

tholdy and Ernest Bloch (see “Mock, Mockery VIII. Music”).

The *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel* (the Song of Zechariah; Luke 1:68–79) includes a reference to the salvation promised “through the mouth of [God’s] holy prophets” (v. 70), in the *Vg. per os sanctorum ... prophetarum eius*. This canticle (see “Canticle”) was sung at Lauds in the medieval office and was set in polyphony by numerous composers in the 16th century. It is also part of many modern liturgical ceremonies (see “Benedictus III. Music”).

Many biblical passages concern mouths in some way without using the word “mouth.” Thus, it may be questionable what exactly counts as a musical reception of “mouth.” Numerous references to, e.g., “lips” or “tongue,” necessarily imply a reference to a mouth, and quite often more than one of these words are mentioned together (see “Lips III. Music”). In any case, it seems natural to include the musical reception of those words in the musical reception of mouth, when understood as a part of the body, not just a word. The seeming fortuitousness in delimiting the reception of “mouth” can be illustrated with an example: In the episode where the crucified Jesus is offered wine mixed with gall in Matt 27:33–34, Jesus’s mouth is not mentioned. In the same episode as referenced in John 19:29–30, a sponge full of wine on a branch of hyssop “is held ... to his mouth.” It is clearly unreasonable to count all *historiae* or oratorio passions (see “Historia [Music]” and Smither: 2:4) based on the Gospel of John to the musical reception of “mouth,” as opposed to those on the Gospel of Matthew, just because the word “mouth” is not found in the passion according to Matthew.

In some cases, the general use of “mouth” in biblical texts (as in Pss or Job) seems to lie behind a wording in an item of biblical music although “mouth” in that case does not reflect a specific biblical passage. This is so, for instance, in one of the stanzas of Paul Gerhardt’s hymn *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* (O head full of blood and wounds; 1656), used in J. S. Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*. In the stanza “Erkenne mich, mein Hüter,” one of the lines reads “Dein Mund hat mich gelabet / Mit Milch und süßer Kost” (“Your mouth has refreshed me / with milk and sweet fare”; Marissen: 38), a statement not directly found in the NT. This line is reflected later in the *St. Matthew Passion*, in the aria “Gerne will ich mich bequemen” (“Happily will I be so kind as”). This aria includes the phrase “Denn sein Mund der mit Milch und Honig fließet, hat den Grund und des Leidens herbe Schmach durch den ersten Trunk versüßet” (“For his mouth, which flows with milk and honey, has sweetened the grounds and the bitter humiliation of suffering by the first sip”; Marissen: 42). Thus also the *St. Matthew Passion* should be counted to the musical reception of biblical “mouth.”

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See also → Lips; → Orality; → Tongue

Mouth of Hell

- I. Introduction
- II. Visual Arts
- III. Literature and Music
- IV. Film

I. Introduction

1. Biblical and Non-biblical Precedents. The mouth of hell, aka hellmouth or jaws of hell, is “one of the most recognizable images of the Middle Ages” (Schmidt 1995: 13). Although related to, but not found in, the Bible, the definitively animate hellmouth motif is distinct from earlier notions, already present in the HB/OT, of the inanimate “gates of Sheol” (*šā’ārê šē’ōl*; Isa 38:10a); and in the NT, of the likewise inanimate “gates of Hades” (*πύλαι ᾗδου*; Matt 16:18; see “Hades/Hell, Gates of I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament; II. New Testament”). The rabbis, who imagined the apertures of Gehinnom as “door(s)” (e.g., AgBer 20; bShab 39a) or, most often, “gates,” sometimes conceptualized Gehinnom’s possible opening(s) as a “mouth” (something Moses is said to have imagined in bNed 39b) or “mouths” (e.g., AgBer 20). Among the different theories the Midrash proffers about the number and locations of the entrances to Gehinnom was that its “mouth” is discoverable anywhere in the world, and, if needed, the mouth opens and gulps down whoever is standing there (*Midrash Konen* in BHM 2:24–39; MidAg 18a; in Schwartz: 233; see also “Hades/Hell, Gates of III. Judaism”).

Whereas the “gates of hell” became a permanent fixture from early on in the Christian tradition, in the Qur’ān and Islamic tradition, and in literature, visual arts, and popular culture (“Hades/Hell, Gates of IV. Christianity; V. Islam; VI. Literature and Visual Arts; VII. Film; IX. Further Popular Reception”), the visual representation of hell, or of hell’s opening, as a living monster’s open *mouth* or *jaws* in iconography and art began by the early 9th century CE in Britain, which yields most of the known examples prior to the 12th century (for examples see Schapiro: 264, n. 67; and, esp. Schmidt 1995). Meyer Schapiro called this image “a typical English motif” (ibid.: 257) and identified the carved ivory relief of ca. 800 CE in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Museum no. 253–1867) as the earliest example known to him (ibid.: 264, n. 66). Gary D. Schmidt (1995: 13) finds the image first developing

“in the artistic light of the tenth-century Monastic Reform.” Whereas Schapiro allowed for Adolph Goldschmidt’s identification of Tours as the piece’s source but pronounced the associated ornament as “clearly of insular type” (ibid.), the Victoria and Albert Museum itself locates the piece’s place of origin as possibly south Germany, north Italy, or Reims (see V&A).

In Gary Schmidt’s view, the hellmouth motif came to be through a coalescence of several prominent, diverse, earlier Anglo-Saxon iconographic motifs (“one of the great artistic and imaginative leaps of tenth-century British art”; Schmidt 1995: 32), each with scriptural or partially scriptural roots: Leviathan; (falling into) the open pit; the dragon, sometimes scripturally associated with Satan but also drawn from the Anglo-Saxon image of the draco; and the lion (for pertinent scriptural references see Schmidt 1995: 32–60; and, below, “II. Visual Arts”; and, elsewhere in *EBR*, in “Leviathan”; “Pit”; “Netherworld”; “Dragon”; and “Lion”). The first hellmouth images typically figure in the iconography of the last judgment (see “Day of Judgment”) and the harrowing of hell or of Limbo (see “Descent into the Netherworld/Hell VIII. Visual Arts”; and “Limbo IV. Visual Arts”). In demonstrating Christ’s divine ability to extract HB/OT heroes out from hell through its very “mouth,” the harrowing of hell is inverted by medieval pictorial images of Jesus or any of various saints exorcizing devils or demons out from the mouths of persons who were possessed (see, e.g., Biedermann: 230; and “Demons, Demonology X. Visual Arts”). Schapiro also suggested a connection between the jaws-of-hell motif and the tradition, emergent in England from as early as the first half of the 11th century on, of representing Cain as slaying Abel with an animal jawbone (perhaps an obvious adaptation of Samson’s use of an ass’s jawbone as a weapon at Judg 15:15–17). Schapiro (257) observes: “The animal jaw is the most powerful sign of violence and destructiveness,” and “English artists who represented Cain with the jawbone sensed the bestiality implied in the use of this weapon.”

The earliest written allusion to “hell-mouth” recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from the second series of Old English Catholic Homilies by the Benedictine scholar, abbot of Eynsham, and leader in the Monastic Revival, Ælfric of Eynsham (ca. 950–ca. 1010): “Witodlice seo swearte niwelns de þ u gesawe mid þ am ormætum þ eostrum and fulum ... stence, seo is helle muð [But the swart abyss that thou sawest with the boundless darkness and foul ... stench is the mouth of hell]” (homily 23, “Alia visio,” in Thorpe: 2:352, 353). Accordingly, several other Old English homilies from this time describe the soul’s passage into hell as a sequence of swallowings by dragons (see Schmidt 1995: 43–44).

The Anglo-Saxon attraction to the mouth of hell, Schapiro speculated, may have been influenced by the north European pagan myth of the “crack of doom” (referenced, e.g., in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* 4.1.117) and the Nordic-mythic battle with the wolf who devoured Odin but whose jaws were later broken by Odin’s son Vidar (later identified with Christ; see Schapiro: 264, n. 66; cf. Schmidt 1995: 28). Yet the hellmouth image also finds a much earlier loose precedent in ancient Near East mythology: the Ugaritic Baal cycle, outlining the conflict of the deities Baal and Mot, includes Baal’s descent into the Netherworld through the maw of the rapacious Mot, the personification of death (*KTU* 1.6 II:13–23; see “Descent into the Netherworld/Hell I. Ancient Near East”).

Whatever its genetic origins may have been, as discussed below, the hellmouth image combines two tendencies of symbolization that are found in different cultures around the world: the construal of a mouth as the liminal aperture marking the boundary between “this” world as we know it and either some region of the “next” or “other” world, or a vision of the entire cosmos (see sec. 2 below); and the locating of hell or the netherworld inside the body of some living creature or beast (see sec. 3 below). In addition, from modern feminist and other perspectives, the hellmouth image can be sexually and misogynistically suggestive (see sec. 4 below).

2. Mouth as Liminal Aperture. Used as a symbol, the mouth, “the point of departure or of convergence of two directions ... symbol[izing] the source of opposites, contrarities and ambiguities” (Chevalier/Gheerbrant: 686), is morally ambivalent, bearing both positive and negative connotations. Positively, the mouth is the orifice through which food, speech, and breath pass (although the Bible’s first creation account specifies that it was through the first man’s nostrils that YHWH breathed in the breath of life; Gen 2:7); and the mouth can be symbolic of creative force, insufflation of the soul, heightened consciousness, and rational control (see, e.g., Biedermann; Chevalier/Gheerbrant: 685). For the Jungian psychologist Erich Neumann, the mouth as “an organ of speech, ... communicating psychic expression” (Neumann: 123) takes precedence in the “most abstract symbol” of “the world of the spirit,” namely through “the form that leads from mouth to breath, and from breath to word, the logos, the spiritual symbol, whose son character became a historical force in the logos of Philo and subsequently of Christianity” (ibid.: 61; the prototypical exemplification is John 1:1, 14). Yet, as the Bible also makes clear, the utterances and speech that pass through the mouth can be either good or bad (see, e.g., Jas 3:10; and “Mouth III. New Testament; VI. Visual Arts”). Negatively, the mouth can be “terrifying” in its linkage with “the engulfing

jaws of death” (Ronnberg/Martin: 364; viz. Homer’s man-eating Cyclops, Saturn’s devouring of his children, or the child-eating witch encountered by Hansel and Gretel). Hence the mouth is symbolically associable with “destroying, killing, disorganizing and debasing” (Chevalier/Gheerbrant: 685). At the same time, as symbolisms of violence in the Bible are not always equated with evil, Rev 19 says of Jesus as he returns “in righteousness” to judge, and to wage “war” (v. 11), “From his mouth [ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ] comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations” (v. 15). Typically, in medieval portrayals of exorcism, a devil-like figure or demon, compelled by Jesus or a saint standing before the victim, emerges from that formerly possessed, but now healed person’s mouth (Biedermann: 231).

Like all other body openings, including eyes, ears, nose, rectum, genital zone, as well as skin, according to Neumann (39), the mouth for early human beings had, “as [a place] of exchange between inside and outside, a numinous accent.” Uninfluenced by the Bible, and unmentioned by Neumann, a chief example of the mouth as an opening to an “other” world or to the whole cosmos is the Indian myth of Krishna (Kṛṣṇa), one of the god Vishnu’s prime avatars, in his form as a mischievous child: one day, after his mother Yashoda scolded him for reportedly eating dirt and asked him to open his mouth for her to inspect, he did so, and to her astonishment revealed within it an envisagement of his cosmic form, i.e., his embodiment of the entire universe in all its limitless diversity (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.8.32–36; in Doniger 1975: 220–21; Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsadeva: 34–35) – a vision that informs the theophany in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* 11.13, where Krishna enables the princely warrior Arjuna by means of a “celestial eye” (11.8) to behold him in his awesome majesty as constituting all that is: “Then did the son of Pāṇdu see the whole [wide] universe in One converged, there in the body of the God of gods, yet divided out in multiplicity” (Zaehner: 83, 306; see also Mukundananda’s commentary on this verse). As noted by Wendy Doniger (1980: 95–96), the tale of Yashoda (Yaśodā), Krishna’s foster-mother, beholding the cosmos through Krishna’s mouth, epitomizes the genre of myth that exposes the magical essence behind seemingly mundane phenomena, a type of myth that often employs the image of entering the mouth of a god. An inversion of this mythic type occurs in another Indian myth, told in the vast Indian epic *Mahābhārata* (3.183–190), of the sage Markandeya (Mārkaṇḍeya). Having been swallowed by Vishnu (Viṣṇu), Markandeya roamed within the god’s belly for thousands of years, visiting sacred sites on earth. One day Markandeya slipped out of Vishnu’s mouth, saw the world and ocean veiled in darkness, and became terrified at not recognizing himself

there on account of God’s illusion. Then he saw the god sleeping and wondered whether he was crazy or dreaming; but then he was again swallowed, and the moment he was back in the god’s belly, he assumed his vision had been a dream; only later, when he again slips from the god’s mouth and again returns, does Markandeya realize that what lay outside the god’s mouth was reality, not illusion. Thus, observes Doniger, for Markandeya, the experience of the hierophany (manifestation of the sacred) occurs outside the god’s mouth, whereas for Yashoda, it occurs inside the mouth (Doniger 1980: 96; see also Doniger 1975: 218).

There is a striking difference between this story involving Vishnu’s mouth and the motif of the mouth of hell, aside from obvious difference between the alternate world of reality-or-illusion to which Vishnu’s mouth admits Markandeya and the infernal world to which the hellmouth admits sinners. The admission of sinners into hell via the hellmouth, a portal “awful in its orality” (Schmidt 1995: 16), is traditionally conceptualized as a one-way process of no return, with the unique exception of the hell’s “harrowing” by Christ, whereas Markandeya passes back and forth multiple times in opposite directions through Vishnu’s mouth. Christ’s harrowing of hell does find at least a loose Indian counterpart in the Puranic myth of Krishna’s rescue of the cowherd boys from the mouth of Aghāsura, the demon posing as a giant snake, into whose mouth the boys had wandered (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 10.12) – a myth Hans Schmidt (140) likens to the biblical tale of Jonah and the whale.

3. Location of Hell/Netherworld within the Belly of a Beast. The term hierophany used above by Doniger was a word popularized by the historian of religions Mircea Eliade (see “Eliade, Mircea”). In his allegedly ahistorical “morphological” manner that puts off so many of his critics, Eliade compiled accounts from widely diverse geographical regions documenting the initiatory-ritual motif of being swallowed by a divine being or a monster. For example, in an account from southeastern Africa, the mother of a novice inadvertently killed by his tutor was told that her son was swallowed by a monster with the other boys but failed to escape its belly; according to another account, from New Guinea, for boys to be circumcised, a special cabin is constructed in the form of a monster who is believed to swallow them (Eliade: 35; see also 13–14, 36–37).

In the Bible and its Christian reception, the narrative where an initiatory-ritual motif of being consumed and then spit out by a beast most closely anticipates the hellmouth image is Jonah 1–2. In that story, the swallowing of the prophet by “a large fish” (1:17a) and the fish’s vomiting him out onto dry land on the third day (2:10) were read during the Middle Ages as prefigurative types finding their NT antitypes in Jesus’s burial and resurrection.

From the 14th century on, this typological interpretation was literally enacted in medieval European mystery plays, where the hellmouth as a stage prop was “in most every instance ... designed to heighten the dramatic impact of the image through technical virtuosity. Mouths that moved up and down, jaws that opened and closed, smoke and fire gushing from the open mouth, perhaps howls of woe and glee – these are the stuff of visual and auditory drama” (Schmidt 1995: 165; see 14, 165–78; “Jonah [Book and Person] VI. Literature”; and “Liturgical Drama and Mystery Plays”).

In this respect it is instructive to consider both the pictorial images of, and the accompanying Bible-based texts about, the successive scenes of Jesus’s entombment, descent into Limbo, and resurrection in the edition of the *Biblia pauperum* (*Bible of the Poor*) catalogued as Blockbook C.9 d.2 in the British Library (see Labriola/Smeltz: 83–85 [facsimiles of pp. ·g·, ·h·, ·i·], 41–43 [Latin text], 126–28 [English translation], 171–72 [commentary]). (With several exceptions, each page of the *Biblia pauperum* is designed on the same template: dominating the page is an iconographic triptych in which a NT scene is pictured in the central panel, and depictions of two HB/OT scenes, which typologically adumbrate the NT scene, appear in the triptych’s two side panels. The page’s sections above and beneath this main triptych contain inscriptions of biblical paraphrases and interpretive commentary pertinent to these three images; paired images of HB/OT patriarchs and prophets; and further related inscriptions from, and commentary on, the Bible.) In the ·g· triptych, which juxtaposes an image of Jesus’s burial and an image of Jonah being cast to the fish in the triptych’s central and right sections, the fish’s open, sharp-toothed maw corresponds to both (a) the open, fanged mouth of the monster – i.e., the hellmouth – from which Christ is shown drawing Adam, Eve, and other figures in the central section of the ·h· triptych, and (b) the open mouth of the lion that Samson is seen seizing as he slays it in that same triptych’s right section, prefiguring Christ’s vanquishment of the devil through his harrowing of Limbo. In turn, the abovementioned open-mouthed fish, monster, and lion all correspond to the open-mouthed, sharp-toothed fish from which Jonah is pictured emerging in the right section of triptych ·i·, which typologically anticipates Christ’s resurrection from the tomb, as pictured in that triptych’s central section. Cf. the image of Jonah tossed by two crewmen into the large, open-jawed, diabolically oriented fish that looks just like a hellmouth rather than a Leviathan in an early 14th-century *Biblia pauperum* in Vienna’s Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS. 1198, as discussed by Schmidt 1995: 60.

The “portal” (*porta*) through which Dante recalls entering the Inferno with Virgil is not, in the strictest sense, a hellmouth, though like a mouth it *does*

speak, addressing all enterers with the celebrated words, “Abandon every hope, you who enter” (*Inferno* 3.9; Dante: 1:24/25; see also “Commedia”; “Dante Alighieri”). Captivated by the charisma of this scene, readers typically forget the Inferno’s other aperture, the “round opening [*pertugio tondo*]” through which the two poets eventually exit hell (*Inferno* 34.138; Dante: 1:368–69), and, to my knowledge, it has never been noted that Dante in effect adapts or perhaps *parodies* the hellmouth image in Judecca, the Inferno’s bottommost and hence most sinful level. Dante does so through his portrayal of Judas, Brutus, and Cassius, writhing and clawing as Satan, depicted here with three faces and hence three mouths, incessantly chews upon the bloody, flesh-stripped bodies of those three nonpareil betrayers: “In each mouth he champ’d a sinner with his teeth [*Da ogne bocca dirompea co’ denti / un peccatore*]” (*Inferno* 34.55–56; Dante: 1:364/365). In this way, the three mouths of Dante’s Satan function as (microcosmic) mini-hellmouths situated within the broader (macrocosmic) Inferno, and connect back to the Bible through the image of Jesus’s betrayer, “who has his head within [Satan’s mouth] and plies his legs outside [*che ‘l capo ha dentro e fuor le gambe mena*]” (v. 63; Dante: 1:364/365).

The popular diffusion of the medieval motif of the hellmouth as the entry to monstrous animate beings, the inside of whose stomachs constitute hell (at least impliedly), was not limited to Christian iconography and literature. The motif’s appropriation within Islamic tradition is attested, e.g., by a painting of Muḥammad, three haloed figures (*rashīdūn*), and a group of turbaned prophets interceding as a trio of angels hold a two-headed dragon that shoots fiery flames from its fanged, gaping, dual mouths toward a cluster of terrified deceased souls in an early modern Ottoman copy the anonymous apocalyptic text, *Aḥwāl al-Qiyāma* (The Conditions of resurrection; Ottoman Istanbul or Baghdad, late 16th cent., Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. Or. Oct. 1596, fol. 28v; illus. in Gruber: fig. 7).

4. Alleged Sexual Symbolism. While the mouth itself may be “an emblem of eros and its lovely kisses” (Ronnberg/Martin: 366), as epitomized biblically in Song 1:2a and 4:3, it remains a biological fact that “no matter how sexy, the human mouth is primarily the instrument of eating; even its role in lovemaking has the quality of a sensual devouring of the lover ... and every part of the mouth contributes to the elemental function of digestion” (ibid.: 364; cf. Neumann: 130, who considers “the archetypal symbolism of the receiving mouth in relation to the engendering [i.e., giving-outward] breast”; cf. Neumann: 123). Accordingly, the medieval hellmouth image, together with its threatening suggestion of swallowing, has been viewed as conveying sexual, threatening, and misogynistic innuendos. It has been likened to “a ‘yawning’ yoni,” a

yoni being the Indian sign representing the shape of the outer female genitalia, recognized by the ancients as the basis of female sexual potency: "Some authorities even declared openly that women's genitals are gates of hell, ready to swallow men" (Walker: 320, s.v. "Mouth"; see also 18, s.v. "Yoni").

Embedded within an intensely misogynistic passage that identifies all women with Eve, with her primal transgression against God, and with God's consequent cursing of her in Gen 3, Tertullian's (ca. 160–after 220) branding of women as "the devil's house-door [*diaboli janua*]" (*Cult. fem.* 1.1, in PL 1:1305A) helped prepare for the kindred association of female genitalia with the entranceway to hell. The modern feminist theologian Margaret Miles finds the "grotesque" gendered in such a way that huge female genitals are associated with the dangerous threat women pose to men's self-restraint, independence, and potency: "Women's mouths, tongues, and speech have also frequently been correlated with the vagina – open when they should be closed, causing the ruin of all they tempt or slander" where sinners are subjected to unending torments (Miles: 156; see also 155; and Rees: 57).

With the medieval Christian metaphorization of the vagina as the gate or mouth of hell came a revival of the ancient gynophobic motif that turns the vagina, and hence the entrance to hell that the vagina becomes associated with, into a mouth equipped and ready to masticate and thereby emasculate those who enter it: the *vagina dentata* (toothed vagina) which could chew off a male's penis (Walker: 328, s.v. "Vagina"; Miles: 223, n. 49). Barbara Creed (1993: 106), among other feminists in recent decades, equates the hellmouth image, as "a terrifying symbol of woman as the 'devil's gateway,'" with the *vagina dentata* – a motif Neumann (168) found expressive of "the destructive side of the Feminine, the destructive and deathly womb, appear[ing] most frequently in the archetypal form of a mouth bristling with teeth"; and which the theologian Jill Raitt (1980: 415) construes as "an expression of the universal male fear of the 'castrating female.'" Likewise, albeit from a different perspective, Eliade (1994: 52; see also 51, 63, 66) noted "a number of myths of an initiatory traversal of a *vagina dentata*, or a perilous descent into a cave or crevasse assimilated to the mouth or the uterus of Mother Earth." This Latinism for a vagina armed like a mouth with teeth is a modern coinage, the use of which in English seems retracable to no further back than 1908 (see *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "vagina dentata"), even if the fears and anxieties the term captures are detectible in various, often timeworn myths, folktales, and artworks worldwide. In the popular culture of late medieval Western Europe, as Miles (156, 159) suggests, an equally misogynistic counterpart to the hellmouth image may have been the sheela-na-gig (a term whose use

the *Oxford English Dictionary* traces from 1844). As architectural adornments on corbels, capitols, and elsewhere in England and Ireland especially, but also on the continent (e.g., in France and Spain), sheelas are carved stone female figures, typically naked, often associated with the demonic, and notorious for eagerly exhibiting their usually open vaginas (see, e.g., Andersen 1977a; 1977b; McMahon/Roberts; Oakley; and *The Sheela Na Gig Project*).

Inasmuch as the hellmouth was represented as, or associated with, the *vagina dentata*, it is further linkable with the envisagement of hell as, in the words of Francesca Romana (1384–1440), "a lurid and rotten uterus" (quoted by Miles: 147; see also 155–56). The recognition of such a connection from the perspectives of comparative religion and literary history is nothing new. In his 1907 *religionsgeschichtliche* study of the Jonah theme, Hans Schmidt (1907: 178) considered the association of hell and the Virgin Mary's womb (which had sheltered [*beherbergt*] the divine son and future harrower of hell), while the poet, literary critic, and art collector Walter Arensberg, in his own controversial, quasi-Freudian 1921 analysis of what he claimed to decipher as the "cryptography" of Dante's *Commedia*, tries to demonstrate that Dante in the *Inferno* borrowed from antecedent pagan and Christian sources the symbolization of hell as a woman's womb, elaborating that symbolism "with a precision of detail which is unique ... in the history of literature" (Arensberg: 228). Thus, e.g., for Arensberg (228–29), the "selva oscura" ("dark wood") of *Inferno* 1.2 (Dante: 1:2/3), where Dante has symbolically just been born, represents pubic hair, and the "lago del cor" ("lake of my heart") at 1.20 (Dante: 1:4/5) completes the birth symbolism, as this "lake" is analogous to the waters of the flood of Gen 6–9, "the amniotic fluid which accompanies the birth that the story of the flood symbolizes" (Arensberg: 229). Other cryptographic connections Arensberg perceived linking the *Inferno*'s topography to the sexual (and maternal) regions of a woman's body include: "il diletto monte" (1.77, "the delectable mountain") = *mons Veneris*; hell's "porta" (3.11, "portal") = vulva; "la triste riviera d'Acheronte" (3.78, "the dismal stream of Acheron") = bodily streams, seminal, lacteal, urinary, and fecal; and "la proda ... de la valle d'abisso dolorosa" (4.7–8, "the brink of the chasm of pain") = entrance of vagina (Dante: 1:6/7, 24/25, 28/29, 34/35); to mention but a few examples.

Writing less than a decade after the term *vagina dentata* was introduced, Arensberg makes no mention of that motif, or, for that matter, of the sheela, and hence makes no effort to link his cryptographic interpretation of the *Inferno* with the Bible-connected hellmouth motif.

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Eric Ziolkowski

II. Visual Arts

The anthropomorphic image of the mouth of hell emerged in Britain during the 10th-century Monastic Reform and remained popular in Western Art

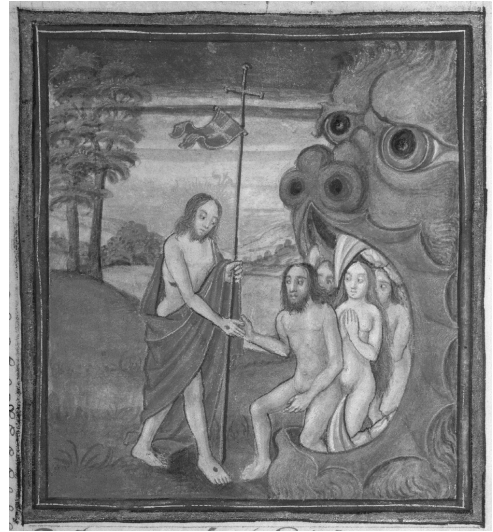


Fig. 2 “The Harrowing of Hell: Christ releases Adam and Eve and the faithful from Hell” (ca. 1485–1509)

until the advent of Renaissance. The depiction of the entrance to hell is characterized by a disembodied monstrous head with a large gaping mouth. This imagery was loosely modeled on one of four principal biblical descriptions: those of Leviathan (Job 41:14), the open pit (Isa 5:14; Num 16:30–32; Pss 69:15; 106:17), the dragon (Rev 12:9), and the lion (Ps 22:21; 1 Pet 5:8). Oftentimes one sees a line of sinners being led into the mouth of hell, or a number of unfortunate souls tormented by demons. A good example of this is the miniature from the *Hours of Catherine of Cleves* by the Master of Catherine of Cleves from ca. 1440, now in the Morgan Library and Museum in New York. The intention behind this image was to suggest the terror of spiritual damnation by depicting physical distress.

A further theme that includes the mouth of hell is Christ’s harrowing of hell, in which Jesus removes souls out of the jaws of hell. Even though this event was only alluded to in the Bible (1 Pet 4:6), it was visualized in the miniature found in *Speculum humanae salvationis*, an anonymous religious work from ca. 1485–1509 (see fig. 2). From the 16th century onwards, the mouth of hell retained its morphology, but lost its original connotation. It appeared in wholly different contexts and media as seen in Giovanni Guerra’s decorative garden of Bomarzo from the 16th century. It was also used as an ironic commentary in the Palazzo Zuccari in Rome (1592) where windows and two doorways are modeled after the mouth of hell.

In Jacob van Swanenberg’s painting *The Sibyl Showing Aeneas the Underworld/Charon’s Boat* from ca. 1595–1605, the mouth of hell no longer adhered to

its original devotional objective, but was added to entertain the beholder. It even entered the political arena in *A Warm Place – Hell*, a satirical engraving made by Paul Revere in 1768.

The mouth of hell survived well into the 20th century – mostly in literature, though, which is suggestive of the potency of this theme.

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Tijana Zakula and Anna Tchitcherine

III. Literature and Music

1. Medieval Representations. Images of the mouth of hell first developed in England in the medieval period. Their iconography was based, not on classical models, but partly on biblical images (Satan as a “roaring lion” or as a dragon), and partly on the Norse myth of the wolf monster Fenrir. Hell is depicted actively as a monster devouring the damned, as in the British Library’s 12th-century *Winchester Psalter* or the hell’s mouth in Bourges Cathedral.

Preaching took up the image, as in the Anglo-Saxon *Vercelli Homilies*. Theatrical representations developed with the beginnings of the miracle, mystery, and morality plays, staged first within a church setting, and then in the streets as an open air stage performance or as a procession of carts. Numerous special effects were developed to dramatize the reality of hell, especially as part of the last judgment: trap doors, loud clashing noises, smoke, and fire issuing from a mouth-like structure on one side of the stage, with demons dragging the damned into hell (see “Liturgical Drama and Mystery Plays”).

In England, as in other European countries, the height of the popularity of such plays was just before the Reformation. This put a stop to most religious drama by the end of the 16th century, but the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe used the hellmouth convention at the end of *Doctor Faustus* (1588). The Faust theme was a popular one; a *Faust Book* certainly existed in Germany, Marlowe exploits the drama of damnation by making it impossible for Faust to repent, and by isolating him as he waits for the inevitable midnight hour before hell’s mouth opens and demons issue forth with smoke and flames, forming one of the most dramatic moments in English theater (see “Faust”; “Marlowe, Christopher”).

2. Post-Reformation Representations. Although the literal representation of hell’s mouth ceased to hold the popular imagination, it did continue to do so figuratively, as in John Bunyan’s allegory *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678; see “Bunyan, John”). In part 1, the pro-

tagonist Christian encounters the mouth of hell not on the day of judgment, but as part of the spiritual topography of the Valley of the Shadow of Death. There, he has a number of struggles, through which he emerges unscathed. The allegory clearly calls for a psycho-spiritual interpretation, describing perhaps a “Dark Night of the Soul” experience. Part 2 mentions the mouth of hell again, but this time it deliberately lacks its terror, and the pilgrims are perhaps frightened but no more. This is in keeping with the much calmer tone of a more typical Christian experience.

This internalization of hell’s mouth is in keeping with earlier literature where hell is seen as an internal state. Both Marlowe and John Milton in his *Paradise Lost* (1667), while depicting an outer reality, see the main locus of hell as within the human spirit (see “Milton, John”; and “Paradise Lost”).

Later depictions of the Faust legend make it possible of Faust to repent and so be saved from hell and its maw, as in Goethe’s rendering (1808, 1832). Here a love interest becomes central in the figure of Gretchen (or Marguerite). 19th-century French versions of the Faust story omit any actual depiction of hell, as also the operatic version of Gounod (*Faust*, 1859). Another opera, Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* (1787), however, keeps the Marlovian ending, as the statue of the murdered Commendatore attends Giovanni’s feast and hell opens. Hector Berlioz’s opera *La Damnation de Faust* (1846) has Faust riding into hell, the earth opening and the devils receiving him in Pandemonium, though Gretchen achieves salvation. The Faust story also inspired Franz Liszt’s *Faust Symphony* (1857), and Mahler’s 8th Symphony (1907) sets the final act of Goethe’s *Faust* as a major choral work.

More recent depictions have either been in the Gothic genre, from Dickens’s *Hard Times* (1855) to Peter Benchley’s *Jaws* (1974); or in fantasy, from C. S. Lewis’s Weston in *Perelandra* (1943) and the stable door in *The Last Battle* (1956), to J. R. R. Tolkien’s 1955 depiction of Frodo and Gollum struggling over the hellish chasm of Mount Doom, where the older meaning of “doom” as judgment returns to the medieval tradition (*The Lord of the Rings*).

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David Barratt

IV. Film

The double complication of the mouth of hell in film stems, to begin with, from the biblical appearance of the phrase. In Isa 5:14 the operative Hebrew word, *she'ol*, really means “grave,” but, due to the lack of a word for hell, comes eventually to be thought of and often translated as “hell.” On the other hand, there are many works of visual art in the medieval period that depict the “Hellmouth” as the wide-open, many-toothed maw of a dragon-serpent-like creature, swallowing up humans and evoking Rev 12:3–4, 9 (although not necessarily with multiple heads) – but that biblical passage does not specifically refer to the “mouth of hell.”

Given this complication as a starting point, the often oblique range of references in film, filtered through centuries of Christian interpretation and visualization, is not surprising. Some are not directly biblical at all, but contemporary; others use the biblical allusion to contrive timeless fantasy and/or horror. Thus, on the one hand, the 2014 film *Mouth of Hell*, directed by Samir Mehanovic (IN/UK) uses the phrase in its title to refer to the horrific, fire-belching coal mine in Jharia, India in which the eight-year-old hero, Anant, labors in order to provide sustenance for himself and his very ill mother. It does so in order to educate the viewer to the extraordinarily harsh realities that persist in various places on our planet. Completely the opposite in terms of both elemental medium and narrative intention, *Crossing Hell's Mouth* is a 2010 BBC-made documentary regarding the magnificent and ultimately failed attempt – the tides fail him – of middle-aged open water swimmer Frank Chalmers to swim the more than six miles across the treacherous waters of Pentland Firth that connect the Orkney islands to Scotland.

Fuller-fledged references to Hellmouths (there is more than one) are fixtures in the fantasy alternative universe – the “Buffyverse” – that comprises reality for Joss Whedon’s television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003, US; based in part on the more comedic US 1992 film of the same name directed by Fran Rubel Kuzui), and its spin-off, *Angel* (created by David Greenwalt and Joss Whedon, 1999–2004, US). Such a zone, first mentioned in the second episode of *Buffy*, is overrun with intense supernatural activity: as a portal between earth and hell it attracts demons and other supernatural creatures. The series asserts that such sites are found beneath Cleveland, Ohio and Sunnydale, California – whose first, Spanish-speaking European settlers referred to it as *Boca del Infierno* (rendered in English as “Mouth of Hell”) – as well as under other cities. Intense, demonically-impelled activity becomes a consequential focus for many episodes of the series.

Later television shows make reference to the same concept. In the 2014 Rob Thomas film *Veronica*

Mars (US, based on the 2004–2019 TV series also created by Thomas), a character jokes that Neptune, California (the setting for the film), is on top of a Hellmouth. In the 2016 *Doctor Who* spin-off *Class* (dir. Edward Bazalgette et al., UK), Coal Hill School is the locus of negative activity because it sits on a “weak point in time and space” – or, as a few of its characters opine, it is “like a Hellmouth.” So, too, in the 2006–2012 television series *Eureka*, created by Andrew Cosby and Jaime Paglia, one of the characters suggests that perhaps the research facility called Global Dynamics “was built over a Hellmouth” (Season 2, episode 10, dir. Mike Rohl, 2007, US).

Television also offers instances of humorous brief mention: In Steven Moffat’s British sitcom *Coupling* (2000–2004), the name of Oliver Morris’s science fiction shop (introduced in the fourth season), is “Hellmouth.” More substantively, on the comedy show *Saturday Night Live*, in a parody of the series *This Old House*, John Larroquette (portraying home renovation expert Bob Vila), decides to remodel the house from *The Amityville Horror* – which included a Hellmouth – and suggests that they convert that spot into a fireplace. He quips, “There’s no way to really hide a hellmouth. But what you can do is feature it. You know, make it part of the room, with an antique mantel” (Season 14, episode 3, dir. Paul Miller, 1988, US).

The Amityville Horror itself, the Stuart Rosenberg-directed 1979 horror film (US) based on Jay Anson’s 1977 novel – subtitled “a true story” – offers a hidden, red-walled basement room that one of the characters refers to in terror as “the passage ... to hell.” The horrifying events associated with the house are implicitly derived from an interesting cross-pollination of “sources”: that the house is built over a former First Nations (Shincock tribe) burial ground; but that this was also the site where a Satan-worshipper named John Ketchum had subsequently lived.

Yet more intense, the 2015 film *Hellmouth* (CA), written by Tony Burgess and directed by John Geddes, most directly offers a nod toward the Bible by presenting in a literal manner the trope of the entrance to hell. The cemetery in which the hero, Charlie Baker, comes to work is a gateway to – the mouth of – hell, into which he enters in order to save the soul of the woman he loves. Shot mostly in black and white with significant moments in color, and intending to evoke horror films of the 1950s, *Hellmouth* takes the viewer on a fantastic voyage into the underworld of answered and unanswerable questions.

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Ori Z. Soltes

See also → Descent into the Netherworld/Hell;
→ Hades/Hell, Gates of; → Netherworld; → Pit

Mowinckel, Sigmund Olaf Plytt

Sigmund Olaf Plytt Mowinckel (1884–1965) was an Norwegian Hebrew Bible scholar. In 1911 Mowinckel traveled to Germany, where he studied the HB/OT and Assyriology under Peter Jensen and Hermann Gunkel. His thesis for his dissertation in 1916 at the University of Oslo was titled *Stadholderen Nehemia* (Nehemia, the stadtholder). Mowinckel published on a wide spectrum of subjects throughout his career. However, it was his contribution to the book of the Psalms that was to make him known throughout the scholarly world. Mowinckel was early on influenced by Gunkel and Grønbech, as well as by Johannes Pedersen. From Gunkel came the emphasis on the formal classification of the Psalms, the so-called *Gattungen*. From Grønbech and Pedersen came the appreciation of the importance of religious cult to ancient societies in general and the way in which ritual served to unify and shape both the formal political structure of society as well as its forms of piety. Cult was therefore as far as ancient Israel was concerned not a late form of folk piety but instead an ancient drama that involved the entire Israelite community. It was this cultic drama that Mowinckel thought was tested to in the Psalms. He published his first work in 1916, *Kongesalmerne* (The royal Psalms) and then in six volumes *Psalmestudier* (1921–24). He focused in his *Psalmestudier* primarily on the Israelite autumn festival, which he called “The enthronement Festival,” since he ascribed to it a group of Psalms (Pss 47, 95–100) that Gunkel had categorized as enthronement psalms, as they celebrated the role of YHWH as king. Mowinckel saw many other psalms as related to this festival, such as many psalms of lament. He argued that the distinction between cult and magic was not as easily made as had been thought. He claimed that the enemies from whose power the psalmist seeks deliverance is often persons regarded as having magical power. Mowinckel also made a connection between psalms and prophecy, and proposed the existence of cultic prophecy in ancient Israel. In relation to his studies on prophecy Mowinckel also made a significant contribution to royal ideology in relation to eschatology and early Jewish Messianic expectations, in *Han som kommer* (1951, *He That Cometh*). In this study Mowinckel revises somewhat his earlier views on the perception of the king in ancient Israel. The king had played a prominent role in the cult, but should not be considered in any way as divine. The king was highly regarded as the earthly representative of God on earth, and eventually these perceptions gave rise to Israel’s messianism.

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Viberg Åke

Moza (Person)

1. Introduction

Moza (MT *Môṣā*) is a name that occurs five times in 1 Chronicles and refers to two different persons. The literal meaning of the Hebrew *môṣā* is “going forth” or “fountain.” The LXX has three chief variants for the name: Μωσα in 1 Chr 2:46, Μαωσα in 1 Chr 8:36–37, and Μασα in 1 Chr 9:42–43. The variant ωωσαν in Codex Vaticanus (1 Chr 2:46) can be explained as a scribal confusion of combined letters between the article and the name (τὸν Μωσα): NM was read as NNI and the second N was dropped due to haplography (Allen: 26). The Hebrew name resembles the Benjaminite place name Mozah (*Môṣā*). Based on this resemblance, Wilhelm Rudolph notes that the name might mean “(oil or wine) press” (21–22). The name would then be connected with the verb *m-ṣ-h*, “drain out.” According to Michael Avi-Yonah (591), however, the connection between the place name Mozah and personal name Moza is doubtful and a different locality might be meant.

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2. Son of Caleb

Moza is one of the three sons on Caleb, along with Haran and Gazez, born to his concubine Ephah (1 Chr 2:46). The genealogy of Judah in 1 Chr 2 includes two sections concerning Caleb’s descendants (in 2:18–24 and 2:42–55). A name such as Moza in which the border between a place name and a personal name is fluid is not unusual in these sections (Rudolph: 21). The places referred to in the latter section are centered around Hebron. According to Hugh G. M. Williamson (358–59), the Chronicler has structured the genealogies in the chapter so that they emphasize the position of David and his offspring within the tribe of Judah.

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3. Son of Zimri

Moza is a son of Zimri and a descendant of King Saul (1 Chr 8:36–37; 9:42–43). A geographical connotation with the place name Moza is probable,