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**The Personification and Characterization of Hell in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes***

Hell is a paradox. It is simultaneously dark, plunging into the deepest, blackest corridors of human heads and hearts, and it is ablaze. It is an inferno, burning and torturing sinners to purge them of their flaws, and it is empty: vast, endless, and horrible. It exists as a place, a destination of dark geography, and it lives in the mind of every person. The only constant in the enigma Hell presents can be summarized with a warning in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*: "Ye who enter, abandon all hope". In their Epic narratives, *Paradise Lost* and *The Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes*, Milton and Neil Gaiman approach the abstract concepts of Hell, Satan, and Lucifer with differing strategies and the same objective. In the worlds of Milton and Gaiman, Hell transcends location and is personified as a character.

When Lucifer fell, he became both Satan and Hell as he crafted the dark infinity of the Pit into a kingdom of his own design and being. "Book 1" of Milton's *Paradise Lost* describes Hell as "A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round / As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames / No light, but rather darkness visible... " (ll. 61-64), that has been "swallow'd up in endless misery" (l. 142). The misery Milton refers to is the misery of Satan. Hell is Satan's place, and is, therefore, an extension of Satan's self. The deep recesses of Satan's heart that contain his anger, despair, and disillusionment are projected onto Hell's landscape as the hills, the fiery lakes, and the darkness itself. The perverted kingdom and dark sovereign Milton introduces in "Book 1" of *Paradise Lost* are one and the same. Hell is Satan, and Satan is Hell.

The landscape of Milton's Hell in *Paradise Lost* and the corporeal form that Satan adopts are both manifestations of the fallen archangel. The dichotomous existence of Satan can be

equated most easily with the primeval Greek gods and goddesses, Uranus and Gaia. Uranus personifies the Sky and Gaia the Earth, but the two deities also appear in the mythologies as human-like beings. This manner of thinking applies to Milton's Satan, who is described as being "long and large / ... floating many a rood, in bulk as huge / As whom the Fables name of monstrous size, / Titanian, or Earth-born..." (ll. 194-198), but who also interacts with his dark army as a single commanding figure. Later in "Book 1", in lines 670-674, Milton equates a volcanic hill in Hell with Satan's womb to further stress the geographic personification.

Though Gaiman and Milton both personify Hell, Milton characterizes Hell and Satan as the same entity while Gaiman casts Hell and Lucifer as two separate characters. In Gaiman's massive and pantheistic universe, Hell existed before Lucifer fell and will continue to exist when he ends his own perdition. It is drawn in pastel colors, a sharp contrast to the typically imagined red and black tones, and the geography is both organic and dynamic. When Dream first returns to Hell in "A Hope in Hell" to see Lucifer and recover his helmet, he follows Etrigan through the Woods of Suicide and notes that the landscape has changed. Even the Woods, whose withered, dark brown branches look dark and dead against the lavender sky, have changed since Dream's last visit (see fig. 1). Buildings will crumble, statues will be overturned, and regimes will fall, but the Wood will still grow as Hell adapts and continues.

The Gates to Hell and Lucifer's Palace are both grotesque representations of Hell's organic nature. The first impression of Hell encountered by readers of *The Sandman* while following Dream on his quest in "A Hope in Hell" is the Gates; they twist upwards in rounded, organic shapes, many of which are recognizably human body parts, and are colored in dark reds, olive greens, and varying shades of pale purplish grays (see fig. 2). While visually disturbing, the organic nature of the Gates to Hell are important because they are indicative of the landscape to

follow. Similarly, Lucifer's Palace is an organic structure that towers over the rest of the landscapes. It is composed of the same humanoid shapes that make up the Gates, but on Lucifer's Palace the figures are distorted and demonic. The colors are vibrant and warm; pinks, purples, and reds are contrasted by the cooler greens and olive blacks of the celestial backdrop (see fig. 3). Collectively, the colors and architecture simultaneously emphasize the organic quality and unique atmosphere of Hell.

Like Milton, Gaiman makes use of geographic personification to create a biologically suggestive landscape in Hell. Both writers equate the hills in Hell to different body parts: Milton to a womb, and Gaiman to an open wound. In "A Hope in Hell", the hill Dream, Lucifer, and Etrigan stand on as they look out over a sea of demons is disturbingly similar to an artery that has been exposed and sliced neatly into a stump on which the characters can perch. The stump is wider at the base, curving through concave lines into the ranks of Hell's monstrous occupants. As it tapers upward, the wrinkles and organic creases become more prevalent and the initial pink, fleshy tones bleed into bright, scarlet tones. The shading and contrast also become more evident as the hill moves skyward; the hatched, parallel and perpendicular lines that give the stumped artery dimension at its base transition quickly to dense, black shadows that force the eye to pull the image forward from the sparse, gray background (see fig. 4). With his graphic narrative, Gaiman is able to further characterize Hell with chillingly organic illustrations and repulsive associations of Hell's surface to flesh.

Milton's and Gaiman's endeavours to make Hell its own character in their epic narratives is essential because of the abstract nature of Hell. It is impossible to determine whether Hell is a physical place, as Gaiman suggests in *The Sandman*, or an intangible depth in the human psyche, as Milton suggests in *Paradise Lost* when Satan declares: "The mind is its own place, and in

itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (ll. 254-255). In either case, Hell is a living world for dead souls. It is adapting, changing, and entirely autonomous. As Dante wrote in *The Divine Comedy*: "Eternal, and eternal I shall endure. / All hope abandon, ye who enter here."

Appendix:

Figure 1: The Woods of Suicide

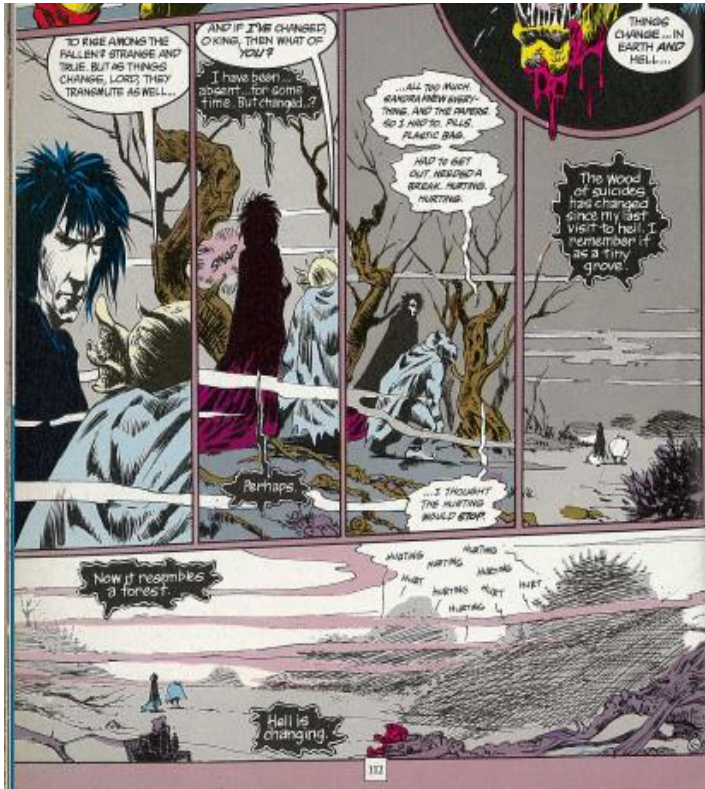


Figure . 2: The Gates of Hell



Figure 3: Lucifer's Palace



Figure 4: Open Artery, A Hill in Hell



Works Cited:

Gaiman, Neil. "A Hope in Hell." *The Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes*. New York: DC

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Milton, John. "Book 1." *Paradise Lost*. New York: Signet Classic, 2001. 4-27. Print.