Dante’s Afterlife
HON 314

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Course Description
This course is devoted to one of the most fascinating and influential masterpieces of Western literature, Dante Alighieri’s Divine Comedy. Dante's poem relates one man's journey from the dark wood of error to the vision of truth, but as readers we not only observe the pilgrim's journey through the afterlife, we participate in it as well. We encounter questions about the nature of evil, the possibility for spiritual improvement, and the experience of true happiness, and we discover surprising parallels with our own time. While situating Dante's work within the intellectual and social context of the late Middle Ages, the course also challenges students to recognize Dante's presence in modern and contemporary global culture and mediascape.
Texts
• Various online study tools (see list at the end of the syllabus)

WHAT DO WE DO IN THIS CLASS?

Participation
A student receives an outstanding participation grade (A) when he or she is on time, brings readings and necessary materials to class, contributes regularly and in an informed manner to the class discussions, successfully collaborates with others, participates in all class activities, manifests professional behavior (also in email exchanges), avoids distractive use of technology, and helps others to do all of the above.

Travel Logs
During the course of the semester you will become a big creator of marginalia, side notes and comments with thoughts and questions, that you will mark directly on your copy of the *Comedy*. In preparation for each class, you will also organize and elaborate your notes in a travel log journal. The travel log is an essential part of your success in this course, because it’s the tool that will allow you to contribute to class discussions and make the most of your Dantean journey. Furthermore, the travel log represents the preliminary research and writing stage for both of your exploratory essays.
• The first travel log will relate to your reading of *Inferno*
• The second travel log will relate to your reading of *Purgatory* and your own teaching of specific cantos.

Paradise Group Extravaganzas
For the last Canticle, the travel log, will be substituted by a routine of collectively authored pieces. Working in small groups, you will complete a series of critical information responses to various cantos of *Paradise* (2-3 pages each). While the writing and submission will take place during class, each student is encouraged to take and organize notes in preparation for class.

Exploratory Essays
During the semester students will compose two explorative essays. Exploratory essays are different from argumentative essays in that they are concerned with the process of spawning and exploring ideas rather than proving a particular thesis statement or arguing for a particular point of view on an issue. These essays count as a portion of the final grade and must be completed if the student wants to be considered eligible to submit the final project later in the semester. Format: 750-1,000 words (include word count please), your favorite font, double-spaced please, MLA style. See handout for guidelines. Students of Italian who have completed ITAL 201 are required to complete one of these essays in Italian.

Reflective Letter “The Contemplation Bomb”
This letter is an opportunity to think about your course and clarify—for yourself and your me—how your knowledge and awareness of creativity, literature, religion/spirituality, history and culture have grown this semester. Organize your letter in a way that is easy to follow. Be specific and use
detailed examples, anecdotes and explanations. Format: 750-1,000 words (include word count please), your favorite font, double-spaced please, MLA stile.

Final Project
Emerging from your travel logs and exploratory essays, the final project will need to engage with several parts of *The Comedy*. Depending on the nature and genre of your chosen project, you will follow one of the approaches below:

- **An Argumentative Essay**: you will research and support a thesis linked to a chosen Dantean issue or theme. This will be an essay of penetrating theoretical import, using methodologies that are comparative, thematic, interdisciplinary or cross-cultural, and pointing to a contribution in the field of cultural studies or related fields. The essay will enter into a dialogue with at least 6 other scholarly voices. Format: 6–8 pages plus a works cited page (MLA citation style), double-spaced with one-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font.

- **A Narrative Essay**: you will tell your personal story of reading and reflecting on Dante's *Comedy* focusing on a chosen issue of theme. This first person essay, reflective in nature, is characterized by self awareness, and by emotional and intellectual and even spiritual responses to the experience of reading and discovering Dante’s work and world. This essay is anecdotal, experiential, and personal, allowing you to express yourself in a sincere and, quite often, moving way. The narrative will report your journey through Dante’s magnum opus, and engage in a dialogue with “travel companions” comprising at least 4 other scholarly voices, but also classmates and instructor’s perspectives. It is highly recommended to keep a journal for this assignment. Format: 12-15 pages, plus the bibliography page (MLA style), double-spaced with one-inch margins, 12-point Times New Roman font.

- **Artistic Project + Reflection Paper**: Students with already strong background and skills in a specific artistic medium (advanced control of the medium’s conventions and techniques) can propose the possibility of a project documenting and elaborating their research through their artistic medium. This project requires a thorough integration between the research and creative component, where the former supports the latter and the latter fuels the former. The student can chose to work in video or written media (various media are also possible, but you need to ask me for specific directions). Furthermore, the final product will be accompanied by a 3-4 pages critical reflection paper elaborating on the intellectual ramifications of your creative work vis-à-vis previously and newly selected bibliography. *Submission criteria: Video option: The final product must be recorded and submitted in CD, DVD, or web transfer. Written option: This can be a polished and completed shorter piece of creative writing or the draft of a longer piece.*

The project will be developed during the course of the semester during individual meetings with me as well as class presentations and workshops.

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<tr>
<th>Grade Breakdown¹</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation (three-parts)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inferno Travel Log</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purgatory Travel Log</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purgatory Student-Led Discussions</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paradise Extravaganzas (6)</td>
<td>12%</td>
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¹ A 100-94; A- 93-90; B+ 89-87; B 86-84; B- 83-80; C+ 79-77; C 76-74; C- 73-70; D+ 69-67; D 66-64; D- 63-60; F 59-0
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Reflection Letter (Contemplation Bomb)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
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<td>— Idea discussion</td>
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Absences and Punctuality
You are allowed one unexcused absence. Each additional unexcused absence lowers your grade of 2 percentage points. Two late arrivals (5 minutes or more late) count as one absence. In order to be granted an excused absence, you will need to provide evidence that you were unable to attend for causes beyond your control (illness, accidents, death in family, etc); a general note from Health Center is not considered acceptable documentation. Permission to submit assignments late or make-up examinations will be granted only with absences excused through appropriate documentation (e.g. a doctor's note specifically mentioning the student's inability to attend class). You should contact your instructor with any questions.
“The best book literature has ever achieved”
— J. L. Borges

OUR SCHEDULE
(Aspects of this calendar might change; always refer to the most recent online version)

INTRODUCTION TO DANTE’S WORLD

WEEK I
Tuesday, February 4. Reading Dante
  At home: Review syllabus.
  In class: Introduction to the course.

Thursday, February 6. Dante’s Times, Life and Works.
  At home: Thoroughly explore online study tools.
  In class: Introductory Lecture

PART ONE: INFERNO, “THE BLIND PRISON UNDER THE EARTH”
Approach: During the first part of the semester, we will be analyzing the entire first Canticle at the micro level. I will lead the way guiding you through an understanding of the moral order of Dante’s world, the author’s cultural influences, the poetry of the Comedy, and its significance across the centuries. *Begin your first travel log.

WEEK II
Tuesday, February 11. The Dark Wood.
  At home: Read Inferno 1 through 3, begin creating your marginalia and taking notes (supplement: The Aeneid, Book 6). Memorize at least the first 6 lines of canto 1, and if you’re good the first line lines of canto 3.
  In class: Discussion 1-3.

Thursday, February 13. Limbo and Lust.
  At home: Inferno 4-5 (supplement: Augustine’s Confessions, book 8).
  In class: Discussion 4-5

WEEK III
Tuesday, February 18. To the Citadel of Dis.
  At home: Sweep read Inferno 6-9 (Don’t get bogged down in the details; rather, try to get the overall feel and idea(s) of these cantos). Also focus on the impasse before the gates of Dis.
  In class: Discussion starting from canto 6.

Thursday, February 20. The Order of Hell.
  At home: Inferno 10-11.
  In class: Discussion 10-11.

WEEK IV
Tuesday, February 25. Violence!
** SPRING BREAK **

** PART TWO: PURGATORY, “CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN OF PURIFICATION OF THE SELF”**

*New approach: you now become the Guides along with me. From here on out, everyone will have assigned Cantos that they will have to read and take notes on, as well as specific Cantos to teach on given days. *Begin your second travel log (saving room in your notebooks to take notes on Cantos that will be taught to you. You get a big ‘teaching’ grade on the discussions that you will lead, and your notebook grade will depend on your taking notes on cantos taught to you.)*

** WEEK IX **


At home: *Purgatory* 1 (and Mandelbaum Notes) with a fine-toothed comb. Continue work on
marginalia.
In class: Discussion of *Purgatory* 1

Thursday, April 2. Ante-Purgatory ctd.
  At home: *Purgatory* 2-5
  In class: Discussion 2-5

**WEEK X**
Tuesday, April 7. Ante-Purgatory (ctd.)
  At home: Everyone reads *Purgatory* canto 9.
  In class: Students teach 6, 7, 8. Discussion of 9.

Thursday, April 9. First Terrace (The Prideful), Second Terrace (The Envious), Third Terrace (The Wrathful).
  At home: Everyone reads *Purgatory* 17 and 18.
  In class: Students teach 10, 13, 15, and 16. Discussion of 17 and 18.

**WEEK XI**
Tuesday, April 14. Fourth Terrace (The Slothful), Fifth Terrace (The Avaricious & the Prodigal), Sixth Terrace (The Gluttonous), Seventh Terrace (The Lustful), Threshold of the Earthly Paradise
  At home: Everyone reads *Purgatory* 21.
  In class: Discussion of canto 21. Students teach 22, 25 and 27.

Thursday, April 16. The Story of Our Love
  At home: Read *Vita Nova* 1-19.
  In class: Discussion of *Vita Nova*.

**WEEK XII**
Tuesday, April 21. The story of Our Love (ctd.)
  At home: Read *Vita Nova* 20-42.
  In class: Continue discussion of *Vita Nova* and its relationship to *The Comedy*.

Thursday, April 23. Divine Forest, Lethe, Golden Age, The Earthly Paradise,
  At home: Everyone reads *Purgatory* 30 and 33. **Perfect your *Purgatory* travel log for a grade.**
  In class: Discussion of canto 30 and 33. Students teach 29, 31 and 32.

Friday, April 24: **Exploratory Essay #2 due (via email).**

**PART THREE: PARADISE, “ASCENSION. THE GREATNESS AND FULLNESS OF LIFE”**
New Approach: In the third Canticle you will be your own guides almost exclusively. You will be assigned only certain cantos (you have access to online synopsis of all cantos) for which you will be keeping up your travel log notebook. In class, you will be completing on your own in pairs, as I hover around elaborate, close reading and thought questions on sweeps of Cantos.

**WEEK XIII**
At home: *Paradise* 1-5.
In class: *Paradise* at a glance PDF. Group work on extravaganza 1-5 (submit via email).

At home: *Paradise* 6-8.
In class: Preliminary remarks. Group work on extravaganza 6-8 (submit via email).

**WEEK XIV**

At home: *Paradise* 10, 11 and 13.
In class: Preliminary remarks. Group work on extravaganza 10, 11 and 13 (submit via email).

Thursday, May 7.
At home: *Paradise* 15 and 17. Fifth Heaven: the Sphere of Mars.
In class: Preliminary remarks. Group work on extravaganza 15 and 17 (submit via email). Be ready to discuss your final project idea.

**WEEK XIV**

Tuesday, May 12.
At home: *Paradise* 28 through 30. Sixth through Eighth Heavens, Ninth Heaven: the Primum Mobile.
In class: Preliminary remarks. Group work on extravaganza 28-30 (submit via email). Be ready to discuss your final project idea.

Thursday, May 14.
At home: *Paradise* 31 through 33. Tenth Heaven: the Empyrean.
In class: Preliminary remarks. Group work on extravaganza 31-33 (submit via email). Course evaluations. **Contemplation Bomb due.**

Final project due: _____
Online study tools

- **Danteworlds** (University of Texas at Austin) [http://danteworlds.laits.utexas.edu/](http://danteworlds.laits.utexas.edu/)
  A quick reference guide enriched by brief audio samples and visuals to better understand general meaning and key figures from all three books.

- **Digital Dante** (Columbia University) [http://digitaldante.columbia.edu/](http://digitaldante.columbia.edu/)
  A sophisticated scholarly tool which provides: an in-depth commentary of the entire *Comedy*, comparisons between the Italian and Maudelbaum and Longfellows translations, an effective system to explore intertextual connections between the *Comedy* and its sources, reproductions of manuscripts, and more.

- **The World of Dante** (University of Virginia) [http://www.worldofdante.org/](http://www.worldofdante.org/)
  A good archive of charts, maps, musical references and timelines to learn about the context of Dante and his *Comedy*.

- **The Dante Society of America** [https://www.dantesociety.org/](https://www.dantesociety.org/)
  A large site showing the multifarious activities of the Dante Society. Among its highlights, this site presents the comprehensive bibliography of Dante’s study ([https://www.dantesociety.org/publications/american-dante-bibliography](https://www.dantesociety.org/publications/american-dante-bibliography), also available in PDF in our class site).

- **Mapping Dante**: [http://www.mappingdante.com](http://www.mappingdante.com)
  A wonderful interactive map to study the places that influenced and are mentioned in the *Comedy*.

- **Image Archive**: [http://divinecomedy.library.cornell.edu/index.html](http://divinecomedy.library.cornell.edu/index.html)
  A comprehensive archive of illustrations and more.

- **13th century Moralized Bible:**
Program Objectives

Honors Program Learning Outcomes
Upon completing a course in the University Honors Program students will have:

a. obtained a starting point for integrative exploration of the development of cultures and intellectual achievements through a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives;
b. sharpened their ability to critically analyze and synthesize a broad range of knowledge through the study of primary texts and through engagement in active learning with fellow students, faculty, and texts (broadly understood);
c. understood how to apply more integrative and interdisciplinary forms of understanding in the advancement of knowledge and in addressing complex challenges shaping the world;
d. developed effective communication skills.

Course Learning Outcomes
Upon completing this course students will be able to:

• Complete the entire reading of the Comedy for literal meaning and aesthetic pleasure.
• Demonstrate ability to analyze selected passages in connection to major central critical and theoretical issues.
• Discuss relevance of Dante’s Divine Comedy across disciplines.
• Investigate and interpret the influence of Dante’s Divine Comedy in contemporary global culture and media.
• Improve critical thinking, reading, writing skills while examining some episodes of the poem using a variety of approaches and media.

Content

• Defining features of the cultural, religious and political context for Dante’s work.
• Theological, literary, geographic, and historical references in Dante’s Divine Comedy.
• Aims and layers of Dante’s narrative and poetic style.
• The structure of Dante’s afterlife and its religious and philosophic basis.
• Digital humanities approaches to the study of literature and Dante’s Divine Comedy in particular.
• Adaptations of Dante’s Divine Comedy in various media and its contemporary cultural influence.

University Policy

Chapman University Academic Integrity Policy
Chapman University is a community of scholars which emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated anywhere in the university.

Use of Technology
The mis-use of laptops is prohibited since it distracts fellow students and creates a barrier between me and you during class. Cellphones must be turned off and stored away. Distractive use of technology is considered unprofessional behavior and negatively affects your participation grade. This course employs features of Blackboard, some of which are directly connected to your success in the course. It is your responsibility to learn to use all the web functions which are relevant to this course ahead of time. You can access Blackboard through “My Chapman” on the Chapman University homepage. The course homepage also contains the updated version of the syllabus, which I recommend you refer to during the semester.

Students with Disabilities Policy
In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. The University, through the Center for Academic Success, will work with the appropriate faculty member who is asked to provide the accommodations for a student in determining what accommodations are
suitable based on the documentation and the individual student needs. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.

Equity and Diversity
Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlined in Chapman’s Harassment and Discrimination Policy: http://tinyurl.com/CUHarassment-Discrimination. Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the Dean of Students and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.