

The inferno and sir gawain and the green knight

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

24 Oct A Comparison between Inferno and Sir Gawain & the Green Knight

The medieval period, with its philosophical undertones and cultural richness, has produced several pieces of classic literatures that illustrate the relevance of values and ethics in human life. The *Inferno* by Dante Alighieri and *Sir Gawain & the Green Knight*, written by an anonymous author whose identity still remains unknown, are two of the major works that exemplify the intellectual tradition of the era. The *Inferno*, an epic poem of the 14th century narrates Dante's journey through different circles of Hell along with his guide, Virgil, a Roman poet, where they encounter condemned souls punished for their sins on earth. On the other hand, *Sir Gawain & the Green Knight* recites the chivalrous quest of Sir Gawain for the Green Knight at the Green Chapel, to sustain his life. While both these poems share some significant similarities in terms of plot, characters, theme and poetic language, they also differ in many aspects.

Dante, through his poem *Inferno*, illustrates that human beings ignore their values and virtues in the pursuit of trivial pleasures. They indulge in sinful activities of varying nature despite their faculty of free will, in utter neglect of morals. Thus, they land up in hell, as the punishment for their misdeed. He assigns different circles in hell for each type of sin and contends that the worst sin is the lack of self control due to which humans embark on wrong deeds. Similarly, the anonymous author of *Sir Gawain & the Green Knight* also emphasizes the need for virtues and values in human life, through the protagonist's chivalry. The poem also connotes to the lack of spiritual value in humans by depicting the protagonist's conflict of having to choose between his life and his virtues.

Another significant similarity of these works is that they use their plot to

<https://assignbuster.com/the-inferno-and-sir-gawain-and-the-green-knight/>

depict the social, political and intellectual life of the medieval era. While Dante does this through the narration of the lives of the people whom he meets in Hell, the other author achieves this through Gawain's encounter with different characters during his quest. Both these works use poetic language to illustrate their themes and to create impact on the readers. Such parallels can be found in Dante's allusion that humans will not be "absolved without repentance//nor repent and wish to sin concurrently," in which the author conveys a profound meaning in a few words (XXVII 118 - 119).

Similarly, the latter paints a vivid of a character in a couple of lines with "Fair faced, and free of fear//He sitteth o'er them all" (V 19 - 20).

The major difference in both these works derives from the structure of the narrative and the point of view. Dante's narrator is basically detached from the main events of the poem and traverses through Hell. The themes unfold, not through the life of the protagonist but through the lives of the sinners he meets in Hell. Besides, the poem does not follow a single storyline but is divided into several sub stories incorporating each sin. On the other hand, the themes of the other poem are unraveled through the life of the protagonist and he is directly experiencing the events. Also, the plot spins around a single thread of Gawain's quest and the final revelation that he, as an immortal human, prioritizes the safety of his life than any virtues and for its sake he has forsaken his basic trait of chivalry.

Thus, it transpires that both *Inferno* and *Sir Gawain & the Green Knight* portray the glories as well as anguishes of medieval period, reflecting the social, political and intellectual lives of the era. They also claim several features such as theme, use of language etc that are common. However, through the deployment of varying structure, point of view as well as

storytelling techniques, both these works differ. Such features distinguish them from each other though both represent the classic nature of literature during that time and have several common traits.

Works Cited

Weston, Jessie L. *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight* (Trans). Cambridge, Ontario: In Parentheses Publications, Middle English Series. 1999. Web.

Available at

< http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/sggk_weston.pdf > Unknown. *Inferno* Dante Alighieri. United State: Spark Publishing, 2002, 2007. Print.