

Historical Allusions in Dante's Inferno: Their Implications in Teaching History and Literature

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Abstract: *This research focused on the historical allusions in Dante's Inferno. Specifically, it aimed to find out the historical allusions in the first book of the Divine Comedy, its images, and its symbols, identify how these historical allusions are used in Dante's Inferno; describe the categories of these historical allusions; analyze or interpret the historical allusions; and relate their implications in literature and history. It covered only the first canticle of the poem which is the Inferno. Excluded in the study were the last two books of the Divine Comedy- the Purgatorio and the Paradiso. This study was a qualitative research, particularly descriptive-analytical using textual analysis focusing on the historical allusions found in Dante's Inferno. Being a qualitative one, it did not employ statistical treatment of data but an in-depth and careful analytical description of the historical allusions in Dante's Inferno. The study was anchored on New Historicism which treats literature not as a reflection or product of a social reality but as one of several, sometimes antagonistic practices. Through this story, Dante is preaching the perfection of God's justice. He shows that Hell exists to punish sin and the sinners suffer punishment to a degree befitting the gravity of their sin, as to correspond allegorically to that sin's nature.*

Keywords: Historical, allegory, allusions, implications, allegorical images, symbols, historical allusions, textual analysis, seven deadly sins

1. Introduction

The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri which is an allegorical masterpiece includes history in the scenario. It is not only a literary piece for appreciation but also a lesson in life. It not only enhances literary appreciation, it also reinforces one's knowledge about History. The historical allusions in the Inferno give the readers a vivid description of the morality and politically corrupt people during his time.

Dante's Inferno was situated and thus account for all history within the poet's vision, so that part of the beauty and persuasiveness of that vision is going to come from its comprehensiveness.

To foster love for literature and to relish the excitement of incorporating literature teaching in World History/ Asia and the World, the researcher deemed to come up with the analysis of Dante's Inferno which can be used in teaching Literature and History.

Corollary to the literary, mythological and biblical allusions, she believes that historical allusions should also be studied since they are also utilized in language and literature and even in the social sciences aside from formal and informal conversation. Besides she is handling History and output of this study can surely enrich the lessons In World History to have more lively discussion. It is hoped that these allusions can be used to underlie the similarities between the past and present and point the common features of historical events of different eras. Hence, this study was conducted.

2. Objectives

In the textual analysis of historical allusions on Dante's Inferno, the following objectives were intended to:

- 1) Find out the historical allusions in the first book of The Inferno, the images and the symbols;
- 2) Describe the categories of these historical allusions;
- 3) Identify how these historical allusions are used in Dante's Inferno;
- 4) Analyze or interpret historical allusions on the basis of sins committed;
- 5) Relate their implications in teaching literature.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted at the University of Eastern Philippines- main campus.

This study is a qualitative research particularly descriptive-analytical using textual analysis focusing on the historical allusions found in Dante's Inferno.

Being a qualitative one, it did not employ statistical treatment of data but an in-depth and careful analytical description of the historical allusions in Dante's Inferno.

The analyses of this study followed the pattern:

- 1) Read the entire poem(Inferno).
- 2) Listed down all the historical allusions found in all circles of hell. The researcher used books in history in order to find out why these particular characters or prominent figures in history were placed in hell. Knowing what they are in history served as a springboard or bases for analyzing their place in the Inferno. A full understanding of these characters in history was therefore needed. She identified further if the allusions were used as "simple allusion" or an 'allusion field"/spread allusion.
- 3) Each historical allusion was categorized for the appropriacy of its role in hell. The stories of these historical allusions were noted and analyzed according to the sins that they committed which were based on the seven deadly sins: lust, gluttony, avarice, wrath, sloth, pride and envy.

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4) Drew implications for teaching literature and history.

4. Discussion/ Analysis of the Epic

The Allusions from History and Their Place in Hell.

From the Inferno translated by Allen Maundelbaum, the historical allusions were taken, analyzed and interpreted.

"I found myself within a shadowed forest." (1-2:13) Shadowed forest is the dark wood of life on earth where someone lived in sin. It is the wood of political darkness of Florence, Italy, of papal corruption of the absence of imperial authority.

"And I was born, though late, sub Julio," (1-70:17) Sub Julio is in time of Julius Caesar.

First Circle- LIMBO

Limbo is the place for the unbaptized and virtuous pagans. It is inhabited by those who were worthy of being in paradise but lived before they were baptized. The not having this first sacrament makes their punishment spiritual. They have strong desire to see God, but being unbaptized, this desire will never be satisfied. Dante addresses one of the moral problems of Christianity here. Baptism is necessary for salvation, but it is unfair that all good people who lived before Christianity should suffer in Limbo. Dante however, gave them a painless and honorable fate for they were put in a contemplative and calm place. In Limbo are found Homer, Horace, Ovid and Lucan.

Homer, Horace Ovid and Lucan

"That shade is Homer, the consummate poet, the other one is Horace, satirist; the third is Ovid, and the last is Lucan." (IV-88:35)

Like other of his time, Dante did not know the works of Homer directly. Horace is the satirist. Ovid died in exile.

Dante implies that these people poets are all virtuous pagans, who though not sinful, did not accept Christ. They are not punished in a native sense, but rather grieve only their separation from God, without hope of reconciliation.

Second Circle- LUSTFUL

The souls here are forever buffeted by violent storms. The sin is closely linked with love according to Dante and that is why he considered it as relatively mild. Readers can see that there are more female sinners in this circle. It is because women are the seductresses. In the circle are seen Cleopatra and Francesca de Ramini.

Cleopatra

"The other spirit killed herself for love, and she betrayed the ashes of Sychaeus; the wanton Cleopatra follows next." (V-63:43)

Cleopatra the Queen of Egypt whose beauty was legendary, was mistress first of Julius Caesar and then Marc Anthony. Rather than be taken to Rome as captive, she killed herself

into a poisonous asp. She is placed in a circle higher than the seventh circle, second ring, the place of suicide.

Francesca de Ramini

"Then I addressed my speech again to them and I began Francesca, your afflictions move me to tears of sorrow and pity." (V-97:45)

The historical identities of Francesca and her lover are well known. Francesca da Ramini was married around 1275 to Gianciotto Malatesta of Ramini for political reasons. She fell in love with her husband's younger brother Paolo and when her husband discovered the adulterous love, he killed them both.

Third Circle- GLUTTONS

Dante's awakening to the third circle, where the gluttonous are supine. The souls assigned here are flailed by cold and filthy rain. In this circle, no historical allusion was found.

Fourth Circle- THE AVARICIOUS AND THE PRODIGAL

The punishment in this circle is that the avaricious and the prodigal move in opposite directions, endlessly pushing around the weights.

Avarice

"These to the left-their heads bereft of hair- were the clergymen, and popes and cardinals, within whom Avarice works its excess." (VII-46:61)

Church was associated with avarice reflects its immense wealth in Renaissance Italy; religious taxes, goods and land seized by the church armies and pious bequests made by wealthy citizens all contributed to its riches. Monasteries and convents owned huge expenses of land.

Fifth Circle- THE WRATHFUL AND THE SULLEN

Dante distinguishes two kinds of wrath. One is active and ferocious; it vents itself in sheer lust for inflicting pain and destruction on other people. The other is sullen, the withdrawal into a black sulkiness which can find no joy in God or man or the universe. In this circle Filippo Argenti is found.

Filippo Argenti

"They all were shouting at Filippo Argenti" (VIII-67:71)

Filippo Argenti was a historical figure, a black quelp, is a political enemy of Dante who is now in the fifth circle of hell. Filippo was nicknamed "Argenti" which means silver because he had his horse shod with silver.

Sixth Circle- THE HERETICS

Entombed with red hot sepulchers, the heretics suffered great torments. Heresy according to Dante means an obduracy of the mind; a spiritual state which defied consciously; an intellectual obstinacy. In this circle, Dante saw a field of graves, burning tombs were spread around and inside them, souls suffered great torments. In this circle, historical places Arles, Pola, Jehosaphat, Sodom and Cahors are found. Historical figures like Epicurus and Guido Calvacanti are found.

Arles and Pola

“Just as at Arles, where Rhone become marsh, just as Pola, near Quamero’s gulf” (IX-112:83)

Arles, a town in Provence is the site of the famous Roman metropolis later a Christian cemetery.

Pola, in Northerneastern Italy now in Yugoslavia was the site of another famous Roman metropolis which today has disappeared.

Jehosaphat

“They’ll all be shuttered up when they return here from Jehosaphat” (IX-10:87)

The last judgment day will take place in the valley of Jehosaphat, the Kidron Valley, source of the stream that separates Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.

Sodom and Cahors

“So with its sign, the smallest ring has sealed both Sodom and Cahors and all of those who speak in passionate contempt of God.” (XI-49:97)

Sodom, a city in Palestine and Cahors a city in France became synonymous with sodomites and usurers respectively.

Seventh Circle- First Ring- THE VIOLENT AGAINST NEIGHBORS

The tyrants and murderers are immersed in the river of boiling blood. Alexander the Great and Attila the Hun are found in this circle.

Alexander and Dionysius

“Here they lament ruthless crimes; here are both Alexander and the fierce Dionysius who brought such years of grief to Sicily.” (XIII-106:109)

Alexander the Great of Macedon was the King of Macedonia who conquered most of the world, including powerful Persian empire. His victory over Darius III, king of Persia won him the title “King of Asia.”

Dionysius the Elder was a tyrant of Syracuse.

Attila

“And these ivine justice torments Attila he who was such a scourge upon the earth.” (XII-133:111)

Attila and his brother Bleda succeeded their uncle as leaders of the Huns, a wandering tribe. It is believed that Attila killed his brother in a hunting trip to become the sole ruler. He then began terrorizing Europe and Asia. His invasion of Gaul ended in defeat at the hands of the Romans and the Visigoths. Attila invaded Italy but did not capture Rome because of a request made by Pope Leo I.

Seventh Circle- Second Ring- VIOLENT AGAINST THEMSELVES AND AGAINST THEIR POSSESSIONS

The suicides are transformed into strange trees, and the squanders are hounded and rent by bitches. This vision of

Hell is one of the most striking scenes in the Inferno. The desolate forest made up of black, twisted trees which bled if they were broken seems strangely fitting as the place of punishment for suicides. As they refused life, they remain fixed in a dead and withered sterility. They are images of self-hatred, which dries up the very sap of energy and makes all life infertile.

Lano

“Lano, your legs were not a nimble at the jousts of Toppo!” (XIII-120:119)

Arcolano of Siena, a member of the Maconi family. He belongs to the notorious “Spendthrift Club”, a company of fanciful banquets, festivities and presents that could contrive.

Seventh Circle- The Third Ring- THE VIOLENT AGAINST GOD**Seventh Circle- The Third Ring- THE VIOLENT AGAINST GOD**

First Zone- The Blasphemers

The Blasphemers are lying supine on fiery land. In this zone, no historical or political allusions are found.

Second Zone- The Sodomites

These are people who are engaged in homosexual activity. The sinners are punished endlessly crossing the fiery sands beneath the rain of fire. Sodomy or homosexual vice is so named from Genesis XIX. The images of the sand and burning rain are taken from the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis XIX. The sodomites are chosen as image of all perverse vices which damage and corrupt the natural powers of the body. Their perpetual fruitless running forms a parallel, on lower level, to the aimless drifting of the Lustful in Canto V. The sinners are distinguished Florentine noblemen and political leaders. No historical allusions are found in this zone.

Third Zone- THE VIOLENT AGAINST NATURE AND ART (USURERS)

Each is seated beneath the rain of fire with a purse, bearing his/her family’s heraldic emblem around his neck. The image of the violent against nature and art is derived from nature. They set looking up the ground, because they have sinned against the labor that should have cultivated its resources. The usurers are punished by being made to sit under the rain of fire with their purses bear emblem to identify their families. The emblems are the costs of arms of families notorious for their usury.

Turks and Tartars

“No Turks or Tartars ever fashioned fabrics more colorful in background and relief.” (XVII-16:151)

Turks and Tartars were famous in the middle Ages for their Artistry in weaving.

Vitaliano

“Remember that my neighbor Vitaliano shall yet sit here, upon my left hand side.” (XVII-68:153)

Vitalianodel Dente of Padua, chief magistrate of Vicenza in 1304 and Padua in 1307.

Eight Circle- First Pouch- THE PANDERS AND SEDUCERS

The sinners in the first pouch are scourged by demons as they unsuccessfully tried to escape the whips. They are the panders and the seducers who deliberately exploited the passions of others and so drove them to serve their own interests, are themselves driven and scourge.

VenedicoCaccianemico

“Must be VenedicoCaccianemico dell’ orso (1228-1302) was a Bolognese whom Dante places in this Bolgia because he was said to have acted as a pander to his own sister, Ghisolabelle.

Eight Circle- Second Pouch- THE FLATTERERS

The sinners in pouch are immersed in excrement. The sinners are waded through masses of human excrement which they tries to cleanse themselves.

Eight Circle- Third Pouch- SIMONIACS

The sinners in this circle are plunged heads down, into the holes in the rock with protruding feet tormented by flames. The sin of simony is named after Simon Mugus. Simony means the dale of spiritual goods such as ecclesiastical offices or indulgences.

San Giovanni

“They did not seem to me less broad or more than those that in my handsome San Giovanni were made to serve as basins for baptizing.”(XIX-16:169)

San Giovanni is the Florentine Church.

Dejected Soul

“Whoever you may be, dejected soul.” (XIX-46:171)

The dejected soul is Pope Nicolas.III, Giovanni Orsini. He was elected in 1277 and died in 1280.

Boniface

“Are you already standing, already standing there, O Boniface?”

Boniface VII (1235-1303) born Benedetto Caetani, was a Pope of Roman Catholic Church from 1294-1303.

Constantine

“Ah Constantine, what wickedness was born and not from your conversion.” (XIX-115:175)

Dante alludes here to the medieval legend, supported by a document of “The Donation of Constantine”, thought of as historical fact at that time.

Eight Circle - Fourth Pouch- DIVINERS, ASTROLOGERS AND MAGICIANS

In this pouch, the sinners walk forward with their heads turned backward on their bodies so that tears ran down their backs. This is an exact distortion of humanity. Dante did not

believe in Astrology, so as sinners look forward, they move forward.

Guido Bonatti

“See their Guido Bonatti; see Asdente, who now would wish he attended to his cord and leather, but repents too late.” (XXI-7:189)

Arsenal at Venice, built in 1104 was one of the most important shipyards in Europe, enabling the Venetian Republic to remain a great sea power.

Great City

“There I was born and raised, in the great city. (XXIII-95:211)

Great city refers to the city of Florence.

That One

“That one impaled there, when you see.” (XXIII-1`15:213)

That one is Caiaphas, the highest priest under Pontius Pilate.

One Man

“To let one man- and not one nation- suffer.”

One man is Jesus.

Eight Circle- Six Pouch- THE HYPOCRITES

In this circle, the sinners are walking in glided cloaks lined with lead. The sinners were dressed in magnificent glided robes, but the robes were made out of heavy lead and so the spirits wept as they trudged around. The lead cloak is the image of hypocrisy, presenting brilliant show but weighing lead so as to make spiritual progress impossible.

Red Sea

“Or all the land that borders the Red Sea.” (XXVI- 89:221)

The region near the red sea is Arabia.

Eight Circle- Seventh Pouch- THE THIEVES

The punishment in the pouch of thieves is the sting of serpents, being reduced to ashes and being restores to their original former shape only to be stung. The punishment here seems to be based on the idea that there are not enough human bodies for everyone. The thieves are reduced to continually stealing each other’s human shape, where on earth they stole other’s goods.

Cianfa

“Where was Cianfa left behind? (XXV-43:229)

CianfaDonati was a noble Florentine whom early commentators speak of as both a cattle thief and a thief who broke into shops.

Gaville

“The other one made you, Gaville, grieve.” (XXV-151:229)

Gaville is a small town near Florence.

Eight Circle- Eight Pouch- THE EVIL COUNSELORS

The evil counselors are punished by being clothed in flames that burn them. The evil that they advised is the same evil

that made them suffer. "O you whom I turn my voice." (XXVI-19:247)

The speaker is Guido de Montefeltro, from the region of Romagna. Guido was a renowned Ghibelline leader whose conversion Dante had promised as exemplary. Toward the end of his life he made peace with the pope and entered Franciscan order.

Lombard

"Who only now were talking Lombard saying." (XXVII-20:247)

Lombardy is the name used to indicate Northern Italy.

HIGHEST Priest and the Prince of the New Pharisees

"Had not the Highest Priest- may he be damned! (XXVII-70:251)

"The Prince of the New Pharisees" (XXVII-86:251)

Pope Boniface was the highest Priest and the Prince of the New Pharisees.

Lateran

"Waging war so near Lateran." (XXVII-86-251)

Lateran Palace was the papal residence. Dante is alluding the feud between Pope Boniface, who belonged to the Caetani family- and the legitimacy of Celestine V's abduction and thus, the election of Boniface as Pope.

Predecessor

"My Predecessor did not prize are two." (XXVII 105:251)

Predecessor was the ascetic of Pope Celestine V who was frightened into abdication when Boniface depicted the sins invariably connected with holding public office.

Eight Circle- Ninth Pouch- SOWERS OF DISCORD

Sowers of discord are perpetually circling and wounded. When wounds heal they are wounded again by a demon with a sword. The sin is primarily of the intellect. The sinners of this pouch are the founder of Islam and also leaders of contemporary heretical order.

Apulia

"Who once, within Apulla's fateful land," (XXVIII-7:253)

Puglia in middle ages, desolated in the whole of Southern Italy..All battles mentioned are place in that area.

Trojan

"Had mourned their blood. Shed at the Trojan's Land." (XXVIII-9:257)

Trojan men in their Roman descendants are referring to the Samnite wars and the Tarentine wars.

Livy

"Even as Livy writes, who does not err," (XXVIII-12:257)

Ceperano

"With all the rest whose bones are still piled up at Ceperano," (XXVIII-16:257)

Ceperano was a small town in Southern Lazio, located at the strategic pass on the border between the papal states and the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily, where the Barons of Apulia were pledged to defend for Manfred, the natural son of Frederick II.

Mohammed

"See how maimed Mohammed is!" (XXVIII-31:259)

Mohammed is the founder of Islam, was believed by some to be an apostolate Christian.

Fra Dolcino

"Then you, who will perhaps soon see the sun, tell Fra Dolcino to provide himself." (XXVIII-55:259)

Fra Dolcino was head of a reformist order known as the Apostolic Brothers. A sect pronounced heretical and condemned to extirpation by Clement V. Dolcino including her mistress were burned alive at Vercelli in 1307.

Pier de Medecina

"Remember Pier Medicina if you ever see again the gentle pain." (XXVIII-73:261)

This historical Pier de Medecina was a habitual sower of discord especially between the Polenta and Malatesta families.

Curio

"His tongue slit in his gallet: Curio who was once so audacious in his talk!" (XXVIII-101:261)

Caius Curio was bribed by Julius Caesar to leave Pompey's party and betray his former friends.

Bertrand de Born

"Know that I am Bertrand de Born- the one who gave bad counsel to the fledging King." (XXVIII-135:265)

Geri del Bello was the first cousin to Dante's father and a notorious troublemaker. It would seem that he was killed by a member of the Sacchetti family, that his death was avenged by the Aleghieri in 1310.

Eight Circle- Tenth Pouch- THE FALSIFIERS OF METALS

The sinners are plagued by scabs, lying on the earth, scratching furiously. Dante in this part of hell wanted to cover his ears with his hands so as not to hear the lamentations of the sinners afflicted with scabs like leprosy. Leprosy hardly exist in western cultural consciousness today, but in Dante's time the disease was more common and much more terrifying.

One

"One answered me, My city was "zo"." (XXIX-109:271)

The One who answers is Griffino of Arezzo, who cheated the Gullibel Alberto of a large sum of money by promising to teach him the art of Daedalus-flying.

Cappochio

“And see that I am the shade of the Cappochio.” (XXIX-136:271)

Cappochio, a Florentine or Siense was burn at stake as an alchemist.

Eight Circle- Tenth Pouch- Second Group- COUNTERFEITERS OF OTHER PERSONS (Impersonators)

Gianni Schicchi

“That phantom’s Gianni Schicchi, and he goes raging, render others so.” (XXX-32:277)

Gianni Schicchi (who died before 1280) of the Cavalcanti family of Florence, was renowned-and here punished for impersonation.

Master Adam

“Look now and pay attention to this, the misery of Master Adam.” (XXX-61:277)

Master Adam was possibly an Englishman who came to Bologna after a stay in Brescia. He counterfeited the gold coin.

Ninth Circle- First Ring- (CAINA) TRAITORS TO THEIR KIN

In this ring, sinners are immersed in the ice, heads bent down. Their eyes and lips are frozen, shut with tears, and miserable with cold. It is named after Cain who treacherously killed his brother Abel. There is no historical allusions here because the sinners here are mostly Ghibelline and Guelp political parties.

Ninth Circle- Second Ring- (ANTENORA) TRAITORS TO THEIR MOTHERLAND

Those guilty of this sin is plunged in the frozen lake, gripped by ice. It is named after Antenor, the Trojan warrior who betrayed his city to the Greeks. This section has no historical allusions since sinners here are noble Ghibelline .

Ninth Circle- Third Ring- (PTOLOMEA) TRAITORS TO GUESTS

These sinners are punished by making them out from the ice, eyes sealed by frozen tears. It is named after Ptolemy, governor of Jerico, who killed Simon, his father-in-law and high priest, and two of his sons while they were with him. Sinners here are famous Guelphs and Ghibellines who became traitors to their guests.

Judecca

“That forms the other face of the Judecca.” (XXXIX-116:317)

The last subdivision of the ninth circle, where traitors are punished, was named after Judecca after Judas Iscariot, who committed the greatest betrayal of all.

Images and Symbols

Dante’s Inferno takes the form of allegory, whose literal plot deals entirely in images and symbols. His images are pictorial and symbolic.

From the opening lines of the Inferno, it states, “When I journeyed half of our life’s way, I found myself in the dark forest.” The dark forest symbolized sinful life on earth.

When Dante entered the dark forest, he met three beasts which symbolize sins and temptation. The **Leopard** symbolizes lust, the **Lion** pride and the **She-Wolf** avarice. **Virgil**, his guide represents Human Reason. **Beatrice**, though she is not present in hell symbolizes one of the “God-bearers” who inspired Dante through his journey. The **Greyhound** symbolizes the redeemer who will restore the low-lying Italy.

The inscription in the gateway of Hell “**Abandon all hope all ye who enter here,**” where hell is described as a city. It is walled and gated like medieval city.

The **Golden Leaden cloaks** are worn by hypocrites that make spiritual progress impossible. The **Fortune Tellers** whose heads are twisted and they look forward are compelled to walk backward. The **Desolate Forest** of the **Suicides** symbolizes the image of the self-hatred.

The **Black Wind**, lovers are drifted into self-indulgence and were carried away by their passion, so they drifted forever and the bleeding trees.

1. Conclusion and Implication for Teaching Literature and History

Based on the analysis, it was found out that historical allusions like people, events and places are found in Inferno. Furthermore, the Inferno was rich in imagery and symbolisms. Dante used allegorical figures in the poem. Allegorically, Dante was portrayed as a Christian who journeyed through hell.

Through teaching Dante’s Inferno in Literature and History will hopefully motivate the students not to indulge with the seven deadly sins that would destroy their image in the society. So that they will not be afraid of the punishment he or she receives in the hell

In a literature classroom, literature is taught taking more emphasis on the biography of the author. Looking into the depth of the literary piece is sometimes neglected. Dante’s Inferno should read closely to identify the symbolic personages present in the poem. It implies that more emphasis be given to the messages of the lines to understand the symbols. Teachers should be innovative enough in teaching Dante’s Inferno by employing more techniques in enhancing the literary piece. Showing the beauty of the lines to the students will somehow add to their enthusiasm.

Recommendations

- 1) Political Allusions should also be studied for it will give a vivid description of politically corrupt people in the past and in the present.

- 2) Future researchers should also study the last two books of Dante's Inferno- ThePurgatorio and the Paradiso.
- 3) Literature should be incorporated in teaching History.

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