Allusions in Dante's Infemo

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Allusions in Dante’s Inferno

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay’s first paragraph.

"Vexilla regis produrent inferni; the banners of the king go forth, the king of Hell" (Vergani 74). In a place called Dis, the demon Satan resides. He has three hideous heads and spends his time crying from six eyes, while the tears mingle with the blood of three tortured sinners. These sinners, Brutus, Cassius, and Judas Iscariot, are ground to bits by Lucifer’s gnashing teeth, while Judas alone receives the benefit of also having his back stripped of its skin as retribution for him being the greatest sinner to be found in all of Hell. This illustration is presented in a graphic and figurative manner, thus making it a prime example of the type of allusion that Dante Alighieri uses throughout the Inferno the first section of his literary classic, The Divine Comedy.
"Vexilla regis produent inferni; the banners of the king go forth, the king of Hell" (Vergani 74). In a place called Dis, the demon Satan resides. He has three hideous heads and spends his time crying from six eyes, while the tears mingle with the blood of three tortured sinners. These sinners, Brutus, Cassius, and Judas Iscariot, are ground to bits by Lucifer’s gnashing teeth, while Judas alone receives the benefit of also having his back stripped of its skin as retribution for him being the greatest sinner to be found in all of Hell. This illustration is presented in a graphic and figurative manner, thus making it a prime example of the type of allusion that Dante Alighieri uses throughout the Inferno the first section of his literary classic, The Divine Comedy.

Many instances of allusion can be found in the Inferno in order to create one large allusion to the overall atmosphere and problems of Dante’s time. Most of the allusions in this work can be classified as either political, religious, or social morality allusions. The allusions in Dante’s Inferno act as a means for the author’s expression of his own opinions and predictions about his life and times. The allusions also serve as a mirror through which the present can be viewed through the actions and occurrences of past history. Most of the allusions found in the Inferno were used to present a representation of different stereotypes associated with behaviors and attitudes that Dante felt were injurious to Italian society, as well as to the rest of the world.

Some of these allusions were meant to be parables of warning for the ordinary reader. In this context, the term “ordinary” is meant to primarily encompass the educated of Dante’s own time period and the educated in the years to come. Because these warnings applied primarily to educated individuals, only if the readers were somewhat intellectually advanced would they be able to understand the combined philosophical and religious depth of the text, such as the meaning found in the inscription over the gate at the beginning of the work. This inscription described as residing above the Gate to Hell in the Inferno reads:

Through me the way to the suffering city,  
Through me the way to eternal pain,  
Through me the way that runs among the lost.  
Justice urged on my high artificer;  
My maker was divine authority,  
The highest wisdom, and the primal love.  
Before me nothing but eternal things  
Were made, and I endure eternally.  
Abandon every hope, all who enter here.  

(Alighieri 68).

This inscription lays the foundation for all of the following allusions used in the Inferno as warnings to the world. It sets forth the element of hopelessness that Dante was convinced would consume all people who transgressed in various ways unless they heeded the warnings that his book presented. This warning was that unless individuals right their wrongs while on Earth, they would ultimately be denied passage out of Hell.

Dante may have intended his poem to be read by only the educated of his time, but the impact which the piece actually had was to reach a much larger audience than Dante could possibly have anticipated. The reason for the depth of this one piece of literature is due to the fact that, taken as a modern interpretation, the Inferno can be seen as a metaphoric counterpart of the present world. A literary definition of allusion states that it is a causal or intentional reference to a specific person or event, often used as a...
parable ("Allusion"). Dante employs this method of using allusion in order to achieve certain literary, personal, and political objectives. He wished to create a great piece of literature because he considered himself to be one of the greatest writers of his time. He also wished to express his personal opinions about certain events of his time, and he wished to expose the political beliefs of his party without the risk of personal persecution that might have arisen if he had used some other means of expression.

Some of Dante's primary ways of achieving these objectives were by revealing the misdeeds of religious leaders, denouncing certain political actions by individuals as well as countries, illustrating warnings against transgressions of social morality aimed at the Italians of his time, and by depicting the physical and mythological nature of Hell and the punishments that befall its captives. Dante also wished to communicate his message regarding the condition of the soul after death, as a result of the choices the individual made during life. In this way, Dante hoped to point out the error of the ways of those who were still living in an effort to set them back on the path of salvation (Vergani 14). Dante used his own personal standards of judgment, law, and morality coupled with notorious individuals in order to create these allusions and achieve his objectives.

Most of the allusions found in the Inferno are interrelated. The relationship between the different instances of allusions help to create one large and coherent parable, message, and warning for the reader. The message itself may be different for each reader, because Dante meant the poem to present stereotypical characters from among which the reader could identify with at least one person. By recognizing their similarities with individuals already in Hell, Dante was presenting the readers with the opportunity to repent as individuals and as a society. In this regard, the book serves as a lens through which individuals can view their own lives through the mistakes and transgressions of others in the past, and in doing so they may have the opportunity to correct their misdeeds.

In order to understand the reasoning behind each sinner's specific placement in Hell, Dante's rankings of the different types of sins and sinners found in Hell is necessary. The structure of Hell consists of nine circles and one vestibule found directly outside the gate to Hell. The sinners within Hell are placed according to one of three classifications: incontinence, violence, and fraud. The shape of Hell is a large funnel-shaped pit located directly under Jerusalem. As the circles of Hell progress, the circumference of the entire funnel decreases until it meets Satan at the center of the Earth's core (Vergani 12).

Each circle of Hell is reserved for a particular sin, and these sins are designated to a particular region based on the level of their offensiveness to God. The more offensive the nature of the sin, the further away that sinner is cast from God. Dante considers incontinence, or weakness of will, to be the least offensive sin so it is therefore the first category encountered when progressing through Hell. The next category is violence against neighbors, oneself, or God. The third category is the fraudulent, which includes the worst sinners who betrayed their family, country, guests, or masters (Vergani 13). Dante adheres to this format of Hell based on his own judgments about how severe certain transgressions should be considered. These judgments are based on certain personally held classical, Christian, and legal ideals of his time.

Dante uses allusions in the Inferno in order to better illustrate this scheme of Hell, its punishments, and the sinners found
within its depths. The opening allusion discussed in this paper portrays the three sinners Brutus, Cassius, and Judas Iscariot being tortured by the jaws of Lucifer's three mouths. They reside in the fourth ring of the ninth circle of Hell, which is the innermost depth of Hell. The three sinners reside in this ring as a representation of all traitors against their benefactors, for whom this sphere of Hell was designed (Alighieri 210).

Dante uses this allusion in order to present the reader with historical figures that people of his time were familiar with, due to the infamy of each sinner's deeds. This allusion is mostly of a political nature, though it may also be classified as a religious allusion as well. The two Roman sinners mentioned, Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius, were involved in planning and carrying out the assassination plot against Gaius Julius Caesar, the Roman Dictator of their time, on March 15, 44 B.C. ("Gaius"). Since the two committed the crime against a political colleague, supposed friend, and their benefactor, they were reserved special places in Hell after their own deaths.

The other sinner, Judas Iscariot of Kerioth, a town in Judea, serves not only as a historically political allusion, but also as a religious allusion. Judas is described as having been motivated by greed to betray Jesus Christ to the Sanhedrin. This betrayal was accommodated for a mere thirty pieces of silver, which Judas received in return for bringing the chief priest to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 12:6). Judas had previously served as an Apostle and a steward to Jesus Christ and his other disciples. Upon seeing the results of his betrayal, namely the crucified Jesus hanging on a cross, Judas Iscariot is said to have run away and hung himself on what is known today as the Judas tree ("Judas"). Because of the magnitude of his betrayal and the fact that his benefactor had been the Son of God himself, Dante appointed him as the most tortured soul to reside in Hell (Alighieri 211).

This combined political and religious allusion serves several purposes. One is to make an impact through the visual effect it creates on the reader who is able to picture the actual historical figures being tortured for their notorious sins. Another purpose is to illustrate the repercussions of other people committing similar crimes, and to warn against such behavior if the individual does not wish to end up the same way. The allusion acts as a mirror that enables readers to examine their own lives and reflect on any similarities that they would need to concentrate on correcting so that they do not end up being assigned a similar fate for all eternity.

The focus on political speech is epitomized through Dante's choice of a guide to lead him, as the depiction of the universal sinner, on his journey through Hell. Dante's choice of the poet Virgil as his guide was based on his belief that Virgil was "the greatest ancient exponent of an ideal Roman Empire" (Royal 29). The allusion and placement of Virgil as the universal sinner's guide may seem incongruent when trying to establish a relationship between an ancient pagan Roman and a poem that is devoted to Christian spirituality. Many people believed Virgil to be less of a philosopher with insight to the spiritual world, as opposed to his being a brilliant historical poet. However, Dante believed in the medieval tradition that suggested that classical poets including Virgil were also sages, with supernatural powers that enabled them to have sufficient spiritual insight to serve as an appropriate guide in Dante's journey (Royal 29).

The figure of Virgil also serves as Dante's bridge between two institutions, the church and the empire (Vergani 11). As a
classical poet and a pagan, Virgil represented a link between the classical ideals that Dante believed in and the medieval Christianity that he practiced. Through Virgil, Dante called for a closer marriage between the two institutions and the ideas held by each side. Dante believed that the beliefs of the classical poets could be combined with the traditional teachings of the Christian religions. By using Virgil to make the connection between the seemingly opposite worlds, Dante hoped to illustrate the possibility of a greater union that balanced power between the two institutions.

Further evidence of the connection that Virgil offered between the two worlds can be found in examining several similarities that can be drawn between Virgil’s poems and the Bible. One of these similarities is the fact that both books have been used as types of divinations called sortes. Sortes are books that are opened at random and a verse is then selected randomly as well in order to find an answer to a specific question or problem. Another reason that Virgil may serve as a religiously inspired allusion is the fact that in Virgil’s fourth eclogue, he writes in a symbolic form about the coming of a Wonder Child that will bring the world into a Golden Age. In the Middle Ages, this writing was considered to be a prophecy regarding the coming of Jesus Christ (Vergani 11).

Dante alludes to Virgil in several other ways in the poem as well. One of these ways is through an allusion that involves several other great classical poets, namely Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan. In the fourth Canto of the Inferno Virgil proceeds to talk to these four great masters of literature, who then turn and salute Dante. This gesture is interpreted by Dante to mean that they consider him to be in the same league as themselves in terms of poetic prowess. This is a seemingly arrogant moment in the poem where Dante appears to be extending the self-fulfilling prophecy of fame in centuries to come. Because of the fact that Dante has in fact been counted among the great authors of his time, this comment in his poem has been argued by some to be justified (Reade 318). This allusion to the great classical poets also helps to illustrate Dante’s desire to integrate classical beliefs with his own Christian doctrines and teachings.

While the purpose of this allusion may simply be an opportunity for Dante to applaud himself for what he envisions as great personal success, this allusion also illustrates Dante’s perception of what happens to those souls who lived before Christianity and led virtuous lives but lacked a vision of God by not having been baptized. Dante makes further allusion to other individuals among this group, including Aeneas, the son of Anchises and the subject of Virgil’s own epic poem, the Aeneid. This allusion can also be viewed as evidence that Dante may have borrowed certain established ideas about the qualities of Hell from the Aeneid in order to create the atmosphere of the Inferno. Support for this idea comes from the fact that in Virgil’s sixth book of the Aeneid, the hero Aeneas takes a trip through the underworld in order to speak with his father, Anchises (Forman 14). Dante’s description of the souls found in the vestibule of Hell is similar to the state of Anchises and other souls that Aeneas encounters while visiting the underworld.

Other historical philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and Aristotle are also alluded to in the fourth Canto. This allusion to the great philosophers is used as a means for reassuring readers of the poem that it is not as a punishment that these virtuous pagans have been placed in the first circle of Hell. Rather, this is merely a fulfillment of their visions of what life after death would be like.
(Royal 54). The idea for this allusion can be found in the writings of Socrates. In his apology, Socrates describes an afterlife in which the soul migrates to a place where it is able to speak with the greatest thinkers and people who have died in the past (Vergani 26). Because these people are relatively content with this afterlife, their present state in Hell after death is not portrayed as a cruel punishment. Instead, their only true fault was a lack of imagination or understanding about the anticipated coming of Christ. Because of this, they will be forever denied the opportunity to know or see God, and will be confined in Limbo for all eternity.

This allusion combines with another that follows in the Canto in order to present a lesson to the reader. Dante asks Virgil in the poem if anyone has ever transcended this place of Limbo. Virgil’s response is to tell him that shortly after his own death, Jesus Christ (though He is not mentioned by name), descended into Hell and brought out many of the residents of Limbo who were allowed to rise out of Hell with him (Royal 54). Among those brought out of Hell were Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Rachel, and David. Virgil explains the process of the selection in the *Inferno* as being a result of these individuals’ reputations and names echoing up into Heaven. Through the grace of God they were recognized as ones who had believed and anticipated the arrival of a messiah, but were not around to see the actual event (Alighieri 73).

The lesson that can be found in this allusion to the few redeemed souls from Limbo, and Virgil’s explanation of the event, is that an ordinary individual will not be able to transcend from his or her position in Hell unless he or she has acknowledged the existence of Jesus Christ before his or her own death. The individual will also need something more than a singular belief in the Messiah; his life must have exemplified the characteristics that bring one closer to God (Ozanam 455). Dante presented this lesson based on his own personally held belief that good works, virtue, or morality count for nothing if a person has not acknowledged Jesus Christ as the ultimate redeemer.

Dante uses allusions in order to illustrate that Hell is the place where no one person is given the opportunity to choose salvation, but rather the choice was made long ago, before the person died (Vergani 26). These combined historical and biblical allusions therefore serve as a warning to readers to repent before death for their sins. In this sense, Dante considers sin to be the perversion of intellect, meaning “a lack of or fault in an individual’s belief system and personal knowledge” (Vergani 19).

Dante hoped to warn people of creating too narrow of an acceptance of worldly and biblical teachings, and instead was suggesting a more broad and accepting method that included both science and theology. This idea arose from Dante’s personal experience with various political and religious controversies during his life. Many of these controversies became the subject matter of some of the allusions he used in the *Inferno* and will be discussed throughout this paper. While he recognized that it is ultimately the individual’s choice, Dante made it clear that the alternative he envisioned was not exactly the paradise that could await the individual (Ozanam 220).

Dante’s motives in writing the *Inferno* were not purely out of goodwill and out of the spirit of concern for his fellow man. Dante had a personal stake in the matter. By writing a book of such renowned literary caliber, he was able to voice his own personal opinions. Because of the political and social upheaval that occurred in his hometown of Florence, a town that he loved as much as any man has ever loved his
birthplace, Dante became very disheartened and angry. The social situation of his homeland led to the sense of duty and urgency Dante felt towards writing the *Inferno* a poem he hoped would prove to be a tool to help people repent and achieve salvation. His eventual banishment from Florence in 1302 led Dante to change his political perspective, and gave him the drive to write a poem expressing his feelings and his desire for individuals as well as his beloved homeland to reform their sinful ways (Royal 29).

Dante became a politician when he was around thirty years old, after he had served time in the military services of Italy. Among other positions, Dante was appointed as a papal ambassador in Rome. In Florence at this time, there was a division between two political parties, the Guelphs who were the party of the pope, and the Ghibellines who were the party of the emperor. Dante was classified as a Guelph who in theory supported the pope over the emperor (Royal 24). The Guelphs later divided into two separate groups, the Whites and the Blacks. The Black Guelphs eventually gained control of Florence and it was during this time that Dante, a strong voice for the White Guelphs, was brought up on fabricated charges. When Dante was unable to appear at a trial to defend himself, he was exiled from Florence forever (Royal 26).

This information helps illustrate the personal motivation that drove Dante to write portions of the *Inferno*. Because he was denied the opportunity to defend himself and help try to rectify the political situation in Florence, Dante chose to write a poem that he hoped would have a better chance of achieving his objective of unifying the Florentine people and ridding the city of what he believed were social and moral evils. The *Inferno* presented the perfect place to attempt to achieve this idea, and if nothing else it was a place where Dante could start from a distance, without the fear of possible public execution if he was caught in Florence again.

Political allusions play a significant role in Dante’s *Inferno*. The political situation and its subsequent effect on Dante opened the door of opportunity for him to use his writings in order to denounce certain political activities. The majority of characters alluded to in the *Inferno* were inhabitants of Florence, Italy, or were involved in the politics there. These people were chosen to represent all people who are corrupt in politics, as well as to illustrate whom Dante held responsible for the reprehensible political and therefore moral situation of the city he loved so greatly, but was ultimately exiled from. While only native Italians may have immediately recognized many of these political allusions, throughout history some of these characters have become more notorious and therefore serve as suitable allusions for Dante to use to voice his political frustrations to the world.

Two of these political allusions are made in reference to Mosca dei Lamberti, and the Amidei and Donati families, whose feuding led to the split that resulted in the formation of the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. Dante himself was a member of the Donati family through the marriage to one of the Donati daughters, Gemma to whom he was betrothed in 1277 and later had at least three children with (Forman 2). Dante alludes to Mosca as a sinner confined in the circle of Hell reserved for those who sowed discord and scandal, and counseled evil (Alighieri 182).

The story behind Mosca’s placement in Hell begins in the early thirteenth century, when a man named Buondelmonte de’Buondelmonti, a leader in Florence, was betrothed to a member of the Amidei family. He broke this engagement, which in those
days was considered as binding as a marriage, and became engaged to a member of the Donati family (Vergani 65). Mosca counseled the Amidei family that “a thing done has an end,” which the family took to mean it was necessary to have Buondelmonte murdered. They followed his advice, and on Easter morning of 1215, they had him executed. However, this did not bring an end to the matter because the Donati family, newly allied to Buondelmonte through the betrothal, were outraged and began a bloody vendetta against the Amidei family and caused Florence to become embroiled in conflict for many years to come (“Guelphs”).

The impact of this one man’s counsel directly led to much of the political strife that Florence faced during the thirteenth century. Dante was heavily involved in politics during his life, and the conflicts between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines therefore had a great deal of impact on his political career. It also had an impact on his personal life since his wife was a member of one of the warring families. These facts point to the reason why Dante felt the need to point out the error’s in the ways of the one man who started the entire conflict in Florence, and caused what Dante considered to be a tragedy to befall his beloved homeland. The allusion also serves as a lesson and warning for people to be wary of how they counsel others, because their actions may have much more of an impact then they may intend.

The allusions to Mosca and the Amidei and Donati families are followed by an allusion to an individual who suffers a similar punishment in the same circle of Hell as Mosca. This individual is Bertrand de Born, who was forced to walk through eternity with his head separated from his body. The crime that Bertrand is said to have been condemned for is meddling between the affairs of a father and his sons, creating an evil scandal that made the family members enemies (Vergani 65). His punishment fits the alleged crime because his brain that conjured up the stories that caused the enmity between the father and son is now kept permanently separated from the rest of his body.

This allusion was motivated by a desire to reveal the dangers of involving oneself in political intrigue. Bertrand de Born was a French troubadour from Limousin. A troubadour’s profession was to record the truthful and actual historical events and ideals of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in lyric poems. Bertrand was viscount of Hautefort in Perigord, and he later accompanied Richard the Lion Heart to Palestine. He also served as an attendant to King Henry II of England. It was at this time that he began conjuring up the stories that were aimed at turning the father against his sons (“Bertrand”). Dante includes this allusion to the sins and horrible punishment of Bertrand in order to illustrate his disgust at such actions. He believed that Bertrand was given special talents by God, namely the gift of writing poetry, and instead of using these talents for good, he used them to spread evil in the world in order to try to receive political favors.

Because of his actions in dealing with the King and his sons, and Dante’s personal distaste for such actions, Dante reserved a special position as a sower of schism in Hell. In addition to using the allusion to warn against political intrigue and manipulation, Dante used this allusion as a way to warn other authors and poets against using their literary talents to do evil. In this way, Dante was illustrating two different messages targeted at separate audiences.

Another political allusion Dante uses in the *Inferno* that is also a mythological allusion is that of Ulysses and Diomede. These two together were responsible for many acts of political intrigue involving the
events of the Trojan War. Both men are confined in the eighth chasm of Hell, the realm of the evil counselors. While the two men were not the cause of the Trojan War, their actions concerning the war were considered acts of treachery by Dante.

The Trojan War started as a result of a competition between three goddesses to decide which was the fairest. When a shepherd named Paris was asked to decide the matter, his reward was to be given the fairest woman in the land as his wife. This woman turned out to be Helen of Troy, who was already married to another man, Menelaus the King of Sparta (Fisher). When Helen eloped with Paris, the Trojan War began. Several men had previously pledged their allegiance to Helen, stating that they would defend her honor at all costs. These men were led by Ulysses and included Diomede. When the Trojan War began, Ulysses first tried to pass himself off as being mad so that he would not have to leave his wife and family over the matter, but when this act failed he consented to gathering forces against Paris (Fisher 27).

Among the evils that Dante condemned the two men for were planning the strategy and attack of the Trojan horse, and stealing the statue of Pallas, which guarded the gates to the city of Troy. The two were also responsible for separating the two lovers Achilles and Deidamia. As a result of the separation, Deidamia is said to have died of a broken heart, leaving her death on the two men’s hands as well (Vergani 62). Dante used this allusion because the characters would have been well known representatives of their crimes during his time. He wanted to use an allusion that would have a great impact on the views of his readers in order to cause them to be wary of acting in a similar manner when dealing with conflicts in the future.

Along with representing incorrect and sinful actions of war, this allusion is an example of an incongruence that is found in the *Inferno*. While Dante earlier states that each person is judged by the standards of their times, in this case Dante condemns the two men for something that in our day would have been considered an admirable strategy in war. However, Dante considers these actions as acts of treachery based on the ideals and morals prevalent in his day, and based on his personal view of morality (Vergani 64). Dante manipulated this view of condemnation in order to expose political problems associated with his time, and in an effort to amplify the possible ramifications if the citizens of Florence refused to see the errors of their political intrigue.

Soon after Dante meets the souls of Ulysses and Diomede, he comes upon the soul of Guido da Montefeltro. Guido is from the same region of Florence as Dante, and calls himself a Latian. Dante uses this allusion as an opportunity to present a character representative of a particular sin, as well as an opportunity to address the then current political situation of his homeland. According to Dante, since dead souls are unable to see the present even though they have the ability to remember the past and even in some cases predict the future, Guido enquires as to the present state of Italy. Dante proceeds to tell him of the political problems and mishandling of the provinces in question. He also expresses his dismay regarding the badly equipped rulers and the immorality that they have often spread to the common people (Alighieri 176).

Guido da Montefeltro was a count and a famous warrior, as well as one of the great Ghibelline leaders. He later repented for his sins as a soldier and became a Franciscan monk. His goal was to get to Heaven through a newly directed path of righteousness. However, along the way he was approached by Pope Boniface VIII, who was waging war against fellow Christians,
rather than the Saracen infidels he was supposedly fighting. The Pope asked Guido to devise a plan that would help further the Pope’s own fight against the Guelphs (Vergani 63). Pope Boniface VIII offered Guido absolution in advance, and Guido’s deceitful and evil plan devised to conquer the Christians in Penestrino was a success, causing many people to suffer as a result. However, when Guido died his soul was claimed by a demon before St. Francis could receive him and bring his soul to Heaven, as was customary for all members of the order (Alighieri 178).

Dante uses the allusion of Guido in order to represent the evils that a person entrusted with political power can fall into, as well as provide a lesson of how not to act in positions of power, even if coerced by a religious or political superior. In this case, the superior was Pope Boniface VIII, who will be discussed further in an allusion later in this paper. Dante wished to illustrate that even those who seem sincerely repentant of their sins may not be saved if the consequences of their counsel have severe enough consequences on other Christians. This is especially true when a religious leader who is entrusted with the powers and privilege of granting absolution coerces advice out of an individual such as Guido. However, it is the souls who are coerced that are left to pay the penalty when such trusted religious leaders are disloyal to their vows and offers absolution without any real intention of leading the soul to penance (Ozanam 297).

Dante uses another allusion of a man from Florence named Ciacco, who is confined to the third circle of Hell. This circle holds the gluttons, who are forced to lie in mud and eat the dirt and filth in which they lie. Ciacco’s own name means “the hog,” and he was notorious in his time for his gluttonous behaviors in Florence. Dante uses Ciacco to warn both against political and personal excess. He uses the image of a well-liked man to demonstrate that even if you are good at heart, you can still be condemned for your transgressions and excesses.

Historically, little is known about Ciacco as a man, except that he was a contemporary of Dante’s and he was involved in politics. It was while involved in these political activities that Ciacco exhibited an excess and abuse of power as a political figure. He entertained many guests and showered them with extravagant surroundings and banquets, resulting in his gaining political favors through manipulation rather than hard work and knowledge (Alighieri 84). Because of this, Dante placed Ciacco in the company of other gluttons in Hell for eternity.

Dante uses the allusion to Ciacco as an additional means of political expression as well. When Dante meets Ciacco, he recognizes him as a citizen of Florence and asks him to tell him what the future state of Florence will be. Ciacco tells him that the different political factions will each in turn conquer and then submit to one another. He states that one party will eventually be overthrown and cast out after a future war has been fought. Dante asks Ciacco where other citizens of Florence can be found and Ciacco tells him that they are in lower circles of Hell for worse crimes (Vergani 30). He also adds that the number of good men still found in Florence number the same amount that could be found in the book of Genesis where Abraham asks God to save the just citizens of Sodom (Royal 63). Since the city of Sodom was completely annihilated, this statement illustrates the attitude of despair which Dante had towards his beloved city during his exile and the writing of the Inferno.

Another purpose of the allusion to Ciacco is to illustrate a philosophical and religious concept. Gluttons are people who have an insatiable hunger for worldly
possessions, political power, or other excesses. When Dante alludes to Ciacco, a glutton of political power and the finer things in life, he also takes the opportunity to include a philosophical notion held by Aristotle and commented on by St. Thomas Aquinas. This notion involves the state of a soul's body after Judgment Day. St. Thomas believed that salvation brought about by the Judgment Day led to a reunion of the dead souls' bodies and spirits. Through this union, achieved only through the redemptive salvation of God, the soul achieved ultimate perfection. Aristotle believed that after death only the souls of righteous men would be able to be perfectly united with their bodies. This perfection was alleged to have been the ultimate desire among gluttons of all things (Vergani 32). The similarity between the classical philosopher and the Christian theologian once again illustrates the connection between classical and Christian ideals.

Aristotle established the doctrine that the closer a being became to perfection, the more pleasure as well as pain the individual would actually feel. He believed that souls such as gluttons could never achieve perfection, meaning ultimate salvation, because of their various sins of excess. They could only be reunited with bodies that were closer to perfection, but would never be able to achieve absolute perfection (Vergani 32). St. Thomas Aquinas expanded upon the religious nature of this doctrine by stating that, "The soul without the body hath not the perfection of its nature" (Vergani 31). He believed that the gluttonous would be able to reclaim their bodies, but because of their sins these bodies would not have undergone the transformation to perfection because they lacked ultimate salvation. Therefore, it would be their eternal punishment following Judgment Day to feel endless pleasure from the reunion of their bodies and souls, but they would also feel the pain of knowing they would never achieve perfection.

Dante includes this explanation of the appropriate punishment that keeps the gluttons always wanting more than what they have in order to reinforce the warning found in the allusion to Ciacco. Dante wanted people to see the faults of Ciacco, despite his good qualities, and through an analysis of his characteristics and behaviors, examine their own lives critically. He meant the allusion to serve as a means of comparison in order for readers to view the tragedy of an individual's faults and then reflect upon their own situations and actions. Through this allusion, he was offering them a way to repent of evil ways that they might not have otherwise recognized.

Dante uses several additional allusions that deal with both political and social morality. One of these allusions is found in Canto 33 of the Inferno. This allusion makes reference to Count Ugolino Della Ghurardesca and Archbishop Ruggieri degli Ubaldino. Count Ugolino was involved in political treachery with the Archbishop, who later betrayed him. When Ruggieri captured Ugolino, he imprisoned him in the "Hunger Tower," which is believed to be the same structure as the leaning Tower of Pisa. Ruggieri also imprisoned two of Ugolino's sons and two of his grandsons in the tower.

In this canto, Dante allows Ugolino to tell his own story of how he ended up in Hell. Ugolino tells him that while he was guilty of political intrigue and treacherous scheming with the Archbishop, he did not deserve the cruel way in which he was tortured to death. When Ruggieri captured Ugolino, he imprisoned him in the "Hunger Tower," which is believed to be the same structure as the leaning Tower of Pisa. Ruggieri also imprisoned two of Ugolino's sons and two of his grandsons in the tower.

In this canto, Dante allows Ugolino to tell his own story of how he ended up in Hell. Ugolino tells him that while he was guilty of political intrigue and treacherous scheming with the Archbishop, he did not deserve the cruel way in which he was tortured to death. When Ruggieri captured Ugolino and his family, they were initially locked in a high tower and given food. However, one day they heard the door being nailed shut, and they were left in the Hunger Tower to starve to death one by one (Alighieri 205).
In his story, Ugolino expresses extreme anguish for the death of his innocent sons and grandsons whom he had to watch die of starvation, as well as a burning hatred for Ruggieri’s betrayal and horrible crimes against Ugolino and his family. Ugolino himself eventually went blind from hunger and died of starvation, a fact that Dante uses to conjure up fitting eternal punishments for both men. The fact that Ugolino went blind during his torture illustrates the idea that when men are faced with betrayal and punishment from others, they often lose sight of their own guilt. Since both men were initially partners in political crimes, they are damned to spend eternity together. In addition, since Ruggieri caused Ugolino’s starvation and death, Ugolino will spend eternity making a feast out of Ruggieri’s skull (Alighieri 204). This punishment itself serves as a stark warning against involving oneself in similar types of social or moral transgressions.

Because of the political nature of Ugolino’s crimes, Dante uses him as another stereotypical character that faces eternal damnation as a result of evil dealings in politics. However, because of the horrendous nature of his death and the betrayal associated with Ugolino and his family’s torture and deaths, Dante transforms this allusion into an opportunity to denounce various instances where innocent people are made to suffer at the hands of the guilty. Dante considered this type of betrayal and murdering of family members to be a severe moral transgression during his time because as a result of their deaths, there were no other male members of Ugolino’s family left to avenge their deaths, and very few others knew the horrible details of the crime (Forman 65).

In Dante’s time, private revenge was considered not only a duty of the surviving family members, but also a protected legal right. This idea is later reinforced through Dante’s allusion towards his cousin, Geri del Bello, whom Dante meets in the eighth circle of Hell. Geri’s death had not been avenged yet on Earth, and as a result he would not speak to Dante. The allusion to Dante’s own cousin, along with the reference to Ugolino’s plight, illustrates the moral belief in retribution that was held by Dante’s society in his time. This reference also served as Dante’s way of trying to do justice to his murdered kinsman, since it took nearly thirty years after Dante wrote the *Inferno* for Geri’s nephews to avenge his death (Vergani 67).

The second allusion Dante uses for both political and social reasons is a reference to the two condemned lovers, Francesca da Rimini and Paolo da Rimini. Francesca was married to Paolo’s older and severely deformed brother, Gianciotto da Rimini, as a result of a politically motivated alliance rather than out of love (Vergani 28). Francesca is beckoned by Dante in the name of love to tell her story. She tells Dante that after Gianciotto and herself were married for ten years, Paolo and Francesca were reading the story of Sir Lancelot and Guinevere, another famous ill-fated affair that ultimately caused the ruin of the utopian kingdom of Camelot (Forman 33). At one moment during the afternoon, their eyes met and Francesca tells Dante “they read no more that day” (Alighieri 81).

While the two lovers were still caught in their first embrace, Gianciotto walked in and in a fit of rage, murdered them both. Since the two lovers were killed at the moment of their deceit, they were unable to repent for their sins and therefore condemned to Hell (Vergani 29). Their eternal punishment, as designed by Dante, is to spend eternity buffeted against each other in a raging storm, constantly being reminded of the love they shared, but at the same time the pain it had caused them both.
Dante uses this allusion and the tragic ending of the two lovers in order to condemn the social practice of his time that encouraged marriages and alliances to be formed solely for the purpose of furthering a political cause. Dante himself was betrothed at the age of twelve to a member of the Donati family, which caused his later life to be filled with conflict due to the separation of political parties known as the Guelphs and Ghibelines (Royal 14). However, Dante was in love with a girl named Beatrice, who became the topic of many literary debates concerning Dante. Dante was denied the opportunity of ever professing his devotion to Beatrice, except through his writings, because of both of their political betrothals to different individuals. This allusion to Francesca and Paolo’s plight helped to serve as a means for Dante to express his disagreement with the political traditions of arranged marriages such as the one he was involved in.

In addition, Dante also uses this allusion as a parable concerning social morality. Dante placed the two lovers in the Second Circle of Hell, while Gianciotto was placed in Caina, a much deeper circle of Hell. The reason for this set up was because Dante considered the sins of the two lovers to be one of incontinence, meaning they did not fall in love with each other out of malice or adulterous motives, but rather out of a weakness of will. Neither one intended for anything to happen; instead it was simply a result of a lack of control and carelessness. Gianciotto, on the other hand, is considered to have transgressed worse than the lovers because he made the willful decision to murder his own family members out of rage. Dante considers this sin more socially and morally reprehensible (Vergani 29).

Dante uses this allusion in order to warn individuals against allowing themselves to be caught in compromising situations, as well as to be careful not to let your initial rage control your future actions. Dante incorporates his strong beliefs in Florentine laws and social norms into the allusions of Ugolino, Francesca, and Paolo’s murders in order to illustrate the detriment that disobeying the law can cause.

By examining both of these allusions, the reader is given a larger overall look at the warnings and implications to be found in each of the two situations. There are several aspects between the two allusions that make them very different, even though both pairs experience damnation together. The allusion of Francesca and Paolo is found at the beginning of the Inferno while the allusion to Ugolino and Ruggieri is found at the end. Francesca and Paolo are bound together because of the profound love that they discovered in each other, while Ugolino and Ruggieri are forever joined because of the intense hatred that Ugolino fosters for Ruggieri. The sins of Francesca and Paolo were ones of omission in that they both knew it was wrong, but allowed their affair to manifest itself out of a weakness of human will. In contrast, Ugolino and Ruggieri’s sins were ones of commission because each man deliberately acted in a way that caused others to suffer, either through their political intrigue or through the torture of innocent people.

In each of these situations, the individuals are ultimately condemned for their transgressions against the social morality of their times. Dante uses the stark contrast between the emotions of the two pairs along with the similarities in their plights in order to convey a powerful message to the reader that whatever sins they commit on Earth may impact how and with whom they spend eternity. Dante uses the stories of the tragic events in both situations as a lens through which the reader can examine what actions and behaviors led the condemned souls to their fates. Through this examination the reader is then able to
look at their own life and change their problematic behaviors that may mirror those of the condemned in an effort to save themselves from similar fates.

There are other allusions in the *Inferno* that are used as a way for Dante to express his distaste for other actions that went against acceptable social morals of his time. One such allusion is to a man known as Master Adam, who falsified the gold coin used as the primary currency of Florence during Dante’s time. Master Adam falsified so many coins that he jeopardized the entire currency system in Tuscany, and was put to death for his crime (Forman 67). Master Adam points out several other individuals in Hell that lead to other allusions regarding social morality. Two of these sinners were the alchemists Griffolino of Arezzo and Cappoccio of Siena.

Like Master Adam, Griffolino was a falsifier of metals. He was a well-known alchemist of his time, who was also known for his brief relationship with Albert of Siena. Historically, it is alleged that Griffolino told Albert that he could teach him how to fly. When Griffolino speaks with Dante in Canto 29, he says that it was meant as a joke, but as a result Albert had him burned at the stake. However, it was not for his false pretenses that he was condemned to Hell, but rather for his falsification of precious metals (Alighieri 187). The allusion to Cappoccio, an alchemist whose name means “blockhead,” is another example of an individual who suffers as a result of their corrupt vocation.

These three sinners all face the same punishment of having scabs all over their bodies, and constantly scratching at them. They are unable to transform their wounded, impure bodies back into their natural healed state. This fits their crime because in life they all tried to turn base materials into precious metals. Because they tried to turn something ugly into something rare and beautiful, the falsifiers are plagued with ugly scabs that never heal. Dante uses these allusions to the falsifiers in order to denounce similar practices, which he stated were a result of vanity. Dante also claimed that there were no people more vain than the Sienese, which he supported by the fact that so many of their people were condemned for similar sins, including Griffolino and Cappoccio (Alighieri 187). Vanity often represents a person who is so empty that they seek to find ways of seeming fulfilled. This idea connects with the falsification of objects, which takes something devoid of value, and tries to pass it off as genuine.

Just as Dante uses other allusions to condemn certain social practices of his time, the allusion to the falsifiers serves the same purpose. Dante believed that alchemists, just like troubadours, too often strayed from the true purposes of their profession. In this case, the individuals tried to manipulate their craft for their own personal gain. Dante also takes the opportunity to condemn vanity in any group of civilized people. While Dante singles out the people of Siena, a group of people whom he believed was particularly vain during his time, his warning and condemnation of this type of behavior transfers to any group of people in any time period.

Following the allusion to the alchemists, Dante uses another set of allusions to portray a similar moral transgression involving impersonation and exploitation. The first of these allusions is to the mythological figure Myrrha, who developed an incestuous fixation with her own father. She later developed a plot with the help of her nurse to seduce him by disguising herself and waiting in his chambers. According to Greek mythology, Myrrha fled from her father who threatened to kill her when her scheme was discovered. She transformed herself into a myrtle tree from
which Adonis, the lover of Aphrodite, was allegedly born (Forman 67).

The allusion to Myrrha’s sins helps to illustrate socially accepted moral view of love that Dante and his society adhered to. In Greek mythology, three forms of love are personified in the goddess Aphrodite, the lover of Adonis. These three types of love are Urania, symbolizing a pure love free from bodily lust, Pandemos, symbolizing simple sexual urges, and Apostrophia, symbolizing a rejection of unnatural passions. Aphrodite’s lover Adonis represents the product of the Apostrophia love that the two shared. Myrrha’s sin led to an acceptance of an unlawful love when she should have rejected any incestuous passion towards a blood relative.

The second allusion was made in reference to Venedico Caccianimico. Venedico was condemned for his part in the arranged seduction of his own sister, Ghisola. Venedico was a Guelph from Bologna, who promised his sister to a lustful member of his political party (Forman 51). For his sins, Venedico is confined to the circle of Hell devoted to simple fraud, in this case pandering, since he “sold” his own family member who had trusted him.

Dante considered fraud to be the most harmful of all sins. Dante believed this was true because it illustrated the perversion of human intellect, the one aspect that truly separates men from other animals (Forman 51). Fraud causes the individual to think through his malicious act before he commits it, and is therefore a premeditated and willing corruption of natural intelligence. Dante uses the allusion to Venedico in order to illustrate the danger in sinning through the misuse of the natural intelligence human beings possess. He also uses it to show how this type of deception leads to the ultimate corruption and downfall of the social morals valued by many societies. As Carol Forman states, Fraud causes the disintegration of every kind of human relationships, both personal and private. When sexual favors, political offices, religious offices, authority, money, and the very language itself are fraudulent, the order and trust that allowed men to live and work together is gone (Forman 51).

As evident in the Inferno Dante believed and attempted to illustrate this idea of the possible detriments to society and the social order of men that can occur if fraud is allowed to become widespread and left unchecked.

Dante uses an additional mythological allusion in order to condemn the whole nature of social and moral evil. This allusion is made in reference to four giants confined to the Ninth Circle of Hell, and serves to illustrate the magnitude of the repercussions of spreading evil. The giants found in Hell are combinations of the beings described in Scripture, such as Goliath, and the classical giants that tried to overpower the Roman gods and were thus destroyed by Zeus (Royal 94).

The first giant Dante comes across during his journey is Nimrod, the legendary builder of what is known in scripture as the Tower of Babel, who is unable to understand or be understood by anyone. When he tried to reach the heavens through the union of many peoples’ efforts, he caused the great separation that occurred when God struck down the tower and caused each person to speak a different language. The next giant is Ephialtes, who is held by a large chain that holds one arm in front of him and the other behind him. This chain will hold for eternity as punishment for his part in waging a war against the gods. This punishment is appropriate because it causes someone of great strength and an evil mind to have his source of strength forever held at bay by
heavy chains. The war that Ephialtcs started only ended up bringing about his own personal war of rage against the chains that hold him for eternity. The third giant is mentioned, but not seen by Dante. This giant is Briareus, a Titan who is confined in a similar manner as Ephialtcs. The last giant is Antaeus, a vain giant who is said to have killed over a thousand lions while on Earth. He is not restricted like the others because he did not join them in their fight against the gods, but his indecision kept the giants from being successful (Vergani 68-69).

The allusion to the giants was made in order to illustrate a creature that possessed all the essential elements of evil. Since in essence giants were human creatures, they possessed the powers of intellect and reason. However, because of their enormous size and strength, combined with their natural propensity towards evil deed and schemes, these giants were much more dangerous than any man (Royal 94). Upon meeting the giants in the Inferno Dante states that “Surely when she gave up the art of making such creatures, Nature acted well indeed” (Alighieri 195). Dante uses this allusion as an opportunity to illustrate Nature’s own system of keeping evil in check, as well as to illustrate that Nature is not perfect, a characteristic reserved only for God. Dante uses the giants as a message of warning that all evil will fail and all evil persons or beings will be condemned by the power of God.

Another social evil that Dante wished to expose was murder, and he attempted to aid this cause through an allusion to Branco d’Oria. Dante uses a similar allusion to a religious figure in order to emphasize that murder is in itself bad, but is made worse when committed by someone who is supposed to be dedicated to serving God. This allusion is made regarding Friar Alberigo, a Jovial Friar. Both allusions take place in Canto 33, and both individuals are condemned to the circle of Hell reserved for traitors.

Branco d’Oria was responsible for the death of his father-in-law, Michel Zanche. For this crime, his soul was immediately condemned to Ptolomea, a part of Hell reserved for the treacherous to guests and hosts. Ptolomea was named after Ptolomeus, who murdered his father-in-law at a banquet (Forman 75). Friar Alberigo was also confined in Ptolomea for the murder of his younger brother and his nephew while they dined at his house.

Both men were condemned for the socially and morally reprehensible sin of murder. Dante believed that the stability and order of society were based on each person maintaining their proper place and performing the proscribed duties and responsibilities that accompany these positions (Forman 75). Since the murder ultimately disrupts the natural order, Dante considered it one of the most serious of all sins and placed those guilty of murder in one of the deepest pits of Hell. Dante’s society had a very hierarchical structure to it, and because of this structure Dante believed that laws were necessary to keep order and peace. Dante believed that if people did not follow these laws against certain behaviors, such as murder, then society would be plagued with problems. Dante was concerned with how real this prospect had become in Florence, so he used the punishments associated with them in order to try to point out the destruction that results if such behaviors are left unchecked by a society.

Another interesting aspect of these two allusions is found in a comment Dante makes in the Inferno. When he meets Friar Alberigo, he expresses surprise because he had thought that Alberigo was still alive and living in Italy. He later sees Branco d’Oria whom he knows for a fact is still alive, since Dante himself had spoken with him on Earth.
just prior to his journey (Alighieri 207). This incongruity puzzles Dante, who is told that when the two shades, or spirits, chose to murder their kinsmen, their souls were immediately cast down to Hell, though their bodies remained in a seemingly life-like state. However, their bodies were only living, eating, and breathing shells of human beings, and were now possessed by demons (Vergani 71).

This discussion accompanied these allusions in order to serve as yet another warning for readers. Dante wished to warn individuals who may be tempted to get involved with murderous schemes out of political, personal, or religious motivation. He warned them that should they betray those who place trust in them and disrupt the natural order that keeps society stable and moral, they would pay a heavy price for it. They would be forced to forfeit their souls and allow demons to rule their bodies for the remainder of their natural lives on Earth (Royal 99).

Dante uses an allusion to the thief Yanni Fucci in order to create another illustration of a moral and religious transgression. Yanni was a thief from Pistoia who stole valuable objects from the sacristy of San Zeno’s Church. When Vanni’s crime was discovered, an innocent man was captured and put in jail for over a year. Only after Vanni’s accomplices had been captured and hung for their part in the crime was the truth discovered and the innocent man allowed to go free (Forman 59). Even though he was not punished for his crime while on Earth, Vanni found his punishment waiting for him in the circle of Hell reserved for thieves.

The punishment that Dante designates for Vanni and other thieves is constant torment by serpents. The serpents twist and warp the thieves’ bodies constantly, distorting them so much that it is difficult to tell where the serpent ends and the man begins. In Dante’s time, property and objects were considered not only to be under the ownership of the individual, but they were actually viewed as extensions of the owner’s own self (Forman 61). Therefore, this punishment fits the crime because the serpents in essence “steal” the thieves’ bodies and violate each individual sinner’s body.

Vanni Fucci’s crime was robbing a holy place of sacred objects, a symbol of great irreverence towards God. When Dante meets Vanni, he encounters the same attitude of irreverence when the tortured soul makes an obscene gesture and blasphemes God. Immediately after this outburst, serpents surround Vanni and attack him. This immediate response of pain inflicted upon an individual who blasphemes or is disrespectful of God helps to illustrate Dante’s feelings towards appropriate behavior. He feels that these actions will not be tolerated anywhere, even in the pits of Hell where evil has manifested itself. Dante uses this as a warning to readers to always be careful what they say, for if it is not of a true, reverent manner, they will be punished.

One allusion that helps to explain certain attitudes that Dante holds towards the roles of religious figures and the appropriate behaviors they should exhibit is found in the reference to Cardinal Ottaviano degli Ubaldini. Ottaviano was a cardinal of the Church, and therefore was supposed to be allied with the Guelphs, the party of the pope. Instead, during his life Ottaviano is said to have commented that, “If there is any soul, I have lost mine to the Ghibellines” (Vergani 40). Instead of being loyal to the pope’s party which Dante himself was a part of, Ottaviano allied himself with the Ghibellines, the party of the emperor. When the Ghibellines defeated the Guelphs for the second time at Montaperti under the command of Farinata degli Uberti, Ottaviano was overjoyed.
Because of Ottaviano’s reaction to this major defeat of his own pope’s forces, Dante condemns him for heresy. Dante defines heresy as intellectual stubbornness. In the words of Carol Forman, Cardinal Ottaviano “knew what the Church taught, but preferred (his) own interpretation. (He) did not trust what should or could be trusted” (Forman 41). By following his opinions rather than the teachings of the Church, Ottaviano condemned himself to spend eternity locked in a confining steel sepulcher from which he would never be able to break free to experience true enlightenment (Vergani 39).

Dante uses this allusion to a religious figure in order to illustrate that even men of God can become entangled in following their own paths rather than the path proscribed by God through His Church. Dante wished readers to examine their own paths and be very leery of getting too opinionated in case they allow themselves to become trapped into committing heresy. By illustrating the sad condition of a cardinal who should have been a man of unshakeable faith, Dante is reassuring the reader that there will be times when they themselves will lack faith, but the key to salvation is to never give up sight of the true path to enlightened spirituality. Through this allusion to Cardinal Ottaviano’s plight, Dante makes it clear that this path can only be found by following the teachings of the Church.

Dante uses two additional and connected religious allusions in order to expose several more abuses and inappropriate behaviors on the part of religious leaders. These allusions are made in reference to Pope Celestine V and Pope Boniface VIII. Pope Celestine V was condemned to the vestibule of Hell reserved for the indecisive and uncommitted. Celestine is known historically for making the “great refusal” by giving up the “chair of Peter,” namely his position as pope after only five months (Vergani 23). His resignation made it possible for Pope Boniface VIII, a bitter enemy of Dante, to come to power in his place. In Dante’s eyes, “Celestine preferred to return to the obscurity of non-commitment rather than face the problems of the papacy” (Vergani 23).

Dante employs the allusion to Celestine in two ways. First, he uses it to lead into a reference to one of his most bitterly regarded enemies, Pope Boniface VIII. Second, he uses it in order to illustrate the magnitude of the problem of not being committed to righteousness or to any path at all. Dante reinforces his view on the law of restitution in order to make this point. According to this view the punishment should fit the supposed crime, and therefore Dante designed the punishment he envisions as fitting the crime of being uncommitted. Hornets are constantly stinging the sinners found in the vestibule as they blindly chase a blank banner (Royal 50). These banners represent the emptiness inside of the individuals who are unable to decide what it is that they stand for or believe in.

Dante warns readers in order to keep them from making the same mistakes of being indecisive and not choosing a path in life. To make this warning effective, Dante includes the threatening description of how they would be destined to spend eternity if they did make the same mistakes. Dante makes a comment at the end of the allusion to Celestine and the other indecisive souls, expressing his disbelief of how it could be possible that so many people had lived and died without ever choosing any path at all. This comment represents the severity with which Dante views the problem. It also reveals Dante’s ultimate purpose in including this allusion, which is to warn readers that even if they make a bad choice, it is better than making no choice at all because at least then they will have the opportunity to redeem themselves.
The allusion to Celestine’s condemnation also gives Dante the opportunity to refer to his own personal enemy and the representation of the many problems that Dante believed were associated with the office of the pope during his time. This representation takes the form of the allusion to Pope Boniface VIII. Dante assigned Boniface to the Eighth Circle of Hell, along with other counselors of fraud. Dante believed that Boniface had abused the gifts he had been given by God, including his position of pope, the gift of genius, and the gift of speech (Forman 62). Boniface’s punishment for these abuses is designated to be that he will eternally be preserved as a flame of light, his true form being invisible to others just as his personal motives behind his behavior had been masked during his life. The flame has also been considered to be symbolic of the destruction that his motives and actions had the potential to cause and in many cases did cause (Forman 63).

The allusion to Boniface is not as detailed as some of the other allusion Dante used in the *Inferno*. Dante mentions Boniface by name only in regards to the part he played in the condemnation of Guido da Montefeltro, who was discussed in a previous allusion. However, Dante heavily implies that Boniface has a position reserved for him in Hell among the counselors of fraud. The reason for the mere mentioning of Boniface’s name without a detailed explanation is the fact that Boniface was the reigning pope during the time that the *Inferno* took place and was written. If Dante had been more specific with his allegations, he could have faced even more serious threats to his life than the exile he was forced into.

Dante blamed Boniface for his exile and held a very bitter attitude towards him because he felt Boniface was seriously abusing the powers of the papacy. Dante had been one of six elected officials from the White Guelph party who had been sent to meet with Boniface in an effort to demand that he stop exerting such tyrannical powers over the Italian provinces. While Dante and the rest of the group were gone on their mission, the Black Guelphs regained control of Florence, and Dante and several of his political colleagues were accused of crimes they did not commit. Dante himself was later exiled with the threat of death if he returned to his beloved home in Florence.

Dante blamed these events on Boniface, and believed that he was the individual who actually planned to have the most influential members of the White Guelphs called away from Florence so that the Black Guelphs could more easily take over the city (Ferrante 31). Dante maintained that Boniface had a strong motivation to do such a thing because he believed that the office of the pope gave an individual such divine infallibility that if anyone went against the will of the pope, they went against the will of God ("Boniface"). This idea had caused many problems between Boniface and King Philip IV of France, who wanted to have more control of the clergy in France.

As a result of his personal beliefs about the papacy, Boniface felt that by gaining control over most of Italy, he would have a sound basis for establishing similar practices and controls in France. King Philip IV was in direct opposition with Boniface’s wishes, and despite an attempt at a compromise, Boniface threatened to excommunicate him. However, before Boniface could officially declare King Philip’s excommunication, the King’s army captured him. Since there were many doubts about how the army’s actions would be perceived by the majority of the common people who supported Boniface, he was released only to die a few months later as a result of mistreatment during his captivity ("Boniface").
Boniface was accused of other abuses of the papacy, including his public practice of simony, in which he gave prominent offices of the church to his friends and family ("Boniface"). Boniface also claimed that as pope he held the "keys to the Kingdom," and could therefore offer any man absolution, even before the sin was committed and even if the sinner was not truly repentant of their sins (Royal 91). This concept was evident in the case of Guido da Montefeltro, who was discussed earlier in the paper. Dante felt particularly strong about this case because Boniface used his religious powers to become involved in political schemes that Dante felt "wage(d) war, not against the Saracens, but against the Christians themselves" (Vergani 64). Dante felt that these practices led to Boniface becoming "an instrument of ...spiritual damnation of the sons of the Church," and he therefore deserved to be condemned to Hell himself for his actions (Vergani 64).

Dante uses the allusion to Boniface in order to point out the principle problems with the papacy during his time. This was important to him in order to illustrate his idea that the church and the empire could coexist as peaceful and equally powerful and important forces in the peoples’ lives. This concept was the single most important principle that drove Dante to reveal what he saw as barriers to this coexistence. This allusion also served as a means of personal retaliation for Boniface’s perceived role in Dante’s exile. Dante wanted readers to understand that the papacy was not what it should have been, and to drive them to push for more reforms that would lead to greater peace and prosperity in their own lives and homelands.

One other religious allusion that Dante employs in order to make a statement regarding the condition of religious affairs was the allusion to Caiaphas and Annas. Caiaphas was the high priest of the Sanhedrin, the council that condemned Jesus to die under Jewish law. Annas, Caiaphas’ father-in-law, was also a member of the council and allowed Caiaphas to convince the rest of the Sanhedrin that it would be better for Jesus to be crucified than to sacrifice the whole nation (Vergani 58). Caiaphas’ arguments proved to be persuasive, and met with no objections, so Jesus was therefore arrested, tried, and sentenced to death. However, because of the laws of that time, the Jewish council was not allowed to carry out Jesus’ death sentence, so they turned him over to the Roman authorities for crucifixion. In this way, they tried to remove the responsibility and guilt from their own consciences. The same punishment assigned to these religious figures was also assigned to many of the religious clergy of Dante’s own time, although no names were explicitly mentioned in the "Inferno." Despite the lack of actual names, the fact that Dante made it clear that contemporary clergy could be found with the historical hypocrites illustrates the idea that the same problems existed in Dante’s own time, and needed to be pointed out so that the same abuses of religious power would come to an end.

Caiaphas’ punishment for the role he played in the death of the Son of God was to be crucified to the ground of the narrow chasm found in the Sixth Circle of Hell. This enabled other hypocrites in the same circle to walk over him with their heavy wooden cloaks, symbolizing the weights of their hypocrisy that they tried to hide during their lives. This punishment is fitting because it "force(s) him, as chief hypocrite, to bear the weight of the hypocrisy of the world" (Forman 58). Annas, along with the other members of the Sanhedrin share a similar fate as Caiaphas as punishment for their own roles in Jesus’ death.

Dante has several reasons for including this allusion. One reason is to allow readers...
to view the situation in terms of their own lifestyles, causing them to judge their own actions and to change them if they discover that they are participating in hypocritical behavior. Another reason is to illustrate the magnitude of the sins of the members of the Council, particularly those of Caiaphas. This illustration provides readers with a warning not to act in a similar manner if faced with large political or religious issues. Through the almost allegorical manner of the allusion to Caiaphas and Annas, readers are advised to be cautious when speaking in terms of who is actually a hypocrite; the one who proves he is a prophet or an instrument of God, or those who deny all the evidence and claim their own holiness as a reason for their infallibility. Dante wishes to illustrate that no man is above God, and therefore not all of His ways are revealed to men.

The final purpose of this allusion is primarily symbolic in that it deals with the actual time frame and setting of the 'Inferno.' This allusion to the men who were responsible for the death of Jesus creates a reference to the actual passion of Jesus during Holy Week, ending in His resurrection on Easter Sunday. This event becomes important because it is on one of the anniversaries of this Holy Week that becomes the setting for The Divine Comedy. In this work of literature, Dante, representative of the universal sinner, sets out on a journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, which he reaches on Easter Sunday of the year 1300. Dante sets up a parallel of the Savior’s own death and rebirth to that of the universal sinner’s own view of what might await him upon an unrepentant death, and the new life that awaits him if he chooses to be reborn with a faith in God.

This element of the allusion ultimately illustrates the most important lesson of the Inferno which is that the reader must recognize and view their own sins through the mistakes and conditions of past sinners who were unaware of the evil nature of their ways. Dante is calling the reader to use his book, and the characters in it, as a lens through which they can critically examine their own lives and mistakes. He then uses the punishments and horrible description of Hell as an added incentive for the reader to change his ways, repent, and live a better life.

All of the different types of allusions Dante used in the Inferno contribute to achieving his goals of warning readers and exposing the evils in his day and in the past. Each different allusion represents some aspect of political, social, or religious life that badly needed reform in Dante’s time. Dante loved his homeland intensely and desired to see it live up to its potential, but he instead was forced to watch as its citizens, political leaders, and religious leaders sent Florence into a downward spiral of immorality and social conflict. However, since these problems tend to be timeless, a modern application of the lessons found within the allusions in the Inferno will always be possible for any society. The greatest gift to be taken away from reading the interpretations of these allusions is the opportunity for self-reflection of one’s own life in respect to the view the reader receives from looking through the lens that is found in Dante Alighieri’s Inferno.

Works Cited


