



Dante Today: How Dantean Literature Influenced Visual Arts

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Introduction and Background

Archaic literature has always been the source of great intimidation for students. This is why the *Dante Today* project aims to serve as a didactic tool for teachers and students all over the world by presenting contemporary representations of Dante's works in different media forms, such as film, art, and literature. This forum accepts submissions from anyone able to scavenge remnants of Dantean traces and their influence on popular culture, which allows for the universalization of Dante's poetry.

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), as an esteemed Florentine poet from the Middle Ages, is often credited with having written one of the most important poems of all time: *The Divine Comedy*. This literary work is also thought to be the foundation of contemporary Italian language, which led scholars to label Dante as "sommo poeta" (supreme poet). Because of this, his works have often been gatekept and strictly associated solely with Italian culture. Therefore, *Dante Today* aims to detach the poet from this biased perspective by universalizing his work and reporting its multicultural interpretations.

Therefore, the *Dante Today* project has been a crucial tool for the flourishing of Dantean analysis on behalf of students and teachers, which has shed light on the great impacts that Dante has had on contemporary culture.

Methodology

The publication of articles is achieved by reviewing several user submissions, which summarize the relevance of these sources and their connection to Dantean literature.

Steps to Drafting a Post

- ❖ After having made sure that the submission of choice has not been posted already by consulting the Submission Spreadsheet, one can begin drafting a post by clicking the "New Post" option on the *Dante Today* website.
- ❖ The post must include several elements from the submission: relevant quotes, a brief overview, author, hyper-linked title of the work, name of the forum, date, and linked image.
- ❖ Following this, one must begin listing all relevant tags. These can include dates, genres, citations, etc.
- ❖ After having synthesized all relevant information, the category of the submission is selected and the title of the post is added, along with the featured image — which is displayed on the Home Page of the website.

Note on the images:

The three figures on the right showcase some artworks featured on the website. It is important to note that they exemplify an artistic progression from abstraction to naturalism.



Fig. 1: Paul Laffoley, *The Divine Comedy Triptych (First Panel)*, 1975

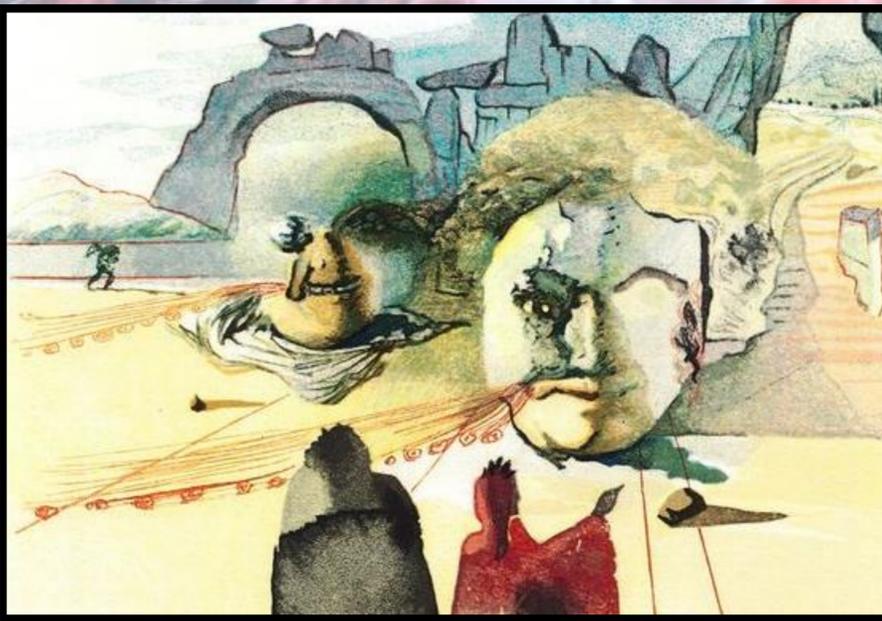


Fig. 2: Salvador Dali, *Purgatory Canto 20 (The Divine Comedy)*, 1950



Fig 3: Gustave Dore, *Paradiso, Canto XXXI*, 1861

Dante and Visual Arts

Since the majority of the articles published on the *Dante Today* website cover music, visual arts, film, and literary elements, an investigation was led to further analyze Dante Alighieri's impact on the history of art.

Although the website's artistic repertoire is vast, it lacks the inclusion of important visual artists that have taken inspiration from Dante's poems, as they have heavily influenced the art historical realm.

Therefore, following the inclusion of prominent contemporary artists' works to the visual arts division of the website, art historical iconographic analysis (the study of the works' subjects) allowed for the conclusion that the divide between Dantean interpretation within the visual arts is led by two overarching artistic perspectives: hallucinogenic abstract compositions and realistic illustrations. In fact, the site has cataloged several works that conveyed a naturalistic overview of the medieval text, whereas others focused on its figurative elements.

Conclusion

Working on the *Dante Today* project, I conducted an analysis on the different contemporary visual art representations of Dante Alighieri's renowned poems.

After having compared several works, I drew the conclusion that many artists choose to focus on the surreal and apocalyptic aspects of these poems — as much inspiration is drawn from the cantos of the *Inferno*. Although this part of Dante's literary assortment is thoroughly covered by these artistic representations, the *Paradiso* and the *Purgatorio*, are not — which is why they are also mentioned less throughout the website.

The main artists mentioned include Salvador Dali, William Blake, Franz Von Bayros, and Paul Gustave Dore. The breadth of variety amongst artistic interpretation, in fact, navigates through Dali's surrealist compositions to Dore's faithful illustrational prints. This diversity gives insight on the imaginative versatility that Dante's works represent.

This observation hints to the Catholic fascination with punishment and criminality, as well as an overall human curiosity for what is obscure. Further research might uncover more artists whose work is in conversation with the less commonly depicted canticles, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*.

Reference: <https://dantetoday.krieger.jhu.edu/>

Acknowledgments:

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