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Analysis of Dante Alighieri’s *The Divine Comedy*

**Introduction**

Dante Alighieri’s *The Divine* is a poetic masterpiece that points out critical issues of concern to humankind. The author poetically presents humanity and spirituality through an imaginative vision of life in hell, purgatory, and paradise. The epic poem was written between 1306 and 1320 and thus outlines and perpetuates the medieval world-view of the afterlife while attaching the religious elements and various stylistic features to bring out literary timelessness. Further, Alighieri employs verbal, tonal, and symbolic effects and integrates different literary devices to provoke thought, strong reaction, whether positive or negative, absorbing the reader and, in the process, achieving its purpose. The poet uses allegory (figurative and literal meanings), metaphors, satire, and irony among other critical literary devices for plot and character development. In one volume, *Inferno,* the author utilizes the different styles and devices to provoke thought and reaction and present the reality of the human reason, faith, and the supernatural truth.

**Critical Analysis**

Dante Alighieri uses the first person point of view in writing the poem. The author utilized this form of narration which was rarely used in the 14th century especially when the author uses his/her character as the main character for a purpose. One of the possible arguments is that the author wanted to attach weight to the issues presented in *The Divine Comedy.* According to Sheppard (22), using the first-person point of view creates a connection with the protagonist, immediacy, and inherent believability of the arguments or ideas advanced in the work. The poet focuses on outlining key issues of concern whose believability is often among the spiritual persons and those with religious affiliations. Acting as the protagonist and using the kind of narration allows the audience to connect with the protagonist and boost the believability of the story concerning the hell (inferno), purgatory, and the paradise. The first person perspective creates an inherent believability (Sheppard 23). The reader is likely to believe the dialogue between Francesca and Dante than s/he is likely to believe the same if presented through the second/third person perspectives.

Dante Alighieri employs numerous stylistic features in Canto V and the entire poem to portray the society accurately and provoke thought. In *The Divine Comedy,* allegory is used extensively to develop the plot and characters therein. The author uses the different characters allegorically to present critical aspects. For instance, the involvement of Virgil, who guides Dante throughout the Inferno, serves a great significance in the development of the poem. Virgil symbolizes the human reason, which guides people and protects them through sinful world. The character is composed, measured, sober, resolute, knowledgeable, and wise, and constantly protects the narrator from the hostility of monsters and demons such as Charon and Centaurs (Alighieri, Durling and Martinez 195). The character presents all the traits that often demarcate the human reason. As such, the author manages to allegorically present the character and thus manages to influence the readers’ views on sin and life in hell. Further, the allegorical representation of the lives of people such Francesca and Ciacco play a significant role in portraying the sinful nature of human and the impacts of sin on the sinners and the society. Other characters are used throughout the poem to represent particular types of sin such as sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust among others. The application of allegory plays a critical role in the development of the plot and characterization and the passage of the message the author intends to pass.

Dante Alighieri shows impressive mastery and application of metaphorical writing and imagery in the poem (Alighieiri 392; Seyed-Gohrab 1). The author uses metaphors alongside other figures of speech broadly to portray the society in which he lived accurately. The dark forest used in the poem depicts the hardships within the society, the moral decadence, socio-political corruption, and failure of social and religious institutions. The author employs the figure of speech to outline the corruption experienced in the political platforms and within the church. Additionally, the struggle uphill represents the continuous quest for redemption and search for what is right within the human person. However, as the Inferno portrays the society, sin makes it difficult for the achievement of redemption and upright living. For instance, Dante uses a lion, a leopard, and a wolf to presumably portray some of the types of sin such as pride, lust, and avarice, which influenced life significantly at the time (Alighieri, Durling and Martinez 36).

Dante managed to tackle issues that continue to influence the society hitherto, thus the element of literary timelessness. Sin continues to influence co-existence in the society, affecting humanity in a major way. Exploitation of the poor by the wealthy and the political class, lust, avarice, and pride amongst other issues such as moral decadence caused by the media continue to impact on the society greatly. Essentially, the major issues that the poet identified during the 14th century remain of critical concern in the 21st century. As such, the poem remains relevant to the current society. Its timelessness stems from the critical analysis of the society at the time, a closer look into the human person, and the human nature among other aspects that influence humanity and the existence of the human race.

The application of different literary devices and the depth in which the Dante analyses sin and the themes he focuses on presenting arouses various reactions. The journey through hell and the realization of what the people were going through causes fear and sympathetic and empathetic reactions. For instance, one feels for Francesca as she explains how she ended up in hell and the life she experiences there (Alighieiri 393). Her story arouses sympathy. Of greater importance, however, the journey through hell causes the reader to recognize the impact of sin on the society and the human person. Additionally, it enables one to recognize and detest the human race’s sinful nature and the impactful influence of evil in the society. Most importantly, the exploration of the poem through the *Inferno* helps the reader to react through the development of the need to shun evil and sin. The consideration of the various reactions depict Dante’s work as a success as the poet has managed to portray the themes of interest in a way that provokes the reader’s mind, causing reaction, and pushing him or her to act.

The application of different oral, tonal, verbal effects, and attitude in the *Inferno* serves a major role in thematic and character development. Dante integrates the elements into the poem to portray characters in certain ways. For instance, the different verbal and tonal variations/effects used by Charon and Centaurs serve to intimidate Dante and show him the reality of life in hell. The effects define the character of the Charon and Centaurs and thus its role in character development. Moreover, the application of the effects and attitudes in the poem is critical for the promotion of thematic development (Whittome 229). The presentation of hell as a frightening place with insurmountable suffering promotes the themes of suffering, fear, and sin. Additionally, the attitude makes the reader fear and disdain the place and push him or her to detesting sin. The influence of the effects allows the author to achieve the major goal of any piece of literature; the ability to influence the audience into action.

Apart from the aforementioned, it is intriguing how the poem presents the influence of the media on the spirituality of a person. A dialogue between Francesca and Dante reveals that reading a book led to a sinful act that put Francesca and her lover (Paolo) in hell. Dante explains to Virgil that it is sweet thoughts and desires that sent the lovers to hell. The influence of the print media must have been significantly high during the period. In comparison to the present society with high technological advancement and various types of more effective media shows the possible influence the media can have on the society.

**Conclusion**

Dante Alighieri’s *The Divine Comedy* remains influential in today’s society even though it was written centuries back. The poem tackles critical issues in the society and focuses on enlightening the society ton shun sin and all that is evil for continued development of a closer relationship with God. It emphasizes the concept of supernatural truth, the human nature and person, the influence of sin and the sinful nature on human life and socio-economic and political development. The author achieves great success in writing the poem through the keen and expert application of figures of speech and literary devices such as allegory and metaphors among other key poetic/literary elements. By all standards, the poet achieved most of the objectives of poetry and any other piece of literature.

# Works Cited

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