

# Dante's inferno: the ninth circle



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Dante's Inferno: The Ninth Circle The book *Inferno*, by Dante Alighien, was written in the 14th century. Dante Alighien was born in Florence, Italy around 1265. He is considered to be " the Supreme Poet" of the Italian language and his works the *Commedia* are the single greatest literary works composed. The *Commedia* is split up into three different sections: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*. The *Inferno* is Dante's account of traveling through hell. He separates hell into nine different levels, each one worse than the one before. Each realm is called a " circle". On his journey through hell, he is guided by an angel, Virgil. Virgil is sent to guide Dante by his love in life, who is not his wife, Beatrice. Beatrice awaits Dante in Heaven. In Dante's, *Inferno* he places people that commit acts of treachery in the deepest circle of hell because of his own personal experiences. The ninth circle of hell consists of traitors. Dante considers these to be among the worst people in hell. That is why he has placed them in the bottom realm. Here there are people who have betrayed their loved ones, families, political parties, countries, and benefactors. There are four sections in the ninth circle. They are the *Caina*, *Antenora*, *Ptolomea*, and *Judecca*. Dante places people in certain circles and sections of those circles depending on their acts in life. In order to get from the 8th to the 9th circle of hell Dante must pass by the giants. The first giant is Nimrod. He has a biblical background which goes back to Genesis and the city of Babylon. This city was very corrupt and eventually tried to build a tower that would reach up to heaven. God was displeased with this and destroyed the tower and scattered all the people about Earth and tore apart their language so they were unable to understand each other. Hence the reason that Nimrod speaks gibberish that Dante cannot understand. The second giant is Ephialtes who comes from the time of the Greek gods. Him

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and his twin brother Otus attempted to siege Mount Olympus but failed. Now they remained chained in Dante's hell forever. The third giant is Antaeus. He was born after the battle against the gods on mount Olympus and is able to take Virgil and Dante down to the ninth circle. The 9th circle of hell in all is a giant ice lake that is clear as glass. It is freezing cold and Dante later learns why it is so cold. The horror Dante experiences in this circle are, in his words, "indescribable, but he will do his best" (Hollander 1). The first section of the ninth circle is called Caina. It is named Caina after the biblical reference to Cain who slaughtered his brother Abel. This section of the ninth circle is reserved for those who were traitors to their family. In this realm he first comes across Alessandro and Napoleone, two brothers that fought over their father's lands. Dante says, "One womb bore them both, and you can search all Caina and you shall not find a shade more worthy to be riveted in ice" (Severino 58-60). These two brothers fought constantly and eventually killed each other over their fathers land. Because of the treachery these two were sent to the first section for their punishment. They were forced to be frozen in ice up to their necks facing each other constantly butting heads. The second section is called Antenora. In this realm, Dante places people that have betrayed their country and political parties. This section is more personal to Dante because he played a major role in politics in Florence and also because of his exile. Upon entering Antenora, Dante kicks a person whose head is sticking out of the ice on accident. He begins to apologize but then realizes that he recognizes the man and does not feel any remorse for kicking the man whose name is Bocca degli Abati. According to the University of Texas Dantesworld, Dante recognizes the man and begins "tearing out chunks of his hair" (Dante). Bocca belonged to a rival family and

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political party, the ghibeline, of Dante, the guelfs. In 1258, Bocca pretended to fight for the side of the guelfs and betrayed the guelfs in a decisive moment of the battle and caused the guelfs to lose the key battle. Throughout his life, Dante was a strong advocate and leader in his political party. He was actually a "political leader of Florence at one point" (Dante). I believe that Dante put these betrayers of country so deep in hell because he felt a strong affection for his own country and the fact that they betrayed their own appalled Dante. Another site that Dante sees in Antenora is one of the most gruesome sites one could imagine. He sees one man, Ugolino, eating the back of another man's head, Ruggieri, like a dog. Count Ugolino was placed there by Dante because during his time on Earth he committed countless acts of treason against his country. The Antenora is the section of hell that Dante places people he despises the most. This is a reoccurring position that Dante is extremely against because of his political background. The third section is called Ptolomea. Ptolomea is for those who have betrayed their guests. The people in Ptolomea are forced to lie on their backs with their whole body frozen in ice except their face forever. The interesting part about Ptolomea is the fact that these people were not able to finish their lives but were sent straight down when they committed their acts while their bodies were possessed by demons on Earth. The first person Dante encounters is a man named Fra Alberigo. He was the leader of the Faenza family and one of his family relatives, Manfred, plotted against him and when they encountered each other about the situation Manfred struck Alberigo. Later Alberigo invited Manfred, believing all was well, to a dinner at his place where at the end he signaled and the troops came in and slaughtered Manfred and his family. This act sent Alberigo directly to his icy resting place

in the Ptolomea. An underlying reason Dante has placed these people here is because of their betrayal to faith. The fourth section is called Judecca. In this section of hell Lucifer resides. Lucifer is depicted as a giant three headed beast with large wings that keep the lake on the ninth circle of hell frozen. In each of his mouths are men that Dante considers the worst betrayers of all time. The first is Judas, the apostle that betrayed Jesus, who is being eaten head first. In the other two heads there are Brutus and Cassius, who murdered Julius Caesar. These three are eternally damned to be gnawed on by Lucifer for all of eternity. The symbolism of the people that Dante chose is the people that betrayed his faith and politics. These are the two things that Dante values most in life. In Dante's time period around the 1300's faith was one of the most important and significant factors in society. Also, in his time period politics and faith went hand in hand and that is why he placed these three figures here. Throughout Dante's Inferno in the ninth circle he shows how much he despises betrayal. In every section of the ninth circle there are different forms of betrayal. In the first, Caina, he places the betrayers of family. In the second circle, Antenora, he places the betrayers of country and political parties. In the third circle, Ptolomea, he places those who betrayed their guests. In the fourth circle, Judecca, he places Lucifer and three of the most notorious betrayers according to Dante. Although he places betrayers of country and political party in the second realm, they receive the most gruesome and grueling punishments of all because Dante is deeply against people that betray their country. This pertains to Dante's life because he as a leader of Florence was eventually exiled because of betrayal by people of his own political party. This is why Dante's Inferno Dante places people that

commit acts of treachery in the deepest circle of hell because of his own personal experiences.