

Yuliia Apetyk, Yevheniia Kosana

Ivan Franko National University of Lviv

SOCIAL ISSUES BASED ON “INFERNO” BY DAN BROWN

The book “Inferno” by Dan Brown explores the topic of the epidemic of overpopulation. The title of the novel is based on Dante’s “Inferno,” which was the first part of his poem “Divine Comedy.” “Inferno” is the Italian word for “Hell.” The setting of the story is Florence, where Dante lived and worked.

In the novel “Inferno,” Harvard professor Robert Langdon is recruited by the World Health Organization to help locate a deadly pathogen. The virus is believed to have been created by Bertrand Zobrist, a Transhumanist who thought that the world was in danger of collapse because of overpopulation.

Overpopulation against the Black Death

Dan Brown decided to explore the theme of global overpopulation, referring also to the Black Death of the 14th century, which killed a third of Europe’s population. In the novel, I found out the origin of the word “quarantine” which is well-known for all of us. Ships arriving in Venice from infected ports were required to be isolated for 40 days before landing. This practice was called quarantine.

In the novel, the growth of population is being compared to cancer, which spreads on the Earth, like cancer does in a human body: “Mankind, if unchecked, functions like cancer.” The antagonist, Zobrist, comes up with a terrible solution to sterilise one-third of the humanity. He declares that our species would not survive another hundred years.

The events of the novel reveal that a billionaire scientist Bertrand Zobrist believes that the human race is out of control, so humans are overpopulating the Earth and will exhaust its resources. He has no doubt that he is supposed to bring human overpopulation under control, but the solution he comes up with isn’t so great: Zobrist invents a virus, the purpose of which is to eliminate half the human race.

Therefore, the book assumes that our population will continue to grow quickly and exponentially. We all know what the situation looks like in countries like China and South India, but apart from this, many countries that have conducted campaigns to reduce the fertility rate, such as Iran and Turkey, are now trying to encourage people to have more children. It gives us the possibility to assume that if these trends continue, the population will level off after increasing to a little over 9 billion.

In fact, there is no magic number of humans that the Earth can hold. The real danger to our planet may not be our number, but our actions, because the challenge facing the environment is that consumption is rising much faster than population. We use natural resources daily, and we will undoubtedly run out of them one day. Furthermore, overpopulation leads to such problems as degradation of environment, water and food shortage, rise in unemployment, diseases, and even pandemics.

CHALLENGES OF TODAY'S SOCIETY

Cultural Symbols

Speaking of symbols, Professor Langdon stands in front of the Gates of Paradise by Lorenzo Ghiberti when he notices a plaque on the wall of the Baptistry of Florence, with the inscription “the Black Death.”

In “Inferno,” the plague mask is used to depict the Black Death. This mask is described as a black mask with a long beak, allowing doctors to avoid contracting the disease during their visits to plague victims. By mentioning this mask the author refers to the disease, and correspondingly he refers to the theme of global overpopulation.

As a result, this symbol is significant to the understanding of this novel, and such notion as pandemic and its relation to the problem of overpopulation. Black Death caused a huge historical change described by most historians as a demographic catastrophe.

However, it is interesting that the author sees this disease not only as a cause of death and suffering, but also a reason for rebirth and changes. The plague created a series of religious, social, and economic upheavals, which had profound effects on the course of European history. In the novel the Black Death is seen as a new chance, a chance to be reborn: “Ask yourself, What followed the Black Death? We all know the answer. The Renaissance. Rebirth. It has always been this way. Death is followed by birth. To reach Paradise, man must pass through Inferno.”

Another symbol is the phrase “cerca trova,” which is essential to the understanding of the message carried by the author. When Langdon discovers a Faraday pointer in his coat pocket, it actually reveals a projection of Botticelli’s Map of Hell, based on Dante’s rendition in Inferno. From clues placed on the Map, Langdon eventually deciphers a message: “cerca trova,” Italian for “seek and ye shall find.” The phrase is famously painted in the background of “The Battle of Marciano” by Giorgio Vasari, which hangs in the nearby Palazzo Vecchio. This phrase “seek and find” acquires a meaning in the course of events in this novel: the characters have to take actions to discover new facts and details in order to save humanity.

Conclusion

The major problem of this book really gives us food for thought. To think logically, we really cause lots of troubles to the Earth, we literally destroy its nature and resources by making our living comfortable. The author wants us to think about it, and even says that we should not stay silent and deal with the problem of overpopulation: “In dangerous times, there is no greater sin than inaction.”

References:

Brown, D. (2013). *Inferno: (Robert Langdon Book 4)*. Random House.