

A literary analysis of dante's inferno: sin and love of god essay

[Design](#), [Fashion](#)



Dante's Inferno has been consistently referred to as a philosophical and religious masterpiece in literature.

Critics draw varying degrees of interpretation in reading the epic text attributing to the work their own sense of what may seem proper reading of literature. Time and again it is considered as a storehouse of deep ideas imbued with different philosophical and religious underpinnings that the growing body of criticisms tends to go wide off the mark (Johnston, 2007). It is a common mistake to give the work some colorable relevance to it in one's point of view. In the process, the analysis fails to see for what Dante's Inferno really is: An exquisitely wrought epic poem describing in immersive detail Dante's vision of Hell, his idea of divine justice and the scheme of sin and punishment (2007). Therefore, to say that the work is solely an interpretation of evil and sin, and consequently, that no one can sin if the person loves God and in loving God everyone has freedom is not only not accurate but the premise liberally revises the intent and notion of the poet in writing this work. In the process of taking the work as if it were one's own and not for what it is, does injustice to the work itself (2007). To begin with the most obvious, Dante's Inferno speaks of a dream of the poet himself descending into the unknown depths of Hell.

At first he suffers an episode of discomfort and fear having found himself in total darkness and alone in a strange and miserable place (Alighieri, 1985). The reason for his sudden transportation to Hell is not yet clear but shall soon be revealed to him as he journeys through Hell, on to the Purgatory and finally in Paradise. Virgil appears to him as a guide who comforts and assures

him that no harm will come to pass while they embark on their voyage into the darkness. Dante's fear is allayed by Virgil's calm and imminence (1985). Virgil was the shining beacon in the eyes of Dante. They push on until they come upon the entrance of Hell. Dante hesitates but Virgil's gentle prodding and wise words convinced him to move forward (1985).

They both begin to see the different tiers of Hell with each circle specifically tailored to the sins of man (1985). The sight was unbearable to Dante having seen a few who were familiar to him. Virgil explains that the souls were punished according to the magnitude of their sins while they were still alive.

These souls suffer precisely because they have transgressed the commandments of God. Their respective punishments are commensurate to the kind of sin. To wit: " Various crimes have sunk them deeper in the dark abyss [...] If one so far descends, one may see them" (Alighieri, 1985). True enough, the deeper they go all the worse are the crimes against the church and God.

The sins of the flesh and the sins of carnal pleasure are meted out with unspeakable torment to their bodies. The sins of violence are likewise punished by agonizing pain on the body as if the souls were the victims of their own violent deeds (1985). The sins of deceit, lies, fraud and treachery merited a brand of punishment that cuts to the core of man's evil nature. At any rate, each tier specializes on a specific type of sin (1985). The punishments are designed to purify that part of the body which is the source of evil and transgression against the dictates of the divine law. Thus far,

Dante's Inferno makes no mention about redemption or respite from sin rather it is filled with textual descriptions of justice in the biblical and religious sense.

At certain points Dante raises a few questions about why the souls suffered as they did to which Virgil replies that the mandate of the heavens have been laid down but the people on Earth stubbornly refuses to abide by these rules much less acknowledge them. Accordingly, sin is translated as errors committed by men that lead them to the wrong path. They had the opportunity to mend their ways while they were still living but having failed to do so the infernal place shall do the purification for them. It is a sort of eternal redemptive suffering for which a man answers for his sins in the form of physical pain where he shall relive the agony caused by his own faults until he is cleansed of all filth and grime. Expressed in other terms, Dante's Inferno pays homage to the dogmas of the Catholic Church prevalent during his time.

The strict doctrines laid down by the church inspired Dante to fashion a fictional yet picturesque complex legal structure founded on the bible and other works of famous theological thinkers. Moved by these religious contexts Dante created a bleak world where people are being punished for their acts and omissions—similar to a penal institution for crimes against humanity and God. If anything else, Dante's intentions were to present Hell in such splendidly horrific fashion to compel men to do what is right and to admonish people of what lies ahead if they continue to ignore the bible and the church (Johnston, 2007).

Indeed, Dante uses historical figures to drive home the point that no one will escape punishment. On another layer of analysis, he uses famous personalities and makes allusions to literary figures to create the necessary link between the crime and its just punishment. Using this technique of allegory and allusion, he establishes the sin of the person without so much as to furnish extraneous details which might undermine the divine-like attributes of the work. The work thus assumes that the characters that were being punished were so familiar to the audience that further explanation of their misdeeds no longer becomes necessary (2007). On this point, it is true that work is dedicated to the exploration of evil and sin, of God and of divine justice.

However, Dante does not make any suggestion as to the redemptive value of the Inferno rather it serves as a warning and inspiration to him and to his readers. Notwithstanding a person's love for God and his choice to be free, a person is still susceptible to punishment for his sins. Love of God to win freedom only becomes clearer at the latter portion of the work and in the next parts of the trilogy where it was explained that men sin because his devotion is turned to worldly pleasures and not fixed on God and his commandments leading him in the wrong path away from righteousness and purity. Yet the Inferno is concerned in creating a provocative image of hell and the sight of the stars [God's mercy] appears only at the very end of the Inferno suggesting that discussions of God will come afterwards.