Hell and its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, edited by Isabel Moreira and Margaret Toscano

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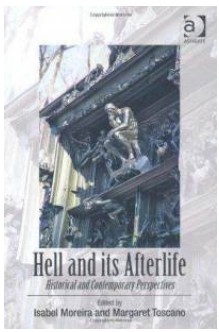

In 2006, an international conference was held at the University of Utah, for the purpose of analyzing both ancient and modern understandings of hell and how those perceptions have developed over time. *Hell and its Afterlife* is made up of selected articles presented at this conference. It is divided into two parts and ordered chronologically. In addition, several of the papers build thematically upon each other, adding an even greater significance to the research as a whole.

Part I of the collection, "The Tradition of Hell in the Old World," begins with Margaret Toscano's "Love is Hell: Torment, Sex, and Redemption in the Cupid and Psyche Myth." Toscano analyzes the Cupid and Psyche

tale found in Apuleius's second-century work *Metamorphoses* and these figures' incorporation on various sculptural works, focusing primarily on the early third-century Endymion Sarcophagus. She expertly demonstrates how their story exemplifies the polar concepts of union and separation and death and rebirth. According to Toscano, "the childlike depictions of Amor and Psyche in visual monuments correspond to the allegorical interpretation of Apuleius' story: the soul's movement from base love to celestial love, from earth to heaven" (22). Her love becomes celestial upon seeing Cupid for the first time, and moves from earthly to heavenly when Jupiter makes her immortal. Although Psyche is not often listed among other, more famous, katabatic figures such as Orpheus, Aeneas, and Persephone, Toscano stresses the overall importance of Psyche's story and the significance of the appearance of Cupid and Psyche on sculptural art such as sarcophagi. Toscano emphasizes, "Psyche becomes the bride of death, undergoes numerous trials and much suffering to reemerge from the underworld, giving hope for immortality to those who saw her image on funerary relief sculptures" (25–26).

Jeffrey A. Trumbower's "Early Visions of Hell as a Place of Education and Conversion," reflects upon 1 Peter 4:6. One of the main sources for contention among early Christians regarding the permanence of hell was Christ's decent after his crucifixion. According to Trumbower, "In the Christian imagination, the death and resurrection of Jesus were the decisive cosmic events.… The question naturally arose of what he did there, and the answers given usually involve some sort of cosmic victory over death, the devil, or Hades personified. This also meant liberation for at least some of the dead, and the various Christian authors understood in different ways precisely who it was who was liberated" (30). Jesus's journey to hell helped to remedy a lingering question, namely, were the God-fearing prophets from the Old Testament consigned to suffer in hell eternally? Trumbower discusses a variety of sources dating through the sixth century whose authors struggled to interpret the purpose of Jesus's journey to hell. Ultimately, Trumbower concludes, early Christian communities sought to highlight the power of divine justice, reaching even those souls who had been sentenced to hell with the hope that eventually all would be found righteous in the eyes of God and be allowed entrance into heaven.

Isabel Moreira's "Plucking Sinners Out of Hell: Saint Martin of Tours' Resurrection Miracle" thematically builds upon the two previous chapters. Moreira focuses on the evolution of the "Christian tradition that resisted the finality of hell," an idea, she argues, as being grounded in "Christ's resurrec-

tion as a rebellion against death itself" (41). Moreira concentrates on Saint Martin of Tours, who as a Christ-like hero descended to hell in order to rescue a young man. In order to demonstrate how changing beliefs affected subsequent versions of this miracle, Moreira compares various retellings of the legend, including Sulpicius Severus's biography of Saint Martin and Gregory of Tours's *De Virtutibus sancti Martini episcopi*. Through a thorough comparison, Moreira is able to demonstrate how the story of Saint Martin's resurrection of the catechumen evolved, corresponding to the expressed orthodoxy of the Church.

Alan E. Bernstein's "Named Others and Named Places: Stigmatization in the Early Medieval Afterlife" sets out "to examine the use of hell to stigmatize individuals and groups in early medieval Western Europe" (53). Bernstein sets out to show that, in narratives pertaining to hell, groups are identified by their wrongdoings more often than are individuals. According to Bernstein, there is little evidence of named individuals in these texts. In the second part, he is able to clearly show the frequency with which groups are named. He focuses on the stigmatization of groups by their association "with symbols of evil from the Apocalypse" (65). Such a distinction is found in the New Testament, and, as evidenced by Bernstein, prolific throughout the early medieval period. Bernstein is able to demonstrate how "hell stigmatizes targeted 'others' in at least four ways: by their origins, according to their deeds, by religious dissent, and by destiny" (69).

Megan C. Armstrong's "A Franciscan Kind of Hell" discusses French Franciscan sermons (with the exception of Diego de la Vega and Francesco Panigarola) during the time of the Wars of Religion and slightly after (1580–1620), focusing primarily on Sunday sermons and those delivered during Lent, in order to "evaluate the pervasiveness of the fearful hell at a critical historical juncture" (76). In analyzing these sermons, Armstrong highlights the lack of "fire and brimstone" preaching that have long characterized Franciscan preaching. Despite the tension of the period, the tone of these sermons was one of love and forgiveness. Armstrong is able to conclude that, within the literature examined, "hell functioned primarily to highlight the loving nature of God, and the critical role of the Christian body in salvation … the redeemable nature of humankind" (82–83). Instead of highlighting a sinner's punishments to be suffered eternally in hell, these sermons "focus on the nature and effects of sin upon the living Christian" (84).

The final paper of this first half is Peter Marshall's "Catholic and Protestant Hells in Later Reformation England," which discusses the weight of the

Protestant movement on the theological debates concerning hell, utilizing English sources dating from 1570–1640. According to Marshall, "Hell was not, formally and prescriptively, an object of religious disputation. Neither the existence nor the essential function of hell was ever at issue between Catholic and Protestant theologians" (91). While the first half of the paper demonstrates a shared understanding of the existence of hell between the two faiths, the second half analyzes the literal versus allegorical understanding of hell-fire and the exact geographical location of hell, the main sources for theological disputes.

Part II, "The Reception of Hell in Modern Times and Contemporary Dialogue" begins with "Devils Conquering the Conquered: Changing Visions of Hell in Spanish America," by Fernando Cervantes. Cervantes focuses on Columbus' journey to the new world and the Christian explorers and missionaries that followed. He poignantly declares, "the fear of hell that helped to fill the churches in the past has helped to empty them in the present … the discovery of America … was a central and, in the end, quite determining contributor to the decline of the traditional notion of hell" (103). Cervantes provides a very interesting analysis of the attempted syncretism that took place among the people of Spanish America. In addition, he discusses some of the issues that arose when trying to overlay the new theology onto the old. For instance, Mictlan, the name of the Nahuatl underworld, was thought to have resembled the Old Testament Sheol more closely than the New Testament and other, later, concepts of hell, in that most of those that died descended directly to Mictlan. Therefore, according to Cervantes, the mendicant friars found it "very difficult to explain why it was so important to avoid it" (109).

Henry Ansgar Kelly's "Hell with Purgatory and Two Limbos: The Geography and Theology of the Underworld" is an examination of the historical development of Thomas Aquinas's theology of the four prospective levels of hell, and, more specifically, how these concepts developed. He begins first with the Old Testament concept of the underworld, Sheol, its transformation into Hades, and the changes that occurred in this place's identity. Kelly also discusses the etymological changes from the Hebrew Sheol to Hades/hell in the Greek and inferno in the Latin Vulgate. From there, he moves to discuss the division of hell, as a place, into different levels. He focuses on Peter Lombard's two-part division of "the bosom of Abraham" and Thomas Aquinas' division of hell into four distinct regions. The section concludes with Pope Innocent IV's papal recognition of purgatory (1254), ecumenical asser-

tions, regarding the purgation of sin, at Lyons (1274) and Florence (1439), and the existence of purgatory during the Protestant Reformation. One of the most interesting aspects of Kelly's paper is his concluding discussion of modern-day papal pronouncements regarding unbaptized babies and the International Theological Commission during the pontificate of Pope John Paul and his predecessor Benedict XVI. According to Kelly, "in recent times the idea of situating hell, purgatory, and the two limbos underground seems to have faded, along with all ideas of spatial location, in favor of purely spiritual states" (132).

John Sanders's "Hell Yes! Hell No! Evangelical Debates on Eternal Punishment," an analysis of modern-day evangelical debates about hell, is paired nicely with Kelly's research. According to Sanders, evangelicals "who see themselves as guardians of orthodoxy decry views that encroach upon what they take to be the clear teaching of the Bible" (137). Sanders discusses the nature of hell and what evangelicals believe its population to be. He describes various debates within the evangelical community, and clearly defines the arguments of both sides of several theological assertions. For instance, Sanders discusses the belief in "eternal conscious punishment," literal versus symbolic flames, mental versus physical suffering, and the degree to which one is made to suffer in hell. He also considers the theory of "conditional immortality" which refers to the continued existence of these sinners to ensure their continued suffering. The second half of the essay is devoted to the population and the redemptive nature of hell, that it is possible for some, or all, the individuals condemned there to be saved through postmortem acceptance in the gospel. The author also discusses restrictivism, salvation that is available only to those that accept/have faith in Jesus Christ. According to Sanders, restrictivism is considered "the most common view among evangelicals" (149). On the other side of the debate is inclusivism, the "second most common view" which argues that there are opportunities for individuals to have faith in God who would otherwise not hear and thereby accept the gospel.

Brian D. Birch's "Turning the Devils Out of Doors: Mormonism and the Concept of Hell" highlights Mormon beliefs about hell. Birch begins by discerning eternal punishment and everlasting punishment, which, according to Joseph Smith, "refer, not to the duration of suffering, but to the source" (155). A vision of Smith's, based on 1 Corinthians 15:40–1 and similar to that of Emanuel Swedenborg, describes three different states of perfection, that a Mormon strives to achieve. He touches on the mental suffering of Mormons over literal, physical torment in hell and of the possibility of in-

clusivism (at least in the case of Smith's brother Alvin). Birch also discusses the Mormon understanding of Christ's descent into hell, which differs from previously discussed interpretations. Mormons believe that messengers were sent on Christ's behalf to "serve as missionaries among the wicked and unevangelized dead" (159). Birch concludes by touching briefly on the debates relating to universalism and a soul's "eternal progression … to advance from one glory to another" (162).

Vincent J. Cheng's "James Joyce and the (Modernist) Hellmouth" and Gambera's article that follows both examine literary uses of hell imagery. Cheng sets out to explore James Joyce's religious upbringing as a fundamental contributor to "the development of his innovative modernist prose styles" (168). After examining several examples, Cheng applies his thesis to Father Arnall's sermons in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and illustrates how Joyce makes "the material presence of hell suffocatingly and sensually real" (171). However, when describing influences other than Joyce's Irish Catholic upbringing, Cheng seems to imply that little is original to Joyce: "based on the model of *The Spiritual Exercise* … passages lifted from a devotional text, *L'Inferno aperto* … Joyce borrowed heavily from Pinamonti, lifting entire passages … Joyce borrowed not only from Pinamonti but from an entire Roman Catholic tradition" (172). Overall, by highlighting Joyce's heavy borrowing, Cheng detracts from the impact of his thesis.

Disa Gambera's "Sin City: Urban Damnation in Dante, Blake, T. S. Eliot, and James Thomson" discusses literature that illustrates Dante's modeling of the *Inferno* as a city. Disa examines William Blake's *London*, James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night*, and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the particular ways in which these authors "superimpose images of hell on the recognizable contours of London … they use infernal images to emphasize the irredeemable nature of the modern industrialized city" (175–6). Gambera argues "that what draws these later poets to Dante is his depiction of hell as an actual city and of damnation as an authentically urban experience" (176). Gambera also briefly mention Sandow Birk's artistic representations of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (who himself was inspired by Gustave Doré's engravings). After describing the ways in which Dante's Inferno reminds the reader of city life, Gambera touches on Blake's and Thomson's poems and their portrayal of London, demonstrating how in each the speakers move through the streets of London, in contrast to Dante, who is in isolation, speaking to no one. The same is true for the speaker in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

Charles W. King's "What If It's Just Good Business? Hell, Business Models, and the Dilution of Justice in Mike Carey's *Lucifer*" is a very interesting chapter on a piece of pop culture that, I believe, has received little attention in the field. *Lucifer*, a comic book written by Mike Carey and illustrated by Peter Gross, was published by DC/Vertigo in 2000–2006. King highlights the ways in which Carey sought to diverge from normal representations of both the devil and of hell. Carey achieved this by "eliminating the clear-cut opposition of good and evil or even the possible existence of moral absolutes such as good or evil" (194). According to King, Carey's "conception of hell draws not on Judeo-Christian ethics, but, rather, on modern American fears of bureaucracies and corporate indifference" (198). King's article provides an interesting commentary, not only on Carey's modeling of hell to be like modern-day corporations, but also of the corporate agenda that lies behind the creation of comic books.

Sharon Lee Swenson's "Guardian Demons in *Hellboy*: Hybridity in Contemporary American Horror Films" begins first with a brief description of the entire film. From there Swenson discusses the attraction of horror films, such as *Hellboy*. She believes that horror films are used by "individuals and culture to simultaneously express and deny these negative emotions, without them fully reaching consciousness" (208). While Swenson's paper is very technical in its analysis of the film's incorporation of hybridity, liminality, and uncannyness it provides an interesting perspective concerning the need for a new, hybrid, hero. Swenson concludes by utilizing four scenes to show "how these concepts are achieved cinematically" (212). Swenson's and King's chapters, which present contemporary understandings and conceptualizations of hell and it usefulness in a secular society, provide an interesting commentary on such perceptions.

The collection ends with Rachel Falconer's "Hell in our Time: Dantean Descent and the Twenty-first Century 'War on Terror.'" Falconer's paper analyzes the use of ancient descriptions about hell to interpret hellish, modern-day terrorist attacks. According to Falconer, "the concept of hell shapes and informs the way in which we experience actual events in the world today" (217). She examines the bombing of the London Underground on July 7, 2005 and the bombing of Lebanon by Israel in the summer of 2006 and how the British press reported on these events. What is so very interesting about this paper is the way in which these two events, separated by time and place were, as described by Falconer, "storied as journeys to hell and back" (219).

She does a splendid job of highlighting the extent to which narratives of hell have been grafted onto our interpretations of horrific disasters. For Falconer, "hell is as potent as ever in the secular West, even if it is no longer regarded as a theological truth" (236).

The overall collection's usefulness to ongoing theological debates surrounding the development of ancient perceptions of hell is clear in each of the chapters included. In addition, the political and societal implications discussed herein are valuable for further study. While the entire collection would be of interest to a scholar studying the general theme, the individual chapters would be of particular interest to researchers seeking a closer examination of specific topics, as each chapter provides well-written footnotes highlighting experts and allows for easy access to additional research.

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