

Study Guide for Cantos 8-17 of *Inferno*

What is the symbolic retribution of the following sinners?

1. The Wrathful and the Sullen: Wrath and sullenness are two forms of the same sin, with wrath, the anger is expressed and with sullenness it is repressed. They are thus both in the swamp of the Styx, but they take their anger out on each other, as other sinners rip Filippo Argenti apart. The sullen repress their anger and are thus “[f]ixed in slime” in the swamp, speaking only to themselves—their words bubble up, but are unintelligible to others (8.119-126).
2. The Heretics: To Dante the Poet, Hell deals with wrong beliefs as well as wrong action. To Dante, the Heretics skeptics denied immortality, thinking that the soul dies with the body. They come from a variety of cults, from before and after the birth of Christ. Their punishment, which fits their sin, is to be entombed in a red-hot sepulcher crowded with similar sinners and ringed with fire. The lids of the tombs are off, but when the Day of Judgment comes, the tombs will be sealed eternally. As they denied immortality, they will have none.

Identify the following:

3. Phlegyas: At the signal (distant “horns of flame”), the mad and fiendish boatman of Styx races across the marsh, fast as an arrow. Phlegyas howls with rage at the poets, but reluctantly gives them passage. Ciardi notes that he was the mythological King of Boeotia, the son of Ares, who became angry at Apollo for seducing Phlegyas’ daughter and burned Apollo’s temple at Delphi. Apollo killed Phlegyas, and sent him to Hades for eternal torment. He is a symbolic link between the Wrathful and the Rebellious Angels.
4. Filippo Argenti: One of the Wrathful, covered in filth from the dead swamp. Dante disdain and berates him. Other sinners rip him to pieces. Argenti, a Black Guelf, was Dante’s political enemy. Dante the Pilgrim’s contempt of Filippo Argenti is a more appropriate response than was his sympathy with Francesca da Rimini.
5. Dis: The Capital of Hell. Iron city: all of the rest of Hell lies within its walls, so the walls of Dis separate Upper and Lower Hell. Its buildings are iron mosques glowing red with the fires of Hell, for which they are vents.
6. Rebellious Angels: More than a thousand of these spirits guard the great Iron Gate of Dis. Rebels against God, they angrily refuse passage to the Poets, because Human Reason cannot overcome evil without divine aid. They were once beautiful but are now demonic monsters. Note how Dante the Pilgrim has “lost hope of returning to the world” when they threaten him (8.93).
7. Heavenly Messenger: In answer to Virgil’s prayer for assistance, comes down to open the Iron Gates of Dis for the poets. Associated with images of Christ (walks on

water and opens the gates of Hell) and Hermes (the wand like the caduceus and the swiftness of Hermes' winged feet). "He is one who needs no guide,/ and at his touch all gates must spring aside" (8.127-8). The ease with which he answers Virgil's request illustrates the inviolable power of God.

8. Medusa: A Gorgon who is so ugly she can turn men to stone any man who looks at her.
9. Three Infernal Furies (Erinyes), Megaera, Alecto and Tisiphone: Around their waists wind belts of green hydras, and snakes grow from their heads instead of hair. They represent human guilt and remorse.
10. Farinata degli Uberti: A proud Tuscan Ghibelline military leader whom respects because Farinata refused to destroy Florence when the Ghibellines controlled it. He taunts Dante, suggesting that the Aligheris are not as distinguished a family as the Ubertis. His prophecy predicts Dante's exile from Florence.
11. Cavalcante dei Calacanti: Cavalcante's son Guido, still alive in 1300, was Dante's friend and a well-known poet. He baits Dante with his assumption that Guido is a better poet than Dante, and he misunderstands Dante, thinking that Guido Cavalcanti has died.
12. Guido Cavalcanti: Dante's best friend, who was a White Guelf and married the daughter of Farinata degli Uberti..
13. Epicurus: A Greek philosopher whose teachings emphasize happiness in life and deny supernatural forces. Cassius in *Julius Caesar* was an epicurean.
14. Hecate: a goddess of the moon, earth, and underground realm of the dead, later regarded as the goddess of sorcery and witchcraft.
15. Cardinal Ubaldini: Ottaviano degli Ubaldini (1209-1273) a cardinal in Dante's time, whose involvement in money and politics replaced his religious concerns. Placed in the Heretics because of his comment "...if I have a soul, I have lost it in the cause of the Ghibellines..." which Dante saw as heresy.
16. Minotaur: a monster with the body of a man and the head of a bull (in some versions, with the body of a bull and the head of a man), confined by Minos in a labyrinth built by Daedalus, and annually fed seven youths and seven maidens from Athens, until killed by Theseus.
17. Chiron: the wisest of all Centaurs, famous for his knowledge of medicine; he is the teacher of Aesclepius, Achilles, and Hercules.
18. Nessus: Centaur who tried to abduct Hercules' wife Dejanira and was killed for doing so, but dying, tricked Dejanira into thinking his bloodstained cloak was a love charm.

She later used it to restart Hercules' love when he took a mistress, but it killed him. See note 67 on page 99.

19. Atilla: king of the Huns and called "Scourge of God" because of his cruelty.
20. Alexander the Great: 356-323 b.c.; king of Macedonia (336-323); military conqueror who helped spread Greek culture from Asia Minor and Egypt to India.
21. Phlegethon: River of boiling blood, site of the punishment for the Violent against Others.
22. Pier delle Vigne: 1190-1249. Famous minister of Emperor Frederick II. Once powerful, he lost Frederick's confidence when others accused him of treachery. Imprisoned and blinded, he committed suicide to escape further torture. He was known for his eloquence in poetry and speech.
23. Capaneus: Blasphemer. One of the seven captains in the war against Thebes' seven gates. Scaling the walls of the city, Capaneus defied Zeus (Jove to the Italians) to stop him. Jove killed him with a thunderbolt.
24. Two Florentines: Lano and Jacopo da Santo Andrew: Squanderers who destroyed their property as part of a fad for burning their own (and their neighbors) property.
25. Old Man of Crete: a figure describe in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the book of Daniel:ii, 32-34. It represents the ages of man, deteriorating from a Golden Age of Innocence. His head is gold, his breast silver, his arms and torso brass. His legs are iron, except for the right foot, which is terra cotta. The whole body is split, from which endless tear drip to form the rivers of Hell, the Acheron, Phlegethon and Styx. See Canto 14, lines 97-110 (p. 114). The terra cotta foot represents the Roman Catholic Church, suggesting that it is weaker than the metals of the rest of the figure.
26. Brunetto Latini: 1210?-1294, a Florentine Guelph whom Dante admired for his prose, poetry and oratory. He is placed with the Sodomites, but as no historical evidence suggests that he was homosexual, the placement may reflect the difference between Dante's early respect for Latini's writing and Dante's later concern that Latini's ideas were sterile, less likely to engender productive ideas.
27. Guido Guerra; Canto 16, the Sodomites: Guido was a respected military leader of the Guelphs; the last name means "war."
28. Tegghiaio Aldombrandino: a knight and a Guelph noble who advised the Guelphs not to move against the Sienese in the disastrous Battle of Monteperti, good advice which the Guelphs failed to consider. Also in the Sodomites.
29. Jacopo Rusticucci: respected Florentine knight. Also in the Sodomites.

30. Giovanni di Buiamonte

31. Geryon;. In myth, he was a King of Spain, represented as a giant with 3 heads and 3 bodies, killed by Hercules. Dante represents him as the monster of fraud, with the general shape of a dragon, the tail of a scorpion, hairy arms, a gaudy reptilian body, but the face of fair and honest man. His body is spotted like a leopard, his paws are hairy like those of a lion, and his face represents the deceptive nature of fraud. The poets ride on his back to get to the next circle, but Virgil ride behind Dante to protect him from Geryon's poisonous barbed tail.

There is a great cliff between Circle 7 and Circle 8, with a waterfall flowing into the abyss. Virgil tells Dante to remove a cord from his waist, which Virgil drops over the edge of the cliff to summon Geryon.