

Title:	Construction through Rejection – The Influence of Dante’s <i>Divine Comedy</i> on Blake’s “A Memorable Fancy” from <i>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i>
Name:	Yuen Wai Shiu Ernest
Supervisor:	Professor Li Ou

Abstract

The idea of the afterlife has long been discussed and debated. In the 14th century, Dante constructed a systematic threefold afterlife, consisting of the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* (Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise). He places sinners into different circles of *The Inferno*, in which they suffer eternal punishment. Each circle represents a different transgression. Such system is a conventional perception of the afterlife.

Four centuries later, William Blake, who repudiates the traditional dichotomised Heaven and Hell, wrote *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, constructing his own system of the afterlife. Blake’s Heaven and Hell, as the title suggests, are intertwined and inseparable. They significantly subvert the conventional vision of the afterlife. In the fourth “A Memorable Fancy” (Plate 17-20) from *The Marriage*, Blake employs unorthodox imageries to depict the afterlife. Despite its absurdity, these imageries bear resemblance to previous works on Heaven and Hell, especially to Dante’s trilogy.

This essay explores the Dantean elements in Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and specifically three scenes in “A Memorable Fancy (4)”. The first part of the essay discusses the tempest and the Leviathan, which resonates with the Francesca and Paolo episode in *The Inferno*, and with the idea of sexuality and suppression. The second section investigates the chained and cannibalistic primates. This scene resembles the Ugolino episode in Dante, in terms of the ceaseless cannibalism and distortion of ‘energy’ after repression. Thirdly, the essay makes a shift as it will study the preservation of Dantean element instead of the rejection of him, by examining the mill, as Dante’s Satan is described as a mill as well. The mechanical grinding of the mill serves as an imagery to censure the institutionalised church. Lastly, the paper will examine Blake’s use of allegory and comedy – the elements Blake inherits significantly from Dante.

Reflection

This project is truly a capstone work of my undergraduate study, as it entails different literary periods, and therefore different courses and studies that I have completed throughout my four years of being an English major. These courses have imparted me invaluable knowledge not only on the writers and their works, but also knowledge and skills regarding analysis of texts, critical thinking, the ability to form cogent arguments, and a lot more.

As the text I analysed are meant to provoke further thinking, working on this project prompts me to ponder the system and logic of the world that we are told and moulded to think. We must decide for ourselves what truth is.

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