

Punishment to fit the crime: dantes contrapasso

Literature



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The paper " Punishment to Fit the Crime: Dante's Contrapasso " is an outstanding example of a literature essay. Longfellow, one of the translators of Dante's Divina Commedia, translated the word Contrapasso as Counterpoise (Dante, Longfellow and Pearl 2003), but perhaps Counter-Pace is a more accurate word made up by this student. It takes in the concept that when Dante's characters reached Hell, they had to travel in a contrary direction to how they operated in life. Many of Dante's characters have to suffer for eternity the Contrapasso that exemplifies their sins on Earth. Here, an attempt is made to illustrate only two sins: lust and treachery, but they are among the best. Francesca da Rimini - together with her ill-fated lover Paolo, her husband's brother - is the first choice because although she never says her name to Dante, he can recognize her by her birthplace ' on the sea-coast' (Ravenna) and other details. This is a nice touch of mystery. Her deformed husband discovered her ' in flagrante delicto' (caught in the act) with his brother, so he stabbed them both to death. Immediately plunged to Hell, in spite of Francesca's excuses that the sin was shared, they were both doomed. Dante draws the line between real love and carnal lust or misguided desire. His creative solution is for them to spend eternity buffeted by freezing cold winds, to counter the sin of boiling-over hot passion. They are continually blown about by powerful gales, and can never rest. In the ninth circle, betrayers are led by Cain, who was treacherous towards his brother Abel and - among others - Judas, who was also guilty of the underhand stealthy sin of treachery and betrayal. These are punished by being totally submerged in ice, with only their faces showing, distorted into wretched positions and suffering cramps and extreme cold. Their faces are on show and they cannot hide their shame, where previously on earth they

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ran away and hid their humiliation and dishonor. In Hell, their faces were displayed for everyone there to see, and they were frozen in place and unable to move or avoid insults and abuse.