# **Ghosts and Otherworldly Visions in Italy: c. 1300-1600**

**Italian 470**

**Fall 2022, Penn State University**

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Classroom and Time: 105 EE West

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:35-11:50

Welcome to ghost storytelling and visions of the afterlife in early Italian literature and culture. Motivations for telling ghost stories go far beyond entertaining or inducing fear in an audience. Ghost stories can engage some of the most profound human inquiries – mortality, grief, commemoration, spirituality, ethics, human imagination, and the violations of proper societal behavior. This course will explore such issues in a range of readings (poetry, short stories, diaries, and dialogues) in works by Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, Ficino, and Machiavelli, among others. In addition to a foundational survey knowledge and contextualization of some of the greatest works of medieval/Renaissance Italian literature, successful students of this course will receive a deep understanding of the potentials of authorial power and the rhetorical strategies that storytellers use to convince or manipulate the beliefs and emotions of their readers through close study of the primary texts, active in-class discussions, practice in critical interpretation, and individual experiments in the creative composition of spirit narratives. This 3-credit course is taught in English, and no knowledge of Italian is expected.

Prerequisite: Minimum 5th-semester standing or permission of instructor.

Required Texts:

* Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Corbaccio,* available at The Student Bookstore Downtown.
* All the other readings for this course are provided on the course website.

Requirements for the Course:

The final grade (totaling 100 points) is calculated according to the following eight aspects:

1. **30 points. Class engagement.** I cannot stress enough how important it is to participate intelligently in class discussions. Consistently practicing your literary interpretive skills in a dynamic learning environment and articulating and defending your ideas are skills that will be rigorously emphasized in this course. Students must volunteer intelligent comments to receive credit for class engagement; points are assessed five times throughout the term (for six points each time). Students who must be absent from class may choose to fulfill some class engagement points by submitting an in-depth analysis of select study questions. Strategies for earning maximum class engagement points will be discussed during the first week of class. No points can be earned by students who openly hinder class discussion in some way (such as by sleeping, inappropriately using cell phones/other electronic devices, etc.).
2. **20 points. Final creative/interpretive project due on or before Monday, December 12.** The final for this course, equivalent in effort to a typical 10-12-page research paper for a 400-level literature class, will consist of a project with both creative and interpretive aspects. Specific guidelines are on the course website, and students are strongly encouraged to discuss their project plans and ideas with the instructor. NOTE: All students submit a one-page description of their proposed final project on or before Thursday, October 27 (see below). This project takes the place of a final exam; there is no final exam during exam week for this course.
3. **10 points. Two take-home quizzes.** Each quiz is worth 5 points. Both offer students the opportunity to display their progress in reading comprehension and analysis, and the ability to apply theoretical concepts discussed in class to a given text. Please also see the **Special Note Concerning the Italian-Language Subsection** **(\*)** below.
4. **10 points. Leading class discussion.** Each student will have the opportunity to lead class discussion one time during the semester. It is the opportunity for a student to guide the direction of the class discussion on one author’s work by posing one or two interpretive questions, polling one’s peers about a theme or point of focus, etc. More information will be provided in anticipation of guided discussions and a schedule will be determined during the first week.
5. **10 points. Homework Assignments and In-class Activities.** Summaries of the readings, critical reactions and interpretations, and short-answer warm-up questions are just some examples of these assignments and activities. Please bring lined paper and a pen to class every day. Five points will be assigned around the midterm, and five points will be assigned during Week 13.
6. **10 points. Two out-of-class activities.** For full credit, each student chooses to complete two out-of-class activities related to this course — ghosts and/or storytelling. Each activity is worth a maximum of five points. One possible activity is the **Individual Conference.** Understanding the intellectual goals and interests of my students is important enough to me that I dedicate time for every student to drop in during my office hours or make an appointment to talk with me for at least 15 minutes once before the end of the sixth week of class (that is **before Friday, September 30**). This activity cannot be “made up” if it is missed or delayed until the second half of the semester. During my conference with you, I am interested in learning what authors/topics in this course are of greatest interest to you and why, which aspects of the course are difficult or unclear to you and what I can do to assist your learning, what ideas you might have for your final project, how this course fits into your major/minor/broader university course curriculum, what personal reasons might motivate you to enroll in a course about ghost storytelling, or any similar discussion topic of your choice. The only way to prepare for your conference is to have one or two topics in mind to bring up with me. In the past, other possible activities have included: **The Marathon Read, The Libraries Micro-Storywriting Contest, The PSU Alumni Haunted Valley Ghost Tour**,and **The Halloween-themed Art After Hours at the Palmer Museum.** More information will follow and students may request the option of substituting another relevant event of interest for one of these. Demonstrated student enthusiasm for the chosen activities is the primary criterion in the assigning of points.
7. **5 points. In-class presentation.** Students offer a summary and preview of the projected outcomes of their final projects as work-in-progress presentations in class during the last two weeks of classes. Details and precise schedule will be determined in class.
8. **5 points. One-page description of the final project**. Due on or before Thursday, October 27.

**\* Special Note Concerning the Italian-Language Subsection:** Any student who has already successfully completed any 300-level Italian course and wishes to maintain Italian-language skills may elect to participate in the Italian-language subsection of this course. Sign-ups will occur during the first week of classes. Subsection participants will meet periodically to discuss readings in Italian and will complete one other assignment in Italian. Doing so takes the place of (potentially earning the equivalent points of) the two take-home quizzes. Most of the course readings will be made available in Italian on Canvas. Details to be discussed in class.

Point Scale:

A 95.0-100.0 B+ 87.7-89.9 C+ 75.0-79.9 D 60.0-69.9

A- 90.0-94.9 B 83.3-87.6 C 70.0-74.9

B- 80.0-83.2 F 0.0-59.9

Please note:

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University’s educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at [814-863-1807](tel:814-863-1807)(V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit the Office for Disability Services website at <http://equity.psu.edu/ods/>. In order to receive consideration for course accommodations, you must contact ODS and provide documentation (see the documentation guidelines at:  <http://equity.psu.edu/ods/guidelines/documentation-guidelines>). If the documentation supports the need for academic adjustments, ODS will provide a letter identifying appropriate academic adjustments. Please share this letter and discuss the adjustments with your instructor as early in the course as possible. You must contact ODS and request academic adjustment letters at the beginning of each semester.

Penn State University defines academic integrity as the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. All students should act with personal integrity, respect other students’ dignity, rights, and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts (Faculty Senate Policy 49-10).

Please follow all PSU health protocols and see Faculty Senate Policy 42-27- Class Attendance and the Academic Policies and Procedures for Undergraduate Students (<http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/health/welcome/illnessVerification/>). A student should attend every class for which the student is scheduled and is responsible for all work covered in the course. In the event a student must miss an evaluative event (such as the student’s presentation days), the student must justify the absence. Legitimate, unavoidable reasons for absence on an evaluative event day are illness, injury, or family emergency. Requests for missing an evaluative event due to reasons that are based on false claims may be considered violations of the policy on Academic Integrity (Policy 49-20). The student should reach out to discuss with me via Zoom the consequences of significant prolonged illnesses or injuries resulting in more than three consecutive absences from class, no later than the third consecutive absence.

As policies permit, I offer in-person office hours at the abovementioned time and location. Limited consultations are also available via Zoom by appointment.

Consistent with University Policy AD29, students who believe they have experienced or observed a hate crime, an act of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment that occurs at Penn State are urged to report these incidents as outlined on the [University’s Report Bias webpage](http://equity.psu.edu/reportbias) (<http://equity.psu.edu/reportbias/>).

Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients’ cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

[Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park  (CAPS)](http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling/)  
(http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling/): 814-863-0395

Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400  
Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

**Grade discussions happen in person with the instructor before the last day of class.**

Italian 470 is designed to be an active and collaborative environment. Reading and discussing ghost stories outside of class with peers is an excellent way to deepen your understanding of the texts. Students are strongly encouraged to share their class notes, and when absent, are responsible for getting class notes from other students who attended the lesson in question. However, all other written components of the course (final project, proposal, written homework assignments, and quizzes) must be individual, non-collaborative efforts. Dishonesty does not benefit anyone and cannot be tolerated. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of quizzes, submitting the work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students who are found to act dishonestly will receive academic sanctions and will be reported to the University’s Judicial Affairs office for possible further disciplinary sanction.

## Provisional Calendar

**Week 1: First Things First**

* Tuesday, Aug. 23. Introductions/Objectives for the course. Telling ghost stories: why do we do it? Has ghost storytelling changed over time or across cultures? How do narrative strategies for ghost stories differ from those of other kinds of tales?
* Thursday, Aug. 25. Ghosts/Spirits/Saints/Lemures/Demons/Shades/Wraiths/Apparitions/Manifestations/Visions/

Phantoms… What exactly are they? What did people of this era THINK they were? What about classical & Biblical precedents? What is the rhetorical figure of *eidolopoeia*, and how does it influence the power or force of narrative impact?

**Week 2: Dante the Great Exemplar**

* Tuesday, Aug. 30. The most concise introduction ever to Dante and to his *Divine Comedy.* The “invention” of Purgatory? Other visions of the afterlife.
* Thursday, Sept. 1. Discuss Dante’s *Inferno* 1 & 15 and *Purgatory* 25. How does Dante describe the spirits of the Other World? How do the souls of the damned differ from those of the blessed in Purgatory? How does Dante treat the spirit of his dead rhetoric professor? What is the purpose of representing communication between the living and the dead? [Olivia leads the discussion.]

**Week 3: Dante is Said to See Ghosts in this World, Too, and Others Claim to See Dante’s Spirit**

* Tuesday, Sept. 6. Continue the discussion of the excerpts from Dante’s *Comedy.* Discuss Matteo Palmieri, “A Heavenly Vision After the Battle of Campaldino.” Dante’s dead friend is said to appear to him while Dante is fighting the Ghibellines of Arezzo in 1289. Why is this narrative significant? [Megan leads the discussion.]
* Thursday, Sept. 8. Discuss Marsilio Ficino, “Florence Welcomes Dante Upon His Return from Exile.” Why does Ficino picture Dante’s spirit receiving a laurel crown in Florence? [Bianca leads the discussion.]

**Week 4: Boccaccio and His Use of Ghosts**

* Tuesday, Sept. 13*.* Introduction to Giovanni Boccaccio’s life and works. Discuss Boccaccio’s “Some Accidents that Occurred in the Course of Writing *The Divine Comedy*” from the *Life of Dante.* Dante after his death somehow had to tell a living person where to find the final missing cantos of *Paradise*, right? [Belle leads the discussion.] CLASS ENGAGEMENT #1.
* Thursday, Sept. 15. Discuss selections from Boccaccio’s *Lives of Illustrious Men*. Boccaccio imagines the ghosts of famous men coming to his study to recount their great accomplishments for him to write down. Among them is Dante, as well as a doppelgänger of Petrarch. What are the primary concerns of these spirits? [Sara leads the discussion.]

**Week 5: Boccaccio Speaks with the Ghost of His Beloved Lady’s Dead Husband**

* Tuesday, Sept. 20. Interpret Boccaccio’s *Decameron* 5.8 and 7.10. In one *novella*, a man hatches a ghostly plan to teach a lesson to the lady who has spurned his love. In the second story, two friends vow that whoever dies first will come back and tell the living one what the afterlife is like. What morals should we draw from these ghost stories? [Abby B leads the discussion.]
* Thursday, Sept. 22. Discuss Boccaccio’s *Corbaccio,* a dialogue in which two men speak. One is the dead husband of the lady whom the second man (still alive) now loves. Who benefits from this communication between the living and the dead, and how exactly? [Kiera leads the discussion.]

**Week 6: Review and the First Quiz.**

* Tuesday, Sept. 27. Continue the discussion of *The Corbaccio.* Review for the quiz.
* Thursday, Sept. 29. Quiz #1. CLASS ENGAGEMENT #2.

All individual conferences must be completed by **Sept. 30** in order to receive points.

**Week 7: Petrarch’s Letters to the Dead and to Us**

* Tuesday, Oct. 4. Preview the life and works of Francis Petrarch. The ideals of Humanism. Begin discussing the Selection of Petrarch’s Letters to the Dead. [Christy leads the discussion.]
* Thursday, Oct. 6. Continue the discussion of Petrarch’s letters, including his “Letter to Posterity.” There is no ghostly character featured in this reading, so how does it fit into this course? [Danielle leads the discussion.]

**Week 8: Perspectives from Priests**

* Tuesday, Oct. 11. Fra Girolamo Malipiero (aka Maripietro) takes upon himself a particular spiritual charity case: to rewrite Petrarch’s love letters to Laura as spiritual praises of the Virgin Mary. How does that turn out? See for yourself in the excerpt from Malipiero’s *Spiritual Petrarch.* [Michela leads the discussion.]
* Thursday, Oct. 13. Discuss one of St. Bernardino of Siena’s sermons, in which he warns his congregation about visions of the dead. What should we believe? [Corey leads the discussion.]

**Week 9: Ghosts in the “Real” World?**

* Tuesday, Oct. 18. Discuss Giovanni Morelli’s diary as it is presented by Richard Trexler in “Father and Son,” *Public Life in Renaissance Florence.* Morelli documents his encounter with the ghost of his dead son Alberto. [Isa leads the discussion.] CLASS ENGAGEMENT #3.
* Thursday, Oct. 20. Interpret Marin Sanudo’s chronicle of a haunting event in Chioggia and compare it to the way he documents other unusual sightings.

**Week 10: Comic and Satirical Ghosts**

* Tuesday, Oct. 25. Discuss Ludovico Domenichi’s tall tales. There are a number of very short ghost stories, including one about a dead Pope in hell who wishes he had behaved better while alive, a ghost who jumps into bed with his grieving (and now freaked out) friend, and some scary naked ghosts that play tricks on some travelers. Is there anything unusual about these ghostly tales? How are the stories told? Who benefits from the telling? [Renata leads the discussion.]
* Thursday, Oct. 27. Discuss Nicolò Franco’s Letter to (the Dead) Petrarch. Who is Franco imitating? Who is he criticizing? And why? CLASS ENGAGEMENT #4.

**Final Paper/Project Proposals Due Oct. 27 by midnight.**

**Week 11: Repentant Ghosts?**

* Tuesday, Nov. 1. Discuss Girolamo Benivieni’s sonnets featuring Pico della Mirandola’s ghost. Who wants a new tomb? … And why? [Kiarat leads the discussion.]
* Thursday, Nov. 3. Discuss Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Dialogue on Language*, which features a ghost of Dante who wishes he were alive so that he could die again. How is Dante being “used” here? [Ethan leads the discussion.]

**Week 12: More on Ghosts Haunting Authors (and Vice Versa)**

* Tuesday, Nov. 8. Discuss Piovano Arlotto’s Ghost of Leonardo Bruni. What is Arlotto saying about Bruni and Jacopone da Todi? [Abby G leads the discussion.]
* Thursday, Nov. 10. Antonio Manetti’s Ghost of Guido Cavalcanti. Does Manetti believe in ghosts or not? What are we to believe? [Lindsay leads he discussion]

**Week 13: Review and Quiz #2**

* Tuesday, Nov. 15. Review and perspectives.
* Thursday, Nov. 17. Quiz #2. CLASS ENGAGEMENT #5

**Thanksgiving Break**

**Week 14: Perspectives and Presentations**

* Tuesday, Nov. 29. Presentations by: Megan, Bianca, and Abby G
* Thursday, Dec. 1. Presentations by: Kiarat, Kiera, Renata, Danielle, and Michela

**Week 15: RIP**

* Tuesday, Dec. 6. Presentations by: Christy, Abby B, Lindsay, and Belle
* Thursday, Dec. 8. Presentations by: Corey, Ethan, Olivia, Sara, and Isa

**Monday, Dec. 12: LAST DAY TO HAND IN FINAL PROJECTS** (via Canvas before midnight).