the paper on a topic chosen by student.
Week 14	21. Final Exam.	

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- tour of the places of the *Commedia* in Siena. Students will be provided with supplementary material before the course-related trip.

REQUIRED READINGS:

- **Course-packet** (including the following texts):

Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy, Vol. I: Inferno*, translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary by Mark Musa. New York: Penguin Books (Penguin Classics), 2003 (excerpts).

---. *The Divine Comedy, Vol. II: Purgatorio*, translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary by Mark Musa. New York: Penguin Books (Penguin Classics), 1985 (excerpts).

---. *The Divine Comedy, Vol. III: Paradiso*, translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary by Mark Musa. New York: Penguin Books (Penguin Classics), 1986 (excerpts).

Auerbach, Erich. "Farinata and Cavalcante," in *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, translated by Willard R. Trask; with a new introduction by Edward W. Said. Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 174-202.

Brand, Peter, Pertile, Lino (eds.). "Dante", in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 39-69.



- Le Goff, Jacques. "The Learned and Popular Dimensions of Journeys in the Otherworld in the Middle Ages," in Understanding Popular Culture. Europe from the Middle Ages to the 19th Century. Ed. Steven L. Kaplan. Berlin-New York-Amsterdam: Mouton, 1984, pp. 19-37.
- Najemy, John M. "Dante and Florence," in The Cambridge Companion to Dante. Ed. Rachel Jacoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 80-99.
- . A History of Florence. 1200-1575. Malden (MA): Blackwell, 2006 (excerpt, pp. 70-72).

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Abulafia, David. Frederick II. A Medieval Emperor. London: Allen Lane, 1988.
- . Italy in the Central Middle Ages. 1000-1300. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Alighieri, Dante. La Vita Nuova (Poems of Youth), translated with an Introduction by Barbara Reynolds. New York: Penguin Books (Penguin Classics), 2004.
- Brand, Peter, Pertile, Lino (eds.). The Cambridge History of Italian Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Davis, Charles T. Dante's Italy and Other Essays. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984.
- . "Dante and the empire," in The Cambridge Companion to Dante. Ed. Rachel Jacoff. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 67-79.
- Drell, Joanna H. "Using Dante to Teach the Middle Ages. Examples from Medieval Southern Italian History," in *Pedagogy*. Winter 2013, Vol. 13, Issue 1 (2012), pp. 59-65 (available on the EBSCOhost).
- Ferrante, Joan M. The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy. Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Green, Louis. "Florence," in The New Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. 5 (c. 1198-c. 1300). Ed. David Abulafia. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 479-496.
- Jansen, Katherine, Drell, Joanna H., Andrews, Frances (eds.). Medieval Italy: Texts in Translation. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.
- Larner, John. Italy in the Age of Dante and Petrarch. 1216-1380. London: Longman, 1980.
- Najemy, John M. A History of Florence. 1200-1575. Malden (MA): Blackwell, 2006.
- Picchio Simonelli, Maria. "Canto VI. Florence, Ciacco, and the Gluttons," in Lectura Dantis. Inferno. A Canto-by-Canto Commentary. Eds. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, Charles Ross. Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1998, pp. 84-100.
- Singleton, Charles S. Dante Studies 2: Journey to Beatrice. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1954.
- Wickham, Chris. Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Authority. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989.