

# The journey through nine circles of hell



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The Inferno is the first part of Dante's epic poem, *Divine Comedy*, of the 14th century. The poet (Dante) starts a spiritual journey where he is guided by the soul of the Roman poet Virgil. Dante takes the journey through nine circles of hell where he observes the punishments that the sinners who had passed on earlier are going through.

In the first canto, Dante is lost in the dark woods and lost both his literal and spiritual sense, which makes him descend to Limbo. This is where Dante meets Virgil, his poetic idol. They both get into hell where they explore the nine circles and come across the historical, biblical, as well as mythological characters, the ones suffering and those offering the punishments. At the ninth circle, Dante meets Lucifer and raises his hefty body to make a return to earth. Dante's element of his journey makes exploration of the descent of a man into sin as he uses poetic justice, mythical and historical figures. He crafts the work to focus on the nature of sin and the nature of sin in society. This paper critically analyses the cantos, themes, key figures in the *Inferno* of Dante.

*Inferno* is a representation of a microcosm of society. Every sort of individuals, including lovers, politicians, non-specialists, clergy, and scholars, among others, are all brought together for punishment and most human attributes. In spite of the blemished nature of hell, it is civilized by the fact that the people punished are diverse as they come from every region irrespective of their beliefs, gender, race or age (Dante 3. 123). Although Dante did not come up with the idea of hell to be a place where sinful souls are punished after they die, he created the concept of imagination that has acquired notable attention in different works of the medieval, classical and

even biblical eras. The Divine Comedy has been perceived to be among the supreme works of the Italian literature since its writing in the 14th century.

Poetic justice has also been explored extensively in Dante's *Inferno* and has been effected through drama, conceiving necessary punishments for every sin committed by every person. From the non-existence to betrayal, Dante documents the sinners' punishments- the popular and the unknown, beloved and infamous. Every punishment given to the sinners fits the kinds of penalty they are given. The poem discusses Satan's domain, as well as the Christian incarnation of evil. There are nine circles in the *inferno*, including gluttony, limbo, treachery, wrath and sullenness, fraud, violence, violence, lust and avarice, and prodigality based on the deadliest sins in society.

At the beginning of the poem, Dante is lost in the woods and unable to escape the three beasts, a lion, leopard, and a she-wolf, surrounding him (Dante 1. 18). He cannot manage to walk straight through the mountain, which represents the road to salvation. The lion represents pride; the leopard represents envy as the she-wolf is a representation of greed. The blockage by these three beasts forces Dante to descend to hell. This journey as a whole is an analogy of an individual's fall into sin (*inferno*), then receives redemption (portrayed through *Purgatorio*), and finally, gets saved (portrayed in *Paradiso*).

Dante passes through the gateway to hell and sees the words that suggest something bad is awaiting him inside. The writing at the gateway says Abandon every hope, who enter here (3. 9). The two (Dante and Virgil) witness a variety of people who lived miserable lives with disgrace and no

praise on the fringe of inferno (3. 17-34). In this domain, Dante and Virgil come across the souls of the miserable people who cowardly live a life of disgrace and were thrown away from heaven and had been refused entry by hell. The sinful souls are given no option, but to race after the unstopping banner where they are constantly stung by wasps and flies as their tears and blood nourish the worms at their foot (3. 69). These sinful and coward souls suffer a limpid punishment for their failure to make proper decisions, which has made them end cast out of both the eternal paradise and damnation and all they have got is to run after the unstopping banner as they endure suffering continuously.

Another significant character in the poem is Charon, hell's boatman. Charon is an irritable old man given the responsibility of piloting the boat that moves the shadows of the deceased to the underworld through the waters (3. 83). Charon's irritability can be seen as he takes someone who is still alive (Dante) to the land of the dead. The guide of the leading character (Virgil) gives the boatman the appropriate credentials and the transportation is made as planned.

There is a place set aside for the ignorant, Limbo. People are punished for their ignorance and are forced into spending their lives in a place that seems no to be much of hell, but still not heaven. The noble-Christian souls, as well as those who spent their life before Christianity, receive their punishment in limbo. This is the idea of a place for the souls that did not get baptized as much as they did not sin (4. 34), which is a show of ignorance. Dante incorporates the babies who never got baptized and the remarkable non-Christian adults in the version of limbo, bearing a similarity to the Asphodel

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Meadows where common souls were taken to live after their death. Even though these souls are not left to languish in hell, the Limbo is not as a good place as paradise, and that makes it the appropriate place for the ignorant according to Dante.

Classical poets such as Homer, Lucan, Horace, and Ovid are also encountered by Dante in Limbo. The classical poets welcome their comrade (Virgil) back and honor Dante as their colleague as well (4. 79-101). Other significant characters who make an appearance in the Limbo include Aristotle and Socrates, the well-known figures for their scholarly successes in their time. Socrates is renowned for his thoughtful and diligent questioning of the works of Plato, who also makes his appearance. Moreover, one outstanding non-Christian soul, Saladin, also finds himself in the Limbo. This is an eminent leader of the military and Egyptian sultan who got a lot of admiration even from the enemies for his nobility. According to Dante, all non-Christians irrespective of whether or not they were exemplary in their lifetime had to get to the Limbo.

In the second circle, the lustful receive their punishment through the blowing of the hurricane. The hurricane blows them constantly with no rests, wheels, and pounds (5. 31-33). Through lust, many found themselves in the sin of adultery, which made characters such as Cleopatra, Dido, and Troy, among others who suffer a violent death. Lust has been symbolized by the strong and violent winds, which also represents the strength it contains in the affairs related to blind passions. Several famous lovers such as Paris, Dido, Tristan and Semiramis are contained by lust. The Assyrian powerful queen, Semiramis, is allegedly reported to have been a very awkward individual who

went to the extent of making incest legal in her territory. Dido, on the other hand, was the queen of Carthage who killed herself after her lover abandoned her. Paris perished in the Trojan War.

The Inferno by Dante is an indication of a revolution in the theology of Christians as it uses poetic justice to deal with the wrongdoers, historical figures, as well as classical mythology. Through a combination of these aspects in a single poem, Dante gives the people of the western world a new perception on the imagination of the afterlife and what the hell entails. He successfully reveals the vision of hell through his focus on scenes and the specific identities of the characters he managed to make an encounter with while there. Throughout the centuries since the writing of the poem, there have been several reviews ranging from passion to repulsive responses depending on the notion that the poem instills on the readers. However, the most agreed response on this supreme work of the Italian literature will remain to be half-hearted.