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Four Languages and a Poem: McDunn '16 Analyzes Dante

Aug. 14, 2014

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Instead of lounging lakeside with the latest beach read, Illinois Wesleyan University student Tim McDunn '16 (Elmhurst, Ill.) spent his summer vacation reading some of the world's greatest works of literature, in their original languages, including Dante's epic poem *The Divine Comedy*.

McDunn is a recipient of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's *Re-Centering the Humanities* grant for student scholars at Illinois Wesleyan University. The **Mellon Scholars** program allows students to conduct research with faculty members over the summer.

As a **Greek and Roman Studies** major, McDunn is interested in the influence of classical ideas on medieval Christianity and western thinking. He is examining how Dante used logos, pathos and ethos to frame and interpret classical works and comment on their relationship to Christianity.



Tim McDunn

Reading texts ranging from Virgil's *Aeneid* in Latin to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in ancient Greek, McDunn is focusing on the works that profoundly influenced Dante. Analysis of the Old and New Testaments and St. Augustine's *City of God*, among other books, has helped McDunn trace the historical relationship between pagan and Judeo-Christian traditions.

"These texts help to illuminate the way Christian attitudes toward paganism developed before and after the Peace of the Church," said McDunn, referring to the early 4th-century edict guaranteeing Christians full liberties in practicing their religion.

"By the time of Dante, Christianity was sufficiently self-assured, as both a religion and a culture, to make allowance for such humanism as found in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* and in *The Divine Comedy*," he added.

McDunn said he has long admired Dante's poetry, but added that his summer reading of *The Divine Comedy* has deepened his appreciation.

"The poetic beauty, insight and creativity never cease to amaze me," he said. "The profound depth and humble simplicity of this poem is probably what has surprised me the most in this project."

McDunn, who is also majoring in **music composition**, is mentored by Assistant Professor of Philosophy Andrew Engen and Assistant Professor of History Amy Coles. After graduation, McDunn plans to pursue graduate degrees in music composition.

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