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Albrecht Dürer, *Christ's Descent into Limbo*, 1510, woodcut, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Art Museums, bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop. (Courtesy of the Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts)

The term *damned souls* is often applied to the dead in hell, Hades, or some sort of underworld that is the opposite of heaven, paradise, or an afterworld of bliss, the reward for good deeds, right thoughts, and pious living. Damned souls are usually pictured in a place of fire and brimstone with demons and devils to torment them as a punishment for their evil deeds and sinful living. However, damned souls can also define people still living who are under a burden of guilt and sin, tormented more by their own consciences than by any external agency. Their consciousness of damnation is within, a living hell. This state is described by Christopher Marlowe in *Dr. Faustus* (1616):

> Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
> In one self-place; for where we are is Hell
> And where Hell is, there must we ever be.
> (*Dr. Faustus*, act I, scene 5, lines 135–137)

The feeling of damnation does not have to go with a religious belief in the existence of hell but can be seen in modern psychological terms as a guilt complex.

The belief in damnation, damned souls, or a place where sinners are punished after death is not a particularly Western or Christian belief. It occurs in a number of cultures both Oriental and Occidental and can be traced back to ancient times in one of the earliest known pieces of literature: 14 Sumerian tablets, which date from 2000 B.C. The tablets relate the myth of the descent to the netherworld by the Sumerian goddess Inanna, but identified in the tablets as Ishtar, Inanna's Semitic counterpart. It tells of Inanna, queen of heaven and goddess of love, visiting the netherworld, perhaps to free Tammuz, her lover. The queen of the netherworld is Inanna's older sister and enemy, Ereshkigal. Inanna fears Ereshkigal will put her to death, so she makes provisions for the other gods to rescue her if she does not return in three days. To get to the kingdom of Ereshkigal, Inanna must pass seven gates, and at each she leaves an article of clothing or jewelry so that she arrives naked before Ereshkigal and seven dreaded judges in an underworld complete with demons and the torture of sinners. Ereshkigal condemns her either to death (one source) or to a torture of 60 miseries; however, the god Enki sends messengers to bring Inanna back, and she revives and returns to Earth.

The concept of damned souls also occurs in Etruscan art beginning in about 350 B.C. At this time, Charun, a bluish green demon, first appears and is later joined by an army of demons in the underworld. He appears on the walls of the tomb of Orcus I in Tarquinia, Italy, and murals in the tomb of Orcus II also depict the king and queen of the netherworld, Hades and Persephone. Before the mid–fourth century B.C., the walls of the tombs at Tarquinia and Cerveterai had depicted scenes of dancing and merriment, but later they depict an increasingly fearsome underworld, with demons tormenting the damned souls.

In classical literature, Hades, as he was known to the Greeks, or his Roman counterpart, Pluto, brother of Zeus (Jupiter) and Poseidon (Neptune), is monarch of a gloomy kingdom of death. During Odysseus's visit to the underworld in book XI of the *Odyssey*, Homer describes the everlasting torments of such damned souls as Tityus, whose liver was eaten by a pair of vultures; Tantalus, who suffered hunger and thirst because food and water were always just out of reach; and Sisyphus, who forever strained to push a boulder uphill only to have it crash down again. Virgil's *Aeneid* (19 B.C.) also contains a section on damned souls. In book 6, Aeneas visits Tartarus, ferried by Charon, to see his dead father, Anchises.

> From within loud groans are heard, and wailings of dismay
> The whistling scourge, the fetters dank and din
> Shrieks, as of tortured fiends, and all the sounds of sin.
> (*Aeneid*, book 6, stanza 73)

At Avernus, where Rhadamanthus judges the dead and metes out punishment, Aeneas sees Tityus tortured by vultures, and he speaks of sinners rolling boulders uphill and others hung on wheels, racked with endless woe.

Although hell and damned souls are often associated with Christian tradition, very little Scripture refers to this subject. The Gospel According to Luke (16:19–31) tells the story of the rich man Dives, who goes to hell and is tormented by flames, and Revelation (20:12–15) refers to a Last Judgment. Revelation 21:8 is the closest to a description of damned souls:

> But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

The Bible makes it very clear that souls are judged by their own deeds, not by an external, arbitrary standard.

The Christian tradition associates the time between Jesus Christ's death on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter Sunday with his visit to hell or Limbo. The Apostles' Creed declares: "He descended into Hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into Heaven." This descent to the dead has further been explained as Christ's releasing the righteous of the Old Testament, from Adam and Eve on, from the bonds of hell into the everlasting life that his death purchased. This event is commonly called the harrowing of hell, from an Old English word meaning "to rob" or "to take away" (in this case, from Satan's power). Often in art and literature Christ is pictured lifting Adam or Adam and Eve from the underworld. The drama of this scene inspired German artist Albrecht Dürer to portray it at least three times in woodcuts and engraved prints between 1509 and 1512. In all the Dürer representations, Christ stretches his hand out to figures below him, and

released souls stand in an archway on one side, while grotesque demons look on. The nude figures of Adam and Eve have already been released, and in some representations Adam still clutches the apple. The souls in these representations are "saved," not "damned," and it is significant in Christian theology that Christ's first act in the afterlife is the pardoning and release of souls rather than their damnation.

Like the Crucifixion, the theme of damnation and damned souls is not known to occur in early Christian art. Allegorical references to the good shepherd separating the sheep from the goats are found, for example, in an early sixth-century mosaic in S. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, Italy. In the medieval era, however, the representation of damned souls, especially in Last Judgment scenes, became increasingly popular. This is particularly true in the sculpture of Romanesque and Gothic churches where, in the tympanum or lunette over the entrance, the fate of those who do not live a righteous life serves as a warning. The Last Judgment usually portrays Christ as judge and St. Michael as the weigher of souls, with the righteous joining the blessed on the right hand of God and the damned souls hauled away by gloating demons on the left (or sinister) side of God. The fate of damned souls is shown in the west tympanum of Autun Cathedral in France (circa 1130–1135), where the terror of the damned and the hideousness of the demons are particularly expressive. This scene is matched in Gothic sculpture by the damned souls on Lorenzo Maitani's facade of Orvieto Cathedral in Italy (circa 1320). The anatomy of the tormented souls in Orvieto is more correct than that of Autun, but the expression of terror and hopelessness is in no way blunted; rather, it is increased by identification with the humanity of the figures. Giotto's painting created an equally terrifying vision of damned souls in the Arena Chapel in Padua, Italy (1305–1306).

In painting, damned souls are portrayed extremely graphically by Hubert and Jan van Eyck in the *Last Judgment* (circa 1420–1425, in the Metropolitan Museum in New York), with figures rising from graves on Earth and in the sea and the damned cast down in the lower center portion of the painting, under a grinning skeleton. Flemish painter Rogier van der Weyden's fall of the damned in his *Last Judgment* (1446, in the Hôtel Dieu in Beaune, France) has the falling figures assume the features of the sins they committed in life. One of the most frightening portrayals of damned souls is in Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (circa 1300, in the Prado in Madrid, Spain), in which the right panel of the triptych portrays a hallucinatory and almost surrealistic hell.

During the early Renaissance in Italy, Christ's deliverance of souls from hell was depicted in works by Fra Angelico (in San Marco in Florence, Italy), Giovanni Bellini (in the Bristol Art Gallery in England), Duccio di Buoninsegna (in the Opera del Duomo in Siena, Italy), and Andrea Mantegna. A less charitable view is presented by Luca Signorelli's frescoes of *The Damned Cast into Hell* (1499–1500, in S. Brixio Chapel at the Orvieto Cathedral), which offers an excellent opportunity to study the artist's mastery of human anatomy. Another early Renaissance representation of damned souls can be seen in Botticelli's drawings for Dante's *Inferno* (1492–1497, in the Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, Germany).

Perhaps the greatest vision of damned souls is in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco (1534–1541, in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican). In it, Michelangelo offered himself for judgment: he included a self-portrait on the flayed skin held by St. Bartholomew to the right of Christ. At the bottom of the representation, instead of a fiery mouth of hell, Charon, the mythological ferryman, carries damned souls to the netherworld. This raised the question for one art historian whether Michelangelo, who belonged to a liberal group of Roman Catholic thinkers, might have meant to imply that hell itself was a myth. This theory, however, seems unlikely because Charon as a ferryman in hell had already appeared in a Christian context in Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* in the early fourteenth century; and a view of hell as a mythic world would have been heretical in both Dante's and Michelangelo's times.

In the seventeenth century, the staring eyes and gaping mouth of Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Baroque marble representation *Damned Soul* (or *Anima Dannata*) (circa 1619, in the Palazzo de Spagna in Italy) brought expressiveness of features to dramatic heights. This expressiveness is equaled on a grand scale by Peter Paul Rubens's painting *The Fall of the Damned* (circa 1620, in Munich, Germany), in which the nude bodies of the damned are inextricably intertwined in a terrifying spiral downward.

The topic of damnation was not very popular in the Age of Reason, but representations of damned souls again become more prevalent in the late eighteenth century, thanks to John Flaxman's illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*, published in 1793 and much copied by nineteenth-century artists. The young Eugène Delacroix showed *Dante and Virgil in the Underworld* (also called the *Barque of Dante*) in the Salon of 1822, peopling the water around Charon's boat with a variety of damned souls. William Blake's illustrations of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, made between 1824 and 1827, depict an encyclopedia of damned souls, from *The Whirlwind of Lovers*, which contains the ill-fated Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini, to *The Self Murderers* and *The Blasphemers*. Here Blake's style of dematerialized bodies in expressive poses perfectly matches the portraits of Dante's epic. Gustave Doré's *Illustrations to Dante's Inferno* (1865) lack the imaginative power of Blake's vision, except in a few instances.

Auguste Rodin's *Gates of Hell*, incomplete at the time of the sculptor's death in 1917, presents a modernized version of Dante's *Inferno* combined with Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, poems of nineteenth-century life and lust. The *Gates of Hell* depicts familiar characters described in the *Inferno*, such as Ugolino and his sons, but the fluidity of form suggests the unfulfilled restlessness of Rodin's contemporaries. In a sense, all those portrayed in the reliefs are damned souls, from the prodigal son to Paolo and Francesca and "She Who Was Once the Helmet-Maker's Beautiful Wife," or the old courtesan. All appear beneath the brooding figure of the thinker above the door in various poses of despair or flight, an encyclopedia of angst and loss.

In literature, the greatest compendium of damned souls is surely Dante's *Inferno*, completed shortly before his death in 1308. In it, in addition to classic sinners, such as traitors and usurers, he featured a number of his contemporary enemies in Florentine politics, such as Filippo Argenti and Farinata degli Uberti. Their punishments run the gamut from lakes of ice to searing fire; the more extreme the sin, the greater the punishment in this encyclopedia of sinners and damned souls. As Dante dealt with a community of the damned, Christopher

Marlowe's play *Dr. Faustus* (1616) dealt with the subject of individual damnation in which a man sells his soul to the devil (Mephistopheles) to gain his goals. This work probably was the origin of selling one's soul to the devil to succeed. Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* also inspired artists, among them Delacroix and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In the seventeenth century, John Milton dealt with the problem of Satan and damned souls in *Paradise Lost*. In it, he dramatized the sense of personal damnation within a person's consciousness, and not in any place, metaphorical or metaphysical:

> Which way shall I fly?
> Infinite wrath and infinite despair?
> Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell.
> (*Paradise Lost*, book III, line 73)

Arthur Rimbaud echoed this view in *A Season in Hell* in 1875, which portrays the poet as a damned soul.

In the twentieth century, secularized visions of damned souls were presented in George Bernard Shaw's *Don Juan in Hell* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, in which the devil is urbane and the demons are interior, although no less powerful for being so. Literary critic and Christian scholar C. S. Lewis gave an up-to-date version of temptation and damnation in *The Screwtape Letters*, in which an elderly, experienced fiend counsels his young protégé on the latest techniques of producing a damned soul. Lewis also pictured a modern view of damned souls in *The Great Divorce*, in which addiction is shown overcome and where pride creates individual hells for its adherents as they move away from an unbearable source of goodness and mercy in God.

In *Drawings for Dante's Inferno* (1959–1960, in the Museum of Modern Art in New York), Robert Rauschenberg used the technique of solvent transfer—transferring magazine clippings pasted with lighter fluid onto the paper—with collage, watercolor, and pencil drawing added. His Dante was a man wrapped in a towel from a *Sports Illustrated* magazine advertisement for golf clubs, and the image of Adlai Stevenson became Virgil, Dante's guide and mentor. Wall Street businessmen appear as corrupt Florentine politicians, and athletes from *Sports Illustrated* appear in a number of roles in his 34 illustrations of the 34 *Inferno* cantos. The figures appear within a swirling haze of pencil strokes and dismembered body parts. His choice of agonized heads for the heretics, the divines, and the inhabitants in Malebolge is particularly telling. The colors used also have significance: white for heaven, ocher for the stench of Malebolge, yellow and orange-red for clerics, and dark red for blood.

Another example of twentieth-century reference to an older work of art is Martha Clarke's inspired 1984 production *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, which depicted the three panels of Hieronymus Bosch's painting. The third act of this dance, music, and drama production brought the damned souls of Bosch's *Hell* panel into vivid being by means of musical instruments. The instruments were scraped raucously as dancers floated on trapezes amid the caperings of assorted demons and sinners.

The concept of damned souls tormented in an afterlife appears in a number of cultures. In addition to the record of Sumer and the weighing of souls in Egyptian art and literature, vivid depictions occur in Japan and Cambodia. In Japanese art of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, Fujiwara Nobuzane created an account of the life of Michizone, in which the spirit of his enemy Tokihira is carried to a flaming hell by devils who torture him for four long horrible scrolls. Another Japanese tale tells of a man with an unlovable, mean mother who died and went to hell while the son went to heaven. He felt it was his duty to get his mother out of such a bad place, and Buddha said if he could find one good deed his mother had done, she would be released. He remembered that she had given a leek to a hungry beggar—her one act of charity. When the leek was lowered to draw her up from hell, it broke because it was rotten, just like the one she had given the beggar, and she was not able to leave hell.

At the Angkor Wat temple complex in Cambodia, relief sculpture shows heaven and hell, with a Last Judgment by Yoma, the Hindu lord of death. The damned souls are punished in a hell of many hideous tortures, while those going to heaven are saved by celestial ladies filled with inextinguishable amorous desire. What happened to heaven-bound females does not seem to be represented, a rather one-sided view. Suffice it to say that the idea of damned souls, whether dead in places of torment or living a doomed existence in this life, seems to be widespread among a number of cultures.

See also Ascent/Descent; Sin/Sinning; Vices/Deadly Sins

Selected Works of Art

Ancient

Etruscan Wall Paintings, 350 B.C., tombs of Orcus I and Orcus II, Tarquinia, Italy

Nude Goddess: Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld, Mesopotamian terra-cotta figure, London, British Museum

Dumazu in the Underworld, Flanked by Snakes, Mesopotamian cylinder seal, London, British Museum

Anubis Weighing the Heart Against the Feather of Maat, from *Funerary Papyrus of Princess Entiu-ny*, Egyptian, from Thebes, Tomb of Queen Meryet-Amun, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Classical

Achelous Painter, *Labor of Sisyphus*, black-figure amphora, late sixth century B.C., Munich, Germany, Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek

Hades' Kingdom, Greek vase painting

Persephone Painter, *Hermes Leading Persephone from the Underworld*, Athenian krater, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Titian, *Sisyphus*, part of *The Four Condemned* Series, 1548–1549, Madrid, Spain, Prado

Ribera, Jusepe de, *Sisyphus*, circa 1634, copy, Madrid, Spain, Prado

Giordano, Luca, *Sisyphus*, circa 1705, The Hague, The Netherlands, Mauritshus

Christian

Hell, Byzantine mosaic, twelfth century, Torcello, Italy, Cathedral

Damned Souls, relief, west tympanum, circa 1130–1135, Autun, France, Cathedral