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Dan Brown's Inferno- an Allusion to Dante

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Abstract

In literature many writers are inspired by other great literary works. The Bible is considered as one of the most influential work. Dante's Inferno was influenced by Bible, in the poem Dante travels through hell, where he introduced famous mythological and historical figures. They were punished for their crime they were committed when they were alive. Likewise, Dan Brown was inspired by Dante's Inferno and he wrote the novel called Inferno. Throughout the novel Dan Brown used many allusions to Dante. In Fact page Dan Brown stated, "all artworks, literature, Science and historical references in this novel are real" (Brown.3). This paper mainly focuses on where and how Brown projected Dante and his artwork throughout the novel.

Keywords: Death Mask, Divine Comedy, Botticelli, Portrait

Something that makes someone want to do

something or that gives someone an

idea about what to do or create.

- Merriam-Webster's Dictionary

Introduction

Dan Brown is a famous American author of thriller fiction. He is well known for his famous novel *The Da Vinci Code* which is highly controversial. Dan Brown is much interested in symbols, paintings etc.. which has hidden messages. He is greatly influenced by Dante's *Inferno* which reflects in his novel *Inferno*.

Dan Brown uses parallelism to connect Dante's Inferno and his work together. In Dan Brown's Inferno, Robert Langdon the protagonist of the novel is trapped in nightmare. In his nightmare, he saw many were killed in different ways and how they were buried. Robert Langdon describes how they were killed, "consumed by fire, buried in feces, devouring one another" (Brown.9). Each death is considered as a punishment which describes in Dante's Inferno. In Dante's Inferno Gluttons are punished by being forced to be buried in feces, Heretics punished by trapped in flaming tombs and Luzifer trapped in the frozen lake. When Langdon awakes from his nightmare he does not know

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where he is, what time it is and what happened to him, he is like one who lost from his path. He woke up with full of allusions of Dante. Likewise Dante states “went astray from the straight road and woke to find myself alone in a dark wood” (Dante. i.1).

Beatrice and Virgil helped Dante travel through Hell likewise Elizabeth Sinskey and Sienna helped Langdon to continue his journey in the novel. Beatrice is an important character in Dante’s *Inferno*, *Divine Comedy*, and *La Vita Nuova*. In real life, he met her only twice once at the age of nine and after nine years only he met her again. Dante’s love for Beatrice is described in the poem called *La Vita Nuova*. There is a painting by an unknown artist which describes the second meeting of Dante and Beatrice in a street, this scene was explained by Dante in his poem *La Vita Nuova*

The Tomb of Beatrice is in Santa Margherita Dei Cerchi, Florentine, people use to leave letters in hopes that Beatrice will help them as just she helped Dante in *Inferno*. In the novel Dan Brown wrote the opening sentence from Homer’s *Illiad*, “sing in muse, and through me tell the story” asking help to complete the work. The character of Elizabeth Sinskey in the novel does not have any children as Beatrice died before having any children. They both were considered as an angel. Elizabeth Sinskey portrayed as a sense of holiness in her, “radiating a white light” (Brown.9).

In Brown’s *Inferno*, Langdon should travel down the surface of the earth into the cister’s of Istanbul where he meets the evil, which changed, “who we are, who we’ve always been at the most fundamental level” (Brown.439). In Dante’s *Inferno*, Dante travels through the centre of the earth, where he encounters sin and devil. Satan changed the nature of humankind in Dante’s *Inferno* and Plague changed the nature of humankind in Brown’s *Inferno* and also it made one third of the population become infertile. As well as the final word of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Brown’s *Inferno* is ‘Stars’. The book cover of *Inferno* has a reference towards Dante and Florence. In Greek and British edition of *Inferno* the image of Dante’s death mask is used in cover as well as a landscape of Florence is used to demonstrate the importance of Florence to Dante.

During a question and answer session Dan Brown says,

No city on earth is closely tied to Dante Alighieri. Dante grew up in Florence. Later in life, he was exiled for political reasons, the longing he felt for his beloved Florence became a catalyst for the *Divine Comedy* (Brown).

Dante was exiled from Florence, he thought that was a punishment for him which worse than death. Dante attempted to gratify the Ghibellines to overturn the punishment by defending that all his actions were for the good for Florence. In addition, he sent a *canzone* to Florence with one line of the poem proclaiming, “forgiveness is the most beautiful victory” (Barbi, 19). When the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII of Luxembourg marched down to Italy with an army, Dante was full of hope that Henry VII would be a *rexpacificus*, peaceful king, who would restore harmony between cities and factions and reinstate the exiles in their homelands

(Barbi, 24). Later in his life, he hoped that he would return to Florence but all in vein. After his death he resides in Ravenna but there is a tomb which built for him in Florence remains empty but his death mask brought back to Florence.

Dante's mask is located in the Palazzo Vecchio in a small andito, corridor on the second floor, between the apartments of Eleanor and the Hall of Priors. The death mask was carved in 1843 by Tullio Lombardo and Pietro after 162 years of Dante's Death. It is considered as the actual death mask because it carved directly from the face of Dante. In 2007 scientist made a reconstruction of the face of Dante. In many editions Dan Brown uses the portrait of Dante in the centre of the dust cover but the portrait differs in some edition.

Brown used the portrait of Dante by an anonymous artist in the version of English and Lithuanian which is looking towards left. In an Arabic version of the book, the famous portrait of Dante which was done by Sandro Botticelli is used which is looking towards right. In both of these portraits artist used the laurel wreath on Dante's head which recognize Dante's skill and influence in the arts. Different portrait were used because that shows different sides, Botticelli showed the left side of Dante's face and an anonymous artist showed the right side of Dante's face. The English language is read from left to right and the Arabic language is read from right to left. According to the language is read, the eyes look at the book differently so the author used different portraits in different edition.

Conclusion

The dust cover of *Inferno* contains many hidden secrets in both front and back. On the back cover in the lower right corner there is a symbol 'H+' which represents 'Transhumanism'. Inside the dust cover in both front and back few letters are printed in 'Bold' typeface. The letters are "s-a-l-i-g-i-a" represents Seven Deadly Sins called Superbia, Avaritia, Luxuria, Invidia, Gula, Ira, Acedia. The book cover of Brown's *Inferno* give hints to understand the novel also it induces the reader to look deep into the novel.

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