

HUMS 4901B Dante's *Divine Comedy* Erik Stephenson Winter Term 2021



Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a love poem dedicated to the memory of his Beloved Lady, Beatrice Portinari. It is equally true to say that it is a poem *about* love. It presents, in poetical form, a comprehensive theory of the nature, origin, function, aim, corruption, and purification of human love. In this course, we will be engaging in a close reading of the *Comedy* in its entirety. We will do so in the aim, first and foremost, of gaining a thorough understanding of its theory of love. Since Dante did not develop his account of love ex nihilo, we

will be studying the *Comedy* with an eye to the many medieval theories of love that it is clearly indebted to or reacting against. These will include, most notably, the theory of courtly love formalized by Andreas Capellanus, as well as the many accounts of the metaphysical, ethical, political, and religious dimensions of love put forward by such theologians as Augustine, Hugh of St. Victor, Bernard of Clairvaux, Ibn Sina, and Thomas Aquinas. But since, as has often been said, the *Comedy* is both encyclopaedic in its scope and yet also firmly rooted in the history and politics of 13th and 14th century Italy, our study of it will inevitably require that we acquaint ourselves with, among other things: the cosmology, natural science, rhetorical theory, and teaching methods of Dante's day; the origins and history of the mendicant orders; the thirteenth-century struggle between Guelfs and Ghibellines and the longer history of conflict between the Empire and the Papacy to which it is tied; and certain developments in 13th and early 14th century visual art and architecture.