

***Inferno*, Cantos XXIV-XXXIV**

**Cantos 24–25**

Circle 8, *bolgia* 7 (thieves; *contrapasso*: in life they took the substance of others and acted deceitfully, now their bodies are constantly changed from human into snakes)

**Cantos 26–27**

Circle 8, *bolgia* 8 (evil counselors; *contrapasso*: having led others to ruin through their deceitful words in life, they are now trapped in “tongues” of flame)

Ulysses – Dante borrows from classical epic style to have Virgil (author of the epic *Aeneid*) speak to Homer's hero, Ulysses (Odysseus), who tells the story of tricking his shipmates into one last expedition past the limits of the sea, promising them knowledge forbidden to mortals, but leading them instead to shipwreck and death

Guido da Montefeltro (1220–1298), fought and won several battles against the Guelfs (Dante's party), and in 1296 he became a Franciscan monk who counseled Pope Boniface VIII how best to trick his enemies, the Colonna family. Boniface absolved him of his sin “in advance.” When Guido died, Saint Francis tried to collect his soul, but a devil argued that you cannot be absolved from a sin first and then commit it later; “the law of contradiction won't allow it.”

**\*Canto 28**

Circle 8, *bolgia* 9 (sowers of discord, schismatics; *contrapasso*: they caused division in life, so now their bodies are cut and torn apart)

divided into three sections: sowers of religious, political, and family discord

Dante (like most medieval Europeans) perceives Islam as a kind of Christian heresy, so Muhammad (570-632) is located with the schismatics and other founders of heretical movements, like Fra Dolcino, leader of the fourteenth-century heretical Apostolic Brothers.

Bertran de Born, twelfth-century nobleman and poet, caused Prince Henry to rebel against his father Henry II of England, dividing the “head” of the family from its “members”; he explains, “Thus the *contrapasso* is observed in me.”

**Cantos 29–31**

Circle 8, *bolgia* 10 (the falsifiers; *contrapasso*: having falsified nature in life, they are now afflicted with disease)

four classifications, each suffering from its own disease: falsifiers of things, leprosy; falsifiers of persons, madness; falsifiers of money, dropsy; falsifiers of words, from “stinking fever” (malaria)

The two poets approach the central pit of the Inferno, which is guarded by giants and titans. The giant Antaeus places them in Circle 9, Cocytus.

### **Cantos 32–34**

Circle 9, Cocytus (treachery; *contrapasso*: the sinners here are immobilized in ice, left with no agency, only memory and sorrowful tears, which freeze and further trap them)

Cocytus, the frozen center of the Inferno is divided into four zones: (1) Caina (named after Cain; treachery against a relative); (2) Antenora (named after Antenor, a Trojan who betrayed his city to the Greeks; traitors to country or political party); (3) Ptolomea (named after the Ptolomy, governor of Jericho, who murders his guests at a banquet; treachery to friends and guests); (4) Judecca (named after Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Christ; reserved for the worst traitors in history)

Count Ugolino—in 1288 Ruggieri degli Ubaldini, Archbishop of Pisa, led a popular revolt against Ugolino's party. Ugolino was promised safe conduct if he returned to Pisa, but he was caught and imprisoned with two sons and two nephews of his. In 1289 the Archbishop ordered the tower locked up and the keys thrown away. After the children had died of starvation, Ugolino, blind and near madness, tells Dante that “fasting had more force than grief.” Ugolino now gnaws Ruggieri's head while both are trapped in the ice.

At the center of the lake of Cocytus lies Lucifer, almost completely immobilized in the ice. Silent and weeping, his three faces eternally chew on Brutus, Cassius, and Judas, the worst traitors in human history.

Dante and Virgil crawl down Lucifer's body, where they emerge through the other side of the earth onto the shores of Purgatory, saying “we then emerged to view again the stars.” (“Stars” (*stelle*) is the last word of each of the three canticas.)

### **So...**

This image of Lucifer is one of the more vivid images in Western literature. What do you notice about it? What's the significance of Lucifer weeping and encasing himself in the ice?

Why do you think Dante ends each of his canticas (*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*) with “the stars”?