

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

PHR-450 / Spring 2019  
Phillips Academy



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

**Instructor:** Mr. Prescott  
**Location:** Chapel 016  
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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).
3. Sandow Birk and Marcus Sanders, *Dante's Inferno* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004)

**II. Assessment and Evaluation** - The final grade you receive in this course should reflect your *understanding* of the subject matter. To that end, there are three summative assessments that will increase in value as the term (and your knowledge) develops:

- **Unit 1 Essay: The Ethics of Hell (25%)** - Due Monday, April 8
- **Unit 2 Essay: Dante's Journey (35%)** - Due Friday, May 3
- **Unit 3 Essay: Artistic Legacy of Dante (40%)** - Due Tuesday, May 28

**III. Revisions** - Making mistakes is not just an important component of the learning process: it is a *necessary* one. Indeed, we learn best when we have the opportunity to reflect on *why* we made certain mistakes and then respond accordingly. With that in mind, you may choose to revise any essay/project in the course. When completing a revision, you must also submit responses to the revision reflection questions with the revised draft (see Canvas). Once the revision is submitted, the grade of the revised essay will replace the original grade on the assignment. Please note that assignments receiving less than a 4- must be revised.

**IV. Habits of Work** - What exactly are good work habits? These are things like doing your homework, showing up to class on time, participating in discussions, keeping up with your journal, collaborating with your peers, coming to conference period, starting your essays early, revising essays, and engaging in regular communication. It shouldn't come as a surprise that good habits of work often lead to a stronger performance on formal assessments, which is why you will receive a "Habits of Work" grade at the midterm and at end of the course. This grade does not factor into the calculation of the final grade in the course, but

I think you will find that they are closely related. Specifically, the “Habits of Work” grade is meant to help you locate and address various factors that might be influencing and/or shaping your performance on formal assessments.

**a. Participation** - Active participation in class discussions and other classroom activities is one of the best ways to deepen your understanding of the subject matter in this course (see “Habits of Work” above). This means that you should come to class prepared and ready to engage with your peers. While you will not receive a formal grade for participation, you will receive regular feedback from me on how best to develop and hone this component of your learning process.

**b. Student Journal** - In order to develop the understandings necessary for success on formal assignments, you will need to engage with the subject matter of this course on a regular basis (again, see “Habits of Work”). To help facilitate said engagement, all students are expected to maintain a journal (on Google Docs) that houses responses to assigned readings, in-class prompts, and other informal writing. The student journal is **not** graded, though you will receive regular feedback from me on these entries.

**V. E-mail/Technology** – Two words on technology: first, there is good research showing that even the presence of a turned-off cell phone on a person’s desk reduces their cognitive functioning. Because we are here to learn, I ask that you drop your phone off at “Cell Phone Daycare” when you enter the classroom. Take some time to talk to others in the room! Second, I kindly ask that you limit e-mail use to requests for in-person meetings or to communicate emergencies. I will respond to these e-mails within 24 hours, though please note that any e-mail sent after 7:00 PM will not receive a response until the following morning. Please plan ahead!

**VI. Absences** - There are many legitimate reasons why you may need to miss class. Andover is a busy place! I first and foremost ask that you communicate with me if you aren’t going to be present. For absences related to religious observances, please contact Ms. Ralston ([gralston@andover.edu](mailto:gralston@andover.edu)) to have the absence excused. In the event of illness, please coordinate with Skyes. For college visits, please coordinate with the Dean of Students Office.

**VII. Accommodations** – Students with learning, physical, or psychiatric disabilities who may require accommodations in the classroom are encouraged to contact Dr. Warner ([lwarn@andover.edu](mailto:lwarn@andover.edu)) at the Academic Skills to receive appropriate documentation.

## SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

### *Unit 1: Comédia, Truth, and the Afterlife*

*“The fiction of the Divine Comedy is that it is not a fiction.”*

- Teodalinda Barolini

#### WEEK 1 – INTRODUCTION TO DANTE AND *THE INFERNO*

TUESDAY, MARCH 19 – INTRODUCTION TO *THE INFERNO*

- No assigned readings

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20 – DANTE AND FLORENTINE POLITICS

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

FRIDAY, MARCH 22 – THE DARK WOOD OF ERROR

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canto 1, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), pp. 3-9.

#### WEEK 2 – SINS OF THE *LUPA*

MONDAY, MARCH 25 – THE THRESHOLD OF HELL

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canti 2-3, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), pp. 10-24.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27 – LIMBO AND THE HARROWING OF HELL

- Read: J.K. Elliott, trans., “Christ’s Descent Into Hell,” *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 165-165, 185-190.
- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canto 4, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 25-34.

FRIDAY, MARCH 29 – SINS OF INCONTINENCE: LUST AND GLUTTONY

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canti 5-7, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 35-58.

#### WEEK 3 – THE ETHICS OF HELL

MONDAY, APRIL 1 – ARISTOTLE AND *MISURA*

- Read: Aristotle, “Virtue Ethics,” in *Moral Philosophy: A Reader*, ed. Louis P. Pojman and Peter Tramel (Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), pp. 306-311.
- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canto 8, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 59-66.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3 – THE CITY OF DIS

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canti 9-11, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 67-91.

FRIDAY, APRIL 5 – WRITING WORKSHOP

- Due: Rough Draft

### *Unit 2: The Circles of Violence, Malice and Fraud*

#### WEEK 4 – SINS OF THE LION

**MONDAY, APRIL 8 – THE STRUCTURE OF HELL**

- Due: Essay #1

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10 – DANTE AND HOMOSEXUALITY**

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Cantos 12-15, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 91-125.

**FRIDAY, APRIL 12 - EBI FRIDAY**

- Note: Class does not meet

**WEEK 5 – THE GERYON PRINCIPLE**

**MONDAY, APRIL 15 – PATRIOTS DAY**

- Note: Class does not meet

**TUESDAY, APRIL 16 - PHR DEPARTMENT DAY**

- Note: Class does not meet

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17 – THE LOWER HELL**

- Read: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Anthony S. Kline (University of Virginia, 2000), 1.747-2.327, 8.183-235.
- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canti 16-20, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 126-168.

**THURSDAY, APRIL 18 – NON-SIBI DAY**

- Note: Class does not meet

**FRIDAY, APRIL 19 – THURSDAY SCHEDULE**

- Note: Class does not meet

**WEEK 6 – THE EIGHTH CIRCLE OF HELL**

**MONDAY, APRIL 22 – THE MALEBRANCHE**

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canti 21-25, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 169-209.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24 – THE TALE OF ULYSSES**

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canti 26-29, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 210-242.

**FRIDAY, APRIL 26 – THE LINGUISTIC FALL**

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canti 30-32, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 243-268.

**WEEK 7 – THE NINTH CIRCLE OF HELL**

**MONDAY, APRIL 29 – JUDAÏCCA**

- Read: Dante Alighieri, Canti 33-34, *The Inferno*, trans., John Ciardi (New York: Signet Classics, 1954), 269-285.

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 1 - WRITING WORKSHOP**

- No assigned readings; work on essays

**FRIDAY, MAY 3 – TBD**

- Due: Essay #2

## Unit 3: The Artistic Legacy of Dante

### WEEK 8 - HUNT EMERSON'S *INFERNO*

MONDAY, MAY 6 – THE SINS OF THE LUPA AND THE LION

- Read: Hunt Emerson, Canti 1-16, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout Books, 2012), pp. 3-40

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8 – THE SINS OF THE LEOPARD

- Read: Hunt Emerson, Canti 17-34, *Dante's Inferno* (London: Knockabout Books, 2012), pp. 41-74.

FRIDAY, MAY 10 – THE URBAN HELLSCAPE OF SANDOW BIRK

- Read: Sandow Birk and Marcus Sanders, Canti 1-3, *Dante's Inferno* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 20014), pp. 1-18.

### WEEK 9 – FINAL PROJECT RESEARCH

MONDAY, MAY 13 – SANDOW BIRK

- Read: Two canti of your own choosing from Sandow Birk and Marcus Sanders, *Dante's Inferno* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 20014).

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15 – CANTO TBD: ANOTHER LOOK

- Read: TBD

FRIDAY, MAY 17 – FINAL PROJECT OVERVIEW

- Read:

### WEEK 10 – FINAL PROJECT RESEARCH

MONDAY, MAY 20 – RESEARCH SESSION

- No assigned readings

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22 – RESEARCH SESSION

- No assigned readings

FRIDAY, MAY 24 – RESEARCH SESSION

- No assigned readings

### WEEK 11 – FINALS WEEK

MONDAY, MAY 27 – MEMORIAL DAY

- Note: Classes do not meet

TUESDAY, MAY 28 – FINAL PROJECT DUE

- Due: Final Project