

## Poetry/Drama 1210: Heaven and Hell

Dear Students;

I hope you are all doing well.

Thank you so much for all the effort you put into an excellent batch of essays and projects overall. I can tell a lot of thought has gone into many of these. I am now marking, which is time consuming, but hope to have the bulk of them done by the end of the week. I will email you your results individually when done. Typically, your essay grade will be a reflection of your overall grade (unless otherwise stated).

Now that the first essay/project has been submitted, we can start thinking about the final essay! This will be a compare and contrast essay of two poems, or two dramas of two different periods in the history of literature. We will go into this in more detail in the forum and zoom meetings, but some of the resources this week will get you thinking about it! Hence, you will find a link to an excellent overview of all the periods of literature/poetry/drama.

This week, we are looking at the very famous work of Dante Alighieri's: **The Divine Comedy**. I am sure you have heard of it! Most people have, as it is a cornerstone of literature and drama.

Although the Divine Comedy is about a traveller who visits hell and heaven, it is also a love story: both the nature of divine love, and the way in which divine love is analogously related to human love. Dante spent his life in unrequited love, and his longed-for love (whom he fell in love with when he was just 9 years old!), Beatrice Portinari, is featured in the story.

The original drama is very long and I encourage you to read the whole thing one lazy summer afternoon! In the meantime, we will be studying an abridged version of the Divine Comedy, hosted on Glyn Hughes wonderful "Squashed Editions". If you have never come across this website, I highly recommend it to you: not that I think you should only read abridged versions of the classics, but it is a great way to familiarize yourself with a wide variety of classics before you get around to reading the whole text.

In fact, I much prefer students to read shortened or abridged versions of texts, rather than summaries on sites like Sparknotes (which are fine) as reading texts for yourself allows you to form your *own* opinions about texts, rather than be influenced to think of texts only in the way someone else thinks about them! Don't be afraid to form your own opinions about texts, and what they mean. Literature is always open to interpretation and discussion, and who knows: you may have a much better insight into a text than Sparknotes provides.

To begin, you should research the following terms to help orient yourself to the story:

- Simony
- The Seven Deadly Sins
- Black Guelphs
- White Guelphs
- Also, do some background research into the life of Dante himself, and the historical and cultural environment he was writing in and about.

Once you have concluded your preliminary research, you should:

- Watch the TedX video which introduces the text;
- Read the abridged version of the Divine Comedy on Squashed Editions;
- Browse through the love poems of Dante in the link provided;
- Start formulating your own interpretation of Dante's work!

During the week, we will delve into the themes of the Divine Comedy and will hold a zoom meeting, which will be posted in the Forum.