

## THE PRACTICE OF STATE IDEOLOGICAL APPARATUSES IN MATTHEW PEARL'S *THE DANTE CLUB*

Rizal Octofianto Datau

[rizaloctofianto@gmail.com](mailto:rizaloctofianto@gmail.com)

Faculty of Humanity, Airlangga University, Surabaya

### Abstract

*The Dante Club is an American historical fiction written by Matthew Pearl. The story takes place in the state of Massachusetts during the aftermath of the American Civil War. The two major issues presented in the novel are xenophobia and anti-Catholicism. Specifically, it tells about a controversy over the Italian literary work, "Divine Comedy", which is being translated into English by a group of notable poets named Dante Club. Their endeavor is considered as promoting Catholicism which is subjectively interpreted as an act of threatening the state. Based on Louis Althusser's theoretical perspective, the work of the state authorities to hinder the group's effort is seen as the manifestation of ideological practice. The theory points out that such an interference may commonly be found to be performed by two types of powerful institution, namely Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs). This study discusses the practice of state ideology which is intended to maintain the state power as described in the novel. The focus is on answering the question of how ISAs and RSAs are authorized to exert their role to control people as well as to influence them on behalf of the state.*

**Keywords:** *Ideology, Ideological State Apparatuses, Repressive State Apparatuses, Divine Comedy*

The influx of immigrants from Europe to America after the American Civil War that had ended in 1865 resulted in hostile impacts to the entire country. It caused an unstable social and political condition which inevitably led to some disadvantages, such as poverty, corruption, and the raising number of violence and crimes happening in some states. Xenophobia is also believed to be one of the effects caused by the conflict. The increasing number of European immigrants occurring alongside the aftermath led to prejudices among citizens. The responses toward any Euro-centrist paradigm in some manner is considered to be overreacted. The nativists blamed on the Europeans for their massive coming that had caused the situation of the country after the civil war worse (Queen, Prothero, and Shattuck, 144).

The emergence of anti-Catholicism, furthermore, aggravated the crisis. *Encyclopedia of American Religious History* mentions that anti-Catholicism arrived in North America with the first British settlers in eighteenth century. They brought with them the anti-Catholicism that was part of the political and social environment in England and enacted into colonial law the anti-Catholic statutes of their homeland. For them anti-Catholicism was a mission. Their goal was to purify the Church of England of its remaining “Popish” elements. As time went by, the anti-Catholicism started to be neatly organized. As a result, until after the Civil War, the increasing of immigration had given birth to a renewed assault on immigrants in general and Catholics in particular besides the ongoing attendant poverty, urban corruption, and rising crime (Queen, Prothero, and Shattuck, 33 - 35).

The situation threatened the social living of the native citizens. Hence, the prejudices and suspicions toward its believers caused the renunciation of anything associated with Catholicism. As a result, one of its further consequences was the Americans’ reaction against whatever was Italian. On the assumption that Italy had been closely related to Catholicism due to the origin of the Roman-Catholicism, they strongly believed that most of the Italian immigrants coming to their country were Catholics. As well as the Italians, the Irish people who had made their exodus from their native land unavoidably underwent the discrimination.

*The Dante Club* (2004), authored by Matthew Pearl, portrays the aftermath of the American Civil War occurring in the state of Massachusetts. It tells about the efforts of a group of renowned literary figures called Dante Club who bring and introduce a world-famous Italian literary masterpiece entitled “Divine Comedy” to the country. The name of the club is derived from the name of an Italian medieval poet who composed the piece, Dante Alighieri. However, it is told that “Divine Comedy” has worried the native citizens due to being allegedly in relation to the mission of Catholicism, whereas the dominant religions believed by the people of the state is Unitarian and Protestant. The differences emerging between groups cause intense friction. The Unitarian Americans suspect “Divine Comedy” to be Euro-centrist and Catholic.

Pearl has composed a story which is based on the issues raising during the mentioned religious conflict. It is therefore considered as a historical fiction. In addition, *The Dante Club* presents real historical figures as its main characters even though the plot is fictional. Henry Wardsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., James Russell Lowell, George Washington Green, and J. T. Fields were esteemed American literary figures who are told by Pearl to be the members of Dante Club.

The story is set in Boston and Cambridge during the backwash of the Civil War. The club is facing accusation of promoting Catholicism, yet they are encouraged to investigate a serial homicide as well. Their knowledge is trustworthily required to untangle the mystery. They notice that the patterned act which is consistently performed by the murderer while slaying the victims is resembling the God's punishments as depicted in "Inferno". Consequently, it has become a major obstacle to their attempt to import "Divine Comedy" into the country.

The social friction emerging between the two beliefs has aroused a prejudicial sentiment addressed to the ruling power. As understood from the story, the state authorities have reacted to the conflict neglectfully instead of resolving it wholeheartedly. Moreover, the state seems to act unjustly by treating the Unitarian believers more supportively. The situation leads to an assumption that the deliberate lack of intervention and the inequitable policies which are demonstrated by the state authorities have become the evidence of the existing state ideology. For that reason, thorough discussion is expected to answer the question of how the state ideology in *The Dante Club* is practicing its power. In order to meet the expectation, a theory of ideology formulated by Louis Althusser is used to carry out this study. In a concise manner, Althusser sees that the state ideology works by means of using its two apparatuses which function *ideologically* and *repressively*, respectively: Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs).

This study applies Louis Althusser's theory of ideology. In general, the objective of applying this theory is to reveal the existence of a particular ideology appearing in the novel by examining its existence through the work of its

apparatuses. There are several concepts found in this theory of ideology. However, only the one that has a close relevance to the issue which is used in this study. It is the concept of State Ideological Apparatuses.

### **State Ideological Apparatuses**

Ideology is a key term for, a French philosopher, Louis Althusser whose theory has contributed to literary and cultural studies. He defines that ideology is a system (possessing its logic and proper rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts according to the case) endowed with an existence and historical role at the heart of a given society (Barry, 163).

In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Althusser explains that ideology has particular tools or instruments that are helpful to maintain the domination of the ruling ideology or power. The tools are the State Ideological Apparatuses. Through these apparatuses, any action or policy, which is taken by the dominant ideology or power, can be justified since it is based on a strong legitimacy. There are two types of State Ideological Apparatuses. The first is Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and the second is Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs).

He explains that RSAs contain the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc. Whereas ISAs is a certain number of realities, which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions (Althusser, 142-143). He proposes the following empirical list of ISA (Althusser, 144):

- the religious ISA (the system of the different Churches),
- the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private 'Schools'),
- the family ISA,
- the political ISA (the political system, including the different Parties),
- the trade-union ISA,
- the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.),
- the cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.).

He concludes that RSAs belong entirely to the public domain, whereas the ISAs are part, on the contrary, of the private domain. Churches, Parties, Trade Unions, families, some schools, most newspapers, cultural ventures, etc. are private.

What distinguishes the ISAs from the RSAs is the following basic function: the RSAs function 'by violence', whereas the ISA functions 'by ideology '. However, he clarifies the fact that the RSAs function massively and predominantly by repression (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology (there is no such thing as a purely repressive apparatus). For example, the Army and the Police also function by ideology both to ensure their own cohesion and reproduction, and in the 'values' they propound externally (Althusser, 145).

In the same way, but inversely, it is essential to say that for their part the ISAs function massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic (there is no such thing as a purely ideological apparatus). Thus, Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to 'discipline' not only their shepherds, but also their flocks. The same is true of the Family. . . . The same is true of the cultural IS Apparatus (censorship, among other things), etc (Althusser, 145).

### **American Civil War and the Aftermath**

The explanation of the following historical accounts merely functions as the supporting information, which is helpful for understanding and gaining a general view about the social living background of Massachusetts before the Civil War and the aftermath that has inspired the author to set the background of the story.

Aside from the Civil War, the large number of immigrants from Europe and anti- Catholicism were two main phenomena faced by the country in the nineteenth century. The main possibility that can be traced in order to find the motive urging the immigrants to move to America is a promising hope of a better life and a better future in the destination land. *Encyclopedia of American Religious History*, for example, mentions that the famine happened in their homeland in 1845 and 1851 have encouraged the Irish immigrants to move to America (Queen, Prothero, and Shattuck, 34). As well as the Irish immigrants, other Europeans decided to move to America since they frequently considered America as the land of hope.

However, the influx of immigrants, especially the ones who had come from Ireland and Italy, triggered the anti-Catholicism. Thus, even though they were encouraged by the spirit of pursuing the hope, it is historically believed that their exodus was actually a double-loss. They were in a position of being accused of sparking off the religious conflict between the home belief and theirs.

In the nineteenth century, the dominant religions of the country was Protestant and Unitarian. Responding the Catholicism brought by the immigrants, the nativists viewed that the teachings of Catholicism were contrary to their religion. Catholicism was considered to be superstitious and vulgar (Queen, Prothero, and Shattuck, 34). However, since this difference could not wisely be overcome, it finally became the main cause of anti-Catholicism.

During the aftermath, the increasing of immigration—with attendant poverty, urban corruption, and rising crime—gave birth to a renewed assault on immigrants in general and Catholics in particular (Queen, Prothero, and Shattuck, 35).

## **METHOD**

This study performs a qualitative analysis since it relies on the critical interpretation of the collected data selectively drawn from its primary source, which is the novel. Besides, the importance of the library research is crucial. It needs a proportional amount of information which is the relevant to history. The collected information is supposedly compatible to support the analysis in order to get the expected comprehension and outcome.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The renunciation of “Divine Comedy” in America as depicted in *The Dante Club* needs to be seen its relevancy to the real historical accounts. The novel describes the overwhelming social issues happening at that time. Some of them are pictured as the continuation of the existing problems in the past, namely the causes of the Civil War and the war itself. “Divine Comedy” is not well accepted by the state due to where it is from. Its great reputation in the continent of origin cannot guarantee the similar acknowledgment in the New World.

The members of Dante Club are in an effort to translate “Divine Comedy” from English into American English. Although they are highly reputable scholars and intellectuals at Harvard University, their attempt is strongly thwarted by the institution. Motorized by the Corporation of Harvard, its coming is insistently refused.

**a. “Divine Comedy” as the Representation of the Uncivilized Europeans**

The exodus of Europeans to America had happened since the early ages of the country. However, after the Civil War, the influx of those foreigners caused a large number of poverty, urban corruption, and rising crime. The story tells that “*everything has changed in Boston since the war lined the whole place with money*” (122). As the country has been impaired by the war and not been fully recovered, some nativists feel threatened by the increasing number of immigrants, especially who are from Europe. The disapproval of Europeans is explicitly expressed, for instance, by putting on signs in front of their houses, saying “FOREIGNERS NEED NOT APPLY” (156). The xenophobic stereotype, however, is responded with no concern by the authorities. This can be seen as the negligence performed by the ruling power. It can mean two possible assumptions: the state becomes purely ignorant due to being too busy recovering from the war or they are favoring the ongoing stereotype. As a consequence, the immigrants are restricted to gain access and take part in the state.

Compared to other immigrants, however, the stereotype is more intensely felt by the Italians and Irish. The nativists believe and accuse the immigrants of contributing the raising number of crime and violence. Furthermore, it is told that the disapproval has eventually arrived to Harvard University. A reputable institution which is told by Pearl as one of the very powerful public elements in the state. The citizens are grateful due to which side the university is taking in this issue. Their major worry has been noticed and their hope is fulfilled because their rebuff will be more well-organized under the control of a very influential institution which has more rights to do it. This shows that the authority is strongly tied to their favor. The involvement of the institutions in impeding the immigrants is practically the evidence of the existence of the ruling ideology.

Harvard University argues that the presence of the immigrants in Massachusetts has been an inevitable threat, for the university in particular. Accordingly, under the authority of the Corporation of Harvard, the university is bound to be in charge of making efforts to prevent the presence of the foreigners from being legal. The ways of Harvard Corporations reject things which are in relation to European is by applying some policies that marginalize the curriculum whose contents are believed to be Euro-centric. One of them is the curriculum of Literature as taught by the members of Dante Club. Literature is one of the most influential majors in the university. For years, Harvard has proudly generated talented poets, authors, and literary writers. However, according to the Corporation, by the end of the Civil War, the success is no longer a pride. It is because, along with the massive coming of the Europeans, they think that the living languages like Italian language which is lectured in the department have threatened the domination of the American domestic literature. The agenda hidden within the policy is to try to discriminate the Italian language. It does not apply to other European languages taught in the university, such as Greek and Latin. This means that the tendency of the policy is tightly close to their disapproval of the immigrants, especially the Italians. The policy leads to a consequence which the Corporation has expected: the people of Massachusetts dislike the living language. They do not read any European works. *Even though many works have been translated into English, they still do not want to read for the translation is bad* (42). Based on such perceptions, the university has found a justifiable reason to refuse the living languages. Seeing from Althusser's point of view, this policy constructed by the university is read as an act or practice of ideology.

The Corporation of Harvard University considers that the living languages, especially Italian language, are unnecessary, papist, and vulgar. They think that there has never been found any significant reason or urgency that represents the need of such languages. In Massachusetts, the image of Italians is underestimated. Even for some universities, *the Italian language is considered only used by opera singer* (155). What makes the Corporation really worries of is that if such languages were available in Harvard, it might legitimize the presence of

foreigners. It would lead to the assumption that the immigrants have been legally received.

#### **b. “Divine Comedy” as the Representation of Catholicism**

The Corporation of Harvard University thinks that the Italian language is papist. This reason is actually also addressed to refuse the presence of Catholic’s influence to the university. According to Harvard University, Catholicism is entirely contrary to the teachings of Unitarianism, in which the university believes. It has been widely known that the major difference between Unitarian and Catholicism is their theological principle. Catholicism upholds the doctrine of Trinity, whereas the Unitarian does not. Pearl delivers a plot which American people in Massachusetts and the Catholics can barely coexist. Catholics are represented by the immigrants, the Italians in particular. The novel illustrates that everything that is Italian is therefore assumed to be equal to Catholicism since Italy is where Catholicism is centered and the pope lives.

The discourse of how abominable Catholicism is has been reproduced continuously. The university points out two sorts of view which regard Catholicism as a disorder. *The first* is the repetition of every century’s rumor about the sexual ritual inside the Catholic convent. This issue is relevant to the past experience undergone by the Catholic immigrants in Charlestown, in which the Ursuline convent was burned by the Protestants because of such rumor. Therefore, it shows that this rumor is still believed and justified by the university to refuse Catholicism. *The second* is the scenes of the Hell’s punishments depicted in the canticle of “Inferno”, in Dante Alighieri’s “Divine Comedy”, which Harvard tends to accuse Dante of presenting violence in its lyrics. They disagree with the presence of the Italian literary work to America since they think after the Civil War, the country does not deserve to receive anymore kind of violence. This reveals a tendency that the university only perceives “Divine Comedy” subjectively based on their viewpoint by selecting findings which they consider negative. The view is expressed by Dr. Manning, treasurer of the Corporation, “*I am bound by duty to defend the good reputation of the university*

against any such blemishes” (205). In short, according to the university, Catholicism is *objectively* a religious belief, yet it is *ideologically* uncivilized.

The story tells that *the Catholic churches have a fund entrusted to them from the Vatican for immigrants* (152). It is, of course, worsening the stigma. People and the university are convinced that the spread of Catholicism is well-organized and directly funded by the pope as expressed by a staff of the university who thinks “*that’s It’s all too Italian, too Catholic for Harvard College?*” (31). It becomes the strong evidence of why the renunciation of “Divine Comedy” is strongly in relation to anti-Catholicism. The university sees the harsh and vulgar depictions of the afterlife described by the lyrics of its canticles are not acceptable. They are not capable of seeing the religious values within the work. Instead, the university thinks it promotes violence. Owing to the powerful propaganda, the native citizens of Massachusetts credulously consider what the university thinks of the issue. It is thus clear why the Catholics become the public enemy of the state.

### **c. State Apparatuses as the Representation of Ideology**

For the main reasons that have previously mentioned, the bad response toward the presence of “Divine Comedy” to Massachusetts finally leads to the efforts to reject it. The story described that these efforts are carried out by the ruling power that is holding a certain ideology establishing anti-Catholicism. In order to reveal and prove the existence of the ideological practices that represent the involvement of the ruling power in renouncing “Divine Comedy”, there are state apparatuses delegated to practically function as the extended-arms of the ruling power. Their main duty is to assure the authorities of the state that the ideology is flawlessly secured. They are also assigned to execute a resolution of the problems occurring at the grass roots. As previously explained, Louis Althusser has divided state apparatuses into two types, namely Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs). However, ISA appears dominantly in *The Dante Club* via university, church, and media.

#### d. The University

The country sees Harvard University as one of the most honorable and influential institutions. In certain occasions, the university shows its concern toward any social issues happening in the state or the country. As told in *The Dante Club*, there are two major influential boards of the university. The first is the Corporation of Harvard that is assigned to manage and control the university and the other is the Harvard Board of Overseers, a twenty-person governing body, which is annually elected by the state legislature and one step removed from the Corporation of Harvard. The Harvard Board of Overseers elects what it calls advocates in order to thoroughly consider issues of particular importance or controversy (292). However, since the Harvard Corporation is assigned to control and manage the university, they have a more significant influence in the institution. They have the rights to make policies and penalties given to any mistakes carried out by the lecturers and students who disobey the rule. The novel describes that due to those rights, the Corporation's policies tend to be radical.

The story tells that the Harvard University encouragingly supports and defends the importance of the ruling authority or power which is mostly represented by the state government. The authority is strongly influenced by the Unitarian and Protestant, the two dominant religions of the state. The obedience of Harvard University toward its religions teachings is strictly applied to the university. The Corporation of Harvard that is assigned to manage and control the university tends to be intolerant toward differences.

Several examples show that some actions taken by the university to face the difference is often radical. One of them has proved that the Corporation had never liked the idea of employing foreigners, particularly an Italian papist. It can be seen from the case undergone by Pietro Bachi, a man that used to be the lecturer of Harvard. Before dismissing him, the Corporation had to think hard to find the proper way until they figured out the correct reasons to dismiss him. Bachi is an Italian that used to teach the language of his mother-tongue at Harvard (68). Regarding to this point, the story describes that during that period, the country tends to give only little trade in thought with foreign countries (41). It

is quite obvious that the xenophobia has not only been the part of the Harvard University but generally throughout the country.

How the Corporation applies the rules and policies tends to be repressive. Before the issue of “Divine Comedy” appears, there are some causes found at the college that show the strict discipline of the Corporation at facing things when break their rules. For instance, Dr. Manning, the treasurer of the Corporation, was found burning the books written by Charles Darwin and other books, including *In Defense of Charles Darwin and His Evolutionary Theory*. It is obvious since according to the Corporation, such theory has offended human beings. They cannot accept such science which concludes that human beings are the descendant of primates. Manning, moreover, even states that people should be grateful because of what he was doing; the religious world owed them. While seeing the smoke coming from the burning books and knew that Manning who was doing it, Lowell bellowed at him to make him stop burning. However, Manning ignored him, and on the other hand, he warned Lowell to return to lecture since leaving the students unsupervised shall not be deemed acceptable conduct by the Harvard Corporation (231). Such arrogance is often shown by the Corporation to show that they are ruling and having the right to do so.

Regarding to the issue of the presence of “Divine Comedy” to America, it has been known that the Corporation can never accept anything that has to do with Catholicism. Toward that literary work, the Corporation has been overreacting to other literary lecturers who teach Dante Alighieri and his works. It happens to James Russell Lowell, a member of Dante Club. While participating in translating the “Inferno”, the Corporation is always looking over his shoulder, racking and sifting and pickaxing and hoeing and shoveling and dredging and scratching (and, he feared, also damning) his brain like so many California immigrants (93). The Corporation’s effort to pressure their lecturers in order not to support the existence of “Divine Comedy” is described as if the feeling of terror felt by those lecturers is similar with the terrified feelings felt by the immigrants. It is also told that the Corporation wishes to bury Dante to preserve their curriculum (105).

The Corporation is worried that the Unitarian as the ongoing ideology which is embraced by most of the people in Harvard and generally by most of the citizens in Massachusetts will be taken over by another religious ideology. Such fear is tried to be resolved by setting a conspiracy between the university and a Unitarian church. It is provenly stated as follows:

*“In October, four of the six members of the Corporation had eagerly sanctioned the idea of engaging the Reverend Elisha Talbot to pen critiques of the upcoming Dante translation, leaving the matter of “appropriate compensation for time and energies” to the discretion of the Treasury Committee—that is, Augustus Manning” (292).*

The Corporation has enough capital to do so. They can afford what they need in order to get rid of “Divine Comedy”. For the university, paying a reverend to propagate the congregation is an easy thing to do since the relation between the university and the church has been held for years. Alongside the university, once Reverend Elisha Talbot was offered to become the Head of the Harvard Divinity School. This misuse of relationship can be assumed as a conspiracy rather than a relationship.

Based on the explanation, the practices carried out by Harvard University to maintain its dominance are encouraged by the feeling of being threatened by the foreigners and Catholicism. Consequently, it has led to repressive actions. However, even though it is repressive, it shows that its role as the extended-arms of certain ideology does work. Although a university is categorized as an ideological apparatus that primarily functions ideologically, the repressive ways taken by Harvard have proven that an ideological apparatus has a secondary function that in some certain circumstances can be operated.

#### **e. The Church**

The propaganda which is intended to be a reaction against “Divine Comedy” is no longer an internal affair that exclusively happens in Harvard University. The conspiracy between Harvard and one of the influential Unitarian churches in Massachusetts has brought the renunciation to a higher level. The church is no longer independent as the university has taken over the control of the church due to the fact that its reverend is bribable. Reverend Elisha Talbot is representing

himself as the extended-arm of the ruling ideology who is trusted to give sermons that persuade his congregation not to support the presence of “Divine Comedy”.

His attempts to prevent the presence of “Divine Comedy” and the rise of the Catholic Church in Massachusetts, Talbot argues vigorously the following chief points regarding the issues:

*“that the superstitious rituals and lavish cathedrals of the Catholic faith constituted blasphemous idolatry; that the tendency of the Irish to cluster in neighborhoods around their cathedrals and convents would give rise to secret plotting against America and signaled resistance to Americanization; and that popery, the great foreign menace controlling all aspects of the Catholic operation, threatened the Independence of all American religions with its proselytizing and its goal of overrunning the country” (80).*

Based on those statements, it can be seen that Reverend Elisha Talbot is likely a typical fundamentalist. He barely realizes that he has been unconsciously compelled by what he ideologically believes. Regardless of whether he is a fundamentalist or fanatic, what is happening has shown that the role of the church has slipped out of its path. The place is not merely a place to pray. A church becomes a place where various interests are laid. Using his power and authority, Talbot has concluded what the university and the church think of Catholicism and its immigrants as if he delivers the message on behalf of the state.

All in all, the church has played its role to support the anti-Catholicism movement both on its own will and on demand. The reverends and their sermons have become effective and reliable tools which are used to influence the congregations. It thus means that the determination of the Unitarian churches working as the extended-arms of the ruling ideology to hinder the coming of a counter ideology is reliable.

#### **f. The Media**

The efforts made by the Corporation of Harvard University to influence the media is not as successful as what they have done to the churches. This happens because the most influential publishing company in Boston and Cambridge that plans to publish the translation of “Divine Comedy” to Massachusetts is never able to be persuaded. The reason is the owner of the company is one of the members of Dante Club. He, J. T. Fields, owns the Ticknor and Fields, Co. that

publishes two reputable papers on the state: *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The North American Review*. Even though the Corporation could not reach the Company to become its partner in supporting them to ban “Divine Comedy”, it does not mean that they give up approaching the mass media.

It has been generally realized that media is believed to be the most powerfully effective tool to influence the public. This fact is very well-read by the ruling authorities. Unitarian is strongly well-kept to be the only influential ideology in Massachusetts by the apparatuses through any possible efforts. Harvard University struggles to persuade the media to be on the same page in rejecting “Divine Comedy”.

*For days, the series of murders heard all over the state have been the hottest topic of public conversation since the newspapers often speak about the terrible murders so frequently as if the media have become partners in the public mind (120).*

The powerful influence of the media makes Dante Club worry about what worse thing could happen if the public knew that the murders resemble the scenes of punishments depicted in the canticle “Inferno” of “Divine Comedy”. One thing that might be bound to happen would be much more accusation addressed to the Catholics. It means the Corporation would take advantage of the situation. They would see it as an opportunity to propagate their idea. In brief, the Corporation’s struggling attempt to gain attention from the public by approaching some media would succeed.

The worrisomeness which is felt by the Club is acceptable because “*it has been well known that in Boston, reputation and rumor can do in gentleman far more efficiently than the hangman*” (105). It means that famous people might easily kill their own reputation and successful career if they could not carefully protect his image from the media. In New England, the members of Dante Club are popularly known as great literati. It is therefore reasonable that they are categorized as the public figures whose popularity may threaten their life as well as the other celebrities'. It has been commonly noticeable that *the public always harbored an unhealthy pinch of jealousy against its celebrities* (105). The aftermath has gradually changed the way the people of Massachusetts think. It is because the gap between the common people and the public figures has been too

wide. The poverty caused by the civil war has widened the differences between the poor and the rich. What makes it obvious is that the common people's jealousy of the public figures is mostly encouraged by the newspapers which regularly expose the glamorous lifestyle of the public figures. Therefore if there were a public figure whose disgrace is being exposed by the media, it would be very easy for people to be judgmental toward the person.

As a consequence, it is clearly seen that the media in Massachusetts have been working effectively to influence the public. Furthermore, it shows that the media can never be neutral. *The Dante Club* emphasizes that the media always take side. An example in the story describes that the role and the ability of *Atlantic Monthly* and *The North American Review*—two reputable newspapers in the state of Massachusetts—to influence their readers people have attracted Harvard University. Thanks to that reason, the university tries to induce those media to support them. The Corporation thinks that they need to gain more trust from the public if they want to succeed in their mission.

## CONCLUSION

The renunciation of “Divine Comedy” in the state of Massachusetts as told in *The Dante Club* has raised some crucial questions addressed to the ruling state ideology. Set in the aftermath of the American Civil War, “Divine Comedy” is seen as a jeopardy which is as threatening as the massive coming of European immigrants to the state of Massachusetts. It is considered that not only does it present ferociousness, but it also represents Catholicism which is contrary to the dominant religious beliefs, namely Unitarian and Protestant.

In order to halt what has been considered as a threat, the state has issued a policy to legitimate the action of banning Catholicism, including preventing “Divine Comedy” from being publicly known by the people. The action requires the role of public institutions to hinder the existence of that Italian literary work. The institutions are Harvard University, a Unitarian church, and the media. Louis Althusser’s theoretical perspective categorizes these institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses.

Despite supposedly working *ideologically*, Harvard University and the Unitarian churches resist against Catholicism and Divine Comedy *repressively* as

well. Besides indoctrinating anti-Catholicism, both apparatuses openly refuse “Divine Comedy” by strictly impeding the process of translating it. As time goes by, it becomes the part of the university's repressive activity which is carried out on a regular basis, such as renouncing publications and books which are opposite to Unitarian and Protestant.

In this case, the state is regarded to be ignorant and permissive to its apparatuses when it comes to reacting discriminatingly over the massive coming of European immigrants and Catholicism. Althusser's theoretical viewpoint sees this overinflated act of disapproving “Divine Comedy” and anything-Europeans as ideological.

All in all, this study is merely aimed at reading the practices of certain ideology presented in *The Dante Club*. There is still however a wide-open opportunity for other researchers to explore further either the novel or the use of the theory. This study is a vast field which provides varied niches to be resolved using different theoretical perspectives and methods.

## REFERENCES

- Althusser, Louis. (1971). *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London: Monthly Review Press.
- Barry, Peter. (1995). *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Horton, Rod W. And Herbert W. Edwards. (1967). Second Edition. “Unitariansism and Transcendentalism”. New York: Meredith Publishing Company.
- Kavanagh, James H. “Ideology”. *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Second Edition. Edited by Frank Letricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. 1995. 306 - 320.
- Pearl, Matthew. (2004). *The Dante Club*. London: Vintage.
- Queen, Edward L., Stephen R. Prothero, Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr. (Ed.). (2001) “anti-Catholicism.” *Encyclopedia of American Religious History*. New York: Facts On File.
- Storey, John. (1997). “Althusserianism”. *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*. 2nd Edition. Second Edition. London: Prentice Hall.