Paralleling Aesthetics: Vestiges of Nineteenth-Century England in Blake's Illustrations of Dante's *Inferno*

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In the year 1826, sixty-five year old William Blake was commissioned by John Linnell to illustrate Dante Alighieri's famous Divine Comedy.[1]The romantic poet spent the last three years of his life engraving that which Dante had initially written a few centuries ago. Yet when one throws a glance at Blake's illustrations and dares to compare the engravings of Sandro Botticelli or illustrator Gustave Doré, there is a certain degree of ambiguity that is cultivated.[2] If focusing on the Blakean illustrations, the observer notices that even the surrealist painter, Salvador Dali, had not depicted the *Divino Comedia* in the way Blake had chosen to do it.[3] But why? What message was the Romantic poet trying to communicate through his work of art? Why is the Divine Comedy's *Inferno* made up of seventy engravings while *Purgatory* has twenty-five and *Paradiso* only ten? Has the Blakean radicalist prophecy found its way into his engraving as well?

This manuscript aims to zoom in on specific depictions of the *Inferno*; each Canto and its engraving will be analyzed individually and paired with one of Blake's poems from *The Songs Of Innocence & Experience*.[4]The thesis at hand is that Blake did not depict Dante's *Inferno*, but used Dante as a mirror to his contemporary reality. Vestiges of nineteenth-century England, the newly industrializing anti-humanitarian society's cries are to be traced within the para-biblical inscriptions. Many have extensively criticized Blake's demonization of industrialization when it comes to his poetry, but what about his other works of art?[5]

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The romantic poet was deemed a nineteenth-century radicalist because he was thought to have been worshiping nature like many of his contemporaries.[6] The Blakean legacy is traced within his *Inferno's* engravings and the moral he was trying to reach the nineteenth-century Englishman is put forth.

Santagata and Marco shed light on the fact that Dante had initially written *The Divine Comedy* as an ethical gateway for his reader.[7] Though Dante's intentions are debatable, literary scholars agree that *The Divine Comedy* was jet down unto paper to remind man of his duties and limitations.[8]

William Blake's manifold of poems are said to have been composed for similar reasons. The young poet was striving to create a medium that would allow his ardent reader a chance to look at reality from another looking glass, a parallax view of industrialization. Both Dante and Blake were initially misread by society, yet their message was all the same. This manuscript will not solely be based on a literary analysis of nineteenth-century poetics, but rather I wish to employ a handful of verses to demonstrate my thesis.

In Blake's illustrations of *The Divine Comedy,* we notice that the depictions bespeak of London in woes. This motivates the young poet to write of *The Daughters of Albion* who are drenched in tears,[9] a young *Chimney Sweeper* bargaining his youth for a piece of bread, and even the disappointed gaze of old Thames who has become the protagonist of an entire series of Blakean songs for both ingenuousness and of experience.[10]

There's no need for a comparative meta-cultural analysis of Dante's Italy and Blake's nineteenth-century England; since they both churned exact replicas of artistic produce, they created paralleling aesthetic realms. As Dante and Blake had chosen to employ various forums to expose their concerns, they stem from the same ideological standpoint.

In autumn 1825, Blake was constantly visited by his friend called Crabb Robinson, and within Robinson's memoirs, we can trace the inauguration of this study.[11] Robinson began by describing the stench that had taken over Blake; he was so drenched within his daily routine that Robinson considers "dirt" to be an understatement of his current façade and he entitled the poet "filthy."[12] Robinson demonstrates how Blake's window looked out at the warehouses all across the country with Thames peeking through the smog that always enveloped the city. Blake had begun to call himself a "Machine," because for once, he was so attached to his work that he forgot to exist as a human, a social being. Blake became a mere vessel that was prone to share his ideas through his art, referencing that of the famous Italian poet who had preceded him.[13]

Thus the term "Blake's Romantic England" is not merely that which signifies the reign a specific revolution, but rather a fundamental aspect of the primacy of British history.[14]An essentialist reading of this era assumes that the muses of the age sang the wrath and anguish of their people, the enchained protagonists of the unified English totality.

Art is said to be the tongue of a particular culture; it is the voice of the collective unconscious serving to justify that which lies beyond the common understanding of reality.[15]The study of art is not that of a particular artist, but that of the culture that produced them. Dante's *Inferno* is a work of art that has morphed into an archetype for human suffering. There are many examples of Dante being implicitly referred to in literature to demonstrate not only tragedy but oceanic misery. Milthorpe and Pierre explain that

Dante is the valid exemplar of the tragic gloom of life, *The Divine Comedy* is a model of the collective travesty.[16] This subsection of the paper aims to demonstrate that Dante's *Inferno* is not that which is depicted in William Blake's illustrations that are titled based on the poem; but rather they demonstrate Blake's vision of the social ambiguity of his contemporary British society. The social conundrum of the age of exhaustion, while mankind was at the squandering epoch of inhumanness. The Industrial Revolution, financial crises, labor dissolution and the hectic social state of the hierarchical British Empire are to be traced in the milieu of Blake's illustrations of the *Inferno*.

There's no objective accuracy in a literary masterpiece. The artist is the product of his times, and art is merely a universal language pertaining to the understanding of this corporate amalgamation of experiences. Even in the very original manuscript of Dante's *Inferno*, one may easily trace the cultural prejudices that drove the artist to compose it. For instance, Dunlop points out that Jerusalem is posited above the center of the largest circle of Hell.[17] Yet geography, it is said to infer otherwise and while investigations regarding Dante's knowledge of the art of mathematics are concerned, it is always evident that the placement of the Holy City was not an accident, but a cultural representation. The same goes for the illustrations of both Doré and Grosz, both of which have infused modern ideas into the depiction of the literary fiction that was initially brought forth by Dante.[18]

William Blake was a master, a seer, and an artistic prophet of his times who knew how to demonstrate the cry of a people worth listening to. Tambling explains how Blake had spent his life in "the shadow of poverty and financial crisis, national and personal".[19] Blake's concern regarding his people is to be traced both in the *Inferno* and in his many poems respectively. One may even go far enough and claim that the *Inferno* is not that of Dante's, but rather illustrations that ought to bring to life the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*.[20] For instance, whence reading Blake's poem entitled *Infant's Joy* a literary analysis demonstrates that the although the depiction is that of familial love, there are the inaugural sparks of the anguish that comes forth in the poem's counterpart an *Infant's Sorrow*. Many literary critiques, such as Mee, have read "the infant" as the Industrial Revolution's generation who is newly blooming, metamorphosing from a romantic naturalist into a capitalist, as they trespass the notions of joy and endeavor the journey of mechanized sorrow.[21] A paralleling image of this is depicted in Blake's illustration of the Canto XXII, Circle VIII, entitled *The Corrupt Officials: The Devils Fight Over Ciampolo's Escape.*

Blake is in ideal Romantic who was left behind in the ashes of the Wasteland that the modernizing world had given birth to.[22] Blake noticed the ideological rampage he was incarcerated within and chose to criticize it following Dante's example. Blake's poetic illustrations are deemed to be another portrayal of his socio-cultural concerns and the destiny of modern industrial heresy. His depiction of Dante's XIX Canto, *The Simoniac Pope,* is an emblem of how innocent souls were rapidly taken aback by the new wave of capitalism that was brought forth by the industrial revolution. The poem paralleling Blake's anxiety is one of the very first within the series of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, *The Chimney Sweeper.* It is Canto XIX's dispersion from paint into verse. The poem and the illustration mirror exact replicas of thematic depictions.

Blake's poetry is often said to convey a message beyond the words that it jets down. Gleckner explains how it is that the poems in itself represent an intrinsic message, because though the poet had initially utilized classical methods of writing and illustration, but later on grew out of them.[23] One might argue that there are still vestiges of classicism in William Blake's poetry which suggest that the language is not there to merely illustrate a single case in history instead of becoming a social archetype. T. S. Eliot entitled this creation the "timeless instant" during which art invades the borderline of entertainment becoming a portal that transmits a collective truth about mankind.[24]

The "hieroglyphic civilization" relies on art as a reservoir for history to lean on. The soundtrack of the battle against modernity is present within a handful of nineteenth-century scholars. The term "modern" in itself represents the radical approach that was initially kindled by romantics such as Blake. Eliot and Woolf are other renditions of the same *Inferno*, they represent what it is to be a gramophone, a Homeric hero that bespeaks the woe of his people in form of an epic.[25] There's a certain discourse in literature, irrelevant of how hard the author tries to isolate himself from the current situation of his people, there's always a gap in classicism which may only be contributed to by the amalgamation of imagination with experience; with the underlying aversion of the artist's contemporary reality. Thus, Eliot's *Wasteland*[26] is that of *Mrs. Dalloway*,[27] that of Pound and inexplicably, that of Blake.

Dante's *Inferno* is a cultural representation of the tragedy of unorthodoxy in society; the artist cannot help but give away the imperial consciousness of his people.[28] Especially if he be someone as fragile, sensitive and sentimental as William Blake.

In Blake's earliest biography, there lies a full passage about the protagonist being far more empathetic than he ought to have been. He was always led to poverty and misery because he believed in morality and ethics, while the rest of London was out in shackles trading children for labor, for money.[29] As the rest of the world was enslaved to capitalism, Blake was inextricably enslaved to his pre-Victorian conscience.

This is also evident in Blake's poems such as *London* and *Tyger*.[30] In *London*, the poet alludes to the corrupt culture emerging from the vicissitudes of economic affairs; Blake illustrates the co-occurrence of poverty and prostitution, the loss of belongingness and the reign of currency instead of virtuosity. A thematically parallel portrayal is suggested within *Tyger* whence Blake goes beyond the boundaries of personification and uses his verse to exhibit the cultural conundrum of the prevalent imperial plague. Dante's *Inferno* was employed to depict the equivalent to these pieces of balladry. In Blake's illustration of Dante's Canto XXV, *Centaur Cacus Threatens Vanni Fucci*, we observe a centaur whose human parts are tortured by various dragon-like creatures that simultaneously set the creature's skin afire. We can see the human form in agony within the poems and the illustration; as the youth's form is cursed to turn into a primitive animal that is bound to eternal flames. Blake uses Dante as an analogy to validate his anti-industrial, nineteenth-century humanist's dissertation.

Mazzero has entitled Blake's works a "historical record," for he is said to speak not merely for himself and his comprehension of the world,[31] but also as a scripted encyclopedia of the Revolution's era. Blake's poetry, though somewhat archaic in the form of its phrasing,

serves a purpose that's beyond academic and scholarly, it aims to manifest itself as a panopticon of British imperial consciousness through its many layers of symbolism.[32]The depictions of the *Inferno* represent hell on earth and not beyond it, explains Tambling,[33] in a manuscript that delved into the process of comparing the Romantic poet to his Russian contemporaries. Blake was deemed as the "forefather of contemporary symbolists."[34] With this in mind, Blake's depiction of the *Inferno* take a whole new turn, what if *Inferno's Three Beasts* and the *Whirlwinds of Lovers* are not constrained to symbolizing misery beyond death, but instead, serve as an emblem of cultural and social travesty. These illustrations exhibit the absence of humanity within mankind and the apocalypse of industry as seen through the analytical lens of the Romantic poet.

A research study conducted by Bidney clarifies how the Industrial Revolution of the Pre-Victorian era has found its way into literature;[35] the cultural nostalgia that clings unto history is said to transform the artist's conception of the rapid change as a sign of misfortune, a depiction of hell. Dante's *Inferno* is thus symbolically representing that of the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution and the on-going social injustice suffocating the commoners of London. Blake gives word to his suppressed perspective in *Little Black Boy*, when the poet campaigns against the rapidly emerging slavery in industrial London. The very same nuance of de-facto capitalism is traced in his depictions of Dante's Canto VII, in which we observe the Stygian marsh and the manifold of people thrashing each other as their cries are heard unto the other end, while the boy's voice was silenced by his need to live.

Eliot, according to Kirk, is one of the very few authors of Blake's proceeding era who took time to explain this conundrum regarding the artist's dispersion of contemporary ideology within art by stating how both the "self " and the "reality" are subjective notions that coupled up give birth to an objective perspective.[36] Another reading into the latter would suggest that Eliot was explaining what is now known as a "collective unconscious." Which is primarily based on subjective perspectives that combined make up an objective reality, a mode of being that the artist cannot but give way to, for it is deeply ingrained in his mental structure.[37]

Blake's lifetime was highly influenced by both his contemporary artists, acquaintances and his art critics; those who represented the ultimate nineteenth-century viewpoint of his generation. His poems were amended and illustrations edited to please the reviewers and safeguard his family home.[38] Though the author did indeed exhibit forms of rebellion, it was always foreshadowed and often concealed within a speck of Romanticism, much like Dante who had chosen to demonstrate an *Inferno* lacking the Biblical fires of hell. Blake too was a rebel, but a craftsman who knew whence it was appropriate to portray such radicalism. One can very easily skim through the nineteenth century and neglect the *Inferno* illustrations, but one cannot fail to notice them whilst inspecting the nature of the people it was said to please.[39] The message of Blake's *The Songs of Innocence*,[40] *Daughters of Albion*,[41] *Urizen*[42] and even *Jerusalem*[43] combine to formulate a cure for the atrocities of Great Britain during the nineteenth century.

"Art is a materialistic activity as well as a spiritual one and serves as a design laboratory for the whole society;"[44] neither Blake's nor Dante's descriptive powers are said to be put

to examination, but their cultural relevance is far underrated. Jungian psychoanalysis offers a very insightful perspective as to what extent art can serve as a cultural catalyst. Jung argues that art in itself is a dangerous thing since it can be interpreted in many ways, all of which are not necessarily true for the public but are true for the individual interpreting them.[45]The scholar at hand, Jung explains, looks at the image targeting one vestige of the represented conscious being, the work of art. Well, what if the Jungian reading of art is inferred upon William Blake's reading of the *Inferno* and reached to the conclusion that the imaginary hell that Dante had spoken of was read by Blake as a mirror of his contemporary times?

O'Malley states that Blake belonged to the generation that was about to proceed with the nineteenth-century mentality.[46] Claims have been made that Blake had seen the clouds of war and injustice that was hastily approaching humanity during his days. Blake is deemed a philosopher, a seer compared him to Nietzsche, Hopkins, Joyce, and Dostoevsky, for he believed that the destiny of a man is on earth and is a function of one's own making. Much like every victim of Dante's *Inferno* was self-victimized, thrown into the very pits of agony because of their personal decision of unorthodoxy, such was the case of Blake's mentality too. When observing Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*,[47] we notice a clear foreshadowing of Dante's *Inferno.* Yet they both overlap because Dante was taken as a symbol for agony and not as a poem which needed a literal depiction. Illustrators of Dante had long ago brought his many verses to life; Blake went beyond that, by giving the words of the Italian prophet a social significance that was not only bound to the 14th century but was the mirror of the very whole of humanity.

The critiques of modernism bespeak of the emergence of a new dimension in the realm of art. Anderson uses to examples of Baudelaire and Wilde to explain how it is that the freedom of autonomous self-awareness and the conscious aesthetic appeals took over the classical art of the past, and chose to ally it with a certain degree of skepticism.[48] Blake's illustrations shed light on the prior mentioned point, in that they fail to translate Dante's scripture into depictions without adding personal social accords to it. Green demonstrates the many ways in which Blake's *Divine Comedy* serves as a mere vessel ~~to trans~~fer personal beliefs. Nineteenth-century England of Blake's era,[49] with its hectic political conundrum and the growing social inequality, could not help but find its way into the poet's artwork; for even if a poet or an artist of any kind strives to isolate themselves from their surroundings, there's still a gateway to his social conceptions found within his art. Man is a social animal and cannot help but construct an identity of his own without it belonging to that of a singular social group.[50] The radical politics of the Blakean days had disfigured his beliefs and conjured scenes that advocate the apocalyptic era of Christianity, the times of trouble that motivated England's radicalists and revolutionaries to re-start their feuds. This is most evident in Blake's poetry, especially in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.*[51]

Blake was evidently aware of the classical poetics, his writings are said to be deliberately wrapped in traditionalism, though advocating rebelliousness.[52]Blake's ideological representation, through his rich imagination and skilled artwork, had taken nuances of conservatism in order not to appear too strange and unfamiliar to the public it was trying to please. Blake's thematic representations reach the audience and put forth a paradox of

radicalism in tandem with traditionalism. According to Warner, Blake sets the exact mood of his generation's ambiguity through his artistry.[53] The nineteenth century is known to be that of a major clash between two castes of people, the conservatives and the radicalists. Yet one often finds that the Blakean "ethical romanticism" and the transformation of one's work into a "Foucauldian panopticon" are indeed "two sides of one dialectical coin."[54] Blake's demonstration of Pre-Victorian England through the *Inferno* serves as both a manifesto of his contemporary times, as well as a romanticized naturalist's cry for help in the rapidly industrializing and de-humanizing world of the early 19th century.

William Blake may not be studied without shedding some light on Johnson's Circle to which he belonged. His writings are said to be the earliest representations of the gatherings done during his days that had re-considered the existing political regime and its many functions. Blake thus emerged as the famous clash between Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine was taking place.[55] The effects of the French Revolution found its way into British society and the Englishman's sight of the monarchy became invariably incomprehensible. Blake represents the peoples of the lower class who knew that they needed to escape the clutches of their reign, but had failed to identify how it is that they might do so without starving to death. Paine's *Rights of Man* became a lullaby for those of Blake's kind,[56] vestiges of which may be traced in the very core of Blake's *Inferno*. The initial ideas of liberal thought bathed in romanticism and naturalism are to be traced in every canto that Blake illustrated and in every poem that Blake wrote.

Blake's political views have gone a long way, this is most evident in a literary context when Melville explains how it is that Pierre finds Dante relevant.[57] It is as though a clear manifestation of how the romantic poet has conjured up the relevance of the Renaissance poet during his times of troubles. The monstrous shapes no longer represent abstraction or the makings of an upcoming world, but rather those of the present reality. Blake was the staged reminisce of a defied social order.[58]

The impact of the French Revolution is also obvious in many of Blake's poems and engravings,[59] though merely one of his seven volumes on the *French Revolution* actually survived for scholarly investigations.[60] Literary critiques can pinpoint his devotion to the notions of the revolution and the principles it was advocating.

Vestiges of the American Revolution also impacted Britain and many of its citizens; it is said that the rule of the wigs party was intensely questions due to the American uprising, breaking England into two halves.[61] Blake was in between the two extremes; trying to represent his people of the lower class and fight for them, while making his art agreeable to those of the wigged class who were financing him and his works of art. Dante's *inferno* indeed does come to life in that Blake mirrors the *Inferno* he incarcerated within as he calls the revolution the "Dark satanic mills" that come to hinder the peace of his "Jerusalem" which is embodied by nineteenth century London.[62]

Another reading stated that Blake has outdone Dante in hell and underrated the poet in his representations of the *Purgatory* and *Paradiso.*[63] The latter might be interpreted as a claim from Blake that demonstrates how it is that our engraver did not know of a heaven to paint it, while he was prone to many examples of an Inferno that the agonizing rapid turns of the nineteenth century had thrown at his footstep.

Tambling states that the elements of dramatic monologue that had continuously astounded romanticists of the previous ages had not found their way into Blake's writing.[64] He was a realist and a radicalist cloaked within the nineteenth century's predominant ideological mentality. Though modernists such as Eliot didn't deny their cultural obligations too, because poetry can't help but echo the poet's essentialist opinion and political framework in which this social animal is conjuring their thoughts and verses.[65] There's "aesthetic autonomy" on the radicalist's collective grounds; literary analyses have proven that the referent most often employs traditional dialects to convey modernized messages.[66]

In Blake's notes on *The Human Abstract*, we venture into Dante's intentions into writing the *Inferno* in its initial state. As Blake goes on to criticize that which gives joy to the wealthy as it devalues the poor, we notice vestiges of Dante's *Inferno* in Blake's poetry. And the paralleling structure of the latter is also evident whilst analyzing Blake's illustration of Dante's 10th and 12th Cantos.

In Blake's depiction of the *Inferno*'s 10th Canto, we observe a charted England, extended between two extremes that mystify the fundamental aspects of being humane; while in the 12th canto we observe a burning stream, read as another rendition of what had happened to London's Thames due to the revolution and the rapid socio-cultural alterations and urbanization that transformed the river from a source of pride and heritage into a mere gateway to the advancement of trade and the facilitation of the worker's navigation. Thus, through the *Inferno*, we trace Blake's nineteenth-century England.

Blake was transcending Romanticism and revising the traditionalized values of his natives through his art. This surpassing of indoctrinated values that are often taken for granted may be read as Blake's prophecy/legacy. As the poet ventured to curate his reader into maintaining the framework of prodigal England, Blake employs every mean to convey his message. One of those means is the archetypical re-imagination of Dante's *Inferno* as the canvas that holds contemporary London's socio-cultural limitations and expectations. Blake's writings, engravings, and drawings were put forth as mediums to be interpreted through his contemporary culture's lens;[67] they dispense the image not of the past nor a future, but rather that of the poetically displayed present that requires modification. The *Inferno* is a mere extended metaphor to demonstrate the nineteenth century's interpersonal struggles.

Blake uses Dante as a gateway to discuss a more interpersonal struggle that the Industrial Revolution has enforced unto the Londoner. In this part of the manuscript, I shed light on the inextricable psychological limitations and anguish brought forth by the advancement of the nation. Dante's *Inferno* is used as a sketchbook to demonstrate the psychological impact inflicted on the nineteenth-century man. Adopting the looking glass of cultural studies, we notice Blake's exaggerated critique of the bourgeois throughout his poems, for instance in a poem Blake's poem entitled *Earth's Answer*, we notice a cry for help emerging from nature itself, yearning to reclaim ownership of itself.[68] The latter is evident in Blake's depictions of Dante, for instance in Blake's portrayal of Dante's 6th Canto we can see Blake readjusting Dante's themes of the human body and gluttony and rearranging them to fit into the context of his contemporary lower-class Englishman. Hence, the third circle of hell, rather than representing the punishment of the lofty, illustrated the struggles

of the vicious cycle of discrimination that has taken hold of the nineteenth century's protagonist.

Blake's aesthetics of this resistance is primarily evident when the poet goes the extra mile in pinpointing how Dante's 13th Canto is a manifestation of his reality rather than that of the sinned sufferer. When looking at Blake's poem entitled a *Sick Rose*,[69] we realize the initial sparks that gave rise to the 13th canto's upheaval as a proclamation for anti-capitalist humanist. According to Williams, Blake was merely the embodiment of the 19th century's collective mentality that was continuously confronted by a paradox of values;[70] historicism versus modernity with the limitations of both and the socio-economic burdens they fester. Therefore, Dante's illustrators, both Blake and Botticelli are read as interpreters rather than sketchers, while Gustave Doré had prepared a literal exemplification of *The Divine Comedy.*[71]

Another spectacle demonstrated through nineteenth-century English Dante's looking glass is the depiction of nature and people's interpretation of the latter. In this section of the manuscript, I throw a glance at the natural world, stemming from the priorly mentioned account regarding the blazing Thames as a cultural momentum.

Dunlop explains that a poem's painting, irrelevant of how literature-based it may be, cannot encapsulate the essence of that which was originally written.[72] Yet within Dante and Blake, there's a re-occurring theme or naturalism as an escape from the socio-cultural indignation. The very fact that Blake chose to draw three versions of Dante's 32nd and 33rd canto says volumes about the illustrator's intentions. In this manuscript, using the analytical methods that I've adopted through my introduction, I continue to argue that Blake was using Dante as a forum to express his Pre-Victorian concerns. Thus, Dante's Ugolino is actually a portrayal of those Blake was representing and defending. The latter is most evident in Blake's poem entitled *The Echoing Green* in which he bespeaks of an old man who recalls his past and how it was nature-bound whilst reality's young generation is flooded by the responsibilities brought forth by the advancement of capitalism through the industrial revolution. As Ugolino is a lost soul in search for the recollection of better days, likewise is Blake's old muse with his silver tongue and vivid memory. I argue that Blake is using Dante's *Inferno* as a projection of his contemporary concerns, because it is not the human form that he has merely depicted by referring to the text, but rather it is his choice of the specific passages that give way to these interpretations, along with his selection of poems entitled *The Songs of Innocence and Experience.*[73]

Thus, as Dante is evidently quoting the growing consciousness of evil that has driven him to commence his writing expedition, we notice the very same cry for salvation from Blake through both his poetry and imagery.[74] According to Dunlop, a poem doesn't merely carry itself through the medium of words but also sprung forth by a socio-cultural setting that gives birth to this poem and generates these attitudes.[75] Hence, applying this approach to the naturalistic viewpoint adopted by Dante and Blake to escape industrialization and commodification of the human soul, we can clearly realize the distinction by observing other illustrator's depictions of Dante. Ferrante employs the example of Doré and Grosz and how both had chosen to illustrate the same image of the circle of suicide from various angles:[76] while Doré bluntly put forth the uncanniness that

Dante was evidently shedding light on, Grosz ignored the latter for comprehensive and aesthetic reasons. The fact still remains, continues Ferrante, that both did depict a hell devoid of fire, they did adapt Dante's primary principles, but the psychoanalytical dimension of this very analysis lies in discerning which feature each artist chose to emphasize and why they were intentionally driven to do so.[77] My argument does not question Blake's skills as an illustrator or a reader, but rather the degree to which the poet was being subjective whilst projecting his ideological standpoint unto the set of verses he was commissioned to illustrate.

Gleckner focuses on the depths of Blake's vision and its considerably poetic sophistication.[78] According to Gleckner, the reader cannot disregard the literary complexity of the poet's claims because of the historical time-frame that Blake had so ardently embodied.[79] Hence, whilst glancing at Blake's poetry, such as the *Ah, Sunflower*! We notice a misplaced aesthetics; Sastri demonstrates how the sunflower is an emblem of London and how she came to lose her virginity due to the prompt overhaul of the Industrial revolution.[80] A similar portrayal is observed in Blake's *Vision of the Last Judgment* whence Blake writes about a world that is entirely conjured in one's mind, yet so easy to envisage due to his use of specific words.[81]

"In an age of profound belief, Blake, the most truly imaginative and impassioned artist that had appeared since Botticelli, would have normally expressed the quintessence of his age's belief and imagination."[82]Hence, as Blake was embodying the woes of his people, like the nineteenth-century Achilles, he would then surrender to the virtues of Romanticism that came with the identity compendium of the nineteenth century revolutionist. Howard clarifies the latter by outlining the various themes of Romanticism that are palpable and marked in several Blake's works; premises such as purity, nudity, and freedom are abundant in all of Blake's illustrations as well as his poetry.[83] An analogous account of Dante has been given by Tambling, who describes Dante's prosaic surrender to "the powers of nature."[84] Consequently, both Dante and Blake were driven by a similar interpersonal authority to correct corruption via naturalism. Baker reveals the nineteenth-century poet's extremism, the poet becomes a vehicle of power, projected either in a lovely pattern or a terrible one.[85] This statement itself envelops the very thesis of my manuscript by illustrating the many ways by which Dante and Blake are similar in classifying reality either as a function of a *Paradiso* or an *Inferno*.

Blake, a true Romantic "living in a world of disembodied imagination,"[86] impregnated Dante's art with cultural significance because he used the *Inferno* as a blueprint to communicate his struggles and impart his anguish. Ergo, while placing Blake's poems in nineteenth-century England on a scale with his illustrations, I argue that there's a distinct shift "from verbal apprehension to visual,"[87] yet the moral is categorically persistent.

If Blake is to depict Milton's battles, the artist must surely engage in mental fights of his own to the same extent.[88] Therefore if the same theory is to be applied to why Blake so fondly accepted the offer to illustrate Dante's *Inferno* we reach to the conclusion that the *Inferno* is indeed a cultural depiction. Since "Blake takes as his materials for poems the cultural artifacts, fabrics, and textile design processes of the London silk trade that surrounded him."[89]

The epilogue of this manuscript is that William Blake was using Dante's *Inferno* as an outlet to share his socio-cultural concerns regarding the contemporary affairs. He used the *Inferno* to illustrate a nineteenth-century England that was mainly driven by the rapid industrialization and the modernity it entailed. I decipher Blake's mentality through his poems and literary demonstrations, be it explicit or implicit. Then, altering the looking glass to the other end of the spectrum, I shed light on the reasons that drove the illustrator to pause and depict those specific instances from Dante's *Inferno*. Although Blake has adopted and employed various aspects of his era's traditionally prevalent mentality, such as his rhyme scheme and romantic approach to painting; the observer can pinpoint a significant manifesto of a metaphorical Blakean *Inferno*. Blake employed Dante as a medium to share his apocalyptic soothsayer's mentality.

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Notes

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