

Dante's Inferno: Upper Hell

With the exception of the Vestibule and Limbo, upper hell is reserved for sins of incontinence--i.e., fleshly sins that originate from unbalanced passions, emotions, and desires. They are few demons here, though Minos does assign sinners to their place in hell when they come to the Vestibule. Most of these sins harmed nobody other than the sinner himself or herself.

REGION	SINNERS	PUNISHMENT
Vestibule: (Waiting area)	Neutrals , indecisive angels who would not fight for God or Lucifer.	Stung by insects, endlessly chase banners
Circle I: Limbo	Virtuous Pagans, Unbaptized Infants	Boredom, not knowing God.
Circle II	The Lustful	Blown forever by storm winds
Circle III	The Gluttons	Discomfort, lying in filth and muck like pigs, senses assaulted
Circle IV	The Greedy and the Spendthrifts	Pushing rocks, useless labor that frustrates others near them for no good end
Circle V	The Angry and the Sullen	The angry thrash about in frustration and fight each other; the sullen sulk under water sighing, blowing bubbles, and refusing all action.

Lower Hell: The City of Dis

Lower Hell is the City of *Dis*. In Dante's scheme, *Dis* is mostly reserved for intellectual sins rather than mere sins of passion. Demons throng here. The suburbs include heretics and violent criminals, and the central rings various frauds.

REGION	SINNERS	PUNISHMENT
Circle VI	Heretics	Trapped in burning tombs
Circle VII: Divided into three rings.	The Violent	(Three types of punishment)
<i>Round 1</i> : Violent against acquaintances and strangers.		Killers submerged in blood--the more people they have killed, the deeper the blood.
<i>Round 2</i> : Violent against self (suicides)		The souls trapped in inanimate objects like trees, and their old discarded bodies left impaled nearby.
<i>Round 3</i> : Violent against nature (blasphemers, sodomites, usurers)		Left naked on burning sand with fire raining down from unnatural clouds
Circle VIII: Divided into ten ditches (<i>bolgia</i> in Italian).	Fraud against those who share no special trust	(Ten types of punishment)
Ditch 1	Pimps and seductresses	Whipped by devils
Ditch 2	Flatterers	Covered with excrement
Ditch 3	Simonists (Church officials who engage in bribery or buy church offices)	Flipped upside down in holes and their feet set on fire.
Ditch 4	Barraters (Government officials, lawyers, and judges who take bribes)	Covered in boiling pitch, poked with pitchforks by demons.
Ditch 5	Soothsayers (False prophets, astrologers, soothsayers, and predictors of the future)	Heads twisted around backward so they can only see what's behind them, not what's in front of them.
Ditch 6	Hypocrites	Forced to wear lead mantles
Ditch 7	Thieves and Robbers	In snake pit, half of them transformed into snakes. Can only regain human form by stealing it from the other half with a snakebite.
Ditch 8	Evil counselors	True nature concealed in flames
Ditch 9	Sowers of Discord, Troublemakers	Wounds, mutilations
Ditch 10	Falsifiers (alchemists, quacks, impersonators, counterfeiters, liars)	Afflicted with same ailments resulting from their treatments (leprosy, madness, dropsy, fevers)

Circle Nine: The Center of Hell

Circle Nine is divided into four areas named after famous traitors who betrayed their family, their country, their dependents, or their proper lords and benefactors. Rather than being hot, this area is freezing cold. Many of the demons here are giant-sized beings, and Satan's batwings endlessly stir up chilling winds to renew the chill.

REGION	SINNERS	PUNISHMENT
Caïna (named after Cain)	Murderers of family-members	Frozen in ice up to the neck with heads bent forward.
Antenora	Traitors to political party or to country	Frozen in ice up to the neck.
Ptolomea (named after Maccabean general who slew ambassadors)	Murderers of guests and dependents	Frozen in ice up to the neck with heads bent backward.
Guidecca	Traitors to lords and benefactors.	Completely submerged in ice.
Center of Earth	Satan, Judas, Brutus, and Cassius	Satan is stuck up to the waist in the center of the universe he sought to control. He chews on Judas, Brutus, and Cassius with his three mouths, and with three wings sends forth freezing blasts of impotence, ignorance, and hatred.

Questions: Why do you suppose Dante puts usury (charging interest) in the category of "crimes that violate nature"? Why does Dante consider *sodomy* to be a separate sin from *lust*? Why do you suppose the subdivisions for intellectual sins are so much more complex than the sins in upper hell? Why make the ninth circle cold when the earlier violent rings were hot? Why do you suppose Dante depicts Satan with three heads? How does the number three play a pertinent part in the structure of Dante's poem and his depiction of hell?

Note the terza rima structure in the sample Italian lines from the opening tercets of Canto I:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
 mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
 chè la diritta via era smarrita.

Ah quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
 esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte
 che nel pensier rinnova la paura!

Tant'è amara che poco è più morte;
 ma per trattar del ben ch'io vi trovai,
 dirò dell'altre cose ch' i' v'ho scorte.

Io non so ben ridir com'io v'entrai,
 tant'era pieno di sonno a quel punto
 che la verace via abbandonai.

Ma poi ch'i' fui al piè d'un colle giunto
 là dove terminava quella valle
 che m'avea dip'aura il cor compunto,

guardai in alto, e vidi le sue spalle
 vestite già de' raggi del pianeta
 che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle.

Note: This handout is based closely on materials written by H. R. Huse in his introduction to *The Inferno, Literature of the Western World: The Ancient World Through the Renaissance*. Ed. Brian Wilkie and James Hurt. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. New York: Macmillan Pub., 1988. 1349-52. 2 Vols.