

Religion, Literature, & the Arts:
Dante's Inferno

PHRE-450 / Winter 2017-18
Phillips Academy



Dante and Virgil approaching the entrance to Hell (Gustave Doré, 1890)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Demons. Fire. Brimstone. The Hell of the modern imagination is one filled with devils and torture; yet, this wasn't always so. Indeed, we can credit much of our modern conception of Hell to one fourteenth century Italian poet, whose his epic poem about the afterlife has proven to be one of the most enduring pieces of literature in the western tradition. Dante's *Inferno* continues to captivate audiences long after its publication in the early 1300s, resurfacing in art, literature, music, film, and present day popular culture. Who was Dante? And why do we continue to find his ideas about the afterlife to be so compelling? This course will explore the complex world of the *Divine Comedy*, as well as the rich literary and artistic tradition spawned by the Italian poet's ideas.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, EVALUATION, AND POLICIES

I. Required Texts:

1. Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 2009).
2. Hunt Emerson, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

II. Evaluation

- i. Classroom Participation (25%)** – Much of this class will proceed as a seminar, which means careful reading of assigned work, regular attendance, and participation in class are all essential in order to succeed in the course. A separate handout/rubric will be distributed regarding expectations for classroom participation/discussion.
- ii. Reflection Papers (15%)** – In an effort to deepen our understanding of the assigned reading, students will be asked to complete a series of journal entries on the readings throughout the term. Each entry should be approximately 300 words, or about one page double-spaced. The journal entries are due at the start of class on the day that the reading is assigned – no exceptions. These entries are graded as Complete, Incomplete, or Missing. Students control how well they do on this assignment, as the number of acceptable entries over the course of the term determines the grade. The final assignment will draw from these entries, so students are accepted to keep track of these throughout the term.
- iii. Essays (60%)** – Three different analytical/argumentative essays will be assigned over the course of the term. More specific information about the nature of these essays will be provided closer to their corresponding due dates.
 - a. Essay 1 (15%)** – Due Monday, January 22
 - b. Essay 2 (20%)** – Due Monday, February 12
 - c. Final Project (25%)** – Due Tuesday, February 27

III. Extensions – Generally speaking, I do not grant extensions. In addition to allocating class time for papers, prompts are also handed out at least one week prior to the due date, so the expectation is that students will plan ahead and manage their time appropriately. The only exception to this policy is when a student has three or more major assignments due on the same day, in which case students are expected to follow the protocols outlined on p. 51 of the Blue Book under “Workload & Assignments” (which includes 24-hours advance notice).

IV. Late Work Policy – All written assignments are to be uploaded to Canvas by the beginning of class on the day the assignment is due. Any work uploaded after this point will be counted as late. Please note that technological difficulties are **not** an excuse for lateness. Anticipate that the printer will break, that files will be lost, or that your computer will die! **Any work handed in after the due date will receive a grade no higher than a 3+.** Work that is handed in more than one week past the due date will not receive credit.

V. Rewrite Policy – All students may choose to rewrite any essay during the term (except for the final). Revisions must be substantial; it is not sufficient simply to plug in the instructor’s feedback. I strongly encourage students to meet with me if they are electing to complete a revision. The grade for the rewrite will be averaged with the initial grade to determine the new grade for the assignment. All rewrites are due one week after the initial essay is returned. Please note that I do not accept rewrites for unauthorized late essays.

VI. Absences - As noted above under Classroom Preparation/Participation, regular attendance is essential if one is to succeed in this course. However, I realize that this course is not your only commitment this term, just as I realize that circumstances inevitably arise that are outside of your control. First and foremost, I ask that you communicate with me (the earlier the better). Regarding **Personal Time**, I ask that students follow the procedures outlined on pp. 54-55 of the Blue Book (specifically, the request must be made at least 24 hours prior to said class meeting). Please note that students are responsible for all announcements or changes made in class. Finally, in the event that an assignment is due on the day a student is sick (with an excused absence from the Health Center), said assignment will be due at the beginning of the next class meeting.

VII. E-mail – I will respond to all e-mail within 24 hours. However, please note that any e-mail sent after 7:00 PM will not receive a response until the following morning, so please plan ahead!

VIII. Religious Observances – Some students may wish to take part in religious observances that fall during the term. Should you have a religious observance that conflicts with participation in the course, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations.

IX. Disabilities – Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who may require disability-related classroom accommodations are encouraged to see me as soon as possible to discuss your particular needs. All discussions will remain confidential, though I may consult Student Health Services to discuss appropriate implementation of any accommodation requested.

X. Technology – Although we live in an increasingly digitized world, please note that I do not allow the use of computers/tablet/phones during class unless otherwise specified.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Unit 1: The Upper Hell

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1 – INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

- No assigned readings

WEEK 1 – THE VESTIBULE OF HELL

MONDAY, DECEMBER 4 – WHO WAS DANTE?

- Read: Archibald T. MacAllister, “Introduction,” *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), xii-xxiv.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6 – THE DARK WOOD OF ERROR

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canto 1, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 3-9.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Canto 1, *Dante’s Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8 – THE THRESHOLD OF HELL

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 2-3, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 10-24.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Cantos 2-3, *Dante’s Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

WEEK 2 – THE UPPER HELL

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11 – LIMBO AND THE HARROWING OF HELL

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canto 4, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 25-34.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Canto 4, *Dante’s Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).
- Read: J.K. Elliott, trans., “The Acts of Pilate,” *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), selections.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13 – SINS OF INCONTINENCE: LUST, GLUTTONY, AND AVARICE

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 5-7, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 35-58.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Cantos 5-7, *Dante’s Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9 – THE RIVER STYX AND THE WALLS OF DIS

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 8-9, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 59-74.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Cantos 8-9, *Dante’s Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

HAPPY WINTER BREAK!

Unit 2: The Lower Hell

FRIDAY, JANUARY 5 – DANTE AND POPULAR CULTURE

- No assigned readings

WEEK 3 – SINS OF VIOLENCE

MONDAY, JANUARY 8 – THE SINS OF THE LION

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 10-12, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 75-100.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Cantos 10-12, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10 – DANTE AND HOMOSEXUALITY

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 13-15, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 101-125.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Cantos 13-15, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

FRIDAY, JANUARY 12 – CIRCLE SEVEN: THE VIOLENT

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 10-11, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 75-91.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Cantos 10-11, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

WEEK 4 – DANTE AND THE OTHER

MONDAY, JANUARY 15 – MLK DAY

- Class does not meet

TUESDAY, JANUARY 16 – DANTE AND THE “OTHER”

- Read: Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante's Sympathy for the Other, or the Non-Stereotyping Imagination: Sexual and Racialized Others in the *Commedia*," *Critica del testo XIV 1* (2011): 177-194.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17 – WRITING WORKSHOP

- No assigned readings; work on essays

FRIDAY, JANUARY 19 – RELEASE TIME

- No assigned readings; work on essays

Unit 3: The Circles of Fraud

WEEK 5 – THE EIGHTH CIRCLE OF HELL

MONDAY, JANUARY 22 – MLK DAY

- Due: Essay #1

TUESDAY, JANUARY 23 – THE FAILED FLYERS

- Read: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Anthony S. Kline (University of Virginia, 2000), 1.747-2.327, 8.183-235.
- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canto 17, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 134-141.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Canto 17, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24 – MALEBOLGE

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 18-20, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 142-168.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Cantos 18-20, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26 – DIABOLICAL SEMIOSIS: THE MALEBRANCHE

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 21-23, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 169-193.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Cantos 21-23, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

WEEK 6 – THE NINTH CIRCLE OF HELL

MONDAY, JANUARY 29 – MLK DAY

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 24-25, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 194-209.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Cantos 24-25, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31 – THE TALE OF ULYSSES

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 26-29, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 210-242.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Cantos 26-29, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 2 – THE LINGUISTIC FALL

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 30-32, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 243-268.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Cantos 30-32, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

WEEK 7: JUDAÏCCA

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5 – MID-WINTER BREAK

- Class does not meet

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 6 – JUDAÏCCA

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 33-34, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 269-285.
- Read: Hunt Emerson, Cantos 33-34, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout, 2012).

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7 – WRITING WORKSHOP

- No assigned readings; work on essays

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 9 – RELEASE TIME

- No assigned readings; work on essays

Unit 4: The Artistic Heritage of Dante

WEEK 8 – FINAL PROJECT RESEARCH

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12 – FINAL PROJECT OVERVIEW

- Due: Essay #2

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14 – RESEARCH SESSION

- Note: Topic Selection due by the end of class

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16 – RESEARCH SESSION

- Note: Annotated bibliography due by the end of class

WEEK 9 – FINAL PROJECT RESEARCH

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19 – FINAL PROJECT OVERVIEW

- No assigned readings

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21 – RESEARCH SESSION

- No assigned readings

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23 – RESEARCH SESSION

- No assigned readings

WEEK 10 – FINALS WEEK

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26 – WRITING WORKSHOP (OPTIONAL)

- Note: Mr. Prescott will provide comments on drafts that are uploaded to Canvas by 8:00 PM on Sunday, February 26

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27 – ESSAY #3 DUE

- Due: Essay #3