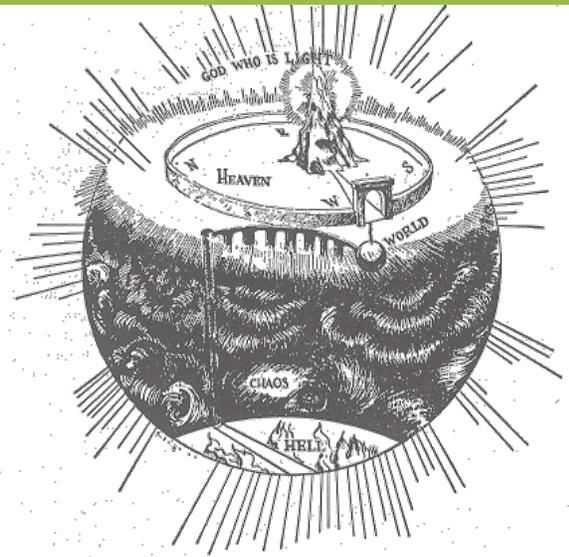


## Milton's Paradise lost summary

### How It All Goes Down

A really, really long epic poem with *hundreds* of Biblical allusions, *Paradise Lost* opens with Satan on the surface of a boiling lake of lava in Hell (ouch!). He has just fallen from Heaven, and wakes up to find himself in a seriously horrible place. He finds his first lieutenant, Beelzebub (his right-hand man), and together they get off the lava lake and go to a nearby plain, where they rally the fallen angels. They have a meeting and decide to destroy Adam and Eve (God's children and precious science experiment) in order to spite God. Satan volunteers for the job and leaves Hell to go look for Adam and Eve.



The scene then shifts to Heaven (Book 3), where God talks about how he can see what Satan is planning. He knows everything all the time. He has a conversation with His Son, says he knows that Satan will tempt mankind and that Adam and Eve will eat the fruit of the Forbidden Tree. He needs to know if anyone will intervene on man's behalf. The Son volunteers, which makes God and all the angels in Heaven very happy.



Poet William Blake did a series of illustrations for the 12 Books of *Paradise Lost*

The scene shifts again, this time to Eden. Satan has reached the Garden, and we see Eden and Adam and Eve for the first time through his eyes. We watch Adam and Eve hang out together for a while, before going into their hut to go to bed and make love. Meanwhile, God has sent out a search party to get Satan out of the Garden, which is easy as pie. The next day, God sends the angel Raphael to talk to Adam and Eve about Satan and whatever else they might want to know. About a week after Adam's chat with Raphael, Satan returns to the Garden, disguises himself as a serpent (snake), and convinces Eve to eat the Forbidden Fruit. She in turn convinces Adam to have a taste. After that, they have steamy, lustful sex for the first time.

As a result of Adam and Eve's sin (eating the Forbidden Fruit), the gates of Hell are now wide open for Sin and Death (who are actual characters in this poem) to build a bridge from Hell to earth. Satan returns to Hell triumphant, but he and his angels are eventually turned into serpents as punishment for Satan's evil deed.

As for Adam and Eve's punishment, God makes them leave the Garden of Eden. He also introduces death, labor pains, and a bunch of other not-so-fun stuff into the world. Before they leave Paradise, however, God sends the angel Michael down to give Adam a vision of the future. After his history lesson, Adam and Eve leave the Garden of Eden in what is one of the saddest moments in English literature.

## Dante's Inferno summary

Written in the early fourteenth century by Italian politician Dante Alighieri, the *Divine Comedy* is a literary reaction to the bitterly contested politics of medieval Florence. When Pope Boniface VIII schemed with the Blacks to seize power over Florence in a military coup, Dante was exiled. His hatred of the Pope can be seen throughout his *Divine Comedy*. The *Divine Comedy* is Dante's fictional account of himself traveling through the three divine realms: Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Not surprisingly, in this story Dante puts his enemies in Hell; the *Inferno* is heavily populated with corrupt Florentine politicians characterized as sinners. It is an epic poem (the length of your average book), written entirely in *terza rima*.

## How It All Goes Down

The *Inferno* follows the wanderings of the poet Dante as he strays off the rightful and straight path of moral truth and gets lost in a dark wood. Just as three wild animals threaten to attack him, Dante is rescued by the ghost of Virgil, a celebrated Roman poet and also Dante's idol. When asked why in the hell (pun intended) he came, Virgil answers that the head honchos of Heaven – the Virgin Mary and Santa Lucia – felt sorry for Dante and asked the deceased love-of-Dante's-life, Beatrice, to send someone down to help him. And voila! Virgil to the rescue! He's an appropriate guide because he's very much like Dante, a fellow writer and famous poet.

For the rest of the *Inferno*, Virgil takes Dante on a guided tour of Hell, through all its nine circles and back up into the air of the mortal world. The first circle of Hell (Limbo), considered pre-Hell, just contains all of the unbaptized and good people born and before the coming of Christ, who obviously couldn't be saved by him. Virgil resides here, along with a bunch of other Greek and Roman poets. In the second circle, lustful sinners are tossed around by endless storms.

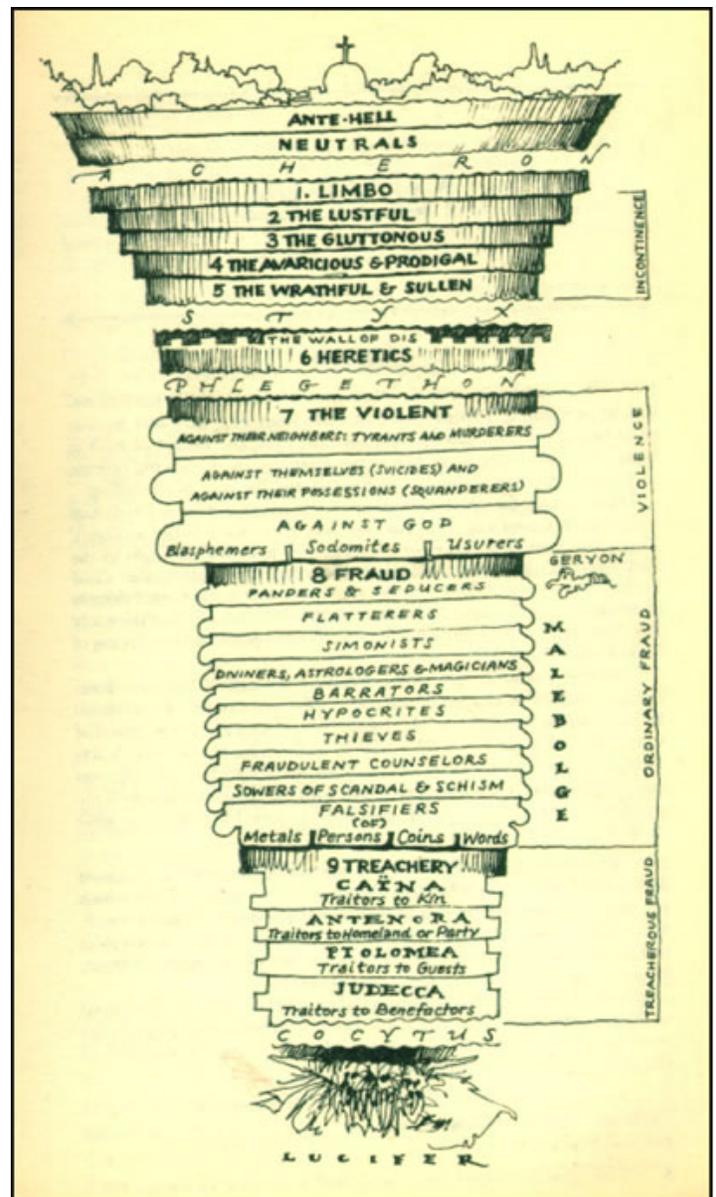
Dante then awakes in the third circle, where the Gluttonous sinners suffer under a cold and filthy rain. Virgil leads Dante on to the fourth circle, where the Avaricious (greedy people) and Prodigal (reckless spenders) roll heavy weights in endless circles. The next stop on the tour is the fifth circle, where the Wrathful and Sullen are immersed in the muddy river Styx.

Now at the gates of a city called Dis, Virgil takes it upon himself to persuade the demon guards to let them pass. Unexpectedly, he fails. This means that instead of continuing on with the journey, Dante and Virgil must wait for an angel to come down and force open the gates for them. After passing the city of Dis, our dynamic duo enters the sixth circle, where the Heretics lay in fiery tombs.

As they cross from the sixth to the seventh circle, where the Violent are punished, Virgil finally begins explaining the layout of Hell. We soon learn that all human sins are divided into three big categories: incontinence (or lacking self-control), violence, and fraud. Everything Dante has witnessed so far has fallen under the first category. The seventh circle will show all the violent sinners. Then the final two circles will include all the sinners of ordinary fraud and treacherous fraud.

Finally, Dante and Virgil ready themselves to cross to the eighth circle. Dante, at Virgil's command, summons the beast Geryon from the depths with a cord wrapped around his waist. Virgil stays to talk with the beast while urging Dante to look at the last of the Violent sinners. When Dante comes back, they mount Geryon and ride the beast during the descent into the eighth circle.

The eighth circle contains ten pouches, each containing different types of sinners. When Dante and Virgil reach the third pouch where Simonists (people who use money to get high positions in the Church) are buried headfirst in the ground while their feet roast in flames, Dante works up the courage to speak to one of the sinners. The soul of Pope Nicholas III mistakes Dante (understandably, because he can't see him) for his successor and Dante's hated enemy, Pope Boniface VIII, come to replace him in punishment.



As Dante and Virgil traverse the fifth pouch, in which Barrators (or corrupt politicians) are forked by demons and plunged into a river of boiling pitch, Virgil bravely approaches the ruthless demons and demands safe passage across the river. When the sinister demons see that he is sent by God, the head demon, Malacoda, tells Virgil that the nearest bridge has been broken and so assigns ten demons to escort him to the next bridge.

Afraid of the demons, Dante and Virgil escape by crossing into the sixth pouch, where the demons cannot follow. Here, they run into the Hypocrites who are forced to stand clothed in robes of lead. After talking to a few of them, Virgil asks for directions to the next pouch. In the valley of the sixth pouch, Thieves are continually bitten by serpents whose venom burns them into ashes.

Our heroes hurry into the eighth pouch, where Fraudulent Counselors are encased in flames.

In the ninth pouch, Dante witnesses the Sowers of Scandal and Schism being disemboweled by a demon with a sword, healed, and punished again – eternally. Dante is so freaked out by this sight that he has to cover his ears to avoid hearing the moans as they pass into the tenth and last pouch.

In the tenth pouch, four different kinds of falsifiers are punished. As they leave, Virgil points out the sinning giants who are immobilized around them in punishment. Nimrod – who was responsible for building the Tower of Babel – has lost the ability to speak coherently. His words are gibberish. Virgil requests that one of the unbound giants, Antaneus, transport them in the palm of his hand down to the last circle of Hell. He complies.

The ninth circle of Hell, where traitors are punished, contains four different zones. The first one, called Caina (after Cain), features traitors to their kin immersed in ice up to their necks. In the second zone, Antenora, traitors to their homeland suffer the same punishment. He moves on to the third zone called Ptolomea, where traitors against their guests suffer, immobilized in ice and their tears frozen against their eyes. Dante promises to break the ice off of the eyes of one of them if he tells him his story.

In the fourth the final zone, Judecca, where traitors against their benefactors are punished, Dante witnesses the king of Hell, the three-headed Lucifer, giant and frozen at the core. In his three mouths, Lucifer mechanically chews on the most evil mortal sinners – Judas, Brutus, and Cassius.

Now that they've finished their tour, Virgil tells Dante that it's time to leave Hell for good. With Dante clinging to Virgil's back, the two climb down Lucifer's massive body, which spans the diameter of the entire Earth, and arrive in the southern hemisphere. Here, Virgil and Dante follow a path back up to the surface of the Earth and emerge to see Heaven's stars.

## Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner analysis



Remember our allusion of the albatross around your neck (equating a burden, a constant reminder of something stupid that you did)? – this poem is where it comes from. Even though Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is one of the most influential poems in the English language, it's still a doozy of a confusing read. It's about an old sailor who stops a wedding guest from entering a wedding celebration, and says, essentially, "I know you want to get your drink and your dance on, but now I'm going to tell you a really long story about how I got my entire crew killed and almost died myself because I acted like a jerk while sailing the far reaches of the globe." *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was published in 1798 in *Lyrical Ballads* (because it IS a lyrical ballad), a collection of poems that essentially launched the movement known as British Romanticism. The book contained works by Coleridge and his equally talented pal William Wordsworth.

How It All Goes Down

Three guys are on the way to a wedding celebration when an old sailor (the Mariner) stops one of them at the door (we'll call him the Wedding Guest). Using his hypnotic eyes to hold the attention of the Wedding Guest, he starts telling a story about a disastrous journey he took. The Wedding Guest *really* wants to go party, but he can't pry himself away from this grizzled old mariner. The Mariner begins his story. They left port, and the ship sailed down near Antarctica to get away from a bad storm, but then they get caught in a dangerous, foggy ice field. An albatross shows up to steer them through the fog and provide good winds, but then the Mariner decides to shoot it. Oops.

Pretty soon the sailors lose their wind, and it gets really hot. They run out of water, and everyone blames the Mariner. The ship seems to be haunted by a bad spirit, and weird stuff starts appearing, like slimy creatures that walk on the ocean. The Mariner's crewmates decide to hang the dead albatross around his neck to remind him of his error.

Everyone is literally dying of thirst. The Mariner sees another ship's sail at a distance. He wants to yell out, but his mouth is too dry, so he sucks some of his own blood to moisten his lips. He's like, "A ship! We're saved." Sadly, the ship is a ghost ship piloted by two spirits, Death and Life-in-Death, who have to be the *last* person you'd want to meet on a journey. Everyone on the Mariner's ship dies.

The wedding guest realizes, "Ah! You're a ghost!" But the Mariner says, "Well, actually, I was the only one who didn't die." He continues his story: he's on a boat with a lot of dead bodies, surrounded by an ocean full of slimy things. Worse, these slimy things are nasty water snakes. But the Mariner escapes his curse by unconsciously blessing the hideous snakes, and the albatross drops off his neck into the ocean.

The Mariner falls into a sweet sleep, and it finally rains when he wakes up. A storm strikes up in the distance, and all the dead sailors rise like zombies to pilot the ship. The sailors don't actually come back to life. Instead, angels fill their bodies, and another supernatural spirit under the ocean seems to push the boat. The Mariner faints and hears two voices talking about how he killed the albatross and still has more penance to do. These two mysterious voices explain how the ship is moving.

After a speedy journey, the ship ends up back in port again. The Mariner sees angels standing next to the bodies of all his crewmates. Then a rescue boat shows up to take him back to shore. The Mariner is happy that a guy called "the hermit" is on the rescue boat. The hermit is in a good mood. All of a sudden there's a loud noise, and the Mariner's ship sinks. The hermit's boat picks up the Mariner.

When they get on shore, the Mariner is desperate to tell his story to the hermit. He feels a terrible pain until the story had been told.

In fact, the Mariner says that he still has the same painful need to tell his story, which is why he stopped the Wedding Guest on this occasion. Wrapping up, the Mariner tells the Wedding Guest that he needs to learn how to say his prayers and love other people and things. Then the Mariner leaves, and the Wedding Guest no longer wants to enter the wedding. He goes home and wakes up the next day, as the famous last lines go, "a sadder and a wiser man."

