

***Inferno*, Cantos XII-XXIII**

***Canto 12**

path to "Middle Ground" of Hell (out of realms of incontinence, into realms of violence and fraud; guardian: Minotaur)

Circle 7, first ring (violence; guardian: Centaurs; contrapasso: having shed blood in life, those who committed violence toward others are now immersed in blood; the depth depends on their level of violence)

***Canto 13**

Circle 7, second ring (violence against self (suicides) and possessions (squanderers); guardian: harpies; contrapasso: those who destroyed their body are denied a human form: the soul becomes encased in a tree; those who needlessly scattered their possessions are now torn apart and scattered themselves by a pack of wild dogs)

Canto 14

Circle 7, third ring (a) (violence against God (blasphemers); contrapasso: recalls the fire rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah, which, according to fourteenth-century interpretations were destroyed for having rejected the laws of God and Nature)

Old Man of Crete: symbolic of human history and decadence. The figure is taken from the Bible and adopted by Dante. The various metals signify the decadence of humanity from the Golden Age down to the present. The iron foot symbolizes the Empire, and the clay foot the Papacy.

Cantos 15–16

Circle 7, third ring (b) (violence against Nature (sodomites))

Brunetto Latini (ca. 1220–1294), a famous Florentine writer, became famous as a teacher in Florence and was Dante's own tutor

Canto 17

Circle 7, third ring (c) (usury; guardian: Geryon) and descent to Circle 8

Geryon is the symbol of Fraud. Fraud, or deceit, "is man's peculiar vice" and is practiced by a man against another (1) who has no trust in him, or (2) who trusts in him, as Dante explained earlier in Canto XI. Fraud, then will be punished, respectively, in the last two circles of Hell.

Canto 18

Circle 8, *bolgia* 1 (panderers and seducers; contrapasso: the weakest in the entire text, both are marched in opposing circles while being whipped from behind by demons, perhaps as punishment for forcing others to sin against their will)

the eighth circle features 10 concentric ditches (*malebolge*, "evil pouches"), each of which slopes downward and is smaller than the one before it

Circle 8, *bolgia* 2 (flatterers; contrapasso: immersed in human excrement, the true equivalent of their flattery on earth)

***Canto 19**

Circle 8, *bolgia* 3 (simoniacs (buyers and sellers of church offices); contrapasso: as by anointment on their heads the Popes have received the flame of the Holy Spirit, so now their feet are painfully ablaze; and, as they fraudulently pocketed money, so now they are "pocketed" in holes)

Dante ingeniously contrives to get all three Popes here by having Nicholas (1277–1280) predict the punishment of both Boniface VIII (1294–1303) and Clement V (1305–1314)

Canto 20

Circle 8, *bolgia* 4 (diviners and soothsayers; contrapasso: those who have tried to look too far forward into the future, now have their heads turned backwards)

Cantos 21–22

Circle 8, *bolgia* 5 (barrators (buyers and sellers of political offices) and blackmailers; contrapasso: immersed in sticky pitch, which may symbolize their "sticky fingers")

***Canto 23**

Circle 8, *bolgia* 6 (hypocrites; contrapasso: forced to wear heavy lead robes as they walk around the circumference of their circle; the robes are golden and resemble a monk's cowl but are lined with heavy lead, symbolically representing hypocrisy)

So...

The sinners in Hell never take responsibility for their own sins (and, by extension, never repent). Are these *contrapassi* punishments, or are the sinners just continuing to do to their souls what they did in life?