

# St. augustine and virgil's influence in dante's inferno

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Reaching an epiphany after a lengthy, perilous journey may seem like the content pertinent for mythological legends. However, the epic poems of St. Augustine, Virgil, and Dante share similar themes and have an important relevance to Christianity. Virgil's *The Aeneid* follows the story of Aeneas who encountered hardships and travels to the underworld to maintain his destiny of establishing Rome.

Dante's *Inferno* follows a spiritually indigent Dante through the nine rings of hell with the purpose of realizing simplicity and reuniting with his wife in heaven. Finally, St. Augustine's *Confessions* are an autobiography that details the life of its author in search of a spiritual awakening. An exploration of Dante's *Inferno* comprises inspirations and influences from the other two pieces of literature copiously in setting and subject matter.

## **Virgil's Influence**

Virgil's *The Aeneid* influences Dante's work through a definition of a hell that is composed of multiple stages and punishment intensities for its unfortunate inhabitants. Dante's *Inferno* reveals a journey through the nine rings of hell (Hunt et al. 369). Through his journey, Dante identifies different parts in hell where people are suffering from different punishments Minervino 2 based on their sins. In this hell, he journeys more in-depth into the rings to the pit that holds the most villainous characters in religious history such as Judas and Lucifer (Dante, Longfellow, and Dore 212).

Comparably, Virgil had developed this narrative in his works, which were written before Dante's. Virgil's *The Aeneid* shows Aeneas travel through different avenues of hell such as the Field of Mourning where adulterous

suffered a horrid punishment (Puchner et al. 999). As they travel deeper into the underworld, Aeneas and Sybil come across a fortress where Rhadamanthus punishes the vilest people with intense torture (Virgil and Fagles 189). Virgil's formation of the underworld has recognizable bearings on Dante's explication of hell. The structural and operational similarity is an affirmation of Virgil's *The Aeneid's* influence on Dante's *Inferno*.

Moreover, Virgil's narrative necessitates the assistance of a spiritual guide, a trope that Dante incorporated into the *Inferno*. The *Aeneid's* protagonist, Aeneas, follows a Sybil also referred to as a priestess through the underworld (Virgil and Fagles 172). Similarly, Dante follows the ghost of a deceased poet called Virgil (Dante, Longfellow and Dore 4). One significant similarity between the guides is their wisdom and strength (Puchner et al. 1465). They are decisive and very powerful such that they can travel around hell with little culmination to themselves and their special formulations. Dante's comparison of Virgil is an satirical guidance of Virgil's clarification of the Sybil.

## **St. Augustine's Influence**

St. Augustine's *Confessions* also has a notable influence on the subject matter shown in Dante's *Inferno*. Unlike Virgil's work, these two pieces of literature detail colossal ramifications concerning religion. Dante and St. Augustine's works are journeys to spiritual clarity (Enright Minervino 3 33).

Dante's *Inferno* originates with a lost Dante wandering in a dark forest (Dante, Longfellow and Dore 1). However, he is unable to reach the light

prompting him to turn back where he meets a guide, who promises to help him achieve righteousness and see his wife in heaven. Similarly; St. Augustine travels the world without much purpose other than engaging in materialistic pleasures such as sexual exploration (Puchner et al. 1127).

However, upon reaching the garden in Milan, he achieves clarity and conversion (St. Augustine and Pusey 106). Dante also achieves a similar epiphany upon exiting hell into the earth. This understanding suggests that St. Augustine's Confessions had a profound ramification on Dante's Inferno.

### **Conclusion**

St. Augustine and Virgil's works of literature had a profound influence on Dante's work. Virgil's The Aeneid developed a conceptualization of hell that Dante later adapted to his work. The visualization of a portioned hell that caters to sins differently based on their intensity appears prominently in either author's work. On the other hand, St. Augustine's Confessions has an important influence on Dante's subject matter of a journey to redemption and eventual spiritual empowerment. Therefore, St. Augustine and Virgil's works were important in developing the Epic poem Dante's Inferno.?