Description Of Hell Design In Dante’s Inferno

Introduction

Dante’s Divine Comedy epic poem describes a journey through the afterlife of inferno, Purgatory and finally Paradise. The journey begins with Dante getting lost in a dark wood and his only escape is through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven under the guidance of Virgil, the poet. In this poem, Hell is depicted as consisting of nine circles of suffering whose location is within the Earth. In The epic poem, Dante enters the afterlife through the gate of hell and then proceeds to the nine circles. The nine circles have unique designs and contain different types of people as will be discussed below.

Discussion

In allegorical terms, the inferno is a representation of the Christian soul’s perception of sin while the three beasts stand for three types of sins, the violent, malicious and self-indulgent. The first five circles are for self-indulgent sins and circles 6 and 7 are for violent sins. Finally, circles 8 and 9 are for malicious sins.

Level 1

This level is known as limbo and it consists of a seven-walled castle with many shades and green fields. Limbo is found across the river Acheron, upon the brink of grief’s abysmal valley. It is a place of sorrow without torment and it has virtuous pagans, authors, the great philosophers, unbaptized children and other people who are unfit to enter the heaven’s kingdom. It is the dwelling place of the wisest antiquity men including Socrates, Aristotle, Julius...
Caesar, Homer and even Virgil himself. The atmosphere of the place is peaceful but sad and there is no punishment in an active sense. There is immense grieve due to separation form God, without reconciliation hope. The unbaptized lacked hope for something greater than things conceivable by rational minds. Hence, Dante implies that almost all virtuous non-Christians find themselves in Limbo (Alighieri, 2008).

Level 2

The second level is extremely dark and mute of all light. The wind bellows as the seas rage in a tempest. This is a place or realm that is an eternal residence of the lustful. Sinners in this level are blown around needlessly and aimlessly by the unforgiving winds as a sign of punishment for their sins. The blowing of these souls aimlessly symbolizes the power of lust to blow one about aimlessly and needlessly. The infernal hurricane relentlessly molests the sinners found in this level. Some of the people Dante sees in this circle or level are Dido, Achilles, Paris, Helen of Troy, Cleopatra and many other people. All these people were overcome by the power of lust and ended up dying violently (Alighieri, 2008).

Level 3

This level is characterized by eternal rain and cold. Sinners punished in this circle are the gluttons. They are lying in a filthy mixture of putrid water and shadows. Due to excessive consumption they meet their fate beneath the dirty rain and cold. This level is also characterized by the fact that Cerebus dwells in it. Cerebus is a cruel canine monster with red eyes and three heads. He crawls and tears the damned people with his claws and teeth. Cerebus guards the gluttons. The Gluttons lie sightless and heedless which is a symbol of the selfish, cold and empty sensuality of their lives.

Level 4
In this level, the people who suffer their punishment are the avaricious and the prodigal. The fourth circle is found just before the river Styx. The avaricious roll weights back and forth against one another as a form of punishment. They share punishment and damnation with other people who either lived greedily and insatiably or wasted their years. This level is the dwelling place of Plutus, the wolf-like demon of wealth. The prodigal and avaricious are guarded by Plutus who is the Greek god of wealth (Alighieri, 2008).

Level 5

This is the circle of wrath and sullenness. The river Styx runs through this fifth level of hell and in this river are punished the gloomy and the wrathful. The wrathful are continually lashing at each other in fury, anger and naked. The gloomy on the hand are gurgling in black mud, sullen and slothful, showing signs of withdrawal from the world. They try repeating a doleful hymn as their lamentations bubble to the surface. These people meet their fate in the Styx due to the fact that they lived a vindictive, cruel and hateful life (Alighieri, 2008). The lower levels of hell are contained within the city of Dis walls which are surrounded by the Stygian marsh. The sins punished within Dis are the active sins. The walls are under the guidance of the fallen angels. The sins dealt with in the lower levels are sins that humanism and philosophy can not understand fully.

Level 6

This level is located near Satan’s wretched city that has w wide plain surrounded by iron walls. There are also burning tombs that are littered around and about the landscape. In this level, the Heretics such as Epicurians are punished for failing to believe in God and the afterlife. These are also individuals who made themselves audible by use of doleful sighs. Three infernos dwell in this circle and these infernos have stains of serpents’ hair and limbs of women (Alighieri, 2008).

Level 7
The seventh level is guarded by the Minotaur, who snarls in fury and is encircled within the river Phlegethon and filled with boiling blood. The tyrants, assassins and war-mongers are punished in this level. Hence, this level houses the violent. Those who try to escape their punishment are shot by centaurs armed with arrows and bows. Moreover, the stench in the seventh level is intense and overpowering. This level is also a home to the wood of suicides consisting of gnarled and stunted trees with poisoned fruits and twisting branches (Alighieri, 2008). It is believed that at final judgment, the bodies of these sinners will be hanged from the branches of suicide trees. Birdlike creatures with human faces make their nests in these trees. There is scorching sand beyond the wood where people who committed sin against nature and God are punished through raining flakes of fire against their bodies. Blasphemers, sodomites and usurers are also punished in this level. The last two levels, level 8 and level 9 punish sins that involve conscious treachery or fraud. These two levels can only be reached by descending a vast cliff.

Level 8

This level is known as the Malebolge where a variety of sinners suffer eternally. This level is designed in such a way that it is an amphitheatre-shaped pit made of stone and is iron in color. Sinners punished in this level are those guilty of malice and fraudulence. Moreover, there are also pimps and seducers who are continuously whipped by horned demons. There are also hypocrites struggling to walk in lead-lined cloaks. The barraters are ducked in boiling pitch by demons called Malebranche. The diviners, magicians, fortune tellers, diviners are panderers are all punished in this circle or level. There is an intense lamentation of sinners afflicted with leprosy and scabs as they lay sick on the ground (Alighieri, 2008).

Level 9

Level nine is the deepest level of hell and this is the residence of Satan himself. The circle has a ring of classical and biblical giants. Satan’s wings flap eternally and as a result produce chilling cold winds leading to freezing of ice found in Cocytus. Satan has three faces, black, red and yellow. All the three faces can be seen with bloody foam gushing from the mouths. Satan’s eyes are forever weeping while they chew on Brutus, Judas and Cassius. Of
the three traitors, Judas is the one that receives the most horrifying torture. His head is continually gnawed by Satan while his back is being eternally skinned by Satan’s claws. This place is extremely cold and dark. Sinners have their mouths shut, eyes frozen and their whole bodies frozen deep in ice. The sinners are traitors against country, family, benefactors and God. They all lament their sin in the frigid pit of despair (Alighieri, 2008). Finally, Dante and Virgil escape hell and they do this by climbing down Satan’s ragged fur and passing through the Earth’s centre emerging on the other hemisphere. The above essay has described the various tortures suffered by the damned in the nine levels of hell.

Reference


Tierce Rhyme. BiblioBazaar, LLC.