

English 635: Major Texts: Dante and Medieval Europe
Fall Semester, 2008
MWF 12:00-12:50 CH 268

TEXT INFORMATION:

Required Texts:

Dante Alighieri The Portable Dante Trans. and ed. Mark Musa.
C. S. Lewis: The Great Divorce (Harper)
Marie de France, Lais 2nd Ed. (Penguin)
The Song of Roland (Penguin)
Ariosto, Orlando Furioso (Penguin)
Njal's Saga (Penguin)
Anna Comnena, Alexiad. (Penguin)
Joinville and Villehardouin, Chronicles of the Crusade. (Penguin)

Francis of Assisi, "Canticle of the Sun." Brian Tierney's text and translation available at <<www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/stfran-canticle.txt>>.

"Thomas of Celano: First and Second Lives of Saint Francis," (excerpts from translations with intervening summary by Paul Halsall, available on at <www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/stfran-lives.html>.

Recommended Texts: C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image. Boccaccio's Decameron.

Instructor:

Dr. Gwenyth Hood
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Office Hours: MW 10-11; 2-4:00 TR 9:30-10:30; 1-2 and by appointment
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Course Description, Credits and Prerequisites:

Major Texts: An intensive study of any major text from any period of British, American or Anglophone literature, leading to mastery of the texts, its critical responses, and its influences. 3 hrs. Prerequisites: English 630, or permission of the Chair.

Objectives and Overview:

Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy is an encyclopedic poem, encompassing world history, as Dante understood it, all knowledge of the human world, and, of course, of life after death, as far as it was comprehensible to the human mind. Although written in Italian, it has the status of a world classic, and is an honorary member of the English Literary canon. Since Dante lived in Italy at the climax of the Middle Ages, his masterpiece both draws on and illuminates the stories from the past. Later writers drew upon up and elaborated his concepts further. The purpose of this course is to study Dante's text in detail, along with other texts which help to illuminate it,

some from before Dante's time, some from afterwards.

EVALUATION (ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING POLICY)

Formal Essays: Each graduate student will write two short essays (3-5 pp) of literary analysis on the readings (topics to be assigned) and one longer research paper (10-20 pp) on a subject to the student's own choice within the parameters of the course. Students may choose topics involving close literary analysis and interpretive problems, or they may choose topics relating the philosophical, intellectual, historical or artistic background to the literary texts under study. All formal essays must be written using correct MLA parenthetical documentation style.

Essay Examinations: There will be no midterm. The final will be a takehome exam, due on the day of the examination.

Informal Writing: Students will write short responses to prompts or study questions given before or during class. These responses must be handed in during class. Generally, students will receive either a check or a check minus and rarely, a check plus, on these assignments.

Oral Response: Students are expected to participate in class discussions, sharing their questions and insights on the texts. As part of this process, each student will be asked to sign up to discuss particular texts on particular days, on a schedule which will be announced throughout the semester.

Grading:

In the final grade, course work will be weighed in the following way: short essays, 10% each; major research essay 30%; journals 15%, oral participation 15% and final 10%.

Informal writing will be graded as follows: students who miss no more than three informal (prompt) assignments and receive no "check minuses" will receive, for their journal and class participation grade, the same grade they received on their second-best **formal** essay. (Final examinations do not count as formal essays.) For students who miss *more* than three informal assignments, or who receive some check-minuses, or who have both deficiencies, the instructor will assign grades on an individual basis. Also, the instructor will add points on an individual basis for those students who hand in every single prompt or who receive some check pluses, or who possess both merits.

Oral Response:

Graduate students will be asked to open discussion on at least two class days in the first half of the semester. In the second half of the semester, each will give an oral presentation involving the subject of his or her research essay

During the semester, all grades on **formal assignments** are given on a scale from 1-100. Points are assigned according to the nature of the particular assignments and will be

explained in connection with them. At the end of the semester, grades are averaged according to the scales listed above, and letter grades will be assigned according to the following scale: 90-100 = A; 80-89 = B; 70-79=C; 60-69.5=D; 0-59=F

Policy Statements:

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Students should not miss class except for the most serious of reasons. In general, the instructor requires students to adhere to the revised university absence policy found in the Undergraduate Catalog. As it states on pp. 120-121, "Excused absences fall into three categories: (1) university-sponsored activities; (2) absences as a result of illness or death in the family; (3) absences resulting from major religious holidays. For excused absences, the student should not be penalized. This means that any benefit or academic choice that accrues to students who are in class will not be denied to students with excused absences." Students should familiarize themselves with this section of the catalog, which can be accessed on the web at <
<http://www.marshall.edu/www/ugradcat/PDF/>> (click on "Academic Information"). Notice that students must apply in advance to the Dean of Students to obtain an excuse for a "major religious holiday." For absences due to illness or a death in the family, students must present specific kinds of documentary proof to the assistant or associate dean in his or her college "on the day the student returns to class."

It is the student's responsibility to obtain a University excuse for an absence when applicable. It is also the student's responsibility to arrange make-up work, when necessary. If an absence does not meet the University's criteria but the student believes it deserves an excuse, the student must contact the instructor outside class, preferably in an office visit, to explain why.

Marshall University's official policy is that students **can fail a class for excessive absences alone**. In this class, which regularly meets three times a week, six absences is defined as excessive. This includes classes which do not formally meet but for which an assignment is supposed to be handed in. This instructor reserves the right to fail students with **more than six absences**, if **any** of these absences is voluntary. Since students who fall behind also tend to hold back the other students, the instructor **will exercise this right** unless the student presents evidence that reasons for the absence were compelling, even if they do not happen to conform to University criteria. If the university does not excuse the absence, students must generally come to or call the instructor's office to explain the absence. Students should **never** use class time for this purpose, even informal or "workshop" classes. **Unexplained absences are presumed unexcused.**

POLICY ON MISSED OR LATE WORK:

Students should hand in all papers on time. Major assignments, without exception, will be docked half a grade level (five points) for every day they are late.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS--SUBJECT TO POSSIBLE CHANGE

Week 1

Monday, August 25: Syllabus, Introduction.

PROLOGUE: MODERN RE-VISIONS.

Wednesday, August 27. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*. Preface, and pp. 1-49.

Friday, Aug. 29. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*. pp. 51-96.

Optional supplement: read C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image "The Medieval Situations," pp. 1-13 and "Reservations" 13-22.

Week 2

Monday, September 1 LABOR DAY. NO CLASS. UNIVERSITY CLOSED

Wednesday, September 3. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*. pp. 96-146.

PART I: LOVE, PRESERVER AND DESTROYER

Friday, September 5. The Portable Dante. Skim Musa's introduction, pp. ix-xliii. Dante's Vita Nuova I-XIV The Portable Dante pp. 589-604.

Also read Marie de France, "Le Fresne."

Optional supplement: read Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Sixth Day, Story 9 [Guido Cavalcanti].

Week 3

Monday, September 8: Vita Nuova XV-XXIX The Portable Dante pp. 604-633.

Also read Marie de France, "Chaitivel" and "Chrevrefoil."

Wednesday, September 10: Vita Nuova XXIX-XLII The Portable Dante pp. 633-649 (to end)

Also read Marie de France, "Laustic."

Friday September 12: Marie de France: "Guigemar," "Eliduc," "Milun."

PART II: POWERS OF EVIL, AND INDIVIDUAL RESISTENCE

Week 4

Monday, September 15: Song of Roland skim introduction; read pp. 29-91.

Wednesday, September 17: Song of Roland pp. 92-156

Friday, September 19: Inferno Cantos 1-8.

Optional supplement: read C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image "Selected Materials: The Classical Period" pp. 22-44. Also, Boccaccio's Decameron, Fourth Day, Story 1, Story 9 [Death for the sake of love]. Also, Book VI, Chapters 77-81 of Villani, Giovanni.

Selections from The Chronicle of Villan, Taken from Florentine 1823 edition. Trans. Rose E. Selfe, Available on line at <www.Elfinspell.com/VillaniStart.html>.

[Background of Battle of Monteperti, Faranati degli Uberti, King Manfred, and Bocca.]

Week 5

Monday, September 22: Inferno Cantos 9-19

Optional supplement: read Boccaccio's Decameron, First Day, Story 2 [Simony and the moral reputation of Rome]. Also Lucan's On the Civil War, Book 5, lines 423-830. [Erichtho's necromancy.]

Wednesday, September 24: Inferno Cantos 20-28

Friday, September 26: Inferno Cantos 29-34

Essay 1: Draft for Peer Review.

Optional supplement: read C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image "Selected Materials: The Seminal Period" pp. 45-121.

PART III: CIVILIZATION AND EMPIRE; REDEMPTION OR CORRUPTION?

Week 6

Monday, September 29: Njal's Saga. Skim introduction. Read pp. 39-126 (Chapters 1-49)

Wednesday, October 1: Njal's Saga pp. 127-181 (Chapters 50-84)

Friday, October 3: Njal's Saga pp. 182-234 (Chapters 85-112)

Optional supplement: read C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image "The Longaevi" pp. 122-138.

Week 7

Monday, October 6: **Essay 1: Due.** Njal's Saga pp. 234-287 (Chapters 113-135)

Wednesday, October 8: Njal's Saga pp. 287-336 (Chapters 135-150)

Friday, October 10: Njal's Saga pp. 336-355 (Chapters 150-159)

Week 8

Monday, October 13: The Alexiad of Anna Comnena: skim translator's preface, 7-9, and Introduction, 11-16. Read Anna Comnena's preface and Book I, pp. 17-72.

Wednesday, October 15: from Book III pp. 103-111 and 122-133; from Book V pp. 155-173; from Book VI pp. 191-198 (Robert Guiscard's death; the birth of an imperial heir).

Optional supplement: read C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image "The Heavens" pp. 92-113.

Friday, October 17: Orlando Furioso: Cantos 1-12 (especially Cantos 1-4, 7, 11-12)

Week 9

Monday, October 20: Orlando Furioso Cantos 13-24, (especially Cantos 14-18, 23-24)

Wednesday, October 22: Orlando Furioso Cantos 25-36 (especially Cantos 25, 27, 32-34, 38)

Friday, October 24: Orlando Furioso Cantos 37-46 (especially Cantos 44-46).

Week 11

Monday, October 27: Purgatory Cantos I-5. Musa pp. 195-222

Optional supplement: read Boccaccio's Decameron, Second Day, Story 6 [Reversals of fortune during the wars between Charles of Anjou and Manfred's heirs]. Tenth Day, Sixth Story (The Magnanimity of Charles of Anjou). Tenth Day, Seventh Story (The Magnanimity of Peter of Aragon).

Wednesday, October 29: Purgatory VI-XII. Musa pp. 222-262

Friday, October 31: Purgatory XIII-XIX. Musa pp. 263-303

Last Day to Drop an Individual Course

Week 12

Monday, November 3: **Due: Essay 2. Draft for peer review.** Purgatory XX-XXVI. Musa pp. 303-346

Wednesday, November 5: Purgatory XXVII-XXX. Musa pp. 346-369

Friday, November 7: Purgatory XXX-XXXIII. Musa pp. 369-387

PART IV: OUTWARD ENDURANCE, INWARD VISION?

Week 13

Monday, November 10: **Due: Essay 2** Skim introduction to Chronicles of the Crusades. Read Joinville's Life of Saint Louis, pp. 163-213

Wednesday, November 12: Joinville Life of Saint Louis, pp. 213-264.

Friday, November 14: Joinville Life of Saint Louis, pp. 265-306

Week 14

Monday, November 17: Joinville Life of Saint Louis, pp. 307-353

Wednesday, November 19: Francis of Assisi, "Canticle of the Sun." Brian Tierney's text and translation available at <<www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/stfran-canticle.txt>>.

"Thomas of Celano: First and Second Lives of Saint Francis," (excerpts from translations with intervening summary by Paul Halsall, available on at <www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/stfran-lives.html>.

Friday, November 21: Paradise 1-7.

NOVEMBER 24 (Monday)- November 29 (Saturday): THANKSGIVING/FALL BREAK - CLASSES DISMISSED

Week 14:

Monday, December 1: Paradise Cantos 8-14. Oral Reports Begin

DEAD WEEK BEGINS

Wednesday, Monday, December 3: Paradise Cantos 15-21.

Optional supplement: read Boccaccio's *Decameron*, First Day, Story 7; Fourth Day, Fourth Story [Legend involving William II of Sicily and his Muslim allies.]

Friday, December 5: Paradise Cantos 22-29.

Monday, December 8: Paradise Cantos 30-33 3.

Final Exam: Friday, December 12, 10:15-12:15

Due: Major Essay