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"What Dante Means to Me:"

Dante Alighieri's Influence on T.S. Eliot and other English Writers

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Abstract:
Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* has made a significant impact on English writers and many of its inspirations are still existing to this day. Famous English writers, such as Geoffrey Chaucer in the 14th century, John Milton in the 16th Century, and William Blake in the early19th century to mention just a few, are so much impacted by the thirteenth century Italian poet's text. In the 20th century, Dante's influence on T.S. Eliot is strong, and the suggestion of any certain relationships between T.S. Eliot and Dante lies in Eliot's famous article: "What Dante Means to Me." Thus, the purpose of this paper is two-folds; first, it provides a quick survey of Dante's influence on famous English writers starting from the fourteenth century up to 20th century; then it explores the influence of Dante Alighieri and his epic poem *La Divina Commedia* on T. S. Eliot especially on his two famous poems: T*he Waste Land* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.*
Keywords: Dante Alighieri, *the Divine Comedy,* Chaucer, John Milton, William Blake, T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land.*

Introduction:

On Sunday October 24th, 2021, I had the chance to participate in a conference organized by the Italian Department at Badr University in Cairo in collaboration with the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo. The conference is entitled, "the 1st International Conference on Dante and the Arab World: 700 Years Later." The purpose of this conference is to mark the 700th anniversary of Dante's death. I thought of writing a paper tracing Dante's influence on English writers from the 14th century to the 20th century. Thus, this essay is not proposed to be a critical analysis of English writers' literary texts to illustrate Dante's influence on them, but rather a historical survey outlining the great influence of Dante and his exemplary text, the *Divine Comedy*, on the most famous English writers.

The topic of Dante's influence on English writers itself is not new. Many critical studies have previously tackled Dante's influence on individual English writers. However, none has been written to trace Dante's influence from Chaucer up to Eliot. Therefore, it is the purpose of this article to track various references to Dante from the 14th century to the 20th century and his significant impact on famous English writers. To carry out this objective, this paper aims to do two things. First, it provides a quick survey of Dante's influence on famous English writers starting from the fourteenth century up to 20th century; then, it explores the influence of Dante Alighieri and his epic poem *La Divina Commedia* on T. S. Eliot especially on his two famous poems: *The Waste Land* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.*

Writers are influenced by each other throughout the history of mankind. From ancient history to modern one, great writers have changed history and influenced the writings of other writers. In his article "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T.S. Eliot illustrates how writers might influence each other: "No writer or artist has meaning all alone. His significance is in his appreciation of other writers & artists. He must have a place among the dead, for the sake of comparison. When a new work is created, something simultaneously happens to previous works" (12). According to Eliot, writers from different cultural backgrounds used to influence each other. In English literature, like any other world literature, there are countless influences from various world-wide writers. One of these writers who greatly affected English literature is Dante Alighieri (1265 -1321).

The 13th century Italian poet is considered one of the most famous Italian poets and the "Father of the Italian Language." For many English writers, Dante was not only widely read, but also considered and celebrated as a great literary writer. According to Brooke Carey, "what Shakespeare is to English-speakers, Dante is to Italians, but the affection Italians feel for Dante is perhaps sharper and deeper. Italians love Dante." Moreover, Dante is highly regarded by many modern critics as one of the greatest writers in the world. As Eliot has rightly said,

> Dante is . . . the most universal of poets in the modem languages. That does not mean that he is 'the greatest', or that he is the most comprehensive - there is greater variety and detail in Shakespeare … Shakespeare gives the greatest width of human passion: Dante the greatest altitude and the greatest depth. ("Dante" 265)

Thus, Dante's existence as a dominant impact on English poetry was such that it would not have been astonishing if a famous modern poet and critics like Eliot had integrated Dante's ideas into his poetry. In addition, he influenced many writers both medieval and modern. It might even be safe to say that Dante is influential in such a way that he has impacted many writers to become the writers they are today. Indication of Dante's influence on the English writers could be easily tracked in the following forms: "direct mention; imitation of the outer form of Dante's works; literal translation or paraphrasing of certain passages; repetition of thought or sentiment; adaptation or use of metaphor or figure; and lastly, the effect on life and character of his moral teaching" (Kuhns 2).

Famous English writers, such as Geoffrey Chaucer in the 14th century, John Milton in the 16th Century, William Blake in the early19th century to mention just a few, are so much impacted by the thirteenth century Italian poet. In the 20th century, Dante's influence on Eliot is similarly strong, and the sign of any definite associations between T.S. Eliot and Dante lies in Eliot's famous article: "What Dante Means to Me." Thus, the remaining of this paper aims at providing a quick survey of Dante's influence on famous English writers starting from the fourteenth century up to 20th century; then it explores the influence of Dante and his epic poem *La Divina Commedia* on T. S. Eliot's famous poems: T*he Waste Land* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.*

His Influence on Chaucer:

The earliest signs of "Dante's influence on English poetry began with Chaucer" (Kuhns 19). There are numerous examples of authentic allusions to Dante and his works in Chaucer's famous works. The reason of this influence is that during his lifetime, Chaucer was sent on "two diplomatic missions to Italy and became acquainted with Dante" (Axson 221). During this visit, Chaucer had "close engagement with vernacular Italian texts" (Slade 22). It is obvious that Chaucer read Italian and wrote poems with Italian features. Chaucer's critics agree that he greatly revered Dante to the point that he frequently cited him in many of his works without losing his own originality. As George Kittredge puts it, "Chaucer was nobody's disciple. Dante ... [and] Boccaccio did not control him: they were his emancipators. They enlarged his horizon. They awoke him to consciousness of power that was his own ... It was a time of originality" (26-27). Moreover, other critics agree that Chaucer had read Dante by the time he began writing *The Canterbury Tales*. For example, Ronald B. Herzman asserted that, "Chaucer read Dante the way Dante read Virgil … The ways in which Dante speaks in and through *The Canterbury Tales* are numerous, various, and subtle" (1).

A close reading of Chaucer's numerous works indicates, at once, the fact that he was familiar with Italian literature. Not only does he mimic Dante spontaneously, but he explicitly says he learned from him widely in writing *the Canterbury Tales*. According to Axson, "There are about one hundred lines in Chaucer which are unquestionably taken from Dante" (222). For example, Chaucer's *The House of Fame* is a poem where stories from Dante are alluded to and adapted. In addition, there is a mention of Dante's *Inferno* in Book I of *the House of Fame*, where Chaucer informs all those who desire to know

> And every tourment eek in helle
> Saw he, which is long to telle.
> Which who-so willeth for to knowe,
> He most rede many a rowe
> On Virgile or on Claudian,
> Or Daunte, that hit telle can. (445-450)

The influence of Dante on Chaucer's the House of Famous is unquestionable. Chaucer's direct reference to Dante in this poem is very evident and it seems that Chaucer had Dante in his mind when he wrote *the House of Fame*. According to Walter William Skeat, there are some similarities between Chaucer's poem and Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

> In general, both are visions; both are in three books; in both, the authors seek abstraction from surrounding troubles by venturing into the realm of imagination. As Dante is led by Vergil, so Chaucer is upborne by an eagle. Dante begins his third book, I1 Paradiso, with an invocation to Apollo, and Chaucer likewise begins his third book with the same; moreover, Chaucer's invocation is little more than a translation of Dante's. (vii)

The House of Fame is not the only Chaucerian text that one can sense Dante's influence. For example, many critics argue that "the structure of *Canterbury Tales* is inspired by Dante's *The Divine Comedy"* (Bloom). For example, both have pilgrimage as a central structural feature. The direct mention of Dante's name is shown in Chaucer's "Second Nun's Tale" where he used a stanza from Dante's *Divine Comedy* for the introduction.

Redeth the grete poete of Ytaille
That highte Dant, for he kan al devyse
Fro point to point; nat o word wol he faille. (*Monk's Tale*, VII.2460-62)

As it is shown from the above quote, Chaucer obviously cherished Dante, whom he recurrently quotes in a way that seems to show he memorized some parts of the *Divine Comedy* by heart.

Wei can the wyse poete of Florence,
That highte Dant, speken in this sentence;
Lo in swich maner rym is Dantes tale:
Ful selde up ryseth by his branches smale
Prowesse of man ; for God, of his goodnesse,
Wol that of him we clayme our gentilesse (*Canterbury Tales* 1126-1131)

Likewise, Chaucer in the *Prologue* to the "Legend of Good Women" refers to some lines of the Inferno, when he speaks about Envy:

Is lavender in the grete court alway,
For she ne parteth , neither night no day,
Out of the Hons of Cesar; thus, saith Dante. (*Canterbury Tales* 333- 335)

To sum up, that Chaucer attempted to imitate Dante in his writings is quite clear and indisputable. Obviously, Dante's poetry became the dominant influence for Chaucer's famous texts, *The House of Fame* and *the Canterbury Tales*, where Dante is acknowledged to have directly impacted some lines of these poems.

Dante's Influence on Milton:

During Chaucer and Milton, an era of approximately two hundred and fifty years, did not see any sign of a strong Dante's impact on English literature (Axson 220). With the death of Chaucer and with the rise of English Nationalism during the rule of Queen Elizabeth 1 in the 16th century, the interest in Dante and Italian literature waned for a while. According to many critics, the 15th and 16th centuries of English literature "owed much more to French than to Italian sources" (Slade 23). However, the tide started again towards Dante in the 17th century. During the 17th century "Dante is used in some way or other by some English writers such as John Milton, and Dryden …[who] show conclusive evidence of having read *the Divine Comedy*; and of these, Milton alone is deeply influenced" (Sills 99).

Similar to Chaucer, Milton loves Italy and Italian literature, and there is "a resemblance of his theme in *Paradise Lost* to Dante's" (Williams 231). Milton is trying out the styles and voices of Dante and at the same time he attempts to write on subjects like his and using words and images like his. According to Scott Williams "Milton's 'Italianate' English verse more than the actual Italian-language sonnets" (232). Moreover, according to Paul Slade, "Milton was 'Italianised' much earlier in his life than has been assumed and that the importance of his relationship with the Italian language and culture to his overall development as poet and writer has usually been overlooked or underestimated" (42-43). As a matter of fact, Milton writes only in Latin and English, Greek, Italian, and French. The greatest number of quotations in languages other than English or Latin are from Italian

sources. Dante is the most frequently cited Italian author in Milton's writings. As Paul Slade has rightly said,

> Milton was raised in an Italianate environment and that he was therefore more 'Italian' than is usually recognised. From his earliest youth, he was exposed to things Italian: to people of Italian heritage, to Italian music and musicians, and possibly to the Italian language. (70)

The most obvious product of his close interest in Italian language and poetry comes in writing six poems in Italian language. In his sonnet 13 to Henry Lawes, Milton directly mentioned Dante as a direct influence on his own verse:

> Thou honour'st Verse, and Verse must lend her wing
> To honour thee, the Priest of Phoebus' Quire,
> That tun'st thir happiest lines in Hymn, or Story.
> Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher
> Than his Casella, whom he woo'd to sing,
> Met in the milder shades of Purgatory. (Hughes edition 346)

As a matter of fact, most of Milton's 'Italianization' occurred in England before he visited Italy. Prior to his official visit to Italy Milton had become closely acquainted with the works of Dante whose *Divine Comedy* was "the only major Christian epic prior to *Paradise Lost*" (Bradford 23).

By the time Milton began work on his great epic, over a decade after the publication of his first collection of poetry, his engagement with Italian literature was of a different order (Slade 72).

Although Dante is never mentioned in *Paradise Lost*, Milton relied heavily on him for his use of biblical references in this spiritual epic. For example, in his description of Hell, Milton recalls Dante's classical descriptions of the *Inferno*. When Milton's narrator describes how the flames of Hell cause permanent sorrow, misery and suffering but do not provide light, he refers to Dante's description of the Inferno. Moreover, Milton's lines "Hope never comes / That comes to all," (*Paradise Lost* 65-67) resemble the engravings on the entrance to Hell in Dante's Inferno: "Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate,"(*Inferno*, Canto III, line 9) which is translated into English as "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."

To sum up, it is easy to find a similarity between *The Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost* where Milton was "involved in a dynamic and fruitful dialogue with Dante, and in particular with his *Commedia"* (Hollander 9). Despite that fact that there are "several instances of Dante's influence throughout Paradise, Milton shows a progression of evil through his own vision of Satan and creates a Hell that is less meticulously constructed than Dante's and more open to interpretation" (Hollander 11). One would conclude this part by quoting Francisco Nahoe who says,

> Indeed, Dante looms so large within the complexities of Milton's intertextual network that the traces he leaves, like the geoglyphs of Nazca, can from ground level remain entirely unnoticed on account of their magnitude and expanse. (24)

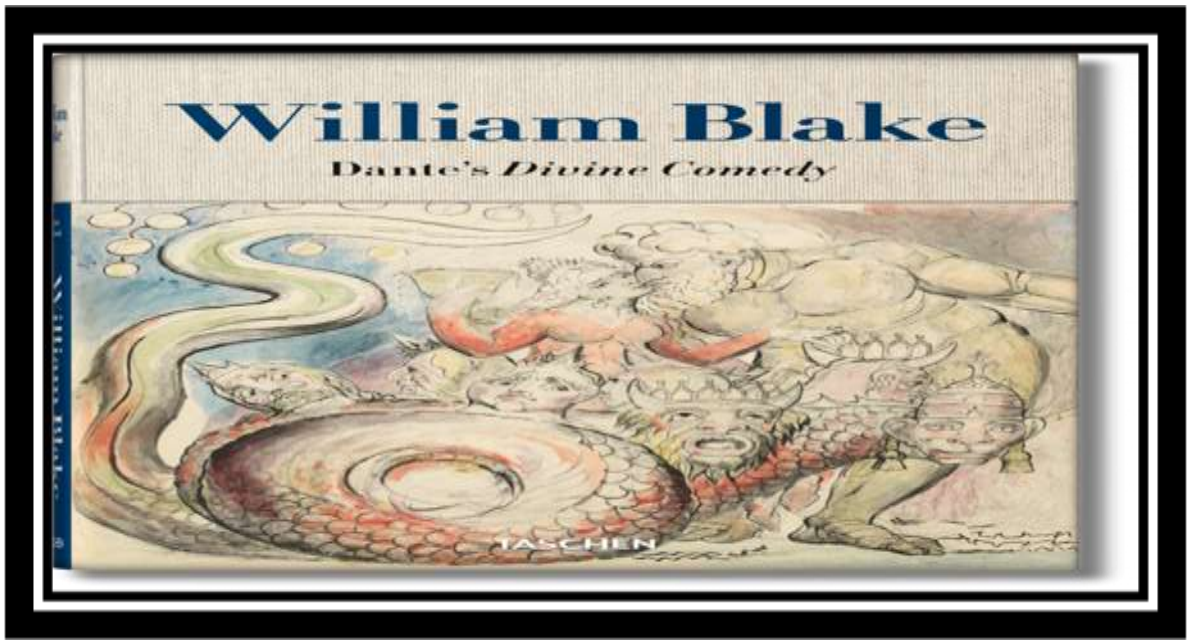
Dante and The Romantics:

Dante has greatly impacted Romantic poets who drew "inspiration from Dante's blend of lyric and epic, of romance and dream vision" (Tunis). In *Dante and the Romantics*, A Braida explores the impact of Dante on Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats and William Blake and explains how much of their writings is strictly attached with their reading of Dante (2). Moreover, in *Dante's Influence on Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound,"* Alisa Tunis shows how Shelley borrows from Dante's language in Purgatory XXX and XXXI, especially Dante's "preoccupation with the cold as a form of punishment." Shelley himself claimed that Dante had demonstrated "the most glorious imagination of modem poetry …[and] the poetry of Dante may be considered as the bridge thrown over the stream of time, which unites the modem and ancient World" (Cited in Manganiello 2). Dante not only impacted Shelley but also many other romantic poets. Among the famous English Romantic writers, it is Blake that Dante influenced him greatly. According to many critics, *The Divine Comedy* was not that popular in the 19th century until William Blake's famous illustrations for it.

His influence on William Blake (1757 –1827:

Dante has had a great influence on William Blake's writings as a romantic poet, especially his idea of the afterlife. In most of poems, Blake deals with the theme of life after death. Moreover, Blake embraces a different and unique way of dealing with Dante's writings. One of Blake's friend, John Linnell, asked him to paint several drawings based on Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Blake designed over a hundred of watercolors for Dante's *Divine Comedy.* Although Blake died before he finished the project, "he left 102 pencil sketches and watercolors and seven completed etchings. By all accounts, Blake enthusiastically dove into the work, even attempting to learn Italian so he didn't have to read Dante's *Divine Comedy* in translation" (Burnside 1).

Blake's drawings of Dante's *Inferno* show us how life after death can have significance for the interpretation of his poetry. Blake was to become the most imaginative and at the same time the most innovative British illustrator of Dante. As a poet and a painter, Blake was able to transform more than a hundred of Dante's ideas in the *Divine Comedy* into wonderful images. This collection includes all of his unique understandings of Dante's immortal text. Like Dante's poem, Blake's illustrations include parts of hellish misery to spiritual light. Despite his truthfulness to the text, Blake also expressed his own standpoint to some of Dante's central ideas. As a matter of fact, Blake's unique way of dealing with Dante's text offers a new perception for those already acquainted with the *Divine Comedy*. The following are some of these paints that explain Dante's famous poem.



William Blake. Dante's '*Divine Comedy'*. The Complete Drawing

Dante Alighieri 1800–1803N
© Manchester City Galleries

William Blake, "Dante running from the Three Beasts 1824–7" © National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

Dante's Hell by William Blake

These are just some of Blake's 103 paintings. Each painting is supplemented with a clarification and an original audio record from Dante's translation of 1812 that Blake himself used when making his enterprises. They are not simple illustrations but comprise a thorough reinterpretation of Dante's poem.

Dante's Influence on T.S. Eliot:

The principal objective of this paper is to trace the presence of Dante's influence on Eliot's most famous works, *The Wasteland (1922)* and *The Love Song of Prufrock (1915)*. To do so, there has been no need to a comparative or an intertextuality approach to find out how much Dante influences T. S Eliot. On giving him his Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948, the Swedish Academy described Eliot as "one of Dante's latest born successors" (51). To Eliot, Dante is "his own master and the master for a poet writing today in any language" (Eliot, 'Preface' to Dante, 1929). Eliot states that he began reading Dante with an English translation alongside the text:

> When I thought I had grasped the meaning of a passage which especially delighted me, I committed it to memory; so that for some years, I was able to recite a large part of one canto or another to myself, lying in bed or on a railway journey. (Eliot "To Criticize the Critic" 125).

Dante preoccupied Eliot's mind as a great literary figure. Moreover, Eliot is very fond of the Italian culture that produced Dante. As Eliot once said, "I prefer the culture which produced Dante to the culture which produced Shakespeare; but I would not say that Dante was the greater poet, or even that he had the profounder mind" (488). In fact, Eliot positioned Shakespeare and Dante on an equal stance: "Dante and Shakespeare divide the modem world between them; there is no third" ("Dante" 265). In the Italian Institute of London, on July 4, 1950, when Eliot was sixty-one, Eliot delivered a speech on Dante entitled '"What Dante Means to Me." He claims:

> Dante is . . . the most universal of poets in the modem languages. That does not mean that he is 'the greatest', or that he is the most comprehensive - there is greater variety and detail in Shakespeare. . . . Shakespeare gives the greatest width of human passion: Dante the greatest altitude and the greatest depth. ("Dante" 256)

According to Eliot, Dante "adds to human experience by extending the frontiers of this world and by taking us to a new and wider and loftier world?" Moreover, Eliot once confessed, "There is one poet . . . who impressed me profoundly when I was twenty-two. . . one poet who remains the comfort and amazement of my age"("To Criticize the Critic" 23). Eliot has a long-standing admiration for Dante. He once admits that he had the chance to "read Dante only with a prose translation beside the text" ("What Dante Means to Me" 1). In 1949 when he was questioned by an interviewer what his preferred era in Italian literature was, Eliot responded,

> Dante, and then Dante, and then Dante. No one has had a greater influence on me than Dante. There is always something to discover in the *Divine Comedy*. As a young man I had other poetic loves, but I betrayed these with the passing of years. I have always returned to Dante, to his poetry. (Cited in Manganiello 1)

Eliot acknowledges that Dante influenced him in a variety of ways including direct excerpts of single lines or passages from *The Divine Comedy*. As Dominic Manganiello has rightly said, Eliot's appreciation of Dante, "manifests itself in a variety of literary strategies, including imitation, parody, citation, and allusion, but at the same time transcends the literary" (16).

Eliot is particularly enthusiastic about the method and style of Dante. He tries to emulate Dante's rhythm and style in his poetry. This kind of imitation does not lead to discredit Eliot as a poet, rather, it teaches him how "'the greatest poetry can be written with the greatest economy of words, and with the greatest austerity in the use of metaphor, simile, verbal beauty, and elegance" (Manganiello 4). Eliot himself expresses his own frustration of imitating Dante

> This section of a poem - not the length of one canto of the *Divine Comedy* - cost me far more time and trouble and vexation than any passage of the same length that I have ever written. It was not simply that I was limited to the Dantesque type of imagery, simile and figure of speech. It was chiefly that in this very bare and austere style, in which every word has to be 'functional', the slightest vagueness or imprecision is immediately noticeable. The language has to be very dired; the line, and the single word must be completely disciplined to the purpose of the whole; and, when you are using simple words and simple phrases, any repetition of the most common idiom, of the most frequently needed word, becomes a glaring blemish. ("What Dante Means to Me" 37)

Eliot imitates Dante's style and language and quotes him directly in many of his works. To name two noteworthy instances in which Dante is directly quoted by T.S. Eliot within a poetic context, I would prefer choosing *the Waste Land* and *the Love Song of Prufrock*,

Dante's Influence on *the Wasteland:*

Eliot was greatly influenced by Dante and by the mystical and spiritual dimension of *the Divine Comedy* in writing his most famous poem, *The Waste Land*. Eliot outlines his objective behind writing *the Waste Land* as "to present to the mind of the reader a parallel by means of contrast' between the mythic journey of Dante through the three states of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, and his own dogged religious search for meaning in the modern world" (226). Thus, the setting of the poem is the inhabited world of Post World War I Europe, which is very similar to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. As Manganiello has rightly said, "Eliot follows Dante's map of the inhabited world … and with the British Empire of 1922, on which the sun never sets, acting as the counterpart to the Roman Empire of 1300" (41).

Eliot frequently quotes Dante in *The Waste Land*. For example, in his dedication of *poem* to his friend, Ezra Pound, Eliot uses a quote from Purgatorio XXVI as a way to inform his friend that he is not only the best poet but also that he's unrecognized: "il miglior fabbro" which means "a better craftsman." The same words, "il miglior fabbro," are said by Guido Guinizelli in canto 26 of the Purgatorio, who speaks of Arnaut Daniel whom Dante regards as a better poet than himself. Moreover, in addition to the dedication, there are a number of other references to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, including specific allusions to the canto III of *Inferno*. For example, near the end of "The Burial of the Dead," Eliot describes an early morning in the city of London:

> Unreal City
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,

I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (WL 60–65)

Those lines remind its readers of the similar crowd in Dante's *Inferno* where Dante says, Di gente, ch'i' non avrei mai creduto,/ Che tanta morte n'avesse disfatta" (*Inferno*. - Canto III. Verso 56-57) which is translated in English as: "I should never have believed death had undone so many." In this line, Dante describes entering hell, and at the same time, he describes people flocking to cross the river Acheron. This section of Dante's canto three is parallel to Eliot's vision of the "unreal" city, London, which looks like hell. In addition, Eliot's reference to London Bridge as being crowded with people who are the shadows of the dead is similar to that of the crowd waiting to cross the river in Dante's *Inferno*. According to Eliot, those who live in London are similar to those who stay in hell. Moreover, the lines "I had not thought death had undone so many / Sighs short and infrequent were exhaled" are references to the Inferno III: 55–7 and Inferno IV: 25–7. This reference makes it clear that the Unreal City of London is part of the scene of hell. Moreover, the "wasteland" of London extends up to the surrounding mountain which is devoid of vegetation. The image of the naked and inanimate rock symbolically objectifies death in relation to the absence of water, a symbol of rebirth and life. Like hell, London's nature is degraded, and the Londoners became endowed with an animalistic ferocity. These allusions make one conclude that Dante's ideas work very deeply in writing *The Waste Land*. To sum up, Eliot's frequent quotes from Dante's *Divine Comedy* serve his specific in reminding his modern readers of the similarity between Dante's Inferno and the modern one even in a very different time and place. As Eliot himself in his speech on Dante admits,

> Certainly I have borrowed lines from him, in the attempt to reproduce, or rather to arouse in the reader's mind the memory, of some Dantesque scene, and thus establish a relationship between the medieval inferno and modern life. Readers of my Waste Land will perhaps remember that the vision of my city clerks trooping over London Bridge from the railway station to their offices evoked the reflection 'I had not thought death had undone so many'; and that in another place I deliberately modified a line of Dante by altering it – 'sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled.' And I gave the references in my notes, in order to make the reader who recognized the allusion, know that I meant him to recognize it, and know that he would have missed the point if he did not recognize it. ("What Dante Means to Me")

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock:

Eliot's other poem that indicates Dante's profound influence on him is *the Love Song of Prufrock*. Eliot starts his poem by directly quoting Dante. The epigraph to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" comes from Dante's Inferno that had explicit significance for T. S. Eliot during his life. The words are articulated by Guido da Montefeltro, a character in Dante's *Divine Comedy* trapped in the eighth circle of the Inferno:

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma percioche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo. (*Love Song of Prufrock 1-6)*

Eliot's use of Dante in the epigraph without any English translation is very surprising to many of his readers who accused him of being pretentious. However, those people do not know that Eliot was entirely preoccupied with Dante and he thought other people might love Dante the way he did and they might translate the quote for themselves. Although there are other little references to Dante everywhere in Eliot's other poems, but this one is more apparent – it is an excerpt said by Guido da Montefeltro. When Dante requests to know his story, Guido says:

If I but thought that my response were made
to one perhaps returning to the world,
this tongue of flame would cease to flicker.
But since, up from these depths, no one has yet
returned alive, if what I hear is true,
I answer without fear of being shamed.

Eliot's choice of this epigraph has been a subject of speculation. One can explain his decision to use this quote from Dante's Inferno as being related to the theme of the poem. As a matter of fact, "Prufrock" is not a poem about virtuous individuals, but about evil ones pretending to be good. Moreover, the setting of the poem is similar to hell. Prufrock, like Dante's Guido, lives in a world like hell from which it is difficult for him to escape. In addition, the poem tells us that Prufrock, who is singing his "love song," might be concerned about his reputation like Dante's Guido. In other words, Prufrock is going to tell his readers things because he thinks they will not have a chance to say them to other people. The same way Guido thinks Dante will never get back to tell people of his story. Unlike Dante who seeks truth about himself and others and decides to go the *Inferno* to find out the truth about himself and others. Prufrock could not make up his mind about ordinary life:

Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse. (45-48)

Like Dante's journey in *the Divine Comedy*, Prufrock is isolated and impotent as if he were in a hell unable to make up his mind to ask his "overwhelming question," and is convinced that he is "ridiculous" and "the Fool." Thus, his world in terms of being like a hell is similar to Dante's Inferno. To sum up, the quick analysis of Eliot's *The Waste Land* the *Love Song of Prufrock*, illustrates how much debt Eliot owed to Dante and showed him as "the true Dantescan voice' of the modem world"(Pound 89).

Conclusion:

More than 700 years ago and Dante is still relevant to us today. His most famous work, the *Divine Comedy*— of which "Inferno" is the first part—remains a significant text continuously being "reimagined and reinterpreted" by many English writers both mediaeval and modern. Many of those Dantestique English writers had the chance to visit Italy and spoke Italian language. They understood "the rules of Italian prosody, absorbed Italian literary theory and devoured Italian poetry from Dante and Petrarch to Tasso and Marino" (Slade 183). The impact of Dante has been seen over famous English writers, such as Geoffrey Chaucer in the 14th century, John Milton in the 16th Century, William Blake in the early19th century and T.S. Eliot in the 20th century. Those writers have been greatly influenced by Dante's descriptions of Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory. They tried to restate and reinterpret the *Divine Comedy* to address their contemporary society. Moreover, they used direct quotations written in Italian, and very often they used lines from Dante's works that have been translated and somewhat modified to fit into their poetry. In short, they inherited from Dante his poetry, his language, images and style. As Nick Havely has rightly said,

> Early twentieth-century writers, like Pound, Eliot and Yeats, thus inherited a cultural tradition in which Dante's 'dead poetry' (Purgatorio 1, 1.7) had undergone a sustained and pervasive resurgence. Translations and editions of the Commedia (and of the Vita Nuova) were by their time proliferating in English and in other European languages. (3)

In conclusion, this paper draws on the critical books and scholarly essays written about Dante, as well as on the works of the selected writers under this study who view Dante and reinterpret his work in a way that shows how his *Divine Comedy* deals with questions that are always relevant to writers throughout different ages. This paper has been successful in illustrating how Dante continues to influence English literature, from Chaucer's direct quotes of Dante's *Inferno* to Eliot's depictions of hell as a modern setting in *The Waste Land*.

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