ITAL 4147: Visualizing Dante's Inferno
Global Seminar: Florence, Italy (May 14-June 1, 2018)
Prof. Suzanne Magnanini, Department of French and Italian

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Course Description and Objectives:

Many of Dante’s most fantastic images in the *Inferno* are formed through references to the medieval art and architecture that surrounded him: the enchained giants ringing the lower circle of hell are compared to the towered walls of the Tuscan city of Monteriggioni; simonists are stuck upside down in holes in the ground that resemble the baptismal fonts in Pisa; heretics emerge from tombs that recall medieval Italian graveyards. In constructing his literary Hell, Dante drew inspiration from visual representations of the underworld he saw in the mosaics in Florence’s Baptistery and Giotto’s frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. In turn his poem inspired many artists, such as Sandro Botticelli, to depict Hell in manuscripts, paintings, or frescoes and greatly influenced the creation of a new iconography of the underworld. In this global seminar we will study Dante’s *Inferno*, visit the sites he references in order to help his readers visualize Hell, and analyze visual representations of the underworld created from the eleventh through sixteenth centuries. This course provides students with a profound understanding of one of the key texts of the Western literary canon and of its influence on the visual arts in the centuries following its creation. Students will also hone their critical thinking skills while developing the skills necessary for perceptive literary and cultural analysis.

The course will be taught in English with all readings in English; no knowledge of Italian is necessary.

Required Text (on sale at CU Bookstore):


Required Readings Available on D2L:


Ovid. Metamorphoses. (selections)


**Required Work/Grading Policy:**

- On site presentation: 10%
- Site Journal (min. 5 entries; Due 6/1): 10%
- Participation/Attendance: 10%
- Final Exam (Due: 6/1): 30%
- Canto/3-5 pages (Due: 7/15): 10%
- Final Research Paper/8-10 pages (Due 7/15): 30%

**Description of Assignments:**

Detailed assignment prompts can be found on D2L.

**On Site Presentation:** Each student will choose a site well before we arrive in Florence and prepare a fifteen-minute presentation that provides: 1) basic background (historical, social-cultural, artistic) information regarding the site; 2) a description of how the site has changed since Dante’s time/what Dante would have seen there; 3) an analysis of the relationship between the site and Dante’s poem. I’ll provide you with specific questions to help you organize your presentation.

**Site Journal:** Each student will keep a site journal and turn in at least 5 entries at the end of the trip. Students will log their impressions of the site we visit and will note relationships between the art/architecture we see and Dante’s poem. The purpose of the journal is to provide basic observations that can be used as a springboard for the final paper.

**Final Exam:** Will include brief identifications (20%) and essay questions (80%) focusing on Dante’s poem and the sites we have studied during the program.
**Your Canto.** Each student will write an original canto imitating Dante’s structure, language, and imagery. Dante formed his fantastic hell from well-known sites, historical and literary figures, and sins of his day. You will set your canto in your own world (contemporary Florence or Boulder), choose a contemporary sin, and invent a fitting contrapasso. The canto may be written in prose or verse (2-3 pages). Film, musical and/or visual art projects will be considered upon consultation with the instructor. An example will be provided on D2L.

**Research Paper.** Students will develop and discuss their topic with me while we are in Florence but carry out their research once they have returned to the US. Students will be able to consult with me in the States regarding their argument and bibliography. As an alternative to a traditional research paper, students may prepare and describe a 3-site tour for which they carry out research. (10-12 pages).

**Participation/Attendance:** Because this is an intensive course, I expect you to attend every class and every site visit. You must notify me immediately if you are going to miss class or a site visit. I expect you to arrive on time each day prepared to discuss the day’s reading, participate in class activities and complete any mini-assignments.