

Lit 165: Imaginary Worlds
Responding to Dante's *Inferno*

Directions: By today you should have read and studied about one third of Dante's *Inferno*. You've had a chance to read the course notes, consider some of the questions I've distributed, listen to some lecture, study parts of the work both individually and within a small group in class. Slowly or quickly, but I would think inevitably, your impressions of the work are forming—not only what strikes you as meaningful or powerful (if anything), but possibly what confuses or disturbs you (if anything). These are responses I'd like you to share. I'm also especially interested in finding out whether you think this medieval work has any significance for us today, whether we can “relate” to Dante's scheme in our modern world. I'd like you to respond (informally) in writing to the work (so far) on your own terms, but since that is too vague a request for most students, I'll ask you to answer the questions below as fully and as thoughtfully as you can. Concentrate on the quality of your answers. Don't worry if you aren't able to answer all of the questions.

1. Dante's system of “contrapasso” (which you've witnessed since Canto III) is an attempt to represent an image of “perfect” justice. Of the ones you've read so far, which of Dante's contrived punishments seems most just to you? Which seems least just?
2. If you had the opportunity to improve on Dante's system, would you change it? If so, describe how. IF not, explain why you think he gets it right. What is the challenge, in your opinion, of trying to devise a system of “perfect justice”?
3. What is the most vivid scene in the book? What do you understand about this scene? Why do you think it is striking to you personally?
4. Based on the characters in the book so far, do you think Dante has an accurate or inaccurate understanding of “human nature”? What makes you think so?
5. What is most confusing about this book for you?