Dante’s Inferno

OSHER 775-001

Dates: Tuesdays, 9/22/15 – 11/3/15, no class 10/13
Times: 3:15PM-4:45PM
Location: Commander’s House, Ft. Douglas
Instructor: Chris Horner, cdhorner@msn.com

Course Overview


Overview: This will be a discussion seminar, with limited lecturing by the instructor—except perhaps for the first session in order to provide necessary background. The Inferno is a highly readable and vivid poem, a quality very much captured in Jean Hollander’s modern English translation. Our primary goal will be to read and enjoy the poem—reading it as a poem that still speaks to us today—and hopefully avoid the potential danger of getting overwhelmed by scholarly notes and background. By the same token, however, the Inferno is a literary work written over seven centuries ago in an era radically different from our own in its assumptions and belief systems. Our knowledge of Europe around 1300 may be hazy at best. The opportunity to collectively discuss and explore the poem, aided by the canto-by-canto commentary of Robert Hollander—a leading Dante scholar—should greatly enhance both our enjoyment and our understanding.

Syllabus:

9/22: Cantos 1 & 2 and (optional) Robert Hollander’s Introduction (xxiii—xl)

9/29: Cantos 3-9 (River Acheron to the Gate of Dis)—Limbo and Circles 1-5, the sins of incontinence

10/6: Cantos 10-17 (beginning of “Lower Hell”)—Circles 6 and 7, heresy and violence; descent to Circle 8

10/13: NO CLASS (Fall Break)

10/20: Cantos 18-23 (beginning of Circle 8—with its 10 separate categories of sins)

10/27: Cantos 24-30 (completion of Circle 8)
11/3: Cantos 31-34 (Circle 9 and the frozen floor of Hell—Satan). If time allows, we may also read Canto 1 of the *Purgatorio*, to get a sense of the change in tone and atmosphere as the pilgrim enters the next realm of the afterlife—a realm in which hope exists (if so, a handout of Canto 1 will be provided).