

The inferno

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



Cruxes are ambiguities in a text that needs to be interpreted by the reader. Dante's Inferno is full of allegory; there are several passages in his work that can be interpreted in several ways. Some of the passages that have veiled meanings or have an elaborate meaning are:

a. " That through the impious circles turnest me, according to thy pleasure, speak to me and satisfy my desires. The folk that are lying in the sepulchres, can they be seen?" (Canto X).

b. The old man in the seventh circle of hell " looks at Rome as if his mirror. His head is formed of fine gold, and pure silver are his arms and breast; then he is of brass far as to the fork. From there downward he is all of chosen iron, save that his right foot is of baked clay, and he stands erect on that more than on the other" (Canto XIV 32).

c. The interesting mention of Beatrice who seems to be out context because she was only mentioned and not explained and this begs the question who is Beatrice particularly in the passage " The prophecy by Ciaccio of the fall of Dantes party, Canto vi., and that by Farinata of Dantes exile, Canto x., which Virgil had told should be made clear to him by Beatrice" (Canto XV).

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These cruxes identified in Dante's Inferno cannot be interpreted literally by relying merely on Dante's text of the Inferno. The reader has to take account of Dante's other works and inclination in order to understand the identified texts. For example, in the first crux which was in the introduction part of Canto X in the sixth circle of hell of Dante's Inferno, what actually Dante meant in this passage is his personal amusement and curiosity if any of his friends from Florence are in hell. He was tempted to ask one of sufferers but

did not really get the satisfaction with the reply.

With regard to the old man in Canto XIV, this passage is reminiscent of Dante's aptitude in classical text such as the text of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* where the metal composition of the head of the old man is made up of the four ages of history: gold, silver, brass and iron, which is typical of its civilization's rise and decline. The old man looks at Rome because his feature is characteristic of Rome's strength and weakness. Its strength is in the right foot made of chosen iron indicating strength in the leadership of the empire. On the left is its weakness as it is made of clay, implying declining influence and the corruption of the church.

The third passage in Canto XV which mentioned Beatrice could never be understood or explained by just relying on the texts of *Inferno*. The reader has to refer to Dante's personal circumstance and other works in order to understand the significance of Beatrice. Beatrice was, in fact, Dante's love interest whom he would or could never get over with because she died young at the age of 24 before his love for her could be consummated. This is why Beatrice is only relived in Dante's work as a sort of a "savior," all knowing, inspiration and all lofty attributes that Dante could assign to consummate his love for her. Beatrice is also present in Dante's other works such as *Vita Nuova*, *Divine Comedy*, *Paradiso* and *Purgatorio* which analysts interpreted as Dante's attempt to fulfil his dreams with Beatrice.

For the reader not to assume several interpretation of the texts, the following questions are ideally asked to render the reading clearer. In the first crux, it would be more appropriate to ask "What would Dante get, assuming he knows some of his friends are in hell?" To understand Beatrice

without further research, it would also help to ask “ Why did Dante not make Beatrice a person to accompany him in hell instead of Virgil?” Virgil seems to be a bother to him. And lastly, it would also clarify the theology of Dante’s Inferno (it is obviously flawed) to ask “ Why were the murderers not in the vortex of hell?” The hypocrites and sycophants seem to be more sinful to Dante than those who kill another person. It seems that Dante trivialize his work by diminishing heinous evils and making a fuss about smaller evils. Dante’s Inferno would make an interesting piece of reading if Dante was able to talk to his personal friends to make the conversation more interesting and truthful in his travel in hell. Among those whom Dante asked were strangers to him that some even used the opportunity to deceive their devil overlord. Also, the temporary relief they get by talking to him would have been more beneficial if he had talked to his friends. The literature would have more insights as well because the character would not hide anything from Dante.

Dante’s travel in hell would also have been braver had he brought Beatrice with him. Beatrice is Dante’s unconsummated love and his source of inspiration and it would have provided an interesting dimension in the work had Beatrice assumed the role of Virgil.

Works Cited

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