

Inferno

Prof. Alison Cornish

ITAL-GA 2310

Thursdays, 12:30-3:15pm



Why would anyone need Hell? Why do people believe in eternal damnation? What is the concept of an Inferno for? When Dante emerges from a dark wood and is unable to climb a mountain clothed in light, he finds that he must go by another path, accompanied by Reason (aka the ancient poet, Virgil). And this path, which eventually will climb to the top of a mountain and beyond, goes down – down through every form of evil, with all the seductions and horrors of each, to the rock bottom, because evil does, it turns out, have a bottom.

For this seminar, knowledge of Italian is helpful, but not required as all readings will be available in translation. Interest in connecting the Inferno to its intellectual, cultural, and political roots, as well as to those of its aftermath, in whatever cultural tradition, will be strongly encouraged. In addition to assiduous participation in weekly discussion of assigned texts, students will develop their own research projects. These will be fostered in intermediate stages such as preliminary close reading, analysis of a short work of scholarship, literature review, a consideration of different methodologies, and peer review. A brief (15-20 minute) presentation of the project or related material will precede the final paper of around 20 pages (5000 words). Open to interested and motivated undergraduates.