

Visual analysis: dante and virgil in hell by william-adolphe bouguereau assignmen...

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Dante and Virgil in Hell (1850) William-Adolphe Bouguereau The image depicts a scene from *Inferno*, a classical poem written by Dante Alighieri in the 1300's in which Dante is led through the levels of Hell by the dead poet Virgil. In this particular moment, Dante is witnessing the horrors of the wrathful in Hell. Clearly, Dante is the figure cloaked in beige and covering his mouth in utter disbelief. His eyes, however, are not directed at the two fighting men. He is staring off towards the side of the painting which makes us wonder what exactly he is looking at.

Virgil continues to look down at the scene before us while he attempts to steer Dante onward with a hand. One of the first things that I notice when I sit in front of Dante and Virgil in Hell is how the two figures engaged in ferocious battle in the foreground capture nearly every ounce of the viewer's attention instantly. The two fighting figures have been accented with an intense light that seems to shine exclusively on their bodies. They clearly proclaim dominance within the painting and begin a clear line of movement. The attacker's knee is slammed into the victim's back, bending him over backwards and pulling his entire torso down.

No matter which figure you first examine, your attention is immediately drawn up through the curvature of the man whose spine is being twisted back at an excruciating angle and out of his head. The line then travels on to the left where you see two figures that are standing in the background, hidden by a curtain of darkness. The use of atmospheric perspective is overly emphasized here as well to once again, push the battling men in the foreground even farther ahead. Dante's eyes leads us to the right side of the

painting where a winged demon is flying overhead and watching with glee on as the two fighters claw at each other mercilessly.

His wings carry the visual line to the right even more and even farther back in the scene where a mountain of living and writhing bodies climbs upon itself. Reddish flesh tones are the color theme of the image, which carries several different interpretations for that choosing. The first interpretation is the fact that they are in a ring of Hell where fire is vivacious and alive. But also it is clear that this level of hell is associated with the wrathful and the violent. To see bare, reddened flesh against flesh brings another level to the idea of pure and primeval wrath. Works Cited Alighierie, Dante. *Inferno*. Penguin Classics, 2006. Print.