



A Comparative Study of the Depiction of Hell in Paradise Lost and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.5.0224.0441>

ABSTRACT

The essay explores the portrayal of Hell in John Milton's "Paradise Lost" and James Joyce's "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," examining similarities and differences in their depictions. Both authors present Hell as a realm of eternal torment for defying God, characterized by flames, darkness, and despair. Milton describes Hell as a bottomless perdition with adamant chains and penal fire, contrasted with Heaven's eternal light. Similarly, Joyce's Father Arnall delivers a sermon depicting Hell as a dark, foul-smelling prison filled with fire and smoke. The abstract highlights the moralizing tone of both portrayals, aiming to terrify listeners into repentance and confession. While Milton's description is poetic and majestic, Joyce's is direct and rough, emphasizing the vivid horror of Hell. Overall, both authors masterfully capture the terrifying essence of Hell, underscoring the consequences of divine disobedience.

Keywords: "Paradise Lost," Milton, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," James Joyce, Hell, Angels, Catholicism, Christian, Heaven, Darkness, Light, Eternal Justice, Eternity, Pandemonium

Introduction

Paradise Lost

It is John Milton's epic poem written in blank verse. The poem tells the biblical story of the fall of man, Adam and Eve's temptation by Satan and the loss of Eden. The epic describes the hell in great detail. The question of agency and punishment become central to the endeavour.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

James Joyce's 1916 novel presents Stephen Dedalus and his growth and becoming an artist. Joyce explores Dedalus' spiritual and aesthetic awakening and their conflicting dichotomy. Father Arnall shows Dedalus the fate of the sinners by describing the horrors of the hell.

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Hell in Paradise Lost is a place for eternal torture, eternal punishment for defying God. It is a bottomless perdition, adamant chains and penal fire await those who sin. It is a fiery gulf. The pain and torment only multiply at the thought of the lost happiness. Heaven's eternal light is contrasted with mournful gloom of hell. This torture without end, as Milton puts, is eternal justice. Hell is like a dungeon, like a prison with utter darkness. Peace doesn't dwell there. No rest is found. Flames give no light. Hell is likened to a great furnace with all the side round. There is no refuge for the fallen angels. Hell is "o'erwhelmed with floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire". There is no "happy fields", only horrors dwell. The place is like a volcano.

"There stood a hill not far whose grisly top

Belched fire and rolling smoke; the rest entire

Shone with a glossy scurf, undoubted sign

That in his womb was hid metallic ore,

The work of sulphur..." (670-675)

The land is dry but the lake is full with liquid fire, Milton compares it with Pelorus and Athena

"...Torn from Pelorus, or the shattered side Of thundering Aetna, whose combustible And fuelled entrails thence conceiving fire..."(232-234)

Milton takes great pains in topographing the hell, giving it space and a sense of space, in turn, familiarizing it. The hopelessness found in the hell is given a sense of odour, the place is riddled with Sulphur fumes and peculiar stench. Thus the feeling of spiritual decay is given an elemental turn, materializing and grounding it. Though the size of the hell is not given but it is not entirely formless. Sea and land are there. Precious metals are found and refined to construct Pandemonium

"...Ransacked the centre, and with impious hands

Rifled the bowels of their mother earth

For treasures better hid.

Soon had his crew Opened into the hill a spacious wound

And digged out ribs of gold..."(686-690)

Father Arnall delivers a sermon about hell in 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'. He describes it as an eternity of torment. It is an abode of demons and lost souls. Hell, according to him, is a strait, dark and foulsmelling prison. It is filled with fire and smoke. The "straitness" of hell is contrasted with that of earthly prisons. In hell there is no movement possible unlike the earthly prisons where liberty of movement is possible, were it only within the four walls of the cell or in the gloomy yard of the prison. Prisoners in hell are heaped together within the "four thousand miles thick walls". Devoid of any movement the damned are bound and helpless. Darkness of the hell is very much emphasized. The fire of hell gives no light. The fire retains its intensity of its heat, it burns eternally in darkness.

"It is a neverending storm of darkness, dark flames and dark smoke of burning brimstone, amid which the bodies are heaped one upon another without even glimpse of the air."

Awful stench is also pointed out by Father Arnall. The brimstone burns and fills hell with its intolerable stench. The air becomes foul and unbreathable.

Next comes the physical torment of the hell. The torment of fire. The sulphurous brimstone burns forever and burns with "unspeakable fury". The fire of hell doesn't consume or destroy but rather it "preserves that which it burns", making the pain and suffering eternal. A certain lake of fire is described. The lake is "boundless, shoreless and bottomless". The fire makes the blood of the damned seeth and boil in the veins, brains boil in the skull, bowels become "redhot mass of burning pulp", eyes flame like molten balls.

"Every sense of the flesh is tortured... the eyes with darkness, the nose with noisome odours, the ears with yells and howls and execrations, the taste with foul matter, leprous corruption, nameless suffocation filth, the touch with redhot goads and spikes, with cruel tongues of flame."

Father Arnall further describes how the company of damned increase the torment in the hell is described. The howls, the screams only increase the torture. "All sense of humanity is forgotten...they are helpless and hopeless: it is too late now for repentance."

Finally Father Arnall says that the company of the devils is a torment in itself. "These devils will affect the damned in two ways, by their presence and by their reproaches...They mock and jeer at the lost souls whom they dragged down to ruin." These demons are voices of conscience in the hell. They taunt and keep reminding the damned the sins they committed. Both Milton's and Joyce's hells are quite similar, deriving from same religious tradition. Both authors meticulously provide graphic details of the hell.

Conclusion

Both, Milton's description and Father Arnall's sermon is moralising in tone. Joyce's Father Arnall is full of passion and rhetoric whose aim seems to terrify the listeners into repentance and confession, unlike Milton, he is not there to "justify the ways of God to men". Vividness of hell doesn't find refuge in the poetic perfection as in Milton, horror is always rough and direct, never to be muffled by the poetic genius of Milton. Both authors put imagination of hell into words beautifully and masterfully.

References

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Admin. "Give a Description of Hell as Depicted in Paradise Lost, Book-1." www.josbd.com, www.josbd.com, 26 May 2016, <https://www.josbd.com/give-a-description-of-hell-as-depicted-in-paradise-lost-book-1/amp/>.