
Sinners And Punishments In Hell Due To Dante

A place where sinners, who voluntarily chose their sin and fail to repent who fail to repent, linger it what is know to be Hell. In The Inferno of Dante, the speaker Dante, unless otherwise stated, finds himself in the midst of the underworld, despite being alive. Dante knows this journey through hell is one that he must complete in order to better himself. Dante and his guide, Virgil, walk amongst the souls who embody the evils of the world. Dante often feels pity for the men and women he meets on his voyage. His physical journey through Hell is seen as a spiritual one as he faces learning not to pity those who have sinned. Despite the painful sights of the underworld, the portion of the journey that proves most troublesome for Dante is attempting to increase his religious devotion by limiting his pity.

There are times within Dante's journey where he expresses a deep hatred towards the sinners; however, Dante's reason for his actions is not due to religious correctness. When Dante meets Filippo Argenti in the Fifth Circle of Hell, the circle of the wrathful, this is obvious. When Filippo begins to challenge Dante, Dante responds violently, telling the shade that he wishes for Filippo to weep and have his "sorrow remain," (VIII, 36). This exhibits the religiously correct response to a sinner: being angry and shaming the souls; however, Dante reveals that he recognizes Filippo from life. Virgil "embraced [Dante's] neck and kissed [Dante's] face," (VIII, 41) praising Dante for his lack of compassion. Dante's insensitivity was not meager; he went as far as to express that he wants to see that Filippo be "pickled in this swill," (VIII, 51), and Dante thanked God for letting him see Filippo "mangl[ed] by the people of the mud" (VIII, 56). Dante appears to have done everything right in this situation, he acted in a way of disapproval and disgust, however the motives behind his actions are not what they should be. Virgil glorifies Dante's actions because Filippo was an egotistic, wrathful sinner in his life, therefore, he shall be condemned; however, the actions of Dante stem from the fact that Dante knew and disliked Filippo prior to Filippo's placement in hell, making his harsh behavior personal rather than religious. Even though there are times in which Dante abandons pity entirely and acts cruelly towards the sinners, it is unmistakable that Dante has not learned that it is wrong in faith to pity sinners, but instead, he is acting upon preexisting grudges.

Dante the Poet presents sinners and punishments to the reader. Many sinners Dante crosses, similar to their punishments, are unfathomable and are deserving of the torture they receive. However, many are people who faced unfortunate situations in life, and it causes Dante to feel a sense of pity for the sinners. No matter how dramatic and emotional the sinners' stories are, Virgil opposes Dante feeling pity, advising him to stop, but Dante struggles greatly with this on several occasions. In the Second Circle of Hell, where the lustful are placed, Dante meets the lovers Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta. He learns their story of how they slipped into love while reading about Lancelot and Guinevere. Dante tells Francesca that the suffering she experiences with Paolo "makes [him] weep/ For sorrow and pity" (V, 13-14), signifying that Dante thinks it is a shame that lovers should be punished for loving more than one should. Love is ordinarily seen as a positive thing; it brings people satisfaction and is a generalized goal in life. However, since these people, Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta, fell in love at the wrong time with the wrong person they get punished for this act. The lovers are punished by the presence of the wind storm, this punishment suggests that Dante views the lover's sin as innocent in nature, uncontrollable to man. Taking his compassion to a further extreme, at the

conclusion of the Canto, Dante is greatly “overwhelmed” (V, 126) and felt himself go “slack:/ Swooning as in death, [Dante] felt like a dying body” (V, 126-127). Dante is incapable to control his emotions enough to even stay conscious, emphasizing how deeply he feels for these sinners, even though it is not right for him to do so. Dante’s acknowledgment of this proves how genuine his pity is for others, it too illustrates a contrast between the normal societal view of the lustful and Dante’s view of these souls.

Dante’s tendency to pity the sinners he encounters continues as he continues further into Hell. In the Seventh Circle, where those who act violently toward themselves remain, Dante encounters Pier Delle Vigne in the Wood of the Suicides. In this scene, Virgil instructs Dante to break a branch off of a tree, and the trunk begins bleeding and crying in anguish; this tree state is Pier Delle Vigne’s new form. The scene immediately turns somber as Dante realizes that Pier is not only in excruciating pain, but he has also lost his identity. This is the first time in Hell where the sinners lose their complete physical identities. Though it is morally appropriate that those who had no desire for their bodies during life do not get them after death, the situation still places pity in both the reader and in Dante. Directly after ripping the branch, Pier, irritable in pain, asks Dante, “Why have you torn me? Have you no pity” (XIII, 34). This question seems absurd to a reader who has been following Dante’s expression of pity, but Dante answers it as he speaks to Virgil; Dante requests that Virgil ask the questions for him, because Dante feels incapable of speaking due to the “pity/ That fills [his] heart”(XIII, 78-79). The exchange implies that Dante, despite knowing that both violence and suicide are sins, wishes that some sinners could be exempted from punishment due to their tragic circumstances. Justifying sinners is not a religious thing to do, but Dante does it frequently, displeasing his spiritual journey.

Dante journeys through Hell with his guide Virgil, and he sees the fate of sinners who have been punished within the different levels of hell. Each punishment being a direct parallel to what the sinner has done wrong in life, however, in many cases Dante chooses to pity the sinner. Virgil advises that Dante does not hold any pity for the sinners as not doing so would be religiously correct. Pity is only allowed in Limbo. Therefore the expression of pity is not to be expressed in other levels of Hell. However, Dante struggles during this journey. Though he attempts to better himself spiritually, he fails, going back to human instinct rather than exclusively expressing religious strength.