

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction

From an allegorical standpoint, Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* is often regarded as a literary masterpiece. Due to this fact, research surrounding *Inferno* (the first of the *Divine Comedy*) is incredibly immense. Many themes have been correlated to the story, ranging from cultural, historical, philosophical and even theological; however, their evolution throughout the years have been quite different.

It is apparent throughout Dante's *Inferno* that theology plays a critical role in the story's representation. Thus, it is no surprise that many religious figures and literary critics have used this theme to create interpretations of the work; moreover, most theological interpretations of *Inferno* are based on Roman Catholicism. Which in itself, isn't an issue, but it does contribute to most theological interpretations revolving around similar topics/conclusions.

When compared to other types of research, such as philosophy, theological interpretations are simply lacking in growth. This comes as a result of the lack of nuance associated with the subject. The reason other types of research are able to flourish is because they are not limited by guidelines or rules, unlike theology which centralizes around Roman Catholic beliefs, which leaves it subject to specific principles

This study's purpose is to identify how research relating to Dante's *Inferno* has evolved in the last century. The emphasis of the articles selected revolves around theology, philosophy, perspectives, and cultural. These different themes are incorporated to analyze whether unique interpretations themes relating to *Inferno* have different rates of modernization/expansion.

## Statement of the Problem

In its entirety, Dante's *Inferno* has a rather large amount of research already associated with it. Due to its age and popularity, it has been compared to many other works, especially in association with depictions of Hell and an analysis of characters. That being said, when it comes to an analysis of the research itself, there is an obvious lack of sources breaching this topic.

As stated above, this study identifies a need for an analysis of research relating to *Inferno*, seeing as it is important to identify factors that may contribute to the evolution of research. This importance is apparent due to two things, the first being that modern critics have relied on past interpretations to support their work. The incorporation of early interpretations in present day research is a critical aspect to examine. Not only does this offer an overview of contemporary values often associated with *Inferno*, but it could also be significant to identifying how 21<sup>st</sup> century research has adapted.

Also, the fact that many of the analyses in the early twentieth century were written by Religious leaders (such as priests and theologians) and Italian critics, should not be overlooked. Critics themselves should be subject to examination, seeing as their background could correlate to how they interpret *Inferno*. This is necessary in relation to *Inferno*, considering Dante Alighieri wrote the *Divine Comedy* in Italy during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, a majority of the early Italian critics could have been influenced by the extremely Roman Catholic based society.

Lastly, the emphasis on Roman Catholic interpretations is pertinent to identifying how cultural and theological interpretations have evolved. As stated before, Roman Catholicism was extremely prevalent in Italian society; therefore, a shift in research could be apparent through sources moving away from the initial values of medieval Italian culture.

## Background and Need

Research relating to Dante's *Inferno* has overall been progressive in its modernization of interpretations, especially in relation to culturally focused sources. This is noticeable in research that outlines the perspectives of multiple writers, most notably ones with an emphasis on philosophy; however, how research has developed in the last century is unclear, seeing as there are many factors that can influence how specific interpretations of *Inferno* are modernized.

As stated before, the types of research highlighted in this study are philosophical, cultural, perspective, and theological. By themselves, each field has unique attributes and focuses, but when related to *Inferno*, most research around the religious themes are present in the text. This unifying connection between research is beneficial to the study, seeing as it makes the differences between each article/book even more apparent.

This "unification" is expressed in culture focused interpretations, which are extremely expansive in regard to their focus and originality; however, they still are able to identify Roman Catholic connections to *Inferno*. With religion as a central theme for most research, it is quite possible that adaptation rests on the unique attributes relegated to each theme.

As the overarching theme of this thesis implies, examining research relating to Dante's *Inferno* is pertinent to identifying how interpretations of the work have modernized. Analyzing how different types of research have adapted to new values/ideals is crucial to highlighting which elements of those sources contributed to their expansion, or, were possibly detrimental to it as well.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the research done in association with Dante's *Inferno*, especially with a focus on philosophical, cultural, perspective, and theologically based sources. The goal of this study is to express the necessity for research to be done on *Inferno*, specifically relating to the analysis of research itself. This type of introspective analysis would be beneficial to identifying specific aspects of the research that would otherwise be unapparent.

Research done on research can be beneficial to figuring out how sources have evolved over time. As stated previously, this study centralizes around a cross examination of research published a century apart from each other. From a comparative standpoint, these sources have the possibility of identifying aspects/values of society and how they have come to influence interpretations of *Inferno*.

More specifically, the emphasis on identifying change in research revolves around how it has modernized. As previously noted, there is an apparent gap in *Inferno* focused research that delves into the perspective/interpretation of other critics. This study ventures to assuage this situation, seeing as it is attempting to offer an example on how introspective research can be valuable to research as a whole.

Using a selection of philosophical, cultural, perspective, and theological focused sources, this study endeavors to perceive how these different themes have evolved over the past century. Not only does the examination of these types of research have the possibility of identifying what aspects of research can encourage/discourage adaptation, but it also represents the utility of research that outlines the trajectory of different interpretations.

## Research Questions

How has the past century affected research relating to *Inferno*?

Are critics influential in regard to the adaptation of research?

Is the passage of time or the type of research more likely to affect the modernization of interpretations?

How does the Roman Catholic influence over most research come into play, especially in association with the unique qualities of the different themes?

## Significance to the Field

The significance of this study is its ties to outlining the progression/regression of research relating to Dante's *Inferno* throughout the last century. Due to it being a literary classic, the summarization of these different aspects of research is critical in identifying what elements have positively (and detrimentally) effected adaptation.

Literary analysis is a big component of this thesis, and it is nourished by the implementation of new ideas and perspectives. Thus, the focus on progression is inherently beneficial to the field; moreover, this study offers an example for how the gap in current research can be filled.

## Definitions

1. Theology – The Study of religious beliefs and God.
2. Morality – The relationship between good and bad and how it relates to societal constructs.
3. Roman Catholicism – major branch of Christianity that was prevalent in the medieaval era.

**Limitations**

Deriving a thorough analysis may be hindered by the number of resources that I can find during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, library policies have been altered with reduced access to physical books. As a result, my research must focus on online sources which greatly reduces my data pool since many sources before 1980 have not been digitalized. Also, seeing as this thesis analyzes Dante's *Inferno* from an English translation, there may be some fundamental differences been the translation's interpretation when compared to Dante's original, which was written in Italian.

**Ethical Considerations**

An IRB has been submitted to the College's board, clarifying that the research/study implemented in this thesis will be completely ethical; however, seeing as there are no human participants associated with the research of this project, minimal to none ethical concerns were expected.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

When analyzing the sources used in this study, there is an apparent emphasis on Dante's *Inferno* revolving around religion. That being said, how Catholicism is used in *Inferno* varies greatly. Research based on philosophy, culture, perspectives, and theology are subject to unique interpretations of the *Inferno*, and this attribute is further expanded by the comparison based on time period.

This literature review identifies three areas of research that exemplify the evolution of studies revolving around *Inferno*. The first section revolves around research that focuses on a grouping of interpretations, which offers an overview of how critics from the same time period agreed/disagreed on interpretations of Dante's *Inferno*. The second section incorporates articles that examine the cultural influences that affected the works of Dante, especially in relation to how different cultures can affect a critic's interpretation of *Inferno*. Lastly, the third section focuses on religious articles and how their content is represented, the differences in these articles create a comprehensive outline for how religious aspects are viewed in *Inferno*.

### **Perspectives**

Many interpretations revolving around Dante's *Inferno* have been condensed into detailed summaries that outline how a certain theme has been analyzed (as well as the conclusions reached). Not only do these sources cover a large amount of research, but they are also key to understanding how perceptions of *Inferno* have changed over time, or how they have stayed the same. Teodolinda Barolini's, "Medieval Multiculturalism and Dante's Theology of Hell" does a good job of presenting this ideal, seeing as it identifies certain religious aspects of the *Inferno* through the use of multiple perspectives.

Written in 2010, Barolini's article uses the perspective of Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle to identify different perspectives of religion. This critic highlights how different prominent religious figures view the same work, especially in association with the idea of the self-contained, which refers to Hell as a separate place from earth. This study identifies specific differences in perception, especially in association with the degree of artistic liberties Dante uses in the work. Barolini's study was able to identify key differences between the opinions of prominent religious influences in association with Dante's *Inferno* (Barolini).

The analytical texts from both Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle are the main signifiers of their respective opinions on Dante's religious interpretations in *Inferno*. This is especially true in association with their perspective of Hell, as well as how it is structured (physical association to Earth).

Thomas Aquinas views the contained version of Hell as Dante depicting hell as a "right will," meaning that justness is correlated to punishment, seeing as it relates to sin. On the other hand, Aristotle's views identify the connection between philosophical beliefs and how they influenced Dante in association with depictions of Hell. Barolini insinuates that both these perspectives do hold some truth, especially in association with the biblical ties in Dante; however, there is certainly an emphasis on Thomas Aquinas's view of hell as just, seeing as it ties into the Catholic perspective of sin; therefore, the artistic liberties seem to become less central to the article's conclusion.

Another article that incorporates multiple perspectives is Gioacchino Rossini's, *Readings on the Inferno of Dante: Based Upon the Commentary of Benvenuto Da Imola and Other Authorities*. This source (written in 1906) focuses on multiple critics and their take on particular



cantos in *Inferno*. With a focus on Imola, the most prominent feature of this book is how it identifies how different perspectives can influence the meaning of a work.

The purpose of Rossini's book was to identify how critics differ in regard to how they interpret specific cantos. Rossini does this not only to extrapolate the different perspectives that are available, but he also identifies the differences in their analysis. The book is basically a compilation of different articles, as well as the author's opinions on the various perspectives and scenes; therefore, a majority of the data is extracted from the critical analysis of other experts, which was then compiled into a comprehensive format.

The most prominent area of contention between the different critics revolved around the interpretation of characters and the punishments in the different circles of Hell. The importance of characters was extremely different depending on the critic, some focused on the religious figures, while others seemed to not acknowledge them. In a similar way, punishments were either associated with sin and Catholic views, or they were simply symbolic and interpreted from a moral standpoint (Rossini).

Conclusively, a majority of the critics agree that the punishments in the circles of Hell are reflective of the sins; therefore, the consensus (whether from a moral or religious perspective) highlighted the idea that Dante was influenced by the culture he lived in when it came to creating his version of hell (Rossini, 1906).

Lastly, Geoffrey Lummus's 2011 article, "Dante's *Inferno*: Critical Reception and Influence" incorporates both Italian and American perspectives, specifically critics of Dante's *Inferno*; moreover, he goes in depth into the main factors that attributed to the extreme popularity of *Inferno* and how it shaped the many interpretations that are present in this

article. The purpose of Lummus's article is to create a comprehensive overview of how cultural differences and personal beliefs can impact a critic's perspective of a work. It also expresses the fact that, despite the differences of the critics themselves, there are many commonalities between all interpretations of the *Inferno*.

This data was collected by summarizing the arguments of many different critics in association with their interpretations of *Inferno*. The emphasis of Italian and American critics is meant to strengthen the argument that some key interpretations of Dante are apparent no matter the cultural background of the critic reading it; however, as the results indicate, Italian critics were much more likely to focus on tying Dante's work to Italian cultural interpretations, such as important characters and Roman Catholic interpretations. On the other hand, American critics highlighted the Catholic connections, but delegated characters as less important (Lummus).

The most prominent conclusion that Lummus identified was the shared interpretation of Catholic symbols throughout the work, especially focused on sin and its association with the punishments. There was also conclusive evidence that Italian critics were much more likely to relegate importance to characters; while American critics were less likely to take them into consideration. Also, although Lummus doesn't acknowledge it, there does seem to be a bias against American critics. This bias could be due to the fact that Italian critics were much more closely associated with the work, resulting in the flourishing of their research. That being said, emphasis on one culture over the other does call into question some of its conclusions.

As expressed by all three sources, perspective based research relating to *Inferno* are subject to unique focuses. Although each one incorporated religious themes, their conclusions

were entirely dependent on the critics being analyzed. Because of this, articles such as Barolini's "Medieval Multiculturalism and Dante's Theology of Hell," which incorporate the interpretations of important religious figures, are much more likely to focus on religion. This is especially noticeable when compared to books such as Rossini's *Readings on the Inferno of Dante: Based Upon the Commentary of Benvenuto Da Imola and Other Authorities*, which studied the interpretations of literary critics.

### **Cultural Influences**

When it comes to interpretations of Dante's *Inferno*, none are more diverse in topic than the articles/books that focus on culture. As exemplified in this area, the wide range of potential cultural influences inherently creates this subsection of research into one with unique perspectives. This is best shown by sources such as Kaufmann Kohler's (1923) book, *Heaven and Hell in Comparative Religion: With Special Reference to Dante's Divine Comedy*.

As apparent with the title, Kohler incorporates the perspectives of many different cultures in his book and how they associate with Dante's *Inferno* (with an emphasis on religious and traditional beliefs). The purpose of the study is to identify how other cultures (besides Italian) have affected *Inferno*. This comprehensive book examines surrounding cultures that had the possibility of impacting Dante's depiction of Hell, especially in association with how it appears, and the punishments of the different circles (Kohler).

Kohler extrapolates upon the cultural influences that could have influenced *Inferno* by focusing on historical accounts of traditions and religious beliefs of different cultures. Thus, most of his data is derived from the connections he himself made, rather than outlining the approach of other critics. This comprehensive take on different cultures resulted in a multitude

of cultural beliefs that shared many characteristics with *Inferno*, especially in relation to how Hell is depicted, as well as how sins are viewed by other cultures (even if they don't refer to them as sins).

Kohler reached the conclusion that Dante's depiction of Hell, sin and punishment was not solely based on Catholicism, but was also influenced by other cultures, such as Egyptian. Not only do these findings insinuate that Dante's work isn't a reflection of a Catholic Hell, but it also acknowledges that sin and punishment are important aspects in every culture. Despite this interesting and unique approach to *Inferno*, it is rather vague in regard to evidence.

Dino Cervigini's 2007 article, "Literature, religion, and the sacred" focuses entirely on how Italian culture could have influenced Dante's *Inferno*. He emphasizes the connection between Roman Catholicism (the main religion of Italy during Dante's time) and the work itself; therefore, his insinuations revolve around the strongly religious Italian culture and the impact it has had on Dante's works. The main purpose of this study is to acknowledge the connection between Italian culture and *Inferno*. Not only does Cervigini want to highlight how the culture influenced the work, but he also wants to offer a reasoning for its Catholic symbolism (Cervigni).

Cervigini's article is tied to the ideals/beliefs of Roman Catholicism during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the writer's interpretation of how the secular Italian culture influenced *Inferno*. It identifies many different connections to Roman Catholicism throughout *Inferno*. His correlations also acknowledge the fact that his writing was influenced by other Italian writer's as well, deepening the work's connection to Italian culture/literature.

Cervigini concludes that Dante's *Inferno* reflects the ideals of medieval secular culture, especially in association with sin, punishment, and how the different layers of Hell are structured; moreover, he relates these interpretations to Dante's Italian culture, seeing as his work was also influenced by other Italian writers.

Written in 1901, Allen Dinsmore's book, *The Teachings of Dante*, focuses on the influences that could have impacted *Inferno*, especially with an emphasis on the Italian language, Italian culture, and living in a secular society. These three aspects, according to Dinsmore, have shaped Dante's *Inferno*. Dinsmore uses this focus to highlight the Catholic interpretation of *Inferno*, and how it is directly related to the culture Dante lived in. This is exemplified by the fact that the book focuses on the influences themselves, rather than delving into the interpretation of the story.

To identify Dante's influencers, Dinsmore references writers predating Dante, the historical connection to the crusades, as well as an analysis of the Italian language. These factors are greatly considered in association with elements that could have shaped *Inferno*. Dinsmore focuses heavily on sin as significant evidence for the cultural influence over Dante's work. Using Boccaccio as an example, Dinsmore identifies specific characteristics of Roman Catholicism and Italian literary tropes to connect *Inferno* to a secular Italian perspective. Dinsmore concludes that Dante was extremely influenced by the strictly religious attributes of Italian culture; however, writer's such as Boccaccio seemed to be more influential in the formation of the work, seeing as *Inferno* reflected tropes and common themes in other works.

These examples of culture based research seem to identify a consistent emphasis on religion. The difference between each source revolves around what culture or aspect of culture

they focus on. This is apparent in regard to the fact that Kohler's *Heaven and Hell in Comparative Religion: With Special Reference to Dante's Divine Comedy* ventures into different types of religion. Additionally, even the two other sources (which focus on Italy) incorporate different ways of identifying what could have influenced Dante's writing.

## **Religion**

Research revolving around religion usually fixates on a Roman Catholic perspective. The most noticeable trait of this type of research is a repetition of interpretations and a similarity in regard to themes. A good example of this type of research is Avery Dulles's, "The Population of Hell." (2003) Focusing on Hell, Dulles extrapolates on Dante's *Inferno* and its connection to religion. Outlining such ideas as the concept of hell and sin, Dulles's main goal is to provide evidence of the *Inferno's* connection to the Catholic's perception of Hell. He also examines the concepts of justice and punishment, and how it relates to the circles of Hell (Dulles).

Rather than relying on the perspectives of other critics, Dulles uses the Bible and historical connections to provide an interpretation of Dante's *Inferno* from a Catholic perspective. He identifies many connections between the Catholic perception of justice and how it is reflected by Dante's descriptions of punishments; moreover, the attributes of sin are connected to the Ten Commandments. Dulles concluded that Dante's *Inferno* shares many aspects with Jesus's teachings in association with the occupants of Hell and how sin affects humans; moreover, the association of sin with specific punishments is highly symbolic of the Roman Catholic's ideals of justice.

Unlike Dulles who focused entirely on the theological aspects of Dante, John Carroll's, *Exiles of Eternity: An Exposition of Dante's Inferno* (written in 1903), takes a dual approach to

*Inferno*. He highlights both the ethical and theological aspects that could have influenced Dante when writing *Inferno*. The analytical nature of the book places an emphasis on sin and how it can be interpreted from both a moral and religious standpoint.

Carroll's book offers a detailed analysis of the entirety of *Inferno*. There is special emphasis placed on religious connections, thus, it seems that his main goal is to highlight how Roman Catholicism influenced Dante's conception of Hell. These ideals are emphasized by the data, which is based on pertinent philosophical and theological figures, as well as their perspectives of sin and ethics.

Carroll identifies strong connections between morals and sins; however, there is also a significant relation between religious symbolism and the punishments in Hell. This dual interpretation seems to play a significant part in Carroll's analysis; moreover, he concludes that Dante's interpretation of Hell, which, although is heavily influenced by Roman Catholicism, does in fact incorporate philosophical and ethical attributes. The main indicator to this fact is his perception that Dante took artistic liberties while combining these elements into a concept of Hell.

Lastly, Richard Fenn's article "The Origins of Religion," revolves around how depictions of religion can come as a result of suffering and death. This is relative to Dante's work, seeing as he uses it as an example for how Hell is conceptualized when involving death and justice. Fenn uses this article to identify how humans need to conceptualize life after death, especially in the face of loss. *Inferno* is used as a religious depiction of how the conceptual nature of Hell can influence a society's morals.

Fenn uses sources such as *Inferno* to highlight the literary connection to loss and the imagination of an after-life. Fenn also incorporates biblical and philosophical sources to examine how different fields of thought can conceptualize life after death. The article's analysis divulges down into a focus on both religion and philosophy and how they associate with loss. The Dante's *Inferno* connection is especially prominent in regard to the connection between religious depictions and death. Fenn's central focus is the fact that loss is highly associated with certain aspects of religion, such as sin, punishment, and how death encourages the concept of an after-life.

As shown in this area, theological sources relating to *Inferno* seem to revolve around similar conclusions. Although it seems that each takes a distinct approach to the topic, the focal point of this type of research tends to emphasize the importance of sin and punishment.

### **Chapter Summary**

As expressed in this literary review, different types of research relating to *Inferno* are subject to unique interpretations of the work. Furthermore, the exploration of theme rather than time period identifies the fact that certain similarly themed sources can be quite different from each other, even if they came from the same century. Thus, this study's emphasis on adaptation requires a careful analysis of the theme itself (not just when it was published).

It is also apparent that religion is the most consistent focus in research. Early cultural, perspective, and theological focused sources are especially prevalent when it comes to religion being an important part of the conclusion. In itself, this means that an analysis of the research outlined in this chapter requires an examination of how the evidence gathered, rather than just the resulting interpretation.



Lastly, this literature review identifies certain aspects of *Inferno* based research that should be further explored when comparing early 20<sup>th</sup> century sources to those from the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whether the uniqueness apparent in this chapter is dependent on adaptation or individual critics themselves is dependent on an appraisal of when a source was made and how that associates with its content.

## Chapter 3: Methods

### Introduction

Research relating to Dante's *Inferno* is extremely expansive. Due to its popular nature, it has been associated with many other works, most noticeably with those that focus on Hell and depictions of it; however, the evolution of research over the past century is something that needs to be further analyzed.

More specifically, this study is meant to identify how research has adapted with a modernized society. To do this, it identifies certain causes, such as the fact that many early theological interpretations of *Inferno* were done by religious figures/members. Also, the cultural influences that could have influenced Dante, such as how secular Italian society was. Lastly, it focuses on how each type of research has different approaches to *Inferno* and how these distinctive approaches may have influenced an evolution in research.

Research to support this study was focused around the differences (or lack thereof) of interpretations in association with time period. Data was collected based on if it was made in the early twentieth century or the twenty first century, then, it is further divided based on themes, such as religion, perspectives, and cultural influences.

### Sample

The articles used in this study are quite diverse, especially in association with the time range. The sources are either from the early twentieth century (1900-1920) or the twenty-first century (2000-2020,) roughly there are eight sources for each period. These articles are then divided by religious themes, philosophical concepts, cultural influences, and multi-perspective focused. Most of them are peer-reviewed articles; however, there are multiple books among

the selection. Thus, the sources divulge down into mainly peer-reviewed articles and books that are unconfirmed whether they are peer-reviewed or not.

### **Method**

The main focuses of this study are moral theory, theory of sin, and the concept of Hell. All three of these elements are intertwined, seeing as they create a full view of Dante's concept of Hell. These theories are necessary, seeing as they are implemented in a majority of the articles used in this study. Thus, exploration of the theories incorporated by critics will be beneficial to examining how they approach the *Inferno*.

### **Data Analysis**

The themes this study focuses on revolves around religious connections, cultural influences, perspective based research and philosophical concepts. These themes are organized based on time period, allowing for a close analysis of how progressive sources have been over the past century, as well as the components that enabled their adaptation.

### **Conclusion**

As shown above, this study's fixation on progression research relating to *Inferno* has led to a focus on specific themes and time periods to further extenuate the comparative nature of this thesis. This is representative through the time range, which could be utilized to express how research has been reshaped by modern society's values/ideals.

## Chapter 4:

### Results

#### **Introduction**

To best exemplify how adaptation has influenced research, the sources used in this study were divided by theme/focus. Then, they were further separated based on time period. Not only does this format offer a careful view of each type of research, but it also outlines how interpretations differ in regard to expansion into new avenues of topics and theories.

#### **Theology**

##### Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Research

From a strictly theological standpoint, John Carroll's *Exiles of eternity: An exposition of Dante's Inferno* (1903) and Gerald Rawlinson's *An Anglo-Catholic's Thoughts on Religion* (1924) are both sources that offer a baseline for what a theological interpretation of Dante's *Inferno* has focused on. Much like what this study is based on, Carroll's book places an extreme emphasis on the association of sin and punishment with Catholicism. This is exemplified when he writes there is "Intimate moral connection with the Circles which Dante is just about to leave, / he throws it away, as no longer necessary" (Carroll 254-255). Basically, this line is in association with the fact that Dante's trip through Hell requires him to forget about morality, which outlines how sin and punishment are viewed as the main components of Hell and not the human parallel of conscience and morality.

As stated above, the theological aspects of *Inferno* have been disconnected from the moral implications of the story (at least to the critics). This is further expanded upon by Gerald Rawlinson when he writes, "Do not let us, in our awakened zeal for the study of Moral Theory,

forget this equally important study” (Rawlinson 156). In this case, he is referring ascetic theology, which is an extreme discipline that is associated with religious implications. Rawlinson is literally saying that society’s new founded interest in moral theory should not overcome the rigorous religious implications in *Inferno*. In fact, his focus on sin and punishment works well with the ideals of ascetic theology, seeing as it offers a warning for indulgence and selfishness.

Thus, it is clear to see that these two theological critics follow a consistent theme when it comes to interpreting *Inferno*. Although the two may take alternate routes when it comes to defining Dante as an individual, they both conclude that sin and punishment is formed in the absence of morality.

#### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Research

When compared to twentieth century interpretations of *Inferno*, the theological interpretations of Avery Dulles’s, "The Population of Hell" (2003), and Richard Fenn’s “The Origins of Religion” (2001) do approach the topic from a unique standpoint; however, the conclusions remain much the same. As shown by Dulles, sin and punishment are very black and white when it comes to the Catholic perspective. This is apparent when he states, “The constant teaching of the Catholic Church supports the idea that there are two classes: the saved and the damned” (Dulles). The entire article revolves around the fact that an individual is either going to Hell or Heaven depending on if they sinned or not; however, the bluntness of the biblical interpretation is rather incomparable to the nuanced approach of Catholicism when it comes to mercy and forgiveness. Thus, the conclusion of Dulles falls into the same pattern of previous critics, seeing as sin and punishment are emphasized above all else, the moral implications of sin aren’t even noted.

Much like Dulles, Fenn's article also focuses on the concept of sin and punishment. This is apparent when he writes, "I will argue that religious imagery reflects an experience of primitive and irrevocable loss" (Fenn 176). Basically, rather than morality, Catholicism is shaped around mortality. Also, neither of them finds it necessary to expand upon the relationship between sin and punishment. The interpretation of sin and punishment being cause and effect, while not false, is simply an understatement. Morality is a significant part of Dante's representation of Hell. If sin/punishment were as clear cut as theological research has stated, why would there be so many layers to it? The modulation of sins correlation to punishment signifies an emphasis on specific actions, emphasizing the fact that morally, some actions are worse than others.

That being said, Fenn's interpretation that human instinct creates a system that rewards good and punishes bad is unique. This clear-cut outlook exemplifies the idea of sin and punishment being unnuanced. They are simply a reward and deterrent caused by fear; thus, the gradation of morality would be unnecessary. Clearly, both Dulles's and Fenn's articles focused on different elements of religion.

### **Cultural Influences**

#### Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

In association with early twentieth century research that focuses on cultural influences, Allen Dinsmore's *The Teachings of Dante* (1901) and Kaufmann Kohler's *Heaven and Hell in Comparative Religion: With Special Reference to Dante's Divine Comedy* (1923) exemplify how unique each interpretation is and what influences they consider the most vital to Dante's *Inferno*. Examining Dinsmore's work, there is a clear emphasis on how Dante was influenced by

the world around him. One particular topic Dinsmore focused on was how Italy's tense and violent atmosphere assisted with Dante's focus on religion. This is expressed when we read, "Hildebrand had attempted to realize this splendid ideal in the universal church, whose head should be the arbiter of the nations, the source of authority and order" (Dinsmore 54). This comment is in regard to where Dante sought peace for his country, in which the Church would be the unifying factor that brought Italy together.

Unlike Dinsmore, Kohler focuses more on cultures outside of Italian. This is apparent when he writes, "Of greater influence was Hildegard of Bingen on the Rhine who, Inspired by 'the living light' of God, and exerted like St. Bernard a certain influence, even if only indirectly, on Dante" (Kohler 145). Using other European cultures (in this case Germany) as a focus, Kohler identifies certain religious aspects and figures who could have influenced Dante's work. As shown, both these works implement many examples that highlight Dante's connection to religion; however, they also identify a uniqueness to each other that is not apparent in the religious interpretations.

#### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Research

When it comes to modern interpretations of *Inferno* that are focused on cultural influences, there does seem to remain an emphasis on Italian culture; however, the approaches and conclusions are much different than previous critics. This is apparent in both Dino Cervigni's "Literature, Religion, and the Sacred" (2007) and Terje Oestigaard's "The Materiality of Hell: the Christian Hell in a World Religion Context" (2009). When it comes to Cervigni's article, there is an emphasis on the literary connection to religion. Cervigni identifies this with Dante when she writes, "Dante appropriates also liturgical Christian practices to render a topsy-

turvy world by means of what the author calls a “theological parody” (Cervigni). Public worship/sermons are essentially used by Dante as a theological device in his work; in fact, the entire *Divine Comedy* could be considered liturgical. That being said, when compared to previous critics, such as Kohler, Cervigni’s article is incomparable. This is because cultural influences is a rather nonspecific theme, able to be covered through a wide variety of media.

In a similar way, the approach of Oestigaard is different from both other modern and past cultural interpretations. This is apparent in the fact that the article focuses on both historical and geographical connections to literary influences. Oestigaard’s notes a physical influence by stating, “written early in the fourteenth century, purgatory and hell were characterized by various types of freezing, boiling, burning, and torturing.” This line is in association with a topographical analysis of Hell, signifying that the fact that the lowest circle of Hell is freezing because it gets closer to the South Pole (Antarctica).

Thus, it is clear to see that the modernization of cultural influences in association with *Inferno* has led to progression in ideals and an expansion upon narratives; moreover, there has been an adaptation to different types of media, most notably in this section are other literary influences and the topographical association of Hell and how it influenced Dante’s perception of the nine circles of Hell.

## **Perspectives**

Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Gioacchino Rossini’s *Readings on the Inferno of Dante: Based Upon the Commentary of Benvenuto Da Imola and Other Authorities* (1906) is the only source used in this study from the early twentieth century that focuses on perspective; however, it includes several critics’



interpretations that focus on literal interpretations of the text, including geographical locations of Hell and the general structure of the circles. This is especially exemplified when Rossini writes, “the subterranean water-course extended to as great a distance from the center of the earth where Lucifer is placed” (Rossini 659). This quote exemplifies how literal the interpretations are in regard to identify the physical location of Hell; however, once again, each interpretation has different conclusions and results. The individuality of these analyses are incomparable to other themes of *Inferno*, seeing as there are no direct guidelines to follow for proximity.

#### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Research

In regard to multi-perspective based, there is a noticeable inherent difference to each one, unless they focus on theological aspects of *Inferno*. Both of these perceptions are expressed by Teodolina Barolini’s “Medieval Multiculturalism and Dante's Theology of Hell” (2006) and David Lummus’s, “Dante's Inferno: Critical Reception and Influence” (2011). Although involving multiple perspectives, Barolini’s article is clearly theologically focused seeing as she writes, “The precision and understanding with which Dante gives flesh to the doctrines of the greatest theologians, especially Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, are unprecedented.” This quote is further expanded upon when we read, “The punishments, in most cases, are very clearly linked to the sins” (Barolini). Even sources incorporating multiple interpretations are subject to stagnation when it comes to theology. Although the article is more prevalent in noting some nuances between the relationship of sin and punishment, the moral implications relegated to lesser importance with an extreme emphasis on how Hell’s structure is correlated to the relationship between sin and punishment.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Lummus's research fixates around the evolution of research relating to Dante, and how its interpretations have changed, both from a time period standpoint, as well as from European versus American perspectives. Lummus raises an interesting point when he writes, "Almost overcome by the weight of the authority that Dante's poem had accumulated over the years, critics of eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Italy were left with the choice between biography and philology as approaches to the text." The popularity of Dante's work is not something unexpected; however, the fact that interpretations focused around theology were stunted before the twentieth century is incredibly telling of how the theme is prone to slower expansion than other types of research.

### **Morality**

#### Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Lastly, this study incorporates moral theory focused sources, seeing as it offers evidence as to how morality is connected to theology, and it also is a very progressive form of research; therefore, it becomes a point of comparison to other types of research which are less adaptive. A good baseline for moral theory interpretations of *Inferno* begins with Vincent Reade's *The Moral System of Dante's Inferno (1909)*. This is exemplified when we read, "no other problem of the same rank remains to be noticed, but there are several sins in Dante's scheme whose place has not yet been referred to any acknowledged principle of morality" (Reade 13). Reade is literally identifying the lack of research done in association with morality and sin. Not only does this line identify how moral theory is implemented by critics, but it also highlights the disconnected of morals and sin/punishment.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Research

As stated in the last section, moral theory focused articles have been incorporated into this study to identify how prominent its themes would be in association to theology, if they weren't rejected by it. This is apparent in James Torrens' "Revisiting 'The Inferno'" (1996) when Torrens' writes, "Dante, constrained by the theology of his time, had to confine the virtuous pagans - including Plato, Aristotle and Homer - in the half-light of limbo, at the upper edge of hell." Basically, the poetic/philosophical aspects of these figures were rejected by religious figures/Italian critics due to their ties to Roman Catholicism. They represent a form of expression that is incompatible with the straightforward, blunt ideals of sin and punishment.

## Conclusion

As expressed by these sources, the evolution and progression of research is an apparent aspect when comparing early twentieth century research to its twenty first century counterpart. This is especially noticeable in association with philosophical, cultural, and perspective based research, seeing as each has shown some if not major progression when it comes to the expansion of ideas and incorporation of different media.

As shown in the data, sin and punishment are the most prominent aspects of religious interpretations. The reasoning may differ, but the conclusion always revolves around these two aspects of Dante's Hell. Because of this, this type of research seems to show less adaptation than the other ones examined in this study. As previously stated, theological approaches to the topic have modernized, but the content is relatively comparable, especially in regard to the sources' main focus.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

In regard to research relating to Dante's *Inferno*, there are many different perspectives/interpretations expressed when it comes to a critical analysis of the work. Due to this expansive amount of research, there is a palpable divide between sources made in the early twentieth century and ones made in the twenty first century. In most cases, the research has adapted with the changing times; however, some types of research do remain focused on contemporary ideals.

The purpose of this study is to examine the adaptive nature of *Inferno* based research; moreover, it expresses the utility of studies that analyze the patterns of research, especially with an emphasis on time period and theme. Even today, there remains a noticeable gap in sources that outline how interpretations of *Inferno* have modernized. This lack of research based research inhibits the growth of new interpretations/information pertaining to Dante's *Inferno*.

This study is designed to highlight the distinction (or lack thereof) of research in association with both the century it was made in and the themes it focuses on. Certain elements, such as progression and adaptation are central to identifying what aspects of research have benefitted the modernization of interpretations, as well as how *Inferno* relates to society today.

## Discussion

In regard to the analysis of articles that incorporate multiple perspectives, there is a clear distinction between theological interpretations and other interpretations when it comes to conclusions. Basically, critics engaging in the overview of research relating to philosophical interpretations will usually identify different characteristics that each perspective incorporates; however, when the multiple perspectives are focused on religious interpretations, there is a clear agreement between the critics when it comes to certain aspects of the *Inferno*.

This type of research seems to express a lack of variety when it comes to theological research associated with *Inferno*. This is because most other sources that outline multiple perspectives and are focused on a theme other than religion tend to conclude that there is a difference of opinion when it comes to interpretations. That being said, as a form of research, multi-perspective sources have shown great adaptation. The reason for this stems from the fact that “perspective” in association with *Inferno* research is rather undefined. Perspectives from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century focused on theological and literal interpretations of Hell; however, this changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, seeing as the perspectives were changed to revolve around new theories and critics.

Sources that center around cultural themes and how they could have impacted Dante’s *Inferno* are significant to identifying Roman Catholicism’s influence in the work. This is because most of the sources associated with culture focus on Italian culture or countries around it. Which means that the cultural interpretations do incorporate historical/societal facts relating to Roman Catholicism, seeing as it was the most dominant religion in Italy during Dante’s time period.

These articles offer concrete evidence of just how prominent Roman Catholicism was in Italian society. Not only does this identify characteristics of religion that are present in *Inferno*, but it assists in proving that Dante's work was heavily influenced by Roman Catholicism.

Similar to perspective based research, 21<sup>st</sup> century culture focused sources have expanded into other territory. This seems to be related to the fact that culture has come to encompass more than just a specific society/country. It is apparent that cultural research has adopted the modern definition of culture, meaning that different forms of media and specific groups of people can be associated with this type of research.

Lastly, theological approaches to analyzing *Inferno* are quite different from the other types of sources discussed in this section. Not only because their content has stayed relatively the same, but also because its adaptation to modern society appears rather slow. As stated before, theological critics of *Inferno* tend to develop their arguments around the same ideas, which are sin, punishment, and the layout of Hell. Thus, the extrapolation of new information rests entirely on previous arguments.

While analyzing these articles, there is an obvious denial of the critics when it comes to morality being a religious aspect. This point has been expressed by the study's incorporation of philosophical research, which originated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a critique of theological interpretations. The digression of early philosophy critics centered around the fact that theological interpretations of *Inferno* were unable to branch out into different theories. As previously mentioned, 21<sup>st</sup> century theological research sometimes reiterates the same interpretation as previous critics; therefore, the fact that they haven't established new theories

to associate with *Inferno*, seems to express a lack of progression, especially when compared to other types of research.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation of this study is the fact that it is based on a translation of Dante's *Inferno*. The fact that it is being analyzed in a different language than what it was written in could cause it to be subject to misinterpretations/nuanced interpretations that wouldn't be present in its native language. Secondly, the immense amount of works relating to Dante's *Inferno* leaves many potential holes in the study, seeing as it would be difficult to examine all interpretations of the work. This is especially pertinent right now, seeing as Covid has restricted most if not all physical copies of articles/books, thus eliminating a decent amount of research available.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Seeing as there are sections of the *Inferno* that could be expressed differently depending on the language it is read in, comparative research that focuses on linguistics would be beneficial. Sources comparing an English summary of the work to an Italian interpretation would solve the obstacle that English speaking critics face when it comes to analyzing the *Inferno*. More importantly, research focused on how the interpretation of *Inferno* has evolved would be extremely beneficial. Not only would it remove the requirement for researchers to shift through an immense amount of research to come to their own conclusions, but it would also help identify characteristics that were overlooked by past critics. Which could have the possibility of inspiring interpretations of the *Inferno* which were never apparent before.

Lastly, research from other time periods should receive more attention when it comes to analyzing them and using them in future research. As it stands, research dated before the 1800s is uncommon to find among databases or even potentially on any part of the internet. Thus, sources such as these should be electronically cataloged so future researchers can incorporate them into their research.

### **Conclusions**

This study has identified that: interpretations of *Inferno* are subject to differences based on when they were written, as well as the theme focused on; moreover, the adaptation of sources to modern values/ideals can be dependent on what type of research it is. Different levels of progression in critics' interpretations insinuates that there are some aspects of *Inferno* research that either inhibit/enable advancement into new ideas and theories.

Philosophy, culture, perspective, and theology based research all exhibited different methods when it came modernized interpretations. Basically, the contrasting levels of progression are most likely tied to the content itself, which could mean that a specific type of interpretations ability to adapt revolves around its ability to expand. As noted previously, culture and perspective based research were able to incorporate new theories relating to *Inferno*, seeing as their focus is entirely dependent on the critics themselves.

On the other hand, research such as theology appears less progressive. This is possibly due to the fact that the focal point of this type of research revolves around Roman Catholicism association with *Inferno*; therefore, theologians/critics appear more restricted in regard to what new theories they can incorporate their arguments. The research itself shows signs of



repetition, which is most likely caused by how popular Roman Catholic interpretations of *Inferno* are.

Lastly, this study's attempt to identify the gap in research conclusively shows that there is value to studying the research surrounding *Inferno*. Although the amount of sources used in this study is incomparable to the vast amount available, there are still apparent patterns that arise when comparing them to each other based on theme and time period. The analysis of adaptation in association with *Inferno* research is only one small aspect of a potentially larger, introspective examination of sources. Thus, the potential utility of meta research is something that should not be overlooked when associated with interpretations of Dante's *Inferno*.

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