**ITA 2700** **Great Italian Works in English Translation**

This course will introduce students to some of the most famous works and authors in Italian and European tradition. Among other questions, we will ask, What makes these works great? What constitutes a classic? Why are these works still relevant to burning social and cultural issues today? How can they contribute to the enhancement of our personal existence and effectiveness in our world and our appreciation of life? To our moral sensibilities and aesthetic awareness?

Italy produced one of the first and richest of modern European literatures. The “three crowns” of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio were the earliest harbingers of the Renaissance emerging already at the height of the Middle Ages. These original and ingenious authors established canonical models for subsequent literature across the continent. They remain today primary references for epic, lyric, and novelistic prose world-wide. This medieval flowering is the glory of Italian literature and sows the seeds of the humanist and historicist culture disseminated throughout Europe through the influence of the Italian Renaissance. Italy produced classics in all genres of the arts, visual, musical, and literary. We will look at Renaissance epics by Ariosto and Tasso; Enlightenment philosophy with Vico; the Romantic poetry of Leopardi and the historical novel of Manzoni; modern fiction and film with Morante, Calvino, and Pasolini.

**Objectives:** To acquire an elementary knowledge of Italian cultural heritage and the Italian literary tradition; to develop one’s own ideas about one’s own cultural heritage and to begin to articulate a sense of cultural identity. Objective knowledge of the texts will serve as a basis for reflection on ourselves and our history. Each student will be guided in shaping a personal discourse to articulate their own most crucial concerns for going about the task of constructing a meaningful life. The great texts will be placed in their historical contexts by lectures and critical readings, but then each student will learn to integrate this material into a frame of reference of their own and appropriate it into their own emergent life project.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

1. Regular attendance and participation in seminar discussion.

2. Two papers on individual topics chosen in correspondence with the students’ own interests. By writing the papers, each student will develop a research project exploring their own way of understanding selected ideas that prove seminal for the emergence of our modern world.

3. 10-minute short-answer quizzes on each work

The papers will count for up to two thirds of the grade, the quizzes for another third. Contribution to class discussion will be evaluated for deciding borderline cases.

**Academic Integrity:**

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with Vanderbilt’s undergraduate honor system:

<https://studentorg.vanderbilt.edu/honorcouncil/honoratvanderbilt/>

**Sample Schedule of Weekly Readings**

Week 1 Introduction to Great Works concept and Italian Cultural History + Dante, *The New Life* (I-XI)

Week 2 Dante, *The New Life* (XII-XXXXII)

Week 3 Dante, *Divine Comedy* (Inferno I-V, X, XV; XXVI, XXXII-XXXIII)

Week 4 Dante *Divine Comedy* (Purgatory I-II, X-XII, XXVI-XXXII; Paradise XI, XXXIII)

Week 5 Petrarch, *Canzoniere* (1-6; 106, 126 (“Chiare fresche e dolci acque”); 128 (“Italia mia, benché ’l parlar sia indarno”), 129 (“Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte”), 311, 346, 366 (Vergine) Kline trans.),

Week 6 Boccaccio, *Decameron* (Prologue, I,1; Payne trans.)

Week 7 Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* + Leonardo’s painting and design

Week 8 Tasso, *Jerusalem Liberated* (selections) + Michelangelo’s sculpture and architecture

Week 9 Vico, *The New Science* (Frontispiece, On Method, Poetic Metaphysics, selections)

Week 10 Leopardi, poems (“Sylvia,” “Ginestra”) + Manzoni, *The Betrothed* (selections)

Week 11 Manzoni, *The Betrothed* (selections) + operatic music by Verdi

Week 12 Morante, *History* (selections)

Week 13 Calvino, *Invisible Cities* + *Futurist Manifesto* of Marinetti

Week 14 Pasolini, *Uccellacci e Uccellini* or *Mamma Roma* (film)

Week 15 Papers, students present their projects to the class

Robert M. Durling,

*Petrarch’s Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*, trans. and ed. by Robert M. Durling (Cambridge,

MA: Harvard University Press, 1976)