

SPECIAL MINI-UNIT: GUIDED TOURS THROUGH THE UNDERWORLD 8TH CENTURY BC TO 17TH CENTURY AD

A visit to the Underworld by a mortal was rare in classical literature because, as the Sibyl, Aeneas' guide, tells him...

“...The downward path to death
Is easy; all the livelong night and day
Dark Pluto's door stands open for a guest.
But O! remounting to the world of light,
This is a task indeed, a strife supreme.”

The Aeneid, Book IV, lines 124-127

Odysseus expresses to Circe his fear of visiting the house of Hades when he learns he must consult with the soul of Teiresias before he can return home.

“Circe, who will be our guide on that journey? No one
has ever yet in a black ship gone all the way to Hades.”

The Odyssey, Book X, lines 501-502

Similarly, the Gate to Hell which stands at the entrance to the Inferno bears the following fearsome inscription:

“Only those elements time cannot wear
Were made before me, and beyond time I stand.
Abandon all hope ye who enter here.”

The Inferno, Canto III, lines 7-9

Milton expresses a like sentiment as Satan describes the plight of the fallen angels:

“...long is the way
And hard, that out of hell leads up to light...”

Paradise Lost, Book II, lines 432-433

THE AENEID and THE INFERNO

A Comparison of People, Places, and Monsters

The quotes below are taken from Ciardi’s translation of various Cantos from Dante’s *Inferno* (See bibliography.)

Once you have read the quote, look for the same mythological reference in Book VI of *The Aeneid*. Line numbers are indicated to help you in your research. Write the sentence in which the reference appears.

Make sure you understand the reference. Write a short explanation of the reference in terms of classical mythology.

<p>1. <i>INFERNO</i>, CANTO III, 73-74</p> <p>All this shall be made known to you when we stand on the joyless beach of Acheron...</p> <p>(p. 44)</p>	<p><i>AENEID</i> VI, 295</p>
<p>EXPLANATION:</p>	
<p>2. <i>INFERNO</i>, CANTO III, 79-81</p> <p>There, steering toward us in an ancient ferry came an old man with a white bush of hair, bellowing: “Woe to you depraved souls!...”</p> <p>(p. 44)</p>	<p><i>AENEID</i> VI, 299</p>
<p>EXPLANATION:</p>	
<p>3. <i>INFERNO</i>, CANTO V, 1-4</p> <p>So we went down to the second ledge alone; a smaller circle of so much greater pain the voice of the damned rose on bestial moan. There Minos sits, grinning, grotesque, and hale.</p> <p>(p. 57)</p>	<p><i>AENEID</i> VI, 432</p>
<p>EXPLANATION:</p>	

A NEBULOUS UNDERWORLD

HOMER AND MILTON: Homer's Underworld was inhabited primarily by spirits in one place wandering aimlessly and joylessly. (Morford, p. 256) There were no Elysian Fields for Homer. (Bulfinch, p. 273) Some unfortunate souls, however, like Tantalus and Sisyphus, endured eternal punishment as described in book XI of *The Odyssey*. Milton's *Paradise Lost* was inhabited by fallen angels who endured both punishment and comparative gaiety somewhere in the indefinite "cosmic map." (Samuel, p. 71) References to classical mythology appear in nearly every book of *Paradise Lost*. A few are listed below. Identify the mythological reference(s) in each quote from Fletcher's edition of *Paradise Lost*. (See bibliography.)

BOOK I: ... in bulk as huge
As whom the fables name of monstrous size
Titanian, or earth-born, that warred on Jove,
Briareos or Typhon...
(p. 159, lines 196-199)

BOOK II: ...harder beset
and more endangered, than when Argo passed
Through Bosphorus betwixt the justling rocks:
Or when Ulysses on the larboard shunned
Charybdis, and by the other whirlpool steered.
(p. 196, lines 1016-1020)

BOOK III: And where the river of bliss through midst of heaven
Rolls o'er Elysian flowers her amber stream;
(p. 205, lines 358-359)

BOOK IV: ...Not that fair field
of Enna, where Proserpin gathering flowers
Herself a fairer flower by gloomy Dis
Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world;
(p. 220, lines 268-272)