

Dante's Inferno summary

Written in the early fourteenth century by Italian politician [Dante Alighieri](#), the *Divine Comedy* is a literary reaction to the bitterly contested politics of medieval [Florence](#). When Pope Boniface VIII schemed with the Blacks to seize power over Florence in a military coup, Dante was exiled. His hatred of the Pope can be seen throughout his *Divine Comedy*. The *Divine Comedy* is Dante's fictional account of himself traveling through the three divine realms: Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Not surprisingly, in this story Dante puts his enemies in Hell; the **Inferno** is heavily populated with corrupt Florentine politicians characterized as sinners. It is an epic poem (the length of your average book), written entirely in *terza rima*.

How It All Goes Down

The *Inferno* follows the wanderings of the poet Dante as he strays off the rightful and straight path of moral truth and gets lost in a dark wood. Just as three wild animals threaten to attack him, Dante is rescued by the ghost of Virgil, a celebrated Roman poet and also Dante's idol. When asked why in the hell (pun intended) he came, Virgil answers that the head honchos of Heaven – the Virgin Mary and Santa Lucia – felt sorry for Dante and asked the deceased love-of-Dante's-life, Beatrice, to send someone down to help him. And voila! Virgil to the rescue! He's an appropriate guide because he's very much like Dante, a fellow writer and famous poet.

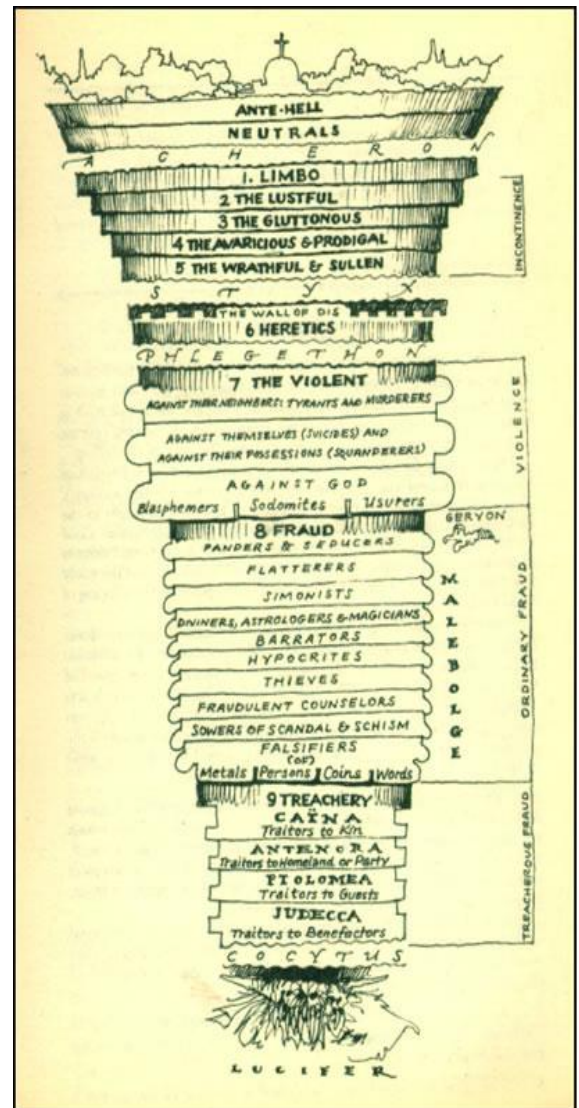
For the rest of the *Inferno*, Virgil takes Dante on a guided tour of Hell, through all its nine circles and back up into the air of the mortal world. The first circle of Hell (Limbo), considered pre-Hell, just contains all of the unbaptized and good people born and before the coming of Christ, who obviously couldn't be saved by him. Virgil resides here, along with a bunch of other Greek and Roman poets. In the second circle, lustful sinners are tossed around by endless storms.

Dante then awakes in the third circle, where the Gluttonous sinners suffer under a cold and filthy rain. Virgil leads Dante on to the fourth circle, where the Avaricious (greedy people) and Prodigal (reckless spenders) roll heavy weights in endless circles. The next stop on the tour is the fifth circle, where the Wrathful and Sullen are immersed in the muddy river Styx.

Now at the gates of a city called Dis, Virgil takes it upon himself to persuade the demon guards to let them pass. Unexpectedly, he fails. This means that instead of continuing on with the journey, Dante and Virgil must wait for an angel to come down and force open the gates for them. After passing the city of Dis, our dynamic duo enters the sixth circle, where the Heretics lay in fiery tombs.

As they cross from the sixth to the seventh circle, where the Violent are punished, Virgil finally begins explaining the layout of Hell. We soon learn that all human sins are divided into three big categories: incontinence (or lacking self-control), violence, and fraud. Everything Dante has witnessed so far has fallen under the first category. The seventh circle will show all the violent sinners. Then the final two circles will include all the sinners of ordinary fraud and treacherous fraud.

Finally, Dante and Virgil ready themselves to cross to the eighth circle. Dante, at Virgil's command, summons the beast Geryon from the depths with a cord wrapped around his waist. Virgil stays to talk with the beast while urging Dante to look at the last of the Violent sinners. When Dante comes back, they mount



Geryon and ride the beast during the descent into the eighth circle.

The eighth circle contains ten pouches, each containing different types of sinners. When Dante and Virgil reach the third pouch where Simonists (people who use money to get high positions in the Church) are buried headfirst in the ground while their feet roast in flames, Dante works up the courage to speak to one of the sinners. The soul of Pope Nicholas III mistakes Dante (understandably, because he can't see him) for his successor and Dante's hated enemy, Pope Boniface VIII, come to replace him in punishment.

As Dante and Virgil traverse the fifth pouch, in which Barrators (or corrupt politicians) are forked by demons and plunged into a river of boiling pitch, Virgil bravely approaches the ruthless demons and demands safe passage across the river. When the sinister demons see that he is sent by God, the head demon, Malacoda, tells Virgil that the nearest bridge has been broken and so assigns ten demons to escort him to the next bridge.

Afraid of the demons, Dante and Virgil escape by crossing into the sixth pouch, where the demons cannot follow. Here, they run into the Hypocrites who are forced to stand clothed in robes of lead. After talking to a few of them, Virgil asks for directions to the next pouch. In the valley of the sixth pouch, Thieves are continually bitten by serpents whose venom burns them into ashes.

Our heroes hurry into the eighth pouch, where Fraudulent Counselors are encased in flames.

In the ninth pouch, Dante witnesses the Sowers of Scandal and Schism being disemboweled by a demon with a sword, healed, and punished again – eternally. Dante is so freaked out by this sight that he has to cover his ears to avoid hearing the moans as they pass into the tenth and last pouch.

In the tenth pouch, four different kinds of falsifiers are punished. As they leave, Virgil points out the sinning giants who are immobilized around them in punishment. Nimrod – who was responsible for building the Tower of Babel – has lost the ability to speak coherently. His words are gibberish. Virgil requests that one of the unbound giants, Antaneus, transport them in the palm of his hand down to the last circle of Hell. He complies.

The ninth circle of Hell, where traitors are punished, contains four different zones. The first one, called Caina (after Cain), features traitors to their kin immersed in ice up to their necks. In the second zone, Antenora, traitors to their homeland suffer the same punishment. He moves on to the third zone called Ptolomea, where traitors against their guests suffer, immobilized in ice and their tears frozen against their eyes. Dante promises to break the ice off of the eyes of one of them if he tells him his story.

In the fourth the final zone, Judecca, where traitors against their benefactors are punished, Dante witnesses the king of Hell, the three-headed Lucifer, giant and frozen at the core. In his three mouths, Lucifer mechanically chews on the most evil mortal sinners – Judas, Brutus, and Cassius.

Now that they've finished their tour, Virgil tells Dante that it's time to leave Hell for good. With Dante clinging to Virgil's back, the two climb down Lucifer's massive body, which spans the diameter of the entire Earth, and arrive in the southern hemisphere. Here, Virgil and Dante follow a path back up to the surface of the Earth and emerge to see Heaven's stars.