

Dante's and Milton's hell



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Perspectives of Hell Since the creation of human life there has been a battle of good versus evil. Before Christianity and non-religious or pagan culture believers often debated the ideology of heaven and "hell". In defining "hell," the Webster dictionary defines "hell" as a place or state of torment or destruction and the damned suffer eternal punishment. Hell has been an interest for many centuries, and according to some religions, Satan or the powers of evil live in "hell" and the spirits of all sinful people go to hell after death. Those souls and/or people in hell are inflicted with eternal pain and misery. Hell over the century has been depicted by many authors in literary works. The Italian poet and writer, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), created a masterpiece in the form of an epic poem, *Divine Comedy* and *Inferno* is the first part of three parts written in the 14th century. He goes into great length to provide vivid images of hell. *Inferno* depicts the medieval Christianity beliefs of the Creator (God) and the consequences imposed on the human souls for their worldly actions. The English poet and civil servant, John Milton (1608-1674), also penned an epic poem, *Paradise Lost* in the 17th century. Milton often rebelled against the church and politics in England. He too included dramatic images of hell with literal interpretations. The epic poems *Inferno* and *Paradise Lost* examine the physical descriptions of hell, the location of hell, and the form of Satan. Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* depict different images of hell. Alighieri's *Inferno* shows a detailed physical description of hell. Alighieri portrays hell as a graphic area or torture containing a structure of nine circles of hell. The first circle of hell is titled Limbo and is described as an area reserved for the unbaptized and virtuous pagans. Some familiar persons present at this level

are Virgil, Homer, Ovid, Socrates, and Plato. The second circle of Hell is called Lust and is the area reserved for souls blown about in a violent storm, without hope or rest. The familiar persons detained here are Francesca and her lover Paolo. The third circle is named Gluttony and Ciacco of Florence is here and forced to lie in vile, freezing slush, guarded by Cerberus. The fourth circle is labeled Avarice and Prodigality. Its occupants, the miserly and spendthrift, push great heavy weights together, crashing them time and time again; Pluto guards them. The fifth circle is entitled Wrath and Sullenness. The wrathful fight each other on the surface of the Styx while the sullen gurgles beneath it; Filippo Argenti resides here. The sixth circle is marked Heresy. Heretics are trapped in flaming tombs. Florentines Farinata degli Uberti and Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti are here. Dante provides an example of Hell's depiction in the sixth circle: . . . My flesh had not been long stripped off when she had me descend through all the rings of Hell, to draw a spirit back from Judas' circle. ³ That is the deepest and the darkest place, The farthest from the heaven that girds all: So rest assured, I know the pathway well. This swamp that breeds and breathes the giant stench Surrounds the city of the sorrowing, which now we cannot enter without anger (Dante Ln 25-32) The seventh circle of Hell is named Violence. The violent against people and property is occupied by the suicides, the blasphemers, the sodomites, and the usurers. The eighth circle is entitled Fraud and designated for panderers and seducers, flatterers, sorcerers and false prophets, liars, thieves, and Ulysses and Diomedes. The ninth and final circle of Hell is called Treachery. This ring is set aside for betrayers of special relationships and they are frozen in a lake of ice. Satan, Judas, Brutus, and Cassius are here. Dante's personification of Hell is similar to Christian theology, as he describes

gruesome and uncomfortable physical images of hell. Milton's Paradise Lost's depiction of the physical landscape of hell differs from his predecessor Dante. The first difference is the description of the organization. Instead of nine circles, Milton presents a Cubic formation. This indicates hell having three measurable dimensions. The sinful habitants and the levels in which they reside in hell, are not clearly defined. Milton does not provide tangible heroic protagonists. The sinners are given human attributes (Chaos, Order, and Dignity). The fallen angels are intangible and reside in a spirit state. The sin is the human action in disobedience to God. Milton displays the first major impact of human infraction against God: Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast Brought Death into the World, and all our woe, With loss of Eden, till one greater Man Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat (Milton Book I, Ln 1-5) The first man and woman were evicted out of Paradise (The Garden of Eden) and compelled to live outside of Eden among Chaos as their punishment for giving into temptation and disobeying God's command. Milton implies that Hell is a physical place or an emotional state. Stella Asch from Ruhr University, Bochum reports, " Milton's description of hell: as a place and as a state, " Man is placed into the new created world and faced with the state of learning how to survive in their new home. Milton shows how Satan manipulated the couple, " That Shepherd, who first taught the chose Seed/In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth/Rose out of Chaos: Or if Sion Hill" (Milton Book I, Ln. 8 -10). Satan plots against God with his miserable fallen angels, Legions, Associates, Council, and his chief follower, Beelzebub. They all rises in Pandemonium as they wait by the burning Lake, thunderstruck and astonish. Hell is a location, literally a hole that Satan made when he fell to earth after his banishment

from heaven. Often construed as a Christian doctrine, but it differs in several fundamental ways. Dante locates hell in Biblical terms. Satan is held in bondage according to the ninth circle, Treachery. He positions hell at the center of Earth. He does this because hell is the opposite of good. Hell is located in the bottom of the frozen icy deep pit. Sinners are punished by the degree of their crimes. Hell is divided into three types of sins. Upper hell includes circles one through five (self-indulged), middle hell holds circles six and seven (violent), and bottom hell includes circles eight and nine (malicious). Milton gives an example of hell in the ninth circle: It was not palace hall, the place in which we found ourselves, but with its rough-hewn floor and scanty light, a dungeon built by nature, " Before I free myself from this abyss, master, " I said when I had stood up straight, " tell me enough to see I don't mistake: Where is the ice? (Dante Canto 34, Ln 98 — 103) Gravity reversed for Dante and his guide, Virgil, to escape hell and Satan just in time Easter Sunday morning. Milton's Paradise Lost 's position Hell underneath heaven and earth. He describes hell as an abyss, " dark unbottomed infinite abyss" and not in the center or icy like Dante. Hell is the lowest part of the universe. Geographically south, as Milton shows that from heaven to hell is straight down. During the Angelic War, Satan fell down from heaven and the impact created a deep infinite hole. Paradise Lost's hell consists of a fiery lake. Milton illustrates: Treble confusion, wrath and vengeance pour'd.

Forthwith upright he rears from off the Pool His mighty Stature; on each hand the flames Drivn backward slope thir pointing spires, and rowld In billows, leave l'th' midst a horrid Vale. Then expanded wings he steers his flight Aloft, incumbent on the dusky Air That felt unusual weight, till on dry Land He lights, if it were Land that ever burn'd With solid, as the Lake with liquid

fire; (PL, Ln 220-229) Hell is displayed in two opposite and extreme elements. Milton's Hell in *Paradise Lost* is described as a Pit of Hell in liquid fire, a burning lake, compared to Dante's *Inferno*, which Hell is depicted as a frozen pit, icy deep lake. Satan has various descriptions introduced by the two poets. Satan in the *Inferno* is depicted in a ferocious immobile image of a giant beast waist deep in ice with six huge wings, six eyes, and three different colored faces: one red, one black, and one pale yellow and each face containing a mouth. Dante displays a vivid example: I marveled when I saw that, on his head He had three faces; 4 one--in front-- bloodred; and then another two that, just above the midpoint of each shoulder, joined the first; and at the crown, all three were reattached; the right looked somewhat yellow, somewhat white; the left in its appearance was like those⁵ who come from the Nile, descending flows. Beneath each face of his, two wings spread out, as broad as suited so immense a bird: I've never seen a ship with sails so wide. (Dante, Ln. 38 — 48) The most vicious mouth devours Judas Iscariot; betrayer of Jesus, and who resides in the ninth circle with Satan. The terrifying non-verbal beast resembles a dragon with claws and fur. Satan is imprisoned in Hell by God for committing personal treachery against God. Satan is impotent, full of hate, and repeatedly inflicts gruesome torture to all Hell's residents. Milton's depiction of Satan, unlike Dante's, is in more human form. An important aspect is Satan's mobility in *Paradise Lost*. Satan's rebellion initiated the battle between Fallen Angels and the faithful. Milton uses epic conventions as he traveled through Satan's corruption and defeats. Before Adam and Eve's creation, Satan was an angel stationed in Heaven with God. Therefore, Satan's allegory represents humans' freewill and wisdom. Satan and his followers deny God's authority and demonstrated the

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ultimate treachery. Satan contains attributes of chaos, verbal, manipulation, charismatic, ambition, power, and enthusiasm. Satan is a dangerous opponent in the fight against evil and order. Milton gives an example of Satan's persuasion: For Spirits when they please Can either Sex assume, or both; so soft And uncompounded is thir Essence pure, Not ti'd or macle'd with joynt or limb, Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones, Like cumbrous flesh; but in what shape they choose Dilated or condens't, bright or obscure, Can execute thir aerie purposes (Milton, Ln. 423 — 430) Satan's deception lures sleeping spirits and confuses the minds of individuals. Souls are weakened by the pleasure and chaos. Satan is capable of changing form and shape-shifting. Satan may appear to be a serpent, demonic, male, female, old, young, appealing, harmless, or strong. Some examples are shown in the movies, *Devil* and *The Devil's Advocate*; Satan dresses temptation and attacks the mind, body, and soul. Satan regularly usurps divine powers. In conclusion, Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* show contrasting images of hell and Satan. Dante's hell is organized around circles identified by sins. There is a staggering difference between circle one and circle nine. In circle one Virgil, Homer, and other virtuous pagans sit in eternity in a pastoral landscape while Satan in circle nine must endure eternal torture. Milton's Hell is chaos and filled with fallen angels. Following the purging of Satan and his arrogant followers from heaven, God creates the world positioning Adam and Eve to be tested by Satan and the first human case for the "Fall of Man." Hell is inhabited by Satan and sinners that exercise demonic qualities, tightly monitored by God. The battle for human persists between good and evil. Works Cited 1. Mack, Maynard. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*, 2nd ed. W. W. Norton and Company, <https://assignbuster.com/dantes-and-miltons-hell/>

Inc. New York, NY. 2002. Pages 1861, 1940, and 1941. 2. Milton, John.

Paradise Lost, Book I. Dr. Michael Sollars lectures, handouts, and Blackboard Notes. October, 2011