

DANTE'S INFERNO

an

OVERVIEW



Compiled by

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(This material was compiled from various sources, both electronic and physical)

Quotes from the *Divine Comedy* are taken from the English Edition

Translated by

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Contents

Dante's Inferno - Quick Reference.....	4
Introduction.....	6
The Divine Comedy.....	6
Language of The Divine Comedy.....	6
Structure of The Divine Comedy.....	6
Overview of Dante Alighiere (1265–1321).....	6
Who were the Guelphs and Ghibellines?.....	8
Investiture Controversy.....	8
Dream Vision.....	8
Overview of the Nine Circles of Hell.....	10
In Hell, the Sinner gets His 'Just Deserts'.....	11
Chapter 1 - The Dark Forest.....	13
The Leopard, Lion, and She-Wolf.....	14
Virgil and Beatrice.....	15
The Journey Begins.....	16
Chapter 2 - The Gate and Vestibule of Hell, and The River Acheron.....	17
The Gate of Hell.....	17
General Structure of Hell.....	17
The River Acheron and Charon the Boatman.....	19
Chapter 3 - The First Circle of Hell - Limbo.....	21
Limbo - An Early Church Invention.....	22
Judgement by Minos.....	22
Who was Minos?.....	22
The Second to Fifth Circles of Hell.....	23
Chapter 4 - The Second Circle of Hell - The Lustful and Carnal.....	24
Chapter 5 - The Third Circle of Hell - The Gluttons.....	26
Who was Cerberus?.....	26
Chapter 6 - The Forth Circle of Hell - The Hoarders, Misers, and Spendthrifts.....	27
Papé Satàn, papé Satàn aleppe.....	27
Who was Plutus?.....	28
Chapter 7 - The Fifth Circle of hell - The Wrathful.....	29
Crossing the Marsh Called Styx.....	29
Who was Phlegas.....	30
What was the River Styx.....	30
Chapter 8 - The City of Dis.....	31
Chapter 9 - The Sixth Circle of Hell - The Heretics.....	33
The Sin of Heresy.....	34
Chapter 10 - The Seventh Circle of Hell - The Violent.....	35
What is the Minator?.....	36
The Three Rings of the Seventh Circle of Hell.....	36
Ring 1 - The Violent against other people and property.....	36
What are the Centaurs?.....	37
Ring 2 - The Violent against Self (suicides).....	38
The Suicides).....	38
The Squanderers.....	39
What are Harpies?.....	39
Ring 3 - The Violent against God.....	40
Chapter 11 - The Eighth Circle of Hell - Malebolge - Fraud.....	42
The Ten Ditches of the Eighth Circle of Hell.....	44
Ditch 1 - Panterers, Pimps, and Seducers.....	44
Ditch 2 - Flatterers.....	45
Ditch 3 - Simonists (those who sell church favours).....	46
Ditch 4 - Fortune-Tellers, and False-Prophets.....	47
Ditch 5 - Barrators (corrupt politicians).....	48
Ditch 6 - Hypocrites.....	50
Caiphas.....	51
Ditch 7 - Thieves.....	52
Ditch 8 - Deceivers.....	53

Ditch 9 - Sowers of Discord	53
Muhammad in Hell.....	54
Ditch 10 - Falsifiers	56
Crossing from the Eighth Circle to the Ninth Circle of Hell.....	57
Who is Antaeus?	58
Chapter 12 - The Ninth Circle of Hell - Traitors in Cocytus.....	59
Cocytus.....	59
Region 1 - Caina - Traitors to Kindred.....	59
Region 2 - Antonia - Traitors to Country.....	60
Region 3 - Ptolomea - Traitors to Guests.....	60
Who was Atropos?	61
Region 4 - Judecca - Traitors to Masters (or benefactors).....	61
Satan in the Centre of Hell	62
The Escape	64

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Dante's Inferno - Quick Reference

Dante's Inferno				
Circle	General Sin(s)	Sub Area	Specific Sin(s)	Beast Association
Vestibule	The Uncommitted	n/a	n/a	
The River Acheron ("Joyless")				
Circle 1	The Unbaptized	Limbo	The blameless but unbaptized (includes children); the virtuous pagans	Sins of the Leopard
Circle 2	The Lustful & Carnal	n/a	n/a	
Circle 3	The Gluttonous	n/a	n/a	
Circle 4	The Greedy	n/a	The hoarders, misers, and spendthrifts (extravagant and irresponsible spenders)	Hot-Blooded Sins
Circle 5	The Wrathful	n/a	The wrathful and sullen (wrathful (in the Styx marsh) and sullen (under the Styx marsh))	Unbridled passions
The City of Dis (The 6th to 9th Circles of Hell are located within the walls of the City of Dis)				
Circle 6	The Heretics	n/a	n/a	Sins of the Lion
Circle 7	The Violent	Round 1	Against neighbours Murderers, war makers, robbers, & plunderers	
		Round 2	Against self Suicides	
		Round 3	Against god, nature, & art Blasphemers, sodomites, & usurers	
Circle 8	The Fraudulent	Ditch 1	Panderers & seducers	Sins of the She-Wolf
		Ditch 2	Flatterers	
		Ditch 3	Simonaics (Sellers of church favours)	
		Ditch 4	Fortune tellers	
		Ditch 5	Grafters & barrators (Sellers of political favours)	
		Ditch 6	Hypocrites	
		Ditch 7	Thieves	
		Ditch 8	Evil counsellors	
		Ditch 9	Sowers of discord	

Dante's Inferno				
Circle	General Sin(s)	Sub Area	Specific Sin(s)	Beast Association
		Ditch 10	Falsifiers - Alchemists, counterfeiters, impersonators	
Circle 9	The Traitors & the treacherous	Ring 1	Caina Against kin	
		Ring 2	Antenora Against Country	
		Ring 3	Ptolemaea Against guests & hosts	
		Ring 4	Judaica Against lords & benefactors	

Introduction

Entering into Dante's *Inferno* begins an incredible journey which is a personal voyage of discovery and revelation concerning Dante's eternal salvation; and, at the same time, a universal moral and spiritual education for each individual who also dares to enter.

The *Inferno* (Italian for "Hell") is the first part of Dante's fourteenth-century poetic trilogy, *The Divine Comedy*, which is comprised of *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. It is a symbolic journey through the medieval concept of Hell; and Dante describes hell as nine circles of suffering located within the Earth. In other words, the *Divine Comedy* symbolically represents the journey of the soul towards God, with the *Inferno* describing the recognition and consequence of sin.

The Divine Comedy

The *Divine Comedy* was not titled as such by Dante; his title for the work was simply *Commedia* or *Comedy*. Dante's use of the word "comedy" is medieval by employment, and to Dante and his contemporaries, the term "comedy" meant a tale with a "happy ending", not a funny story as the word has later come to mean.

Language of the Divine Comedy

At the time that Dante wrote the *Divine Comedy*, most "serious writing" was done in Latin. This was in consequence of the changing nature of the languages, of the day, and scholars were afraid that no one would be able to read them in a few years. However, Dante used the Tuscan dialect of Italian, rather than Latin, for his poem. This was a gamble, but history has confirmed that it paid off.

Structure of the Divine Comedy

Dante wrote the *Divine Comedy* in the form of three canticas:

- 1) **Inferno** (Hell)
- 2) **Purgatorio** (Purgatory)
- 3) **Paradiso** (Paradise)

Each cantica is composed respectively of 34, 33, and 33 cantos. The first cantica, *Inferno*, is by far the most famous of the three, and is often published separately under the title, "*Dante's Inferno*".

In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante tells of his journey through the three realms of the dead - *Inferno* (Hell), *Purgatorio* (Purgatory), and *Paradiso* (Paradise). His guide through Hell and Purgatory is the Latin poet, Virgil, who was the author of *The Aeneid*; and his guide through Paradise is Beatrice, Dante's ideal of a perfect woman, and the woman that he loved and worshipped, but never married.

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Overview of Dante Alighiere (1265–1321)

General

- Name: Dante Alighiere (1265–1321)
- Born: May/June c. 1265
- Birth Place: Florence, Italy
- Nationality: Italian
- Died: September 14, 1321
- Family: He was the son of Alighiero de Bellincione and Donna Bella degli Abatia - a prominent family in Florence. The family had strong loyalties to the White Guelfs, a political alliance

representing the indigenous population of Florence who supported the Papacy. They were opposed to the Ghibellines, who were backed by the Holy Roman Emperor.

Dates

- 1265: Dante Born: c. May/June, in Florence, Italy
- 1271: Dante's mother dies
- 1272: Alighiero, Dante's father, marries Miss Lapa di Chiarissimo Cialuffi. They have two children, Dante's half-brother Francesco, and half-sister Tana
- 1276: Alighiero, Dante's father, dies
- 1277: Dante is married to Gemma Donati, with whom he has four children: Jacopo, Pietro, Giovanni, and Antonia
- 1284: Dante meets Guido Cavalcanti, Lapo Gianni, Cino da Pistoia, and soon after Brunetto Latini; and together they became the leaders of Dolce Stil Nuovo (The Sweet New Style)
- 1289: Dante participates as a cavalryman in the Battle of Campaldino, when the Guelph League defeat the Ghibellines of Arezzo
- 1289: Dante details the Battle of Campaldino in *Purgatorio*
- 1292: Dante writes the *Vita nuova*
- 1294: Dante meets Charles Martel, the King of Hungary and heir to the kingdom of Naples and the country of Provence. Dante recounts their meeting in *Paradiso, Canto 8*
- 1295: To further his political career, Dante becomes a doctor and a pharmacist, and joins the guild of the apothecaries
- 1295: Dante enters public life
- 1300: Dante becomes one of the six highest magistrates in Florence
- 1301: As Charles of Valois approaches Florence, Dante is sent to Rome as an envoy to Pope Boniface VIII
- 1302: The Black Guelphs seize power in Florence. Dante is condemned to exile for two years, and is ordered to pay a large fine. Further, he was forever excluded from public office
- 1302: The sentence of exile is increased to lifelong exile from Florence under threat of being burnt alive if Dante is arrested in the territory of the Florentine Republic
- 1303: Dante began sketching the foundations for the *Divine Comedy*
- 1304: Dante writes *De vulgari eloquentia* and the *Convivio*
- 1306: Dante completed the *Divine Comedy* which includes Dante's *Inferno*
- 1308: Dante visited Paris
- 1310: Henry VII of Luxembourg, Holy Roman Emperor, invades Italy, and Dante writes to him and other powerful leaders inciting them to destroy the Black Guelphs
- 1314: Publication of Dante's *Inferno*
- 1315: Dante moves to Verona as a guest of Cangrande della Scala. he works on *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, and composes the *Questio de acque et terra*
- 1319: Dante moves to Ravenna as the guest of Guido Novello da Polenta, and then he travels to Venice
- Dante never returns to his beloved Florence, and he expresses the pain of exile in Canto 17: 55-60 of *Paradiso*
- 1321: Dante falls ill on return from Venice, where he had been sent as ambassador by Guido Da Polenta, and dies on 14 September.

Who were the Guelphs and Ghibellines?

After the collapse of the "original" Roman Empire, there were attempts to recreate the "Holy Roman Empire." Charlemagne was crowned emperor of the Romans in St. Peter's church at Rome on Christmas Day, A.D. 800. However, intrigue, politics, and conflicts between succeeding Popes and emperors continued for centuries and were often based on the theological problem of divining the right relationship between "spiritual power" and the "temporal order" as such, understood in the framework of "material creation". Christ and the apostles had been poor in material possessions; however, the medieval church was rich - even too rich! Consequently, Dante was very political, and he wanted to separate the two forms of "authority" and have the church only deal with spiritual matters, while the empire dealt with temporal ones. Because of his political activities, Dante was permanently exiled from Florence in 1302.

The Guelphs and Ghibellines were political factions in central and northern Italy during the 12th and 13th centuries. The Guelphs supported the Pope, and the Ghibellines supported the Holy Roman Emperor. The struggle for power between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire had arisen with the *Investiture Conflict of the 11th century. This was a turbulent and a violent time, and there was continual conflict, and much ill-feeling, between these political factions.

After the Guelphs finally defeated the Ghibellines in 1289 at Campaldino and Caprona, Guelphs began to fight among themselves. By 1300 Florence was divided into the Black Guelphs and the White Guelphs. The Blacks continued to support the Papacy, while the Whites were opposed to Papal influence, specifically the influence of Pope Boniface VIII.

Dante was among the supporters of the White Guelphs, and in 1302 was exiled when the Black Guelphs took control of Florence. Those who were not connected to either side, or who had no connections to either Guelphs or Ghibellines, considered both factions unworthy of support but were still affected by the change of power in their respective cities. Emperor Henry VII was disgusted by supporters of both sides when he visited Italy in 1310, and in 1334 Pope Benedict XII threatened excommunication to anyone who used either name.

***Investiture Controversy**

The Investiture Controversy or Investiture Contest was the most significant conflict between Church and state in medieval Europe. In the 11th and 12th centuries, a series of popes challenged the authority of European monarchies over control of appointments, or investitures, of church officials such as bishops and abbots. Although the principal conflict began in 1075 between Pope Gregory VII and Henry IV, Holy Roman Emperor, a brief but significant struggle over investiture also occurred between Henry I of England and the papacy of Paschal II in the years 1103 to 1107, and the issue played a minor role in the struggles between church and state in France as well. The entire controversy was finally resolved by the Concordat of Worms in 1122.

Dream Vision

A dream vision is a literary genre, literary device, or literary convention in which the narrator falls asleep and dreams a vision. In the dream there is usually a guide, who imparts knowledge (often about religion, spiritual concepts, or love) that the dreamer could not have otherwise learned. After waking, the narrator usually resolves to share this knowledge with other people.

The dream-vision convention was widely used in European literature from late Latin times until the fifteenth century. If the dream vision includes a guide that is a speaking inanimate object, then it employs the trope of prosopopoeia (prosopopoeia (trope) - representing an abstract quality or idea as a person or creature).

Common Elements of Dream Vision Literature include:

- The visionary centres in one individual - typically a male.

- The soul/spirit is separated from the body.
- the visionary usually lies "as if dead" for a period of time, typically three for three days (this is exemplified by Christ being three days in the tomb after his crucifixion) while their soul views heaven and hell.
- There is a guide; typically, an interested guardian-angel or saint. Certainly the guide will be an authority figure who is "qualified" for the job.
- The guide directs, protects, explains, and interprets.
- The vision experience is a profound and personal religious/spiritual encounter, which illuminates, transforms, and purges the participant.

The Divine Comedy exemplifies the conventions of dream-vision literature, though Dante specifically says that his Comedy is not a dream vision.

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Overview of the Nine Circles of Hell

Dante and Virgil first enter the wide gates of Hell, and then they descend through the nine circles of Hell.

In each circle Dante and Virgil see sinners being punished for their specific/predominant sin on earth; and in all this, Dante sees the torture as the "Divine justice" of [a loving] God.

The Circles of Hell

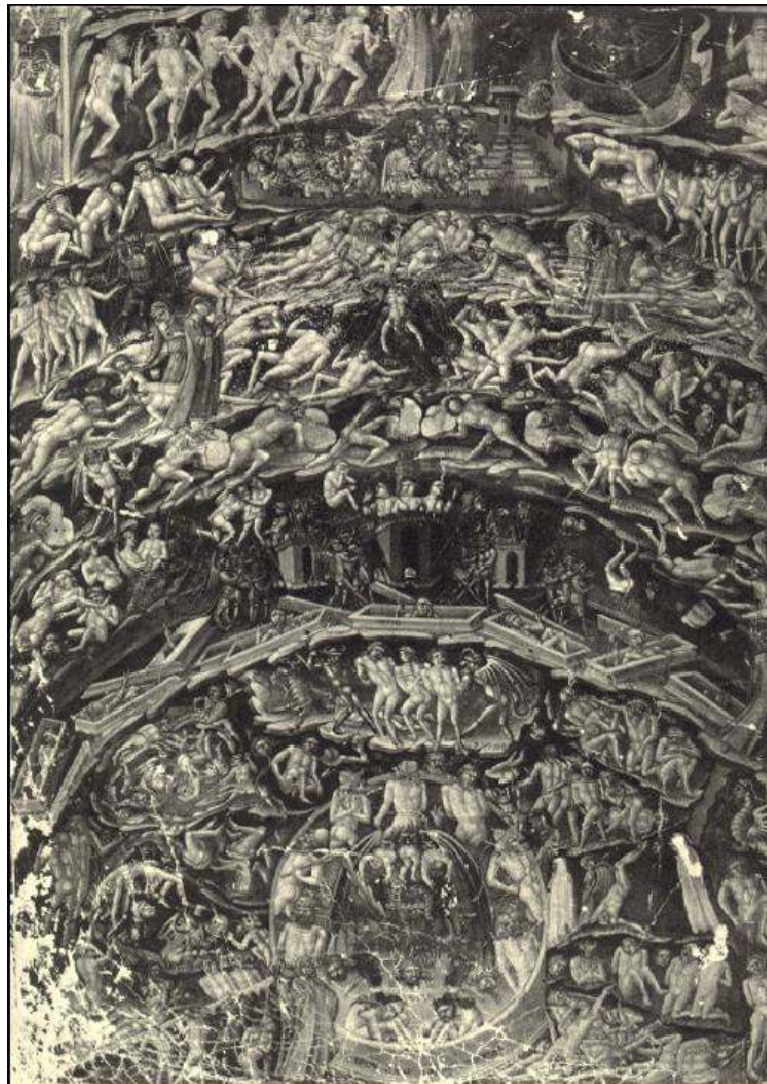
The circles and associated sinners and sins include:

- **Vestibule** - The undecided
- **The River Acheron ("Joyless")** - Flows between the vestibule and Hell proper
- **First Circle of Hell** - Limbo - the blameless but un-baptized (includes children); the virtuous pagans
- **Second Circle of Hell** - The lustful and carnal
- **Third Circle of Hell** - The gluttonous
- **Fourth Circle of Hell** - The hoarders, misers, and spendthrifts (extravagant and irresponsible spenders)
- **Fifth Circle of Hell** - The wrathful and sullen (wrathful (in the Styx marsh) and sullen (under the Styx marsh)).
- **The City of Dis** - The Sixth to Ninth Circles of Hell are located within the walls of the City of Dis
- **Sixth Circle of Hell** - The heretics
- **Seventh Circle of Hell** - The violent
 - Ring 1 - Murderers, war makers, robbers, and plunderers
 - Ring 2 - Suicides, and those harmful to the world
 - Ring 3 - Those violent towards God, nature, and art; as well as usurers
- **Eighth Circle of Hell** - The Fraudulent
 - Ditch 1 - Panderers and Seducers
 - Ditch 2 - Flatterers
 - Ditch 3 - Simoniacs (sellers of church favours)
 - Ditch 4 - Sorcerers and Fortune-tellers
 - Ditch 5 - Grafters, barrators, (sellers of political favours)
 - Ditch 6 - Hypocrites
 - Ditch 7 - Thieves
 - Ditch 8 - Counsellors, especially evil counsellors
 - Ditch 9 - Sowers of Discord
 - Ditch 10 - Falsifiers (Alchemists, Counterfeiters, impersonators, etc)
- **Ninth Circle of Hell** - The Traitors
 - Region 1 - Traitors to their kindred
 - Region 2 - Traitors to their country
 - Region 3 - Traitors to their guests
 - Region 4 - Traitors to their lords

In Hell, the Sinner gets His "Just Deserts"

"One large and important group of punishments in the tours of hell consists of those based on the principle of measure-for-measure. The principle appears in many ancient legal systems. The biblical formulation, "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" is part of a wider ancient Near Eastern pattern." Example: Fortune-tellers pretend to know future; in hell their heads are fastened on backwards so they must always look behind themselves (Himmelfarb 75-76).

(Picture below - Dante's Hell by Bartokomeo - c. 1420)



Summary

Dante's hell is a place where:

- the sinner gets his just and appropriate eternal punishment
- sinners deliberately chose their sins, of which they never repented
- sinners are now forever unable to repent
- each vice is personified in the various circles of the Inferno
- the soul retains those qualities which originally sent it to hell

- there is no possible hope of change or of reprieve/redemption/salvation for the sinners who are trapped there

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Chapter 1

The Dark Forest

The poem begins on the night before Good Friday in the year 1300, "halfway along our life's path". Dante is thirty-five years old, half of the biblical life expectancy of seventy-years (three-score-and-ten years), and is lost in a dark forest (symbolising sin). He finds himself assailed by three beasts (a lion, a leopard, and a she-wolf) that he cannot pass; and consequently, Dante is unable to find the "straight way", also translatable as "right way", to salvation (symbolized by the sun behind the mountain).

Conscious that he is falling into a "deep place", where the sun is silent, Dante is rescued by Virgil, and the two of them begin their journey through Hell.

In the *Inferno*, each sin's punishment is a symbolic instance of poetic justice - for example, fortune-tellers have to walk with their heads on backwards, unable to see what is ahead, because that was what they had tried to do in life.

Symbolically, the *Inferno* represents the Christian soul seeing sin for what it really is, and the three beasts represent three types of sin: the self-indulgent, the violent, and the malicious. These three types of sin are reflected the three main divisions of Dante's Hell: 1) Circles 1 to 5 (Upper Hell) for the self-indulgent sins; 2) Circles 6 and 7 for the violent sins, and 3) Circles 8 and 9 for the malicious sins

(Picture below - Dante in the Dark Forest)



Canto 1 - The Dark Forest

- 1 MIDWAY upon the journey of our life
- 2 I found myself within a forest dark,
- 3 For the straightforward pathway had been lost.

4 *Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say*
5 *What was this forest savage, rough, and stern,*
6 *Which in the very thought renews the fear.*

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The Leopard, Lion, and She-Wolf

The leopard symbolises worldly pleasure/lust; the lion symbolises ambition; and the she-wolf symbolises avarice.

Further symbols of the leopard, lion, and she-wolf:

- The leopard symbolises the sins of the Second to Fifth Circles of Hell (carnal, gluttons, hoarders/misers, wrathful)
- The lion symbolises the sins of the Sixth and Seventh Circles of Hell (heretics, violent)
- The she-wolf symbolises the sins of the Eighth and Ninth Circles of Hell (fraudulent, traitors)

These beasts divert Dante from his "true path", and they prevent him from ascending the mountain.

Canto 1 - The Leopard, Lion, and She-Wolf

31 *And lo! almost where the ascent began,*
32 *A panther [leopard] light and swift exceedingly,*
33 *Which with a spotted skin was covered o'er!*

34 *And never moved she from before my face,*
35 *Nay, rather did impede so much my way,*
36 *That many times I to return had turned.*

...

45 *A lion's aspect which appeared to me.*

46 *He seemed as if against me he were coming*
47 *With head uplifted, and with ravenous hunger,*
48 *So that it seemed the air was afraid of him;*

49 *And a she-wolf, that with all hungerings*
50 *Seemed to be laden in her meagreness,*
51 *And many folk has caused to live forlorn!*

(Picture below - The Lion blocks Dante's Progress)



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Virgil and Beatrice

Virgil represents "human reason", and he is sent by Beatrice, who represents "divine love", to help and guide Dante.

Canto 2 - Beatrice Speaks

61 *A friend of mine, and not the friend of fortune,*
62 *Upon the desert slope is so impeded*
63 *Upon his way, that he has turned through terror,*

64 *And may, I fear, already be so lost,*
65 *That I too late have risen to his succour,*
66 *From that which I have heard of him in Heaven.*

67 *Bestir thee now, and with thy speech ornate,*
68 *And with what needful is for his release,*
69 *Assist him so, that I may be consoled.*

70 *Beatrice am I, who do bid thee go;*
71 *I come from there, where I would fain return;*
72 *Love moved me, which compelleth me to speak.*

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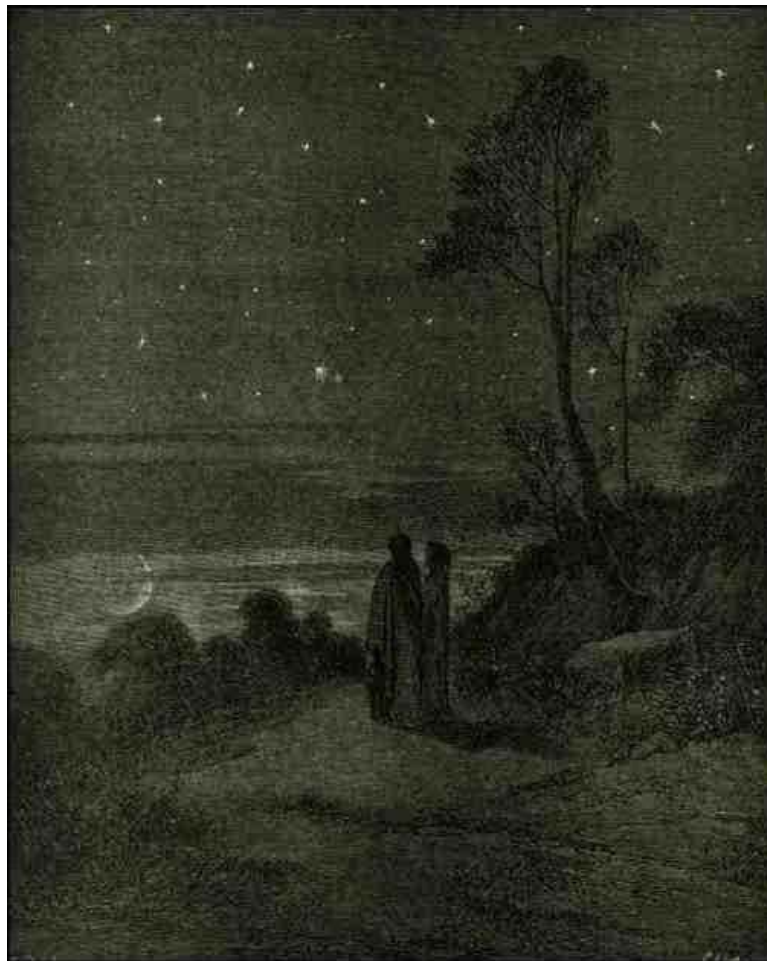
The Journey Begins

With the darkening sky of the first night, the Dante and Virgil begin their journey.

Canto 2

- 1 *DAY was departing, and the embrowned air*
- 2 *Released the animals that are on earth*
- 3 *From their fatigues; and I the only one*
- 4 *Made myself ready to sustain the war,*
- 5 *Both of the way and likewise of the woe,*
- 6 *Which memory that errs not shall retrace.*

(Picture below - The Darkening Sky of the First Night)



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Chapter 2

The Gate and Vestibule of Hell, and The River Acheron

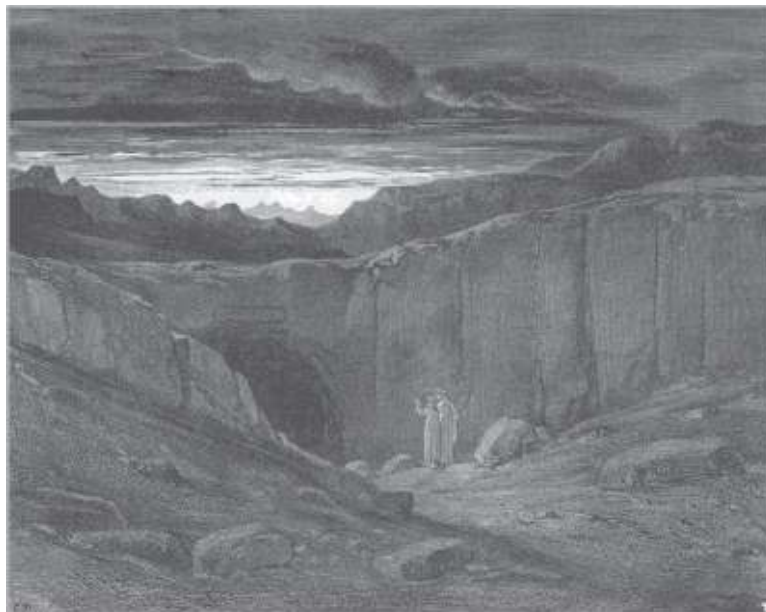
The Gate of Hell

Dante and Virgil pass through the gate of hell and enter the vestibule.

Canto 3

- 1 *Through me the way is to the city dolent;*
- 2 *Through me the way is to eternal dole;*
- 3 *Through me the way among the people lost.*
- ...
- 9 *All hope abandon, ye who enter in!*

(Picture below - The Gate of Hell)



"Abandon all hope ye who enter here" - Inscription on the gate of hell

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General Structure of Hell

The circles of Hell are structured according to the Aristotelian conception of virtue and vice.

Consequently, the circles of hell are grouped into the sins of non-commitment, incontinence, violence, and fraud (of which, some are represented by the Leopard, Lion, and She-wolf).

The sins of incontinence - weakness in controlling one's desires and natural urges/appetites - are the lesser of sins, and consequently they appear in the upper circles; while the sins of violence and of fraud, which are the greater sins, appear in the lower circles:

- **Vestibule** - The uncommitted
- **First Circle of hell - Limbo** - The unbaptized and virtuous pagans
- **Second to Fifth Circles of Hell** - **Sins of The Leopard - Sins of Incontinence (unbridled passions and hot-blood - the carnal, the gluttons, the hoarders/misers, the wrathful).

- ***Sixth and Seventh Circles of hell** - **Sins of The Lion - Sins of violence (cold-blooded violence and bestiality - the heretics, the violent)
- ***Eighth and Ninth Circles of Hell** - **Sins of The She Wolf - Sins of fraud and treachery - the fraudulent, the traitors.

The Vestibule to the Fifth Circle of Hell are known as "The Upper Hell"; and the Sixth to Ninth Circles of hell, which are located within the walls of the City of Dis, are known as "The lower Hell".

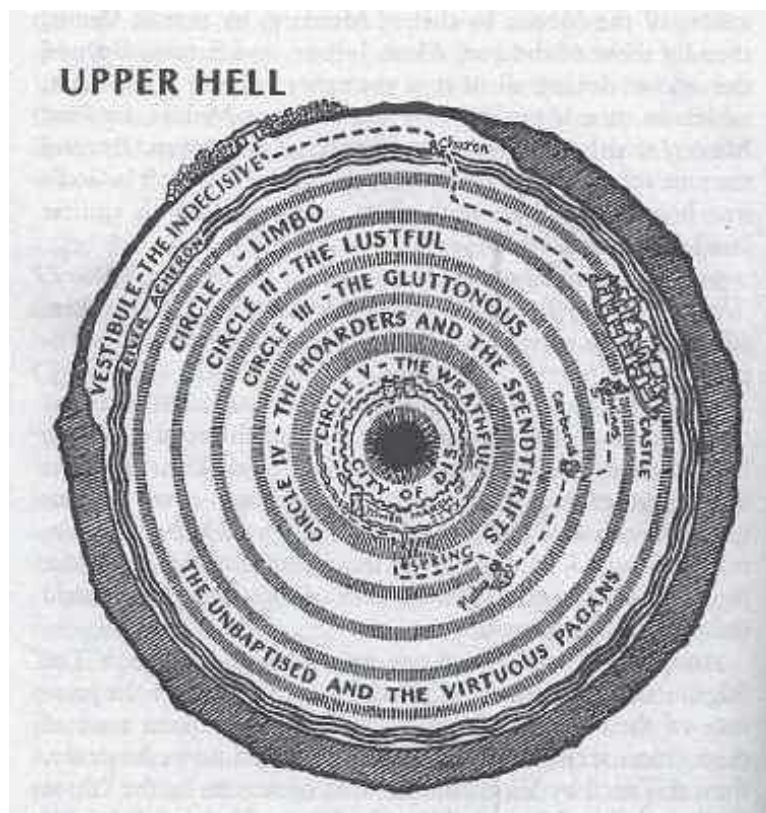
***Note** - The Sixth to Ninth Circles are located within the walls of the City of Dis.

****Note** - There is divergent opinion as to the correct groupings of the Sins of the Leopard, Lion, and She-Wolf.

Some commentators assign them as follows: Sins of the She-Wolf - Circles Two to Five; Sins of the Lion - Circles Six and Seven; and Sins of the Leopard - Circle Eight, with some commentators also including Circle Nine.

However, this editor believes that the correct grouping is as above with the Sins of the Leopard corresponding to the Second to Fifth Circles; the Sins of the Lion corresponding to the Sixth and Seventh Circles; and the Sins of the She-Wolf corresponding to the Eighth and Ninth Circles. Thus it is, and thus shall it be.

(Picture below - Upper Hell - Vestibule to the City of Dis)



Upper hell consists of the Vestibule, the River Acheron, the First to Fifth Circles of Hell, and the City of Dis

Lower Hell consists of the Sixth to Ninth Circles of Hell, which are located within the walls of the City of Dis

Before entering Hell completely, Dante and Virgil pass through the Vestibule where they see the "Uncommitted". These are the souls of people who, in life, did nothing, neither for good nor evil. Among these Dante recognizes either Pope Celestine V or Pontius Pilate; however, the text is not clear. Herein are also outcasts who took no side in the Rebellion of Angels.

The souls in the Vestibule are neither in Hell nor out of it, but reside on the shores of the Acheron - their punishment is to eternally pursue a banner (i.e. self interest) while being plagued by wasps and hornets that continually sting them, while maggots and other insects drink their blood and tears. This symbolizes the sting of their conscience and the repugnance of sin.

The Vestibule is separated from Hell proper by the river Acheron.

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The River Acheron and Charon the Boatman

The River Acheron ("Joyless") flows between the Vestibule and Hell proper.

The banks of the River Acheron are crowded with souls waiting to be ferried across by Charon, the boatman.

Canto 3 - Charon the Boatman

82 *And lo! towards us coming in a boat*
83 *An old man, hoary with the hair of eld,*
84 *Crying: Woe unto you, ye souls depraved*

85 *Hope nevermore to look upon the heavens;*
86 *I come to lead you to the other shore,*
87 *To the eternal shades in heat and frost.*

(Picture below - Charon the Boatman)



(Picture below - The River Acheron - Doomed souls waiting to embark,
and Charon the Boatman)



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Chapter 3

The First Circle of Hell - Limbo - Innocent Souls

The First Circle of Hell is Limbo, which is the region of the blameless but unbaptized.

Canto 4 - Limbo

- 33 *Now will I have thee know, ere thou go farther,*
34 *That they sinned not; and if they merit had,*
35 *'Tis not enough, because they had not baptism*
36 *Which is the portal of the Faith thou holdest;*

(Picture below - First Circle of Hell - Limbo)



In Limbo reside the blameless unbaptized and the virtuous pagans, who, though not sinful, did not accept Christ (or were before the time of Christ - e.g. the patriarchs, etc). These individuals are not punished in an active sense, but rather "grieve" only because of their separation from God, without any hope or possibility of reconciliation.

Limbo includes green fields and a castle, the dwelling place of the wisest men of antiquity, including Virgil himself, as well as the Islamic philosophers Averroes and Avicenna.

In the castle Dante meets the poets Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan, the Amazon Queen Penthesilea, the mathematician Euclid, the philosophers Socrates and Aristotle, and many others, including Julius Caesar in his role as Roman general ("in his armour, falcon-eyed").

Interestingly, Dante also sees, in Limbo, Saladin (Canto 4).

Dante implies that all virtuous non-Christians find themselves here; although he later encounters two non-Christians, Cato of Utica and Statius, in Purgatory; and a further two non-Christians, Trajan and Ripheus, in Paradiso.

Limbo - An Early Church Invention

"Limbo" was an invention of the early Church fathers to serve as the abode of two groups: unbaptized children and the virtuous patriarchs of the Old Testament.

Dante takes the radical step of adding to these infants and ancient Hebrews a third group, the virtuous pagans (including the great poets).

(Picture below - First Circle of Hell - Limbo - The Great Poets)



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Judgement by Minos

Beyond the first circle, all of those condemned for active, deliberately willed, sin are judged by Minos, who sentences each soul to one of the lower eight circles by wrapping his tail around himself a corresponding number of times.

Minos initially tries to hinder the poets' passage; but relents when rebuked by Virgil).

Who was Minos?

In Greek mythology, Minos was a king of Crete, who was the son of Zeus and Europa. Following his death, Minos became a judge of the dead in Hades.

The Minoan civilization of pre-Hellene Crete has was named after him.

Minos reigned over Crete and the islands of the Aegean Sea three generations before the Trojan War. He lived at Knossos for periods of nine years, where he received instruction from Zeus in the legislation that he gave to the island. Minos was the author of the Cretan constitution and the founder of its naval supremacy.

(Picture below - First Circle of Hell Limbo - Judgement by Minos)



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The Second to Fifth Circles of Hell - Incontinence (uncontrolled appetites and urges) (Sins without Malice)

The Second to Fifth Circles of Hell relate as follows:

- **Second Circle of Hell** - The Lustful and Carnal
- **Third Circle of Hell** - The Gluttons
- **Fourth Circle of Hell** - The Hoarders, Misers, and Spendthrifts (extravagant and irresponsible spenders)
- **Fifth Circle of Hell** - The Wrathful (in the Styx Marsh), and Sullen (under the Styx Marsh)

The City of Dis comes next, which contains the Sixth to Ninth Circles of Hell (the heretics, the violent, the fraudulent, and the traitorous).

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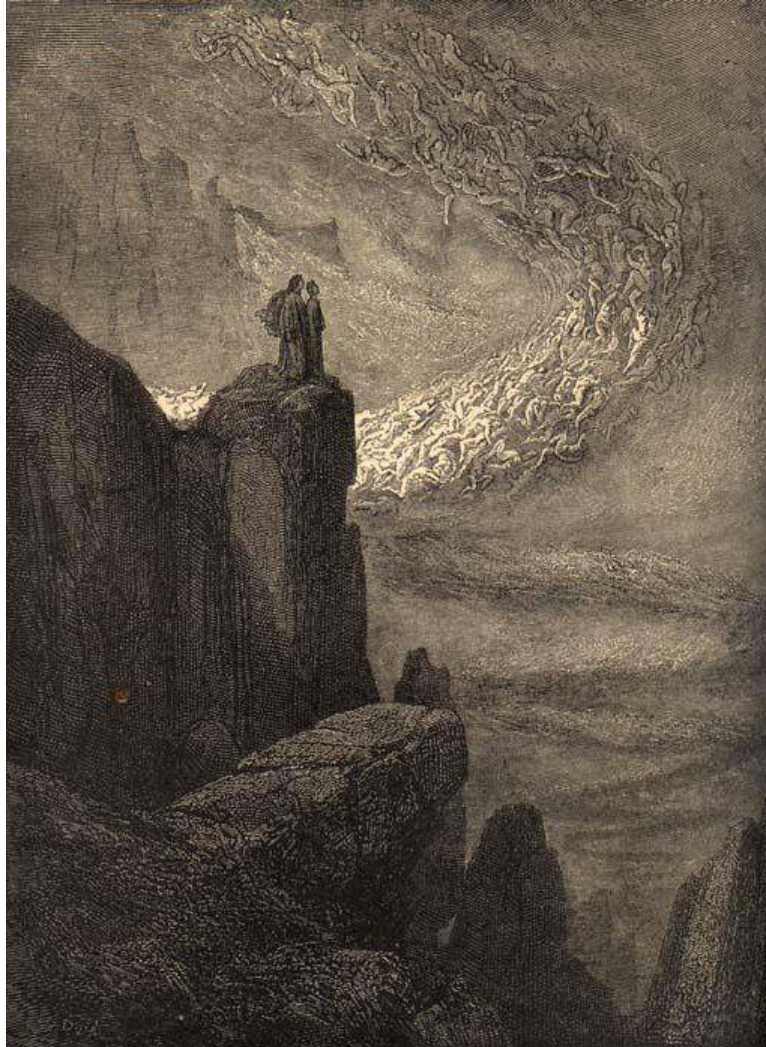
Chapter 4

The Second Circle of Hell - The Lustful and Carnal

This is the first Level of Hell proper.

The Second Circle of Hell is the "real beginning" of Hell, and here Dante sees the principle of retribution - sinners are driven, tossed, and whirled by winds, just as in their mortal lives they were driven in the tempests of passion.

(Picture below - Second Circle of hell - Sinners Tossed and Whirled By Winds)



In the Second Circle of Hell are those overcome by lust, and Dante condemns these "carnal malefactors" for letting their appetites overcome their reason. These souls are the first to be truly punished in Hell. They are blown about by the terrible winds of a violent storm, and they are without hope of rest or of salvation. This symbolizes the power of lust which can blow an individual about needlessly and aimlessly.

In this Circle of Hell, Dante sees Semiramis, Dido, Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, Achilles, Paris, Tristan, and many others who were overcome by "sensual love" during their lives.

Dante is told by Francesca da Rimini how she and her husband's brother Paolo Malatesta committed adultery, but then they died a violent death, in the name of Love, at the hands of her husband, Giovanni (Gianciotto). Francesca also told Dante that their act of adultery was triggered by reading the adulterous story of Lancelot and Guinevere (an episode sculpted by Auguste Rodin in *The Kiss*).

(Picture below - Second Circle of Hell - Paolo and Francesca)



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Chapter 5

The Third Circle of Hell - The Gluttons

Cerberus is the guardian of the Third Circle of Hell, and is taken from the mythological, three-headed dog which guards the threshold of Hades. However, in the Third Circle of Hell, Cerberus guards the gluttons, who are forced to lie in a vile slush produced by a ceaseless, foul, icy rain.

Virgil obtains safe passage past Cerberus by filling its three mouths with mud.

The gluttons lie in the Third Circle of Hell sightless and heedless of their neighbours. This symbolises the cold, selfish, and empty sensuality of their lives. Just as lust has revealed its true nature in the winds of the previous circle (Second Circle), here the slush reveals the true nature of sensuality, which includes not only overindulgence in food and drink, but also all other kinds of addiction (e.g. tobacco, alcohol, drugs, sugar, etc).

(Picture below - Third Circle of hell - Gluttons - Cerberus)



In the Third Circle of Hell, Dante converses with a Florentine contemporary called Ciaccio, which means "hog". Ciaccio speaks to Dante regarding strife in Florence between the "White" and "Black" Guelphs.

Here, Ciaccio "predicts" the expulsion of the White party, to which Dante belongs, and which led to Dante's own permanent exile. His exile occurred in 1302, which was after the date in which the poem is set, but before the poem was actually written (Canto 6).

Who was Cerberus?

In Greek and Roman mythology, Cerberus is a multi-headed hound (typically three-headed), which guards the gates of Hades, to prevent those who have crossed the river Styx from ever escaping.

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Chapter 6

The Forth Circle of Hell - The Hoarders, Misers, and Spendthrifts

Plutus, the Greek god of riches, guards the entrance to the Fourth Circle of Hell. This is the Circle of Hell for those who loved money, and their resultant insubstantiality. Plutus appears as a personification of the prodigal and avaricious, who always hunger for more than they are entitled to.

Those whose attitude toward material goods deviated from God's requirements are punished in the Fourth Circle of hell. This includes the avaricious or miserly (including many "clergymen, cardinals, and popes"), who hoarded possessions, and the prodigal, who squandered their possessions.

Dante observes that the two groups joust using great stones as weapons, which they push with their chests.

In Canto 7, Plutus speaks the cryptic phrase, **Papé Satàn, papé Satàn aleppe*) - See Note below.

Canto 7 - Pape. Satan, Pape Satan, Aleppe!

- 1 **PAPE. Satan, Pape Satan, Aleppe!*
- 2 *Thus Plutus with his clucking voice began;*

***Note:** *Papé Satàn, papé Satàn aleppe* are the opening words in the first line of Canto 7, and have become famous for the "uncertainty of their meaning".

There have been many attempts to interpret/understand the words; however, no solution has yet been found.

Some modern commentators believe that the words are some kind of demonic invocation to Satan.

(Picture below - Fourth Circle of Hell - Plutus, Guard of the Fourth Circle)

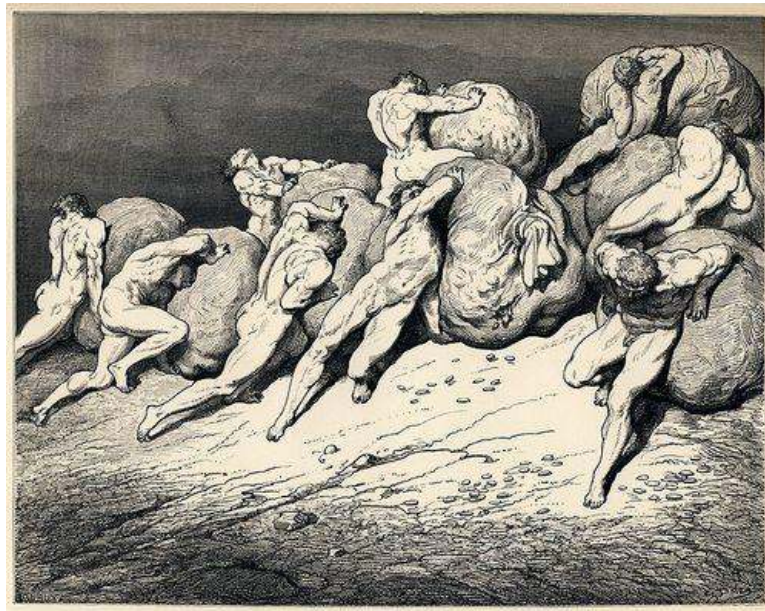


Canto 7 - Misers and Spendthrifts roll great stones to crash against one another

- 25 *Here saw I people, more than elsewhere, many,*
- 26 *On one side and the other, with great howls,*
- 27 *Rolling weights forward by main force of chest.*
- 28 *They clashed together, and then at that point*

- 29 *Each one turned backward, rolling retrograde,*
30 *Crying, Why keepest? and, Why squanderest thou?*

(Picture below - Fourth Circle - Misers and Spendthrifts Roll Great Stones)



Who Was Plutus?

In Greek mythology, Plutus (or Ploutos) was the god of wealth. In early agrarian Greece, he was associated purely with the bounty of rich harvests. Later, however, he came to represent wealth in more general terms.

Plutus was a son of Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, who bore him after lying with Iasion in a "thrice-ploughed field". Later, Plutus was blinded by Zeus so he would distribute wealth indiscriminately, and without favour, towards the good/virtuous.

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Chapter 7

The Fifth Circle of Hell - The Wrathful

In the Fifth Circle of Hell, the Styx, river of hate, forms a marsh which holds the openly wrathful who unceasingly strike and bite one another; while the sullen lie under the surface of the marsh - just as their silent anger (sullenness) lay hidden during their lives.

Wrath and sullenness are basically two forms of a single sin: anger, which is expressed (wrath) and anger that is repressed (sullenness).

Phlegyas ferries Virgil and Dante across the River Styx to the City of Dis.

(Picture below - Fifth Circle, Crossing the Marsh of Styx to the City of Dis)



Crossing the Marsh called Styx

Canto 7 - The Marsh Called Styx

106 *A marsh it makes, which has the name of Styx,*
107 *This tristful brooklet, when it has descended*
108 *Down to the foot of the malign gray shores.*

109 *And I, who stood intent upon beholding,*
110 *Saw people mudbesprent in that lagoon,*
111 *All of them naked and with angry look.*

112 *They smote each other not alone with hands,*
113 *But with the head and with the breast and feet,*
114 *Tearing each other piecemeal with their teeth.*

In the marsh of the river Styx, the openly wrathful viscously fight each other on the surface; and the sullen lie gurgling beneath the surface, withdrawn "into a black sulkiness which can find no joy in God or man or the universe."

Phlegyas reluctantly transports Dante and Virgil across the Styx, and on the way they are accosted by Filippo Argenti, a Black Guelph from a prominent Florentine family.

Canto 8 - Dante's response to the accosting by Filippo Argenti

31 While we were running through the dead canal,
32 Uprose in front of me one full of mire,
33 And said, Who 'rt thou that comest ere the hour?

34 And I to him: Although I come, I stay not;
35 But who art thou that hast become so squalid?
36 Thou seest that I am one who weeps, he answered.

37 And I to him: With weeping and with wailing,
38 Thou spirit maledict, do thou remain;
39 For thee I know, though thou art all defiled.

When Dante responds "With weeping and with wailing, thou spirit maledict, do thou remain; for thee I know, though thou art all defiled," Virgil blesses him. Literally, this reflects the fact that souls in Hell are eternally fixed in the state they have chosen, but symbolically, it reflects Dante's beginning awareness of his own sin (Cantos 7 and 8).

Who was Phlegyas?

In Greek mythology, Phlegyas was a king of the Lapithae. he was a son of Ares and Chryse. Phlegyas succeeded Eteocles, who died without issue, in the government of the district of Orchomenos, which he named after himself, "Phlegyantia".

By Chryse Phlegyas became the father of Coronis, who became by Apollo the mother of Asclepius.

Enraged at this, Phlegyas set fire to the temple of Apollo. Consequently, Apollo killed Phlegyas, and then condemned him to be punished in the lower world.

Phlegyas guards the River Styx, and who ferries the souls from one side of the river to the other. In other myths, Phlegyas guards the Phlegethon, another of the main rivers of Hades.

However, in the *Inferno*, Dante places Phlegyas as the boatman who ferries Dante and Virgil over the marsh of Styx.

What was the River Styx?

In Greek mythology, the River Styx (river of "hate") forms the boundary between earth and the underworld of Hades. The River Styx circles Hades nine times; and in the centre of Hades, the rivers Styx, Phlegethon, Acheron, and Cocytus converge on a great marsh. Other important rivers of Hades include the Lethe and the Eridanus.

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Chapter 8

The City of Dis

The lower parts of Hell, Circles Six to Nine, are contained within the walls of the city of Dis; which is itself surrounded by the Stygian marsh.

Punished within the lower parts of hell are active, rather than passive sins.

The walls of Dis are guarded by fallen angels. Virgil is unable to convince them to let Dante and him enter, and the Furies and Medusa threaten Dante.

However, an angel, who has been sent from Heaven, secures entry for Dante and Virgil. The angel opens the gate by touching it with a wand, and rebukes all those who opposed Dante.

(Picture below - The Walls of the City of Dis (after crossing the Marsh of Styx))



(Picture below - An Angel Comes To Open Gates to the City of Dis)



Within the walls of Dis, the abyss of the rest of hell (Circles Six to Nine - Sins with Malice) is situated.

(Picture below - Hell's circles, Six to Nine, lie within the walls of the city of Dis)



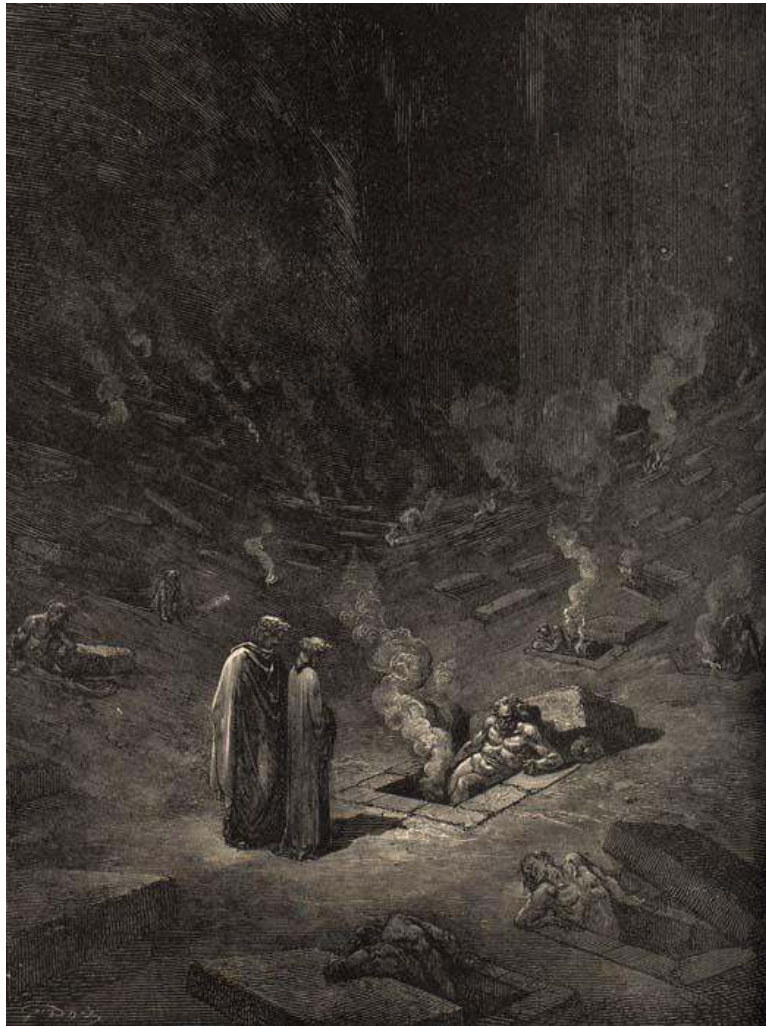
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Chapter 9

The Sixth Circle of Hell - Heretics

Just within the walls of the City of Dis, is the Sixth Circle of Hell. Here Dante and Virgil meet the heretics. These are those who are not merely impulsive, like the sinners in the previous circles, but are completely evilly disposed. These are souls who chose their own opinions instead of following the teachings of the Church. Thus, they are now condemned to an eternity with their bodies tormented in burning graves.

(Picture below - Sixth Circle of Hell - Heretics with their bodies in burning graves)



In the Sixth Circle of Hell, heretics, such as the Epicurians (who say that the soul dies with the body) are consigned to flaming graves.

Here, Dante discourses with a pair of Epicurian Florentines in one of the tombs - Farinata degli Uberti, a Ghibelline (posthumously condemned for heresy in 1283); and Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti, a Guelph, who was the father of Dante's friend and fellow poet Guido Cavalcanti.

The political affiliation of these two men allows for a further discussion/review of Florentine politics (Canto 10).

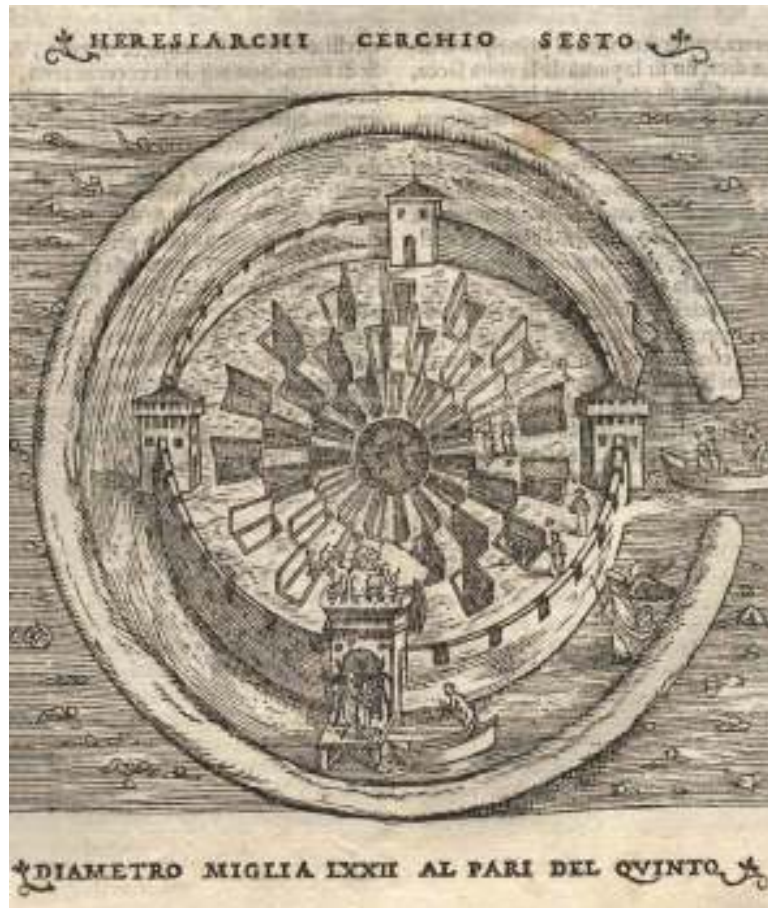
In response to a question from Dante about the "prophecy" he has received, Cavalcante explains that the souls in Hell only know of life on earth from seeing the future, and not from any observation of the present. Consequently, when "the portal of the future has been shut," it will no longer be possible for them to see or know anything.

Canto 10

103 *When they draw near, or are, is wholly vain*
104 *Our intellect, and if none brings it to us,*
105 *Not anything know we of your human state.*

106 *Hence thou canst understand, that wholly dead*
107 *Will be our knowledge from the moment when*
108 *The portal of the future shall be closed.*

(Picture below - Map of the Sixth Circle of hell)



The Sin of Heresy

It is interesting to note that the sin of "heresy" is the only sin punished in Hell that is specifically "Christian". All other sins are potential moral failings for "any human".

Virgil Discourses on the Rationale of Lower Hell

Pausing for a moment before the steep descent to the foul-smelling seventh circle of hell, Virgil explains the geography and rationale of Lower Hell, in which the violent and malicious sins are punished.

In this explanation, he refers to the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Physics* of Aristotle (Canto 11). In particular, he asserts that there are only two legitimate sources of wealth: *natural resources* ("nature") and *human activity* ("art"). Usury, to be punished in the next circle, is therefore a very serious and unforgivable offence against both.

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Chapter 10

The Seventh Circle of Hell - The Violent

Within the Seventh Circle of hell are the violent, and its entry is guarded by the Minotaur. The Seventh Circle of hell is divided into three rings, which are comprised of those who do harm to others; who do harm to themselves; and who do harm to God.

- **Ring 1** - Violent against Neighbours, other people, and property - murderers, assassins, thieves, tyrants, and war makers
- **Ring 2** - Violent against Self - suicides
- **Ring 3** - Violent against God - blasphemers, sodomites, and usurers

(Picture below - Map of the Seventh Circle of hell)



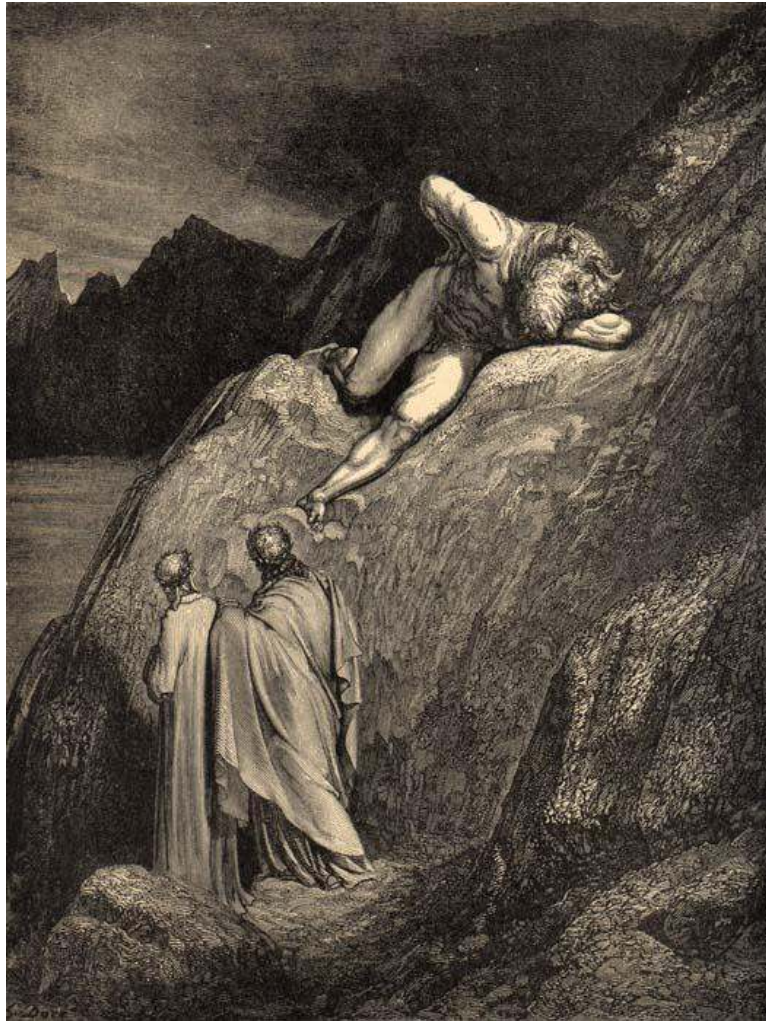
Canto 12 - The Minotaur, a bull-man who appears on this broken slope, and is the guardian and symbol of the entire circle of violence.

Canto 12 - The Minotaur

- 11 *And on the border of the broken chasm*
12 *The infamy of Crete was stretched along,*

13 *Who was conceived in the fictitious cow;*
14 *And when he us beheld, he bit himself,*
15 *Even as one whom anger racks within.*

(Picture below - Seventh Circle - Ring 1 - The Minotaur Guards the Entrance)



What is The Minotaur?

In Greek mythology, the Minotaur was a creature with the head of a bull on the body of a man. The Minotaur dwelt at the center of the Cretan Labyrinth, which was an elaborate maze that had been designed to imprison and hold it. The Cretan Labyrinth had been commissioned and built by King Minos of Crete, and the architects were Daedalus and his son Icarus.

The Minotaur was eventually killed by Theseus, the son of Aegeas.

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The Three Rings of the Seventh Circle of Hell

Ring 1 - The Violent against other people and property

This first ring holds those who were violent against people and property (murderers, robbers, war makers, etc); and they are immersed in Phlegethon, a river of boiling blood, to a level corresponding to their sins/punishment.

Dante noted that Alexander the Great was there, and was immersed up to his eyebrows.

It is interesting to note that Dante does not really distinguish between lives and property;

The River Phlegethon, literally a "river of fire", is the name Dante gives to the river of hot blood that serves as the first ring of the Seventh Circle of hell. Here, the spillers of blood, the murderers, the war-makers, robbers, and the violent offenders against others and property, are submerged in the river to a level corresponding to their sin/guilt.

Warrior-Centaurs (head, arms, and torso of a man, and the body and legs of a horse), who are commanded by Chiron, patrol the ring, and shoot arrows into the souls trying to escape. Easily angered, the warrior centaurs continually patrol and torture those consigned to an eternity in the River Phlegethon.

The centaur, Nessus, guides Dante and Virgil along the River Phlegethon, and then across a ford (Canto XII).

(Picture below - Seventh Circle of Hell - Ring 1 - Warrior-Centaurs)



Armed with bows and arrows, thousands of Centaurs patrol the bank of the river - they use their weapons to keep the souls at their allotted depth (Canto 12).

Canto 12 - The Centaur Guards

73 *Thousands and thousands go about the moat*
74 *Shooting with shafts whatever soul emerges*
75 *Out of the blood, more than his crime allots.*

What are Centaurs?

In Greek mythology, the **centaurs** are a race of creatures who are part human and part horse. Typically, they are depicted with the torso of a human joined at the waist to the horse's withers, where the horse's neck would be.

This half-human and half-animal confluence led many commentators classify them as beings, caught between the two natures of human and animal. Thus the centaurs are cunning and ferocious warriors.

The centaurs were usually said to have been born of Ixion and Nephele. However, another version claims that they were the offspring of Centaurus, who had mated with the Magnesian mares. It is thought that Centaurus was either a son of Ixion and Nephele, or of Apollo and Stilbe, daughter of the river god Peneus.

Centaurs were said to have inhabited the geographic regions of Magnesia and Mount Pelion in Thessaly, Mount Pholoe in Arcadia, and the Malean peninsula in southern Laconia.

Ring 2 - The Violent against Self (suicides)

This Second Ring holds the violent against self; the suicides (wasters of their bodies), and squanderers (wasters of their goods).

It is interesting to note that Dante does not differentiate much between the values of life and property.

The Suicides

In the Second Ring the suicides, are transformed into gnarled thorny bushes and trees, and are fed on by the Harpies.

The suicides are unique among the dead, in that they will not be bodily resurrected after the final judgement, having given their bodies away through suicide. Instead they will maintain their tree-like form, with their own corpses hanging from the limbs.

The thorny bushes and trees are symbols for the state of mind in which suicide is committed.

Dante breaks a twig off one of the bushes and from the broken, bleeding, branch he hears the tale of Pier delle Vigne, who committed suicide after falling out of favour with Emperor Frederick II.

Canto 13 - Dante Breaks a Twig

31 *Then stretched I forth my hand a little forward,*
32 *And plucked a branchlet off from a great thorn,*
33 *And the trunk cried, Why dost thou mangle me?*

34 *After it had become embrowned with blood,*
35 *It recommenced its cry: Why dost thou rend me*
36 *Hast thou no spirit of pity whatsoever ?*

37 *Men once we were, and now are changed to trees;*

(Picture below - Seventh Circle - Ring 2 - Suicides and Harpies)



This dark, thorny, wood is home to despairing souls who, having separated themselves from their bodies, before God's the designated time, are now trapped in sub-human form for eternity.

Harpies (creatures that steal anything and everything) feed upon the sub-human forms of the suicides, and symbolize the stealing away of the souls by suicides.

The Squanderers

The other residents of the Second Ring are the squanderers. These are they who destroyed their lives by destroying the means by which life is sustained (i.e. money and property). These souls are perpetually chased by ferocious dogs through the thorny undergrowth.

Canto 13

124 Behind them was the forest full of black
125 She-mastiffs, ravenous, and swift of foot
126 As greyhounds, who are issuing from the chain.

127 On him who had crouched down they set their teeth,
128 And him they lacerated piece by piece,
129 Thereafter bore away those aching members.

What are Harpies?

In Greek mythology, the Harpies were daughters of Thaumias and Electra, and were the sisters of Iris, A harpy was one of the winged spirits that constantly stole all food from Phineas. The literal meaning

of the word is "that which snatches" as it comes from the ancient Greek word *harpazein*, which means "to snatch".

Hesiod calls the harpies two "lovely-haired" creatures. However, Roman and Byzantine writers spoke of their ugliness.

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Ring 3 - The Violent against God

The Third Ring houses the violent against God (blasphemers), the violent against nature (sodomites), and usurers. These souls all reside in a desert of flaming sand with fiery flakes raining from the sky.

(Picture below - Seventh Circle of hell - Ring 3 - Sin against God, nature, and Art)



The Third Ring consists of a desert of flaming sand, which is rained upon by eternal fire - thus clearly signifying the wrath of the God that the sinners defied.

- the blasphemers lie on the sand
- the sodomites wander about in groups
- the usurers sit (some commentators say that the usurers "crouch over their money bags")

Here, Dante converses with two Florentine sodomites from different groups. One of them is Dante's mentor, Brunetto Latini. Dante is very surprised and touched by this encounter and shows Brunetto great respect for what he has taught him, thus refuting the indictment that Dante placed only his enemies in Hell:

Canto 15 - Dante converses with Brunetto Latini

85 *You taught me how a man becomes eternal;*
86 *And how much I am grateful, while I live*
87 *Behoves that in my language be discerned.*

The other sodomite is Iacopo Rusticucci, a politician, who blames his wife for his fate.

The Usurers

Those punished here for usury include the Florentines Catello di Rosso Gianfigliuzzi, Ciappo Ubriachi, and Giovanni di Buiamonte; and the Paduans Reginaldo degli Scrovegni and Vitaliano di Iacopo

Vitaliani. They are identified not primarily by name, but by heraldic devices emblazoned on the purses around their necks – purses which "their eyes seemed to feast upon".

It has been noted that in one of three categories, all the sinners in the third ring of the seventh circle of hell went against the "divine plan for human existence":

- **The blasphemers** - those who were violent against God himself, lie prostrate, facing the Heaven they scorned.
- **The sodomites** - those who sinned against Nature, God's child, run ceaselessly, driven by the restlessness of their passion in life.
- **The usurers** - those who sinned against art or industry, God's grandchild, crouch forever over their moneybags.

(Picture below - Seventh Circle of Hell - Ring 3 - Sins of Blasphemy, Sodomy, and usury)



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Chapter 11

The Eighth Circle of Hell - Malebolge - Fraud

The Eighth Circle of Hell is called "Malebolge"; which, roughly translated from Italian, means "evil ditches".

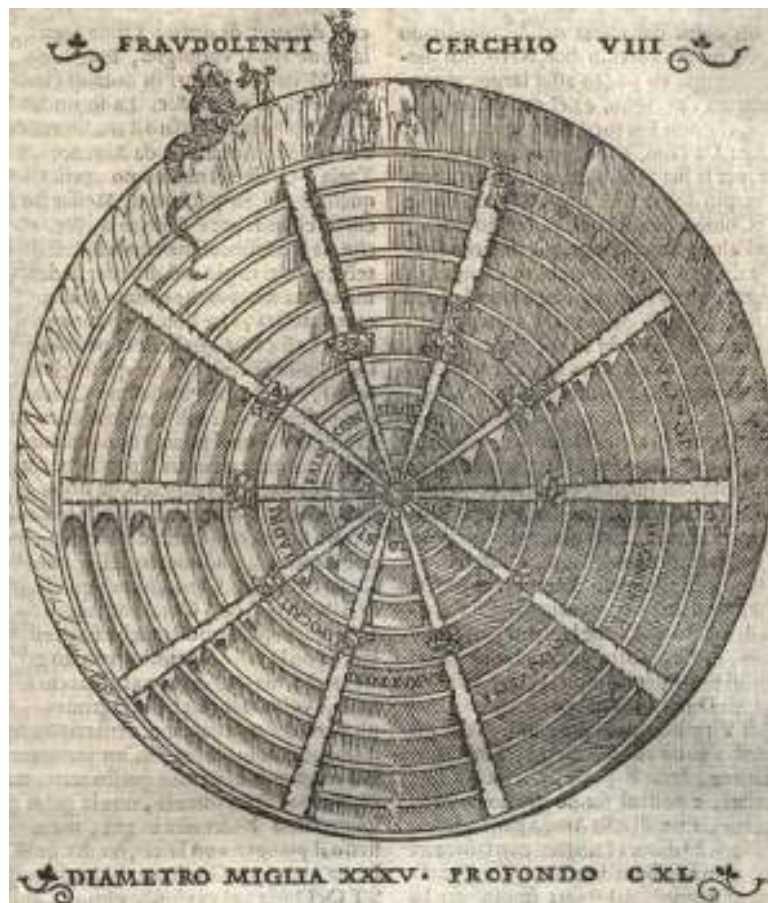
Malebolge is a large, funnel-shaped cavern, which itself is divided into ten concentric circular trenches or ditches.

Each trench is called a "bolgia" (Italian for "ditch" or "pouch").

Long causeways/bridges run from the outer circumference of Malebolge to its centre, and are pictured as spokes on a wheel.

At the centre of Malebolge is the Ninth and final circle of hell - the place of Satan.

(Picture Below - Map of the Eighth Circle of hell)



The last two circles of Hell (Eighth and Ninth Circles) punish sins that involve conscious fraud or treachery.

These circles (Eighth and Ninth) can only be reached by descending a vast cliff, which Dante and Virgil do on the back of Geryon, a winged monster traditionally represented as having three heads, or three conjoined bodies.

However, Dante describes Geryon as having three mixed natures:

- Human

- Bestial
- Reptile

Fraud starts at the edge of an abyss, so Dante and Virgil must descend on the back of the Fraud Monster, Geryon.

Geryon is a winged serpent-like beast, with the tail of a scorpion, but has the face of an honest man - thus, Geryon is an image of fraud. He dwells at the cliff between the Seventh and Eighth circles of Hell (the circles of violence and fraud, respectively). At Virgil's request, Geryon helps him and Dante to descend to the Eighth Circle by carrying them on his back and gliding down the cliff.

Canto 17

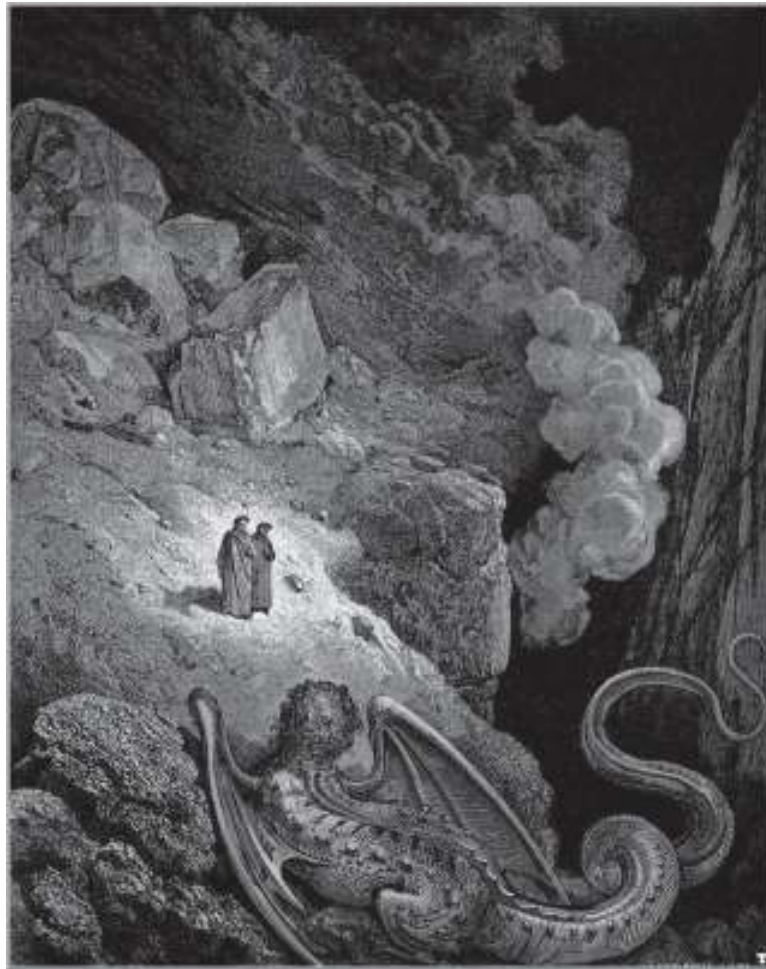
115 *Onward he goeth, swimming slowly, slowly;*
 116 *Wheels and descends, but I perceive it only*
 117 *By wind upon my face and from below.*

(Picture below - Eighth Circle of Hell - Fraud Monster, Geryon)



Geryon has a pleasant face, a snaky body, to symbolize the pleasant first appearance of fraud and its twisted snaky dealings.

(Picture below - Eighth Circle of hell - Dante and Virgil with Geryon)



The Ten Ditches of the Eighth Circle of Hell

In the Eighth Circle of Hell, there are ten ditches (bolgia), one for each of the ten kinds of malicious fraud:

- **Ditch 1** - Panderers, Pimps, and Seducers
- **Ditch 2** - Flatterers
- **Ditch 3** - Simoniacs (those who sell church favours)
- **Ditch 4** - Fortune-Tellers Sorcerers, Astrologers, and False Prophets
- **Ditch 5** - Barrators (corrupt politicians), Grafters (those who sell political favours)
- **Ditch 6** - Hypocrites
- **Ditch 7** - Thieves
- **Ditch 8** - Evil Counselors
- **Ditch 9** - Sowers of Discord
- **Ditch 10** - Falsifiers (Alchemists & Counterfeiters)

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Ditch 1 - Panderers, Pimps, and Seducers

In the First Ditch, a file of pimps is circling one way, and another file of seducers the other; and both lines are whipped by horned demons (horns being the traditional icon of adultery). Just as the panderers and seducers used the passions of others to drive them to do their bidding, they are now themselves driven by demons to march for all eternity.

In the group of panderers, Dante notices Venedico Caccianemico, who sold his own sister to the Marchese d'Este.

In the group of seducers, Virgil points out Jason, who gained the help of Medea by seducing and marrying her; only to later desert her for Creusa. Jason also seduced Hypsipyle, and then abandoned her, alone and pregnant.

(Picture below - Eighth Circle of Hell - Ditch 1 - Panderers, Pimps, and Seducers)



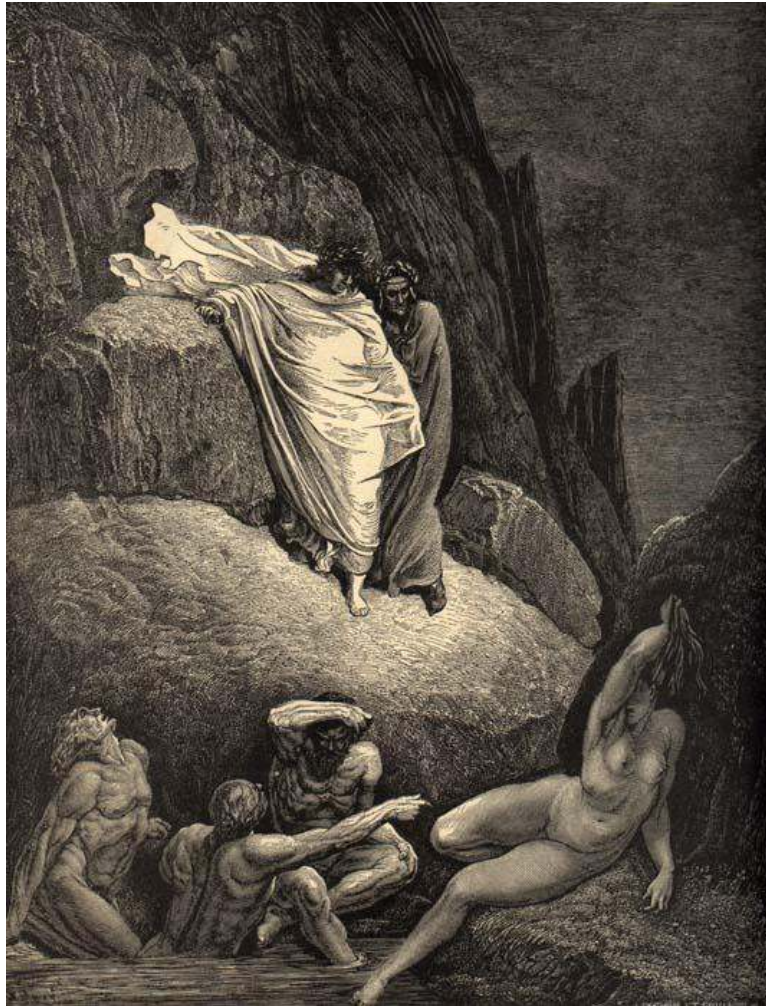
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Ditch 2 - Flatterers

In the Second Ditch are the flatterers who exploited other people using language. They are steeped and sunk in human excrement, which represents the words they produced.

It has been said, that with the full development of 21st Century political propaganda, commercial advertisement, and sensational journalism, "it is good to know that there is a place prepared for the perpetrators."

(Picture below - Eighth Circle - Bolgia 2 - Flatterers in Excrement)



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Ditch 3 - Simonists (those who sell church favours)

Simonists trade the grace and favour of the church for money, and their punishment in the Third Ditch is a kind of reverse baptism - they are placed head-first in holes in the rock (resembling baptismal fonts), and baptised by fire directed onto the soles of their feet.

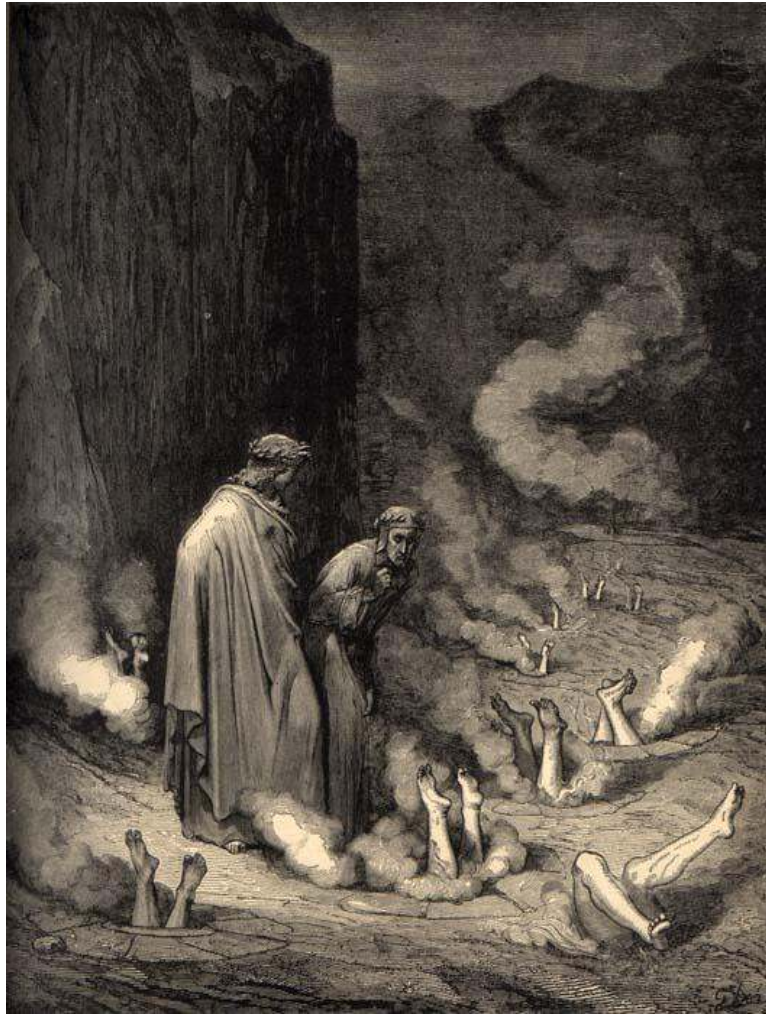
Canto 19

46 *Whoe'er thou art, that standest upside down,*
47 *O doleful soul, implanted like a stake,*
48 *To say began I, if thou canst, speak out.*

49 *I stood even as the friar who is confessing*
50 *The false assassin, who, when he is fixed,*
51 *Recalls him, so that death may be delayed.*

One of the simoniacs, Pope Nicholas III, denounces two of his successors, Pope Boniface VIII and Pope Clement V, for the same offence.

(Picture below - Eighth Circle of Hell - Bolgia 3 - Simonists)



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Ditch 4 - Fortune-Tellers Sorcerers, Astrologers, and False Prophets

In the Fourth Ditch there are fortune-tellers sorcerers, astrologers, and false prophets who tried to foretell the future, so now, as punishment, their heads are on backwards. Now they have to walk backwards, because they cannot see ahead of them

While referring primarily to attempts to see into the future by forbidden means, this also symbolises the twisted nature of magic and pseudo-sciences in general.

Dante sees Amphiaraus, Tiresias, Michael Scot, and Guido Bonatti, among the souls in the Forth Ditch.

(Picture below - Eighth Circle of Hell - Ditch 4 - Fortune-Tellers)



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Ditch 5 - Barrators (corrupt politicians), Grafters (those who sell political favours)

In the Fifth Ditch, Barrators (corrupt politicians), and Grafters (those who sell political favours) are sunk in boiling pitch, corresponding to the dark, secretive atmosphere in which they used to do their dirty work. The way they scheme and cheat here, in the attempt to outwit and evade their tormentors, is also a continuation of their previous behaviour. When the demons - the Malebranche - appear, the sinners duck down below the surface.

Corrupt politicians (barrators) are immersed in a lake of boiling pitch, which represents the sticky fingers and dark secrets of their corrupt deals. The barrators are the political reflection of the simoniacs.

These souls are guarded by devils called the Malebranche ("Evil Claws"), who provide some savage and satirical black comedy. The leader of the Malebranche, Malacoda ("Evil Tail"), assigns a troop to escort Virgil and Dante safely to the next bridge. The troop hook and torment one of the sinners (identified as Ciampolo), who names some Italian grafters and then tricks the Malebranche in order to escape back into the pitch.

The promise of safe conduct turns out to have limited value - there is no "next bridge", so Dante and Virgil have to scramble down into the next (sixth) Ditch

(Picture below - Circle Eight - Ditch 5 - Ciampolo Fails to Escape the Demons)



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Malacoda Incident Between Ditches Five and Six in the Eighth Circle of hell

The Malebranche threaten Virgil and Dante between Ditches Five and Six in the Eighth Circle of hell.

However, Virgil rebuffs Malacoda and his Malebranche fiends:

Canto 21 - Virgil rebuffs Malacoda

... Malacoda:

29 *And I beheld behind us a black devil,*
30 *Running along upon the crag, approach.*

31 *Ah, how ferocious was he in his aspect!*
32 *And how he seemed to me in action ruthless,*
33 *With open wings and light upon his feet!*

34 *His shoulders, which sharp-pointed were and high,*
35 *A sinner did encumber with both haunches,*
36 *And he held clutched the sinews of the feet.*

... Virgil issues the rebuke:

79 *Thinkest thou, Malacoda, to behold me*
80 *Advanced into this place, my Master said,*

81 *Safe hitherto from all your skill of fence,*
82 *Without the will divine, and fate auspicious?*
83 *Let me go on, for it in Heaven is willed*
84 *That I another show this savage road.*

85 *Then was his arrogance so humbled in him,*
86 *That he let fall his grapnel at his feet,*
87 *And to the others said: Now strike him not.*

(Picture below - Virgil rebuffs Malacoda and his Malebranche fiends)



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Ditch 6 - Hypocrites

In the Sixth Ditch, Dante and Virgil find the hypocrites listlessly walking along wearing golden cloaks lined with lead, which represent the falsity behind the surface appearance of their actions. Thus, it is falsity that weighs them down and makes spiritual progress impossible for them. Pretty outside, and awful inside; the heavy cloaks force the hypocrites to behave sedately - although seething within (inner anger).

Here, Dante speaks with Catalano and Loderingo, two members of the Jovial Friars, which is an order that had acquired a reputation for not living up to its vows, and which was eventually suppressed by Pope Sixtus V.

(Picture below - Eighth Circle of Hell - Ditch 6 - Hypocrites)



Caiphas

In Ditch 6, Dante sees Caiaphas, the high priest of Jerusalem, who was responsible for ordering Jesus crucified.

As punishment Caiaphas, himself, is crucified to the ground, and is trampled upon.

Canto 23 - Caiphas

115 *Said to me: This transfix'd one, whom thou seest,*
116 *Counselled the Pharisees that it was meet*
117 *To put one man to torture for the people.*

118 *Crosswise and naked is he on the path,*
119 *As thou perceivest; and he needs must feel,*
120 *Whoever passes, first how much he weighs;*

121 *And in like mode his father-in-law is punished*
122 *Within this moat, and the others of the council,*
123 *Which for the Jews was a malignant seed.*

(Picture below - Caiaphas (the high priest responsible for ordering Christ's Crucifixion))



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Ditch 7 - Thieves

In the Seventh Ditch, the thieves are guarded by the centaur, Cacus, who has a fire-breathing dragon on his shoulders (in Roman mythology, Cacus was not a centaur, but a fire-breathing monster slain by Heracles).

The thieves are hunted and bitten by snakes and lizards. However, the full horror of their punishment is revealed gradually - just as they stole other people's substance in life, their very identity now becomes subject to theft here. The snakebites make them undergo various transformations:

- Vanni Fucci is turned to ashes and then is resurrected
- Agnello is blended with the six-legged reptile that is Cianfa, and then back
- Buoso exchanges shapes with the four-legged Francesco, and then back

In the Seventh Ditch, Dante saw thieves turning into snakes, and snakes turning into thieves - thieves steal other people's possessions; but here, they cannot even keep their own bodies.

Dante and Virgil also saw snakes coiling about the sinners, binding their hands behind them, and knotting themselves through the loins. The analogy is clear - thieves are like snakes or reptiles, and their hands, which are the usual agents of their thievery, are now bound for eternity.

Dante also sees a serpent fly toward a sinner and pierce the jugular vein, and the sinner bursts into flames, collapses to ashes, and then takes shape once more.

Again, just as thieves take away the property of their victims so they themselves repeatedly undergo disintegration throughout eternity.

(Picture below - Eighth Circle of Hell - Ditch 7 - Thieves)



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Ditch 8 - Deceivers, Fraudulent advisers, and Evil Counsellors

In the Eighth Ditch, deceivers, fraudulent advisers, and evil counsellors are individually wrapped in tongues of fire, which conceal them; just as in life their speech concealed their true thoughts. The deceivers or evil counsellors are those who in life used their glibness and eloquence to mislead others. These are not people who gave false advice, but are people who used their position to advise others to engage in fraud. Because they possessed and misused higher human capacities than those of previous sinners, such as the thieves of the preceding Ditch, they have sinned more severely and are placed deeper in Hell.

Ulysses and Diomedes are condemned to the Eighth Ditch for the deception of the Trojan Horse. Ulysses also tells the tale of his fatal final voyage (a poetic invention of Dante's), where he left his home and family to sail to the end of the Earth, only to have his ship founder near Mount Purgatory.

Guido da Montefeltro recounts, to Dante, how he advised Pope Boniface VIII to capture the fortress of Palestrina, by offering the Colonna family inside it a false amnesty, and then razing it to the ground after they surrendered. Guido became a Franciscan in 1296, and died two years later. Guido describes St. Francis as coming to take his soul to Heaven, only to have a demon assert prior claim, even though Boniface had absolved Guido in advance for his evil advice.

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Ditch 9 - Sowers of Discord

In the ninth Ditch, the Sowers of scandal and schism are divided into three categories: 1) The Sowers of religious discord, 2) The Sowers of political discord, and 3) The Sowers of discord between kinsmen.

In the ninth Ditch, a sword-wielding demon hacks at the sowers of discord, dividing parts of their bodies, as in life they divided others (all are appropriately hacked to pieces). Then, as they make their rounds the wounds heal, only to have the demon tear apart their bodies again.

Muhammad in Hell

Canto 28 - Mahomet

- 22 *A cask by losing centre-piece or cant*
23 *Was never shattered so, as I saw one*
24 *Rent from the chin to where one breaketh wind.*
- 25 *Between his legs were hanging down his entrails;*
26 *His heart was visible, and the dismal sack*
27 *That maketh excrement of what is eaten.*
- 28 *While I was all absorbed in seeing him,*
29 *He looked at me, and opened with his hands*
30 *His bosom, saying: "See now how I rend me;*
- 31 *How mutilated, see, is Mahomet;*
32 *In front of me doth Ali weeping go,*
33 *Cleft in the face from forelock unto chin;*

The ninth ditch is where Sowers of Discord are banished, disfigured, and dismembered - their sin being the cause of disharmony and creating factions between people, groups, and religions.

Here we find the Sowers of Discord - their sin was that they were the cause of disharmony and creating factions between people, groups, and religions. As a punishment, a demon slices them open as they walk in a eternal circle. Further, while they are walking, their wounds begin to heal; however, the wounds are again reopened by the demon.

The Prophet Muhammad who tells Dante to warn the schismatic and heretic Fra Dolcino. Dante describes Muhammad as a schismatic, apparently viewing Islam as an off-shoot from Christianity, and similarly Dante seems to condemn Ali for *schism between Sunni and Shiite.

*Consistent with medieval Christian thinking, in which the Muslim world was viewed as a hostile usurper, Dante depicts both Mohammed--the founder of Islam--and his cousin and son-in-law Ali as sowers of religious divisiveness. One popular view held that Mohammed had himself been a cardinal who, his papal ambitions thwarted, caused a great schism within Christianity when he and his followers splintered off into a new religious community. Dante creates a vicious composite portrait of the two holy men, with Mohammed's body split from groin to chin and Ali's face cleft from top to bottom.

According to tradition, the prophet Mohammed founded Islam in the early seventh century AD at Mecca. Ali married Mohammed's daughter, Fatima, but a dispute over Ali's succession to the caliphate led, after his assassination in 661, to a division among Muslims into Sunni and Shi'ite. The sowers of discord are also separated into three distinct groups of punishment according their level of discord:

Mohammed and Ali are punished here, in the ninth ditch of this circle, among the sowers of religious, political, and familial discord, and who are "split" or mutilated by a "devil's sword".

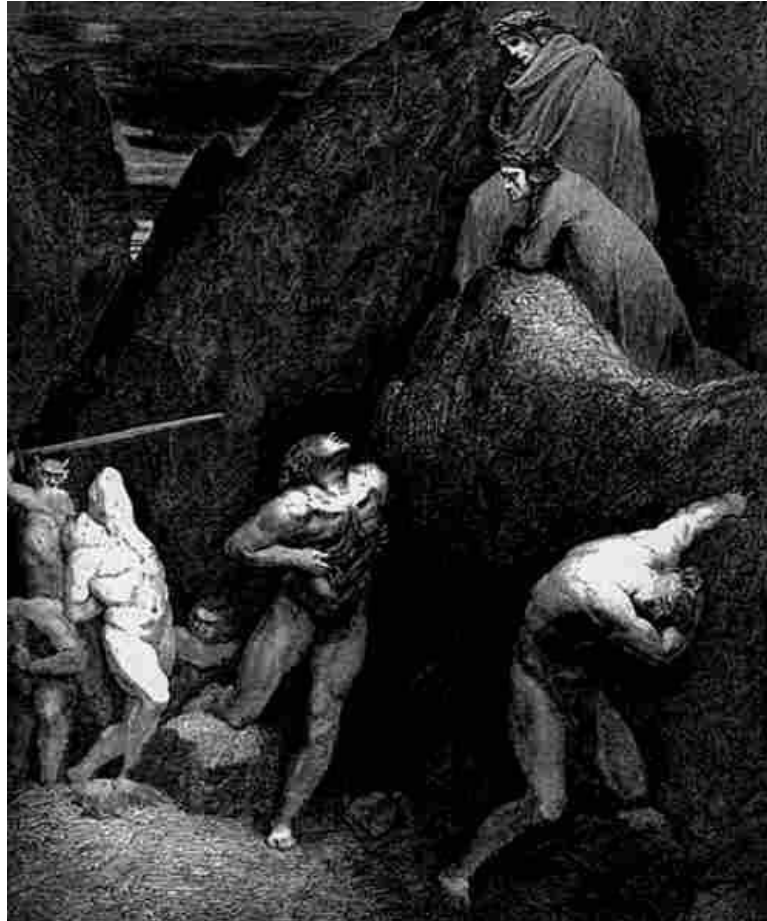
The sowers of discord are also separated into three distinct groups of punishment according their level of discord:

- 1) The first being the Sowers of Religious Discord; and it is here that Dante meets Mahomet and Ali. These men are responsible for splitting Christianity and Muslim religions, and because of their sin, they are also split apart.

2) The second group is the Sowers of Political Discord; and these include Pier da Medicina, and Mosca dei Lamberti. Pier da Medicina warns Dante that Messers Guido and Angiolello will be thrown from their ships from an angry tyrant and that they should be warned unless they wish to end up with them.

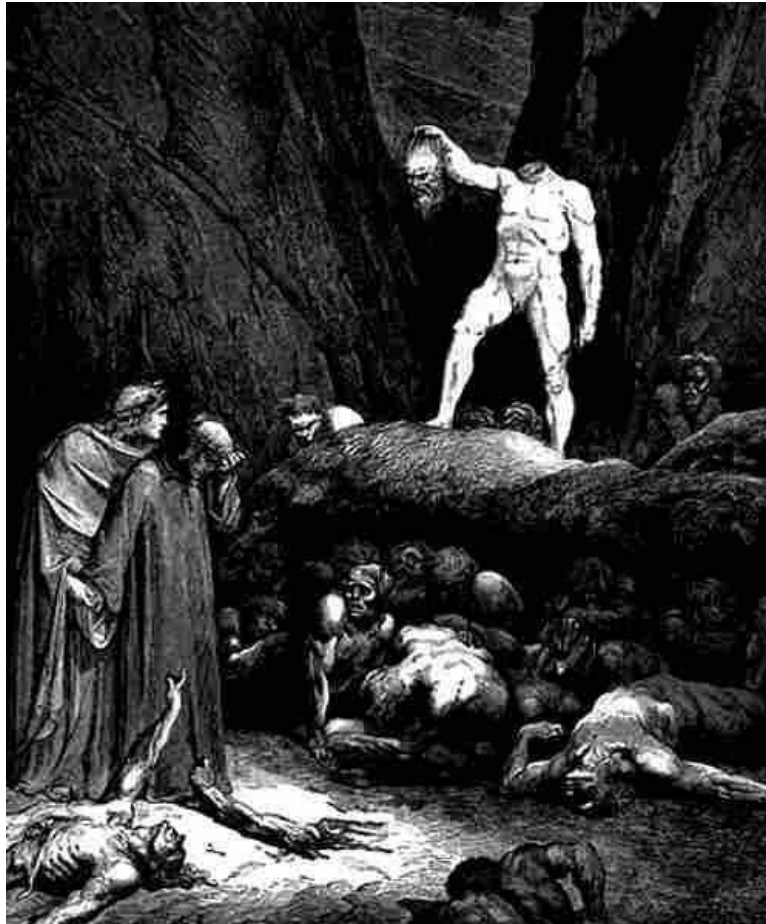
3) The third group is the Sowers of Discord between the Kinsmen. These people caused factions in families. For example, Bertrand de Born, who had put a son against father, was condemned to carry his own head in his hand.

(Picture below - Eighth Circle of hell - Ditch 9 - Mohammed in Hell)



In the Ninth Ditch, Dante also encounters Bertran de Born, who carries around his severed head like a lantern as a punishment for fomenting the rebellion of Henry the Young King against his father Henry II.

(Picture below - Circle Eight - Ditch 9 - Bertrand de Born in Hell)



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Ditch 10 - Falsifiers (alchemists, impersonators, counterfeiters, and liars/perjurers)

Here, Dante and Virgil encountered various sorts of falsifiers (alchemists, impersonators, counterfeiters, and liars/perjurers) who are a "disease" on society and are themselves afflicted with different types of diseases.

The falsifiers described, fall into four categories:

- falsifiers of metals (alchemists)
- falsifiers of persons (impersonators)
- falsifiers of coin (counterfeiters)
- falsifiers of words (liars/perjurers).

Also, the falsifiers suffer from diseases which change their appearance, just as they themselves tried to change the appearance of things and events when they were alive. Unlike all other sinners in Hell, the falsifiers are tortured from within themselves rather than from without:

- the alchemists are afflicted with leprosy
- the impersonators are mad
- the counterfeiters have dropsy
- the liars have a fever which makes them stink

These sinners who falsified nature, themselves, or money or language, have basically corrupted their own souls, which are now diseased for eternity.

Potiphar's wife is briefly mentioned here for her false accusation of Joseph, as is Sinon the Greek spy who tricked the Trojans into taking the Trojan Horse into their city (Sinon is here, rather than in Ditch 8, because his advice was false as well as evil).

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Crossing from the Eighth Circle of Hell (Malebolge) to the Ninth Circle of Hell

Crossing from the Eighth Circle of Hell (Malebolge) to the Ninth Circle of Hell (the central pit), at the bottom of which lies the frozen lake of Cocytus, Dante sees what seems to be a city with towers in the distance. However, as he approaches, he sees, that what he thought were towers are in fact giants who are visible above the rim of the well.

The giants are standing on a ledge above the ninth circle of Hell, so that from the Eighth Circle of Hell (Malebolge) they are visible from the waist up.

(Picture below - Giants Standing on a ledge above the Ninth Circle of Hell)



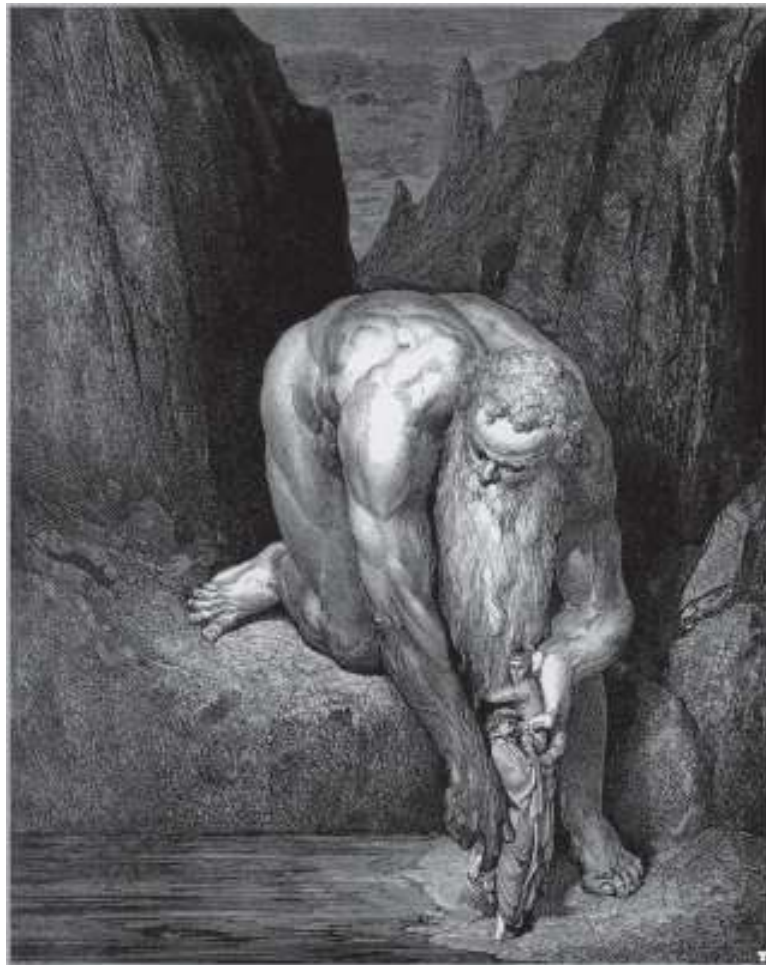
The giants named include Antaeus, Nimrod, as well as Ephialtes who with his brother, Otus, tried to storm Olympus. The giants are personifications of pride and in this they are exceeded only by Satan himself whom they eternally attend and serve.

The river flowing from the fissure in the Old Man of Crete (Canto 14), into Malebolge (Canto 18), now freezes in a circular plain at the bottom of Hell (Picture Above). The symbolism is clear, for the heart

Antaeus "hand-carries" Dante and Virgil

The giant Antaeus "hand-carries" Dante and Virgil down to the last (Ninth) circle of Hell

(Picture below - Ninth Circle of Hell - Antaeus)



Canto 31 - Antaeus "hand-carries" Dante and Virgil to the Ninth Circle

136 As seems the Carisenda, to behold
137 Beneath the leaning side, when goes a cloud
138 Above it so that opposite it hangs;

139 Such did Antaeus seem to me, who stood
140 Watching to see him stoop, and then it was
141 I could have wished to go some other way.

142 But lightly in the abyss, which swallows up
143 Judas with Lucifer, he put us down;
144 Nor thus bowed downward made he there delay,

Who is Antaeus?

Antaeus was a giant from Greek mythology who accosted passing strangers and wrestled them to death - he was invulnerable while touching earth.

Antaeus was finally killed by Hercules who held him in the air to weaken him and then crushed him.

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Chapter 12

The Ninth Circle of Hell - Traitors in Cocytus

The traitors in the Ninth Circle of hell are distinguished from the "merely" fraudulent (Eighth circle of Hell) in that their acts involve betraying one or other special relationship.

Consequently, there are four concentric regions (or "rounds") of traitors, corresponding, in order of seriousness - betrayal of family ties, betrayal of community ties, betrayal of guests, and betrayal of liege lords.

Cocytus

In contrast to the popular image of Hell as a domain of fire and brimstone, the traitors are frozen in a lake of ice known as Cocytus, with each group encased in ice to progressively greater depths.

Thus, Cocytus is a frozen lake of ice, with Satan at the centre of it, and is divided into four regions:

- **Region 1** - Traitors to Kindred (family ties) - Caina
- **Region 2** - Traitors to Country (community ties) - Antenora
- **Region 3** - Traitors to Guests - Ptolemaea
- **Region 4** - Traitors to Masters (benefactors and liege lords) - Judecca

In the first three regions the sinners are buried in the ice up to their necks (Picture below) in the frozen lake of Cocytus; while in the last region, they are completely submerged within the ice.



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Region 1 - Caina - Traitors to Kindred

In this region are Traitors to Kindred. This region is called Caina, which is named after Cain, the first murderer of a kinsman.

In Caina, the traitors to kin are here immersed in the ice up to their faces; however, they are allowed to lower their faces, letting them not only conceal their identities, but also shield themselves somewhat from the cold wind and prevent their tears from freezing their eyelids shut.

Dante notes that Mordred, he who attacked his relative King Arthur, is one of the traitors imprisoned here.

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Region 2 - Antonia - Traitors to Country

In this region are Traitors to Country. This region is called Antonia, which is named after the Trojan prince Antenor who, in the Middle Ages, was believed to have betrayed Troy to the Greeks. Dante also places in this region those who betrayed their political party or their homeland.

In Antenora, where the treacheries have been against the public welfare and thus are more serious than the private treacheries of Caina, the sinners' necks are held firmly in the ice and they cannot lower their heads.

Bocca degli Abati, who was a noble Guelph from Florence, is here. Abati betrayed his party by cutting off the Guelph standard bearer's hand during the battle against Manfred's troops at Montaperti in 1260; which, in turn, caused the Guelphs to panic and to lose the battle.

Here, Count Ugolino pauses from gnawing on the head of his rival, Archbishop Ruggieri, to describe, to Dante how Ruggieri imprisoned him along with his children and condemned them to death by starvation.

(Picture below - Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggieri in the frozen Cocytus)



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Region 3 - Ptolomea - Traitors to Guests

The Third Region is called Ptolomea, which is named after Ptolomey the son of Abubus, and who invited Simon Maccabaeus and his sons to a banquet and then murdered them.

Traitors to their guests are punished here, lying supine in the ice which covers them except for their faces. They are punished more severely than the previous traitors because the relationship to guests is an entirely voluntary one.

Fra Alberigo, who had armed soldiers kill his brother at a banquet explains to Dante that sometimes a soul falls here before Atropos cuts the thread of life. Their bodies on Earth are immediately possessed

by a demon, so what seems to be a "walking man" has reached the stage of being incapable of repentance.

In Ptolomea, where the sinners violated a chosen friendship as distinct from an inherited bond of family and country, treachery is punished even more severely with the head bent uncomfortably back.

Who was Atropos?

In Greek mythology, Atropos, was one of the three Moirae (Fates), goddesses of fate and destiny.

Atropos was the oldest of the Three Fates and was known as the "inflexible" or "inevitable". It was Atropos who chose the mechanism of death and ended the life of each mortal by cutting their thread with her "abhorred shears". She worked along with her two sisters, Clotho - who spun the thread and Lachesis - who measured the length.

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Region 4 - Judecca - Traitors to Masters (or benefactors)

The Fourth Region is called Judecca and is named after Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ, and this is the Region where Traitors to Masters (or benefactors) are punished.

The frozen centre of Judecca contains Satan, where there is a total absence of goodness, and is at an absolute distance from God.

(Picture below - Satan is Cast Out of Heaven)



The traitors are buried under the ice in this final region and are completely out of communication with humanity. We never know who they are. Only the greatest traitors of all, the rebellious angel Lucifer (Satan) and the three souls of Judas Iscariot, Cassius and Brutus (the betrayers of Julius Caesar) who he crunches in his jaws, are identifiable.

Satan in the Centre of Hell

Trapped in the very centre of Hell, condemned and cast out of heaven (Picture above) for committing the ultimate sin of personal treachery against God, is Satan (Lucifer). And Dante sees him chewing and clawing the sinners Judas, Cassius, and Brutus. Satan is described as a giant beast, with three faces, one red, one black, and one a pale yellow:

Canto 34 - Satan in Hell

- 28 *The Emperor of the kingdom dolorous*
29 *From his mid-breast forth issued from the ice,*
30 *And better with a giant I compare*
- 31 *Than do the giants with those arms of his;*
32 *Consider now how great must be that whole,*
33 *Which unto such a part conforms itself.*
- 34 *Were he as fair once, as he now is foul,*
35 *And lifted up his brow against his Maker,*
36 *Well may proceed from him all tribulation.*
- 37 *O, what a marvel it appeared to me,*
38 *When I beheld three faces on his head!*
39 *The one in front, and that vermilion was;*
- 40 *Two were the others, that were joined with this*
41 *Above the middle part of either shoulder,*
42 *And they were joined together at the crest;*
- 43 *And the right-hand one seemed 'twixt white and yellow*
44 *The left was such to look upon as those*
45 *Who come from where the Nile falls valley-ward.*
- 46 *Underneath each came forth two mighty wings,*
47 *Such as befitting were so great a bird;*
48 *Sails of the sea I never saw so large.*
- 49 *No feathers had they, but as of a bat*
50 *Their fashion was; and he was waving them,*
51 *So that three winds proceeded forth therefrom.*
- 52 *Thereby Cocytus wholly was congealed.*
53 *With six eyes did he weep, and down three chins*
54 *Trickled the tear-drops and the bloody drivel.*
- 55 *At every mouth he with his teeth was crunching*
56 *A sinner, in the manner of a brake,*
57 *So that he three of them tormented thus.*
- 58 *To him in front the biting was as naught*
59 *Unto the clawing, for sometimes the spine*
60 *Utterly stripped of all the skin remained.*
- 61 *That soul up there which has the greatest pain,*
62 *The Master said, is Judas Iscariot;*

- 63 *With head inside, he plies his legs without.*
- 64 *Of the two others, who head downward are,*
65 *The one who hangs from the black jowl is Brutus;*
66 *See how he writhes himself, and speaks no word.*
- 67 *And the other, who so stalwart seems, is Cassius.*
68 *But night is reascending, and 'tis time*
69 *That we depart, for we have seen the whole.*

Cast down from Heaven for rebelling against God, Lucifer (Satan, Dis, Beelzebub) is fixed for eternity with his upper body protruding into Hell, and his lower body held in the ice.

Dante and Virgil see Satan thus, waist deep in ice, weeping tears from his six eyes and beating his six wings as if trying to escape. However, the icy wind that his wings create only further makes his imprisonment, as well as that of the others in this region, sure.

(Picture Below - Satan Trapped at the Centre of Hell)



Each of Satan's three faces has a mouth that chews on a prominent traitor - Brutus feet-first in the left mouth, and Cassius feet-first in the right mouth. These men were involved in the assassination of Julius Caesar.

(Picture below - Satan Chewing on the Three Traitors)



In the centre and most voracious mouth is Judas Iscariot - the betrayer of Jesus Chris; and he is receiving the most horrifying torture of the three traitors - his head is gnawed by Satan's mouth, and his back is being forever skinned/flayed by Satan's claws.

The Escape

Dante and Virgil escape Hell by climbing down Satan's ragged fur, and then passing through the centre of the earth. Then, without stopping to rest, Dante and Virgil pursue a winding path toward the earth's surface, and just before dawn on Easter Sunday, they emerge again to a star studded sky.

(Picture Below - Dante and Virgil emerge to a star-studded sky)



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Recommended Reading

Himmelfarb, Martha. *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature*. Philadelphia: U. of Penn. Press, 1983.

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