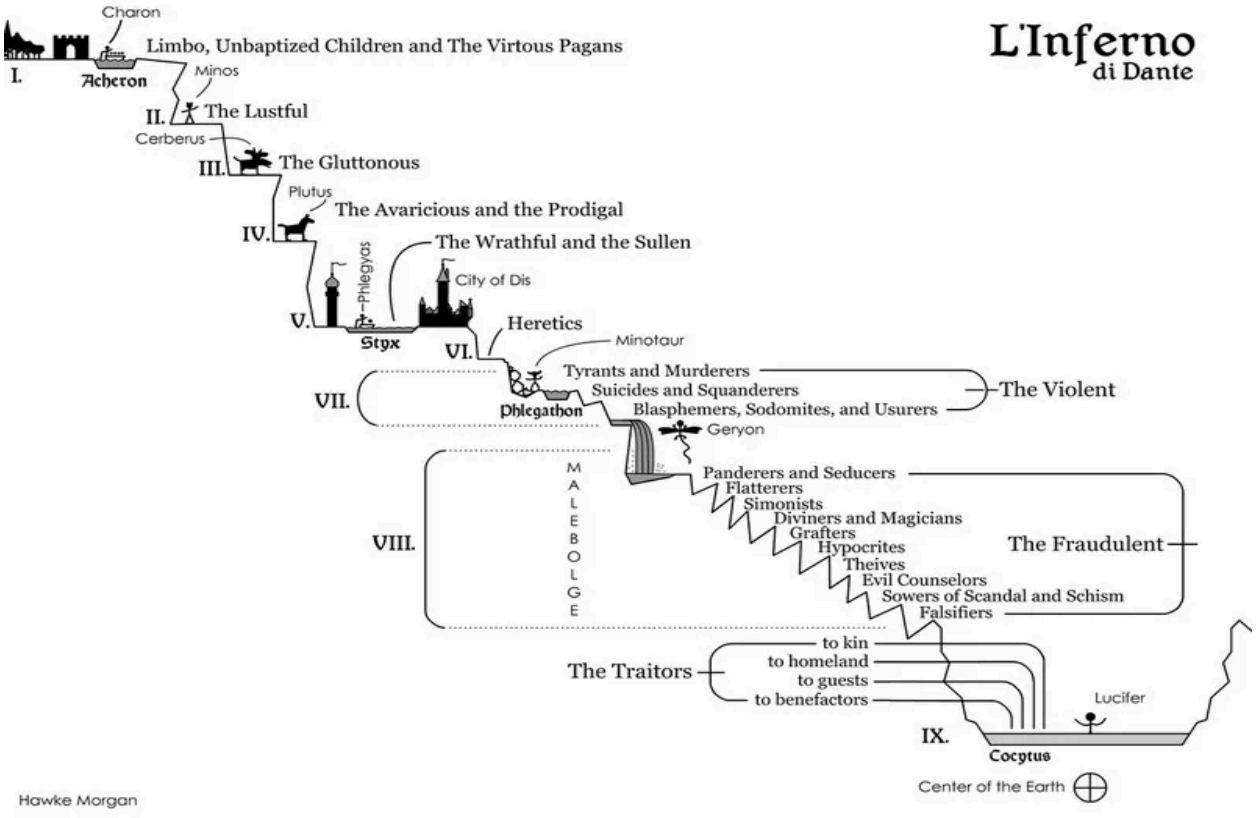
THE STRUCTURE OF DANTE'S HELL

WRITTEN BY LLA

In the new video series that I have just started, I am using the structural model of hell created by the italian poet Dante Alighieri in his masterpiece, the Divine Comedy. Hell obviously occupies the first of the three parts of the poem (Inferno; the other two are centered on the other two otherworldly worlds, namely Purgatory and Paradise), Dante crosses it in twenty-four hours guided by his literary and ideal mentor, Virgil (a Latin poet of the era of Augustus, symbol of the human reason within the poem), during the year 1300, when Dante was thirty-five. In this short document I simply intend to explain the various circles into which Dante's Inferno is divided in order to make it more understandable why some characters fall into it and others do not, and in such a way that anyone who wants to replicate the format of the video can even without having read the poem directly (which I would still recommend).



Before continuing, I think it is fundamental to say what Hell is for Dante: it is an enormous funnel dug in the center of the Earth (yes, in the Middle Ages it was known that the Earth was round) by Lucifer's fall from heaven after his defeat against the archangel Michael. Here are destined all the sinful souls of the world, and here they will reside for eternity, without any hope that their punishment will cease. Hell is guarded by many devils and demons, servants of Lucifer, and is the furthest place from God in the universe.

Having said this we can start by mentioning the fact that the various circles are divided into two macro parts of hell: the upper hell, which contains the anti-hell and the first five infernal circles, and the nether hell, or rather the one in which they are punished the worst sinners, guilty of the sins of heresy, violence, fraud and betrayal. The descent into hell in fact involves a gradual worsening of the sins of the damned depending on how much their actions have offended God: the least malignant sinners are those who simply chose neither good nor evil, while betrayal is considered the worst of possible sins. The worsening of sins leads the lost souls to get closer and closer to the prince of hell and the traitor par excellence, Lucifer, who is placed at the bottom of the last zone of the last circle.

It must also be underlined that although the damned are guilty of horrible actions, it is not necessarily the gravity of the sin that drags them into eternal pain (even if it also counts by a certain point): the element that conditions the future of a man's soul is in fact his earthly conduct and his possible repentance. No matter how terrible the sins committed were, if a man sincerely repents before dying, then God will accept his request for forgiveness and will send his soul to Purgatory, where it will obviously take a long time to redeem himself, but in the end he will be able to reach Heaven. The damned, on the other hand, are too late to repent, their end was decided the moment they took up evil and became its instruments without being able to separate themselves from it.

Before to start with the description of the geography of hell I wanted to apologize again for the embarrassing mistake I made in calling the infernal circles "rings". This shameful mistake as I have already explained is due to the fact that I did not study the Divine Comedy in English, but only in Italian, and I foolishly assumed that the adaptation had changed the specific term.

UPPER HELL (vestibule of hell-VI circle)

VESTIBULE OF HELL (ANTI-HELL): the vestibule of Hell is the first place you reach after crossing the infernal gate and ends at the banks of the Acheron river. There is no demon who guards it and the souls present are called "pusillanimous", those who in life were unable to decide between good and evil, always remaining neutral. Among them stand out the angels who did not take part in the celestial war between God and Lucifer and, perhaps, a pope, Celestine V, who had decided to abdicate the papal throne a few months after his election, effectively leaving the Church in the hands of his corrupt successor, Boniface VIII, enemy of Dante. The pusillanimous are not real sinners, but they still suffer a punishment: they have to run after a constantly moving flag while hornets sting them and the ground beneath them is covered in worms. The punishments used by Dante are never random, but follow the rule of retaliation, so that the eternal punishment and the sin committed are closely related. Obviously, the pusillanimous chase a flag in vain because in life they never knew which side they were on.

FIRST CIRCLE (LIMBO): Limbo is the first of the 9 circles of hell and is the only one where there is no punishment for the damned, who in fact have not committed any sin in life. In the circle reside those who were virtuous in life but who were not baptized and therefore did not know the authentic God, in addition to newborns who died before receiving the sacrament. The circle is divided into two areas, one simply barren, the other more graceful, consisting of a large castle surrounded by green meadows and a stream. Here are the great spirits, the most virtuous among the men of the past. Virgil, Dante's guide, also belongs to this circle, since he died before the birth of Christ. There are many souls mentioned by Dante in this circle, including pagans (Caesar, Aeneas, Homer, Cicero, the great Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato, Saladin, and many others), and although none of them suffer, they are still melancholy and they sigh, making the air tremble due to the absence of God to which they are condemned.

Ayanokoji and Johan were not baptized (we don't have exact information for both but it is very unlikely given that Koji is Japanese and Johan was born from an experiment wanted by the army in the communist Czech Republic).

SECOND CIRCLE (LUST): after the Limbo there is King Minos, ancient ruler of Crete (step-father of the minotaur), who has become an infernal judge and who confirms the sentences decided by divine justice, rounding his tail around the souls as many times as the number of the circle in which they will suffer.
Once past Minos, we enter the circle of the lustful, the first of the circles dedicated to the incontinent. Dante in fact divides the sins into three: the sins of incontinence (linked to the 7 capital sins, which do not follow reason), the sins of violence (linked to the bestial nature of man), and the sins of fraud (those committed with reason, i.e. the worst of all since reason is the most unique gift that God has given to man).

The lustful have subjected rationality to sexual instincts, becoming victims of them. These sinners, just as in life they allowed themselves to be carried away by passion, are now dragged by a storm that never stops, which slams them from one side of the circle to the other. Dante among them identifies (and dialogue) with a specific group of lustful people, that is, those who died violently for love. The most famous characters present here are Francesca da Rimini (the woman Dante speaks to) and her lover Paolo, Cleopatra, Helen, Paris and Achilles.

THIRD CIRCLE (GLUTTONY): going down a circle we reach the place of damnation of the gluttons, who in life have indulged excessively in the pleasures of the table. Just as in life they behaved and satisfied themselves like beasts, now they are forced to remain supine in the mud like pigs, while a rain of snow/hail hits them. The rain, however, is the least of the punishments since their guardian, the hell dog Cerberus (symbol of gluttony), continually flays them. The only character that Dante distinguishes in the circle is Ciacco, a fellow citizen of Florence.

FOURTH CIRCLE (GREED): Dante allocates two complementary sins in the fourth circle: the avaricious (excessively thirsty for wealth and power) and the prodigals (who have squandered their fortunes superficially). Both are forced to push huge boulders with their chests, making them roll halfway around the circle until they collide with the opposite group of sinners, with whom they begin to insult each other, and then start the effort again. The retaliation is not immediately clear, yet it is present: trying to accumulate and squander wealth are tiring actions, but devoid of spiritual usefulness, consequently now such sinners are forced to continually carry out a painful and exhausting effort for eternity. Dante does not recognize any famous sinners among them, although Virgil says that the circle is full of ecclesiastics. The guardian here is Pluto, brother of Zeus (he had been called "the rich" by Cicero, which makes him perfect to be the demon of the miserly and the prodigal), who however does not participate in the punishment of the damned.

FIFTH CIRCLE (WRATH, THE STYNX): The fifth circle is covered by the second infernal river, the Styx, which here forms an extremely muddy swamp. There are immersed the wrathful ones, the worst of the incontinent sinners mentioned directly by Dante, they beat each other and also injure themselves, the luckiest ones near the surface, the others in the dirty waters. On the Styx the demon Phlegias ferries (while on the Acheron it is Charon the ferryman) since he has the task of leading the damned to the infernal city of Dis, home to the next circle. Among the wrathful souls Dante meets one of the most detested fellow citizens of Florence: Filippo Argenti. Some critics have formulated the hypothesis that all the other incontinent people not mentioned by Dante (slothful, envious and proud) are immersed in the Styx, but this seems unlikely given that the system of infernal circles does not have as its basis that of the seven deadly sins (at contrary to the terraces of Purgatory), and it is however possible that Dante considers the remaining deadly sins as derivations of wrath.

NETHER HELL (VI circle-IX circle)

SIXTH CIRCLE (HERESY, THE CITY OF DIS): In the city of Dis, defended by enormous walls and legions of devils, heretics and heresiarchs (i.e. the leaders of heretical and some philosophical sects) are punished. Among them Virgilia directly mentions only the Epicureans, guilty of having believed in the mere materialism of the world and in the mortality of the soul, but we are sure that there are many other heretics in the city. Once beyond the walls (hardly since the devils don't let anyone through, and Virgil had to wait for Heaven to send an angel to convince them to open the gates) the entire city is actually a huge cemetery of continually burning tombs. The retaliation is more cruel than ever and even double: the heretics in Dante's time were punished by burning at the stake, but above all the Epicureans and other philosophers who did not believe in the immortality of the soul are now forced to be dead among the dead, being the only sinners to be buried. Dante in Dite meets Farinata degli Uberti (the greatest florentine ghibelline nobleman), who tells him that together with him many other souls are burning such as that of Emperor Frederick II, and Cavalcante dei Cavalcanti (father of the poet's former best friend and very famous poet himself, Guido dei Cavalcanti).

Beyond the question of whether Johan is a nihilist or not (I think yes, but it's not the place to discuss of this), he is sure that his philosophy has as its central point the lack of value of human life, the mortality and transience of the soul (death that afflicts all human beings), thus braying bridges with every form of spirituality as the Epicureans did, making him a heretic by Dante's standards.

SEVENTH CIRCLE (VIOLENCE): The last three circles of hell are divided into various areas since the sins committed by these souls are so serious that they require different punishments. The seventh is the circle of the violents, those who have followed the bestial side of man, sometimes even combining it with reason, to carry out evil. They are divided into three rings:
-I ring, violents against others: Dante places here tyrants, robbers, murderers and other violent commoners. They are immersed in the Acheron, a river of boiling blood, and are guarded by centaurs, who strike them every time they try to get out of the boiling blood more than has been decided by divine justice. It is important to say that only those who have used violence deliberately or worse for personal pleasure reside here, therefore not all those who have used it in life. Dante here identifies the Hunnic king Attila, Pyrrhus king of Epirus and perhaps even Alexander the Great.
I guess I don't have to explain why Johan, literally a serial killer, would fit this sin while Ayanokoji doesn't.
-II ring, violents against self: this is one of the saddest places in the whole hell, since those who have used violence against their own bodies, killing themselves, are punished here. They were transformed into dry trees without leaves or fruit, horribly changing their shape but not their soul, which still regrets the extreme choice made. In this dead forest there are also squanderers (a

more extreme version of the prodigals), who are chased by a group of infernal dogs who tear them apart, and while they try to escape into the forest they destroy the branches of the suicides, practically amputating them. To make the already tragic situation even worse there are the harpies, mythological monsters who continue to hurt the poor soul-trees and perch on them. Mayve for us such a terrible punishment for someone like a suicide could seem extremely cruel, but the Church has always considered suicide as a sin and Dante, despite being respectful while visiting this place, gives them an exemplary retaliation: those who have rejected the body given by God will now have to dwell forever in one who does not belongs to them and in which they will not even be able to cry or communicate. Suicides are the only sinners who will not receive their earthly bodies back at the time of the Last Judgment, rather they will be hung from the branches of their trees. Here Dante meets Pier delle Vigne, a chancellor of Emperor Frederick II who killed himself due to false accusations of treason.
Johan due to of his suicidal tendencies is obviously considerable violent against himself (even if he didn't manage to reach his goal).
-III ring, violents against Nature and God: the third ring is where there are those who were violent against God and his creature, nature itself. Here there are three different types of sinners: blasphemers (who insult God), usurers (who are violent against nature, since they make money from other money without working or without making art) and sodomites (homosexuals, who do not follow the law of "natural love"). The circle is a great desert with burning sand where fire rains incessantly, the same punishment that hit the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible, which were guilty of sins similar to those of these violent men (the retaliation consists precisely in this). Among the sodomites Dante meets his own old master, Brunetto Latini.
I'm not sure if Johan's asexual nature alone would be enough to place him among the sodomites (with whom he would share a "sexual deviance", obviously according to Dante's criteria, not mine), but he is certainly a usurer given the illicit use of dirty money of which he became the protagonist at 15 with the creation of the criminal bank.

EIGHTH CIRCLE (FRAUDULENCE, THE MALEBOLGE): the sin of fraud, together with that of betrayal, is the worst of all according to Dante's theology since it presupposes the full conscious and malicious use of human intelligence to be accomplished. The circle is enormous and contains 10 bolge (called Malebolge, meaning "evil bolge"). These pits are full of devil patrols, like the one guarding the fifth bolgia. Below is a brief summary of each of the bolge:
-I bolgia, seducers: they are the damned who have used seduction and pandering to compensate for their own pleasures or those of others, as punishments they are continually whipped by the devils. Virgil among them indicates Jason. It's obvious why both Ayanokoji (Kei) and Johan (Suk) are fraudulent seducers.
-II bolgia, flatterers: they used false flattery to gain favor from those who were more powerful than them, as retaliation now they end up immersed in dung, and the bedlam is so full that sinners have to hit each other to stay there.

-III bolgia, simoniacs: they are those who traded the patrimony and positions of the Church and are now stuck in the ground head down while the flames burn their feet. Among them is Pope Nicholas III, who prophesies the imminent arrival of Boniface VIII.
-IV bolgia, sorcerers: the madmen who believed they could see into the future, which is a matter of knowledge only of God, are punished here. As a punishment they are completely deformed in the body, making them so monstrous that they make Dante burst into tears when he sees them, although Virgil immediately reproaches him.
-V bolgia, barattors: the bedlam is guarded by deceiving devils called Malebranche, who also set a trap for Virgil (who naively falls for it). The devils themselves are responsible for hunting sinners on earth and flying them into bedlam. The barattors, however, are corrupt politicians, a charge that was leveled against Dante by his political enemies after his forced exile from Florence), and as punishment they are now immersed in boiling pitch.
Johan contributed to bringing some of his subordinates into politics (evidently corrupt in Dante's eyes), but he could not be punished in this bolgia since he didn't directly commit the sin
-VI bolgia, hypocrites: the hypocrites were those who behaved in a manner opposite to their ideals and their words. Their pain is to advance while they are covered by cloaks made of gold on the outside and lead on the inside, which are obviously of an enormous weight and which force them to walk very slowly. Among them there are even worse sinners: those who condemned Christ to the cross with hypocritical words (among them there is the high priest of Jerusalem, Caiphas). They are crucified on the ground and are forced to be trampled by the infinite and very heavy crowd of hypocrites dressed in metal.
-VII bolgia, thieves: they are hardened thieves and some of the worst kind as they stole from churches. They run chased by various species of snakes, which tie their hands (contrapasso) and bite them, to then cause changes in their appearance
-VIII bolgia, fraudulent advisors: fraudulent advisors in life used their great intellect to deceive others with false words or otherwise manipulating them for their own ends. As a retaliation, those who in life used their tongues to mislead others now burn in huge tongues of fire. Among them is the hero Ulysses.
I don't think there are explanations needed, the VIII and IX bolge are basically perfect for Koji and fit a lot of Johan sins.
-IX bolgia, sowers of discord: they are an even more malignant evolution of fraudulent advisors, as sowers of discord used their intelligence and manipulated others to specifically cause conflict, schism, and division. Their punishment is very harsh: just as they divided people, now it is the devils who divide them, hitting them repeatedly with their swords and gradually cutting off all their body parts, which then regenerate. The most famous among them are certainly Muhammad and his cousin ʿAlī ibn ʾAbī Ṭālib.
-X bolgia, falsifiers: falsifiers, the worst of the fraudulent, are divided into various types (coin falsifiers, person falsifiers, word falsifiers and alchemists), each with different punishments, although they all consist of terrible diseases.

Johan acting like he was his sister became a falsifier of person and is a. The lies told by Ayanokoji would not be serious enough to lead him into this bedlam, the same cannot be said for those of Johan

IX CIRCLE (TREACHERY, THE COCITO): betrayal, as we have already said, is the worst of human actions and as such deserves to be placed in the lowest and most forgotten point of the entire universe. The entire circle is made up of the Cocytus river, which at this point forms a gigantic lake, at the center of which is Lucifer, the worst traitor and the king of Hell. The movement of the devil's huge wings creates winds so strong and cold that they completely freeze the waters of the lake. Traitors are stuck in this ice and, being in the place of greatest concentration of evil, they increasingly lose their humanity. The circle and the souls are divided into four zones based on who the sinners' betrayal was aimed at:

-I zone, Caina: the spirits who betrayed their relatives are stuck here (Caina comes from Cain, the son of Adam who killed his brother Adele). The damned punished in the IX circle are so evil that not even Dante has the slightest pity for them, indeed he even tortures or deceives them when he meets them. The way in which the souls are stuck in the ice varies from zone to zone and gets worse and worse: in the Caina they have their heads out of the ice in such a position as to allow them to cry, in the second the head is cracked so that the tears freeze immediately when they come out (blocking the eyes and blinding the damned), in the third only the face is uncovered while in the fourth the entire body is frozen. Dante here meets Mordred, assassin and nephew of King Arthur, and many tuscans of his time.

Johan surely would be considered guilty in this zone since he killed his uncle Franz Bonaparta and, even if he wouldn't consider it as treachery, he ruined his own sister's life. Koji also rebelled against his father, but the latter was committing wrong actions so he cannot be really considered a sinner.

-II zone, Antenora: there are the traitors of the homeland and the political party and Dante is so disgusted by the Florentine traitor Bocca degli Abati that he beats him to make him confess his name. Here he and Virgil also meet Count Ugolino (traitor of the city of Pisa), who is devouring the head of his traitor, bishop Ruggieri (who had forced Ugolino to watch his own children starve in prison with him before he himself died).

Both Johan and Koji betrayed the political parties to which they had been affiliated, but the fact that they were not voluntarily linked to them and since these were also evil groups cannot be considered guilty at all.

-III zone, Ptolomea: traitor to guests.

-IV zone, Judecca: the most terrible place in Hell, where the damned have completely lost their humanity and are mere frozen witnesses of the violent machine that Lucifer has become (like the damned he too has lost his personality and his true nature, given that evil absolute leads to annulment and spiritual death). He is so large that he makes a giant look like an ant and has three heads, each of which endlessly tortures a different sinner. These are the three worst traitors: Judas Iscariot (traitor of Christ) and Brutus and Cassius (traitors of Caesar). The reason why they

are the worst of all is because not only did they betray their benefactors and the entire human race, but above all because by betraying them they directly betrayed the Church and the Empire, or rather the two institutions that Dante considered direct emanations of God's will on Earth and pillars on which the entire political/social/spiritual system of humanity was to be based.
Johan betrayed Tenma, his greatest benefactor, ruining his life like Anna's and attempted to lead him into sin.

TWO WORDS ABOUT DANTE'S LIFE

Dante Alighieri was born in Florence in 1265 to a wealthy urban family. Having become an orphan (of his mother when he was a child, of his father when he was a teenager, before his marriage with Gemma Donati) he inherited the large family fortune which allowed him to dedicate himself to his studies, literature (poetry in particular, dedicated to his beloved Beatrice) and above all to political activity. He was in fact one of the main political exponents of the White Guelph party, dominant in Florence at the time, and obtained several prestigious positions such as the priory of the municipality. In 1302, however, the rival party of the White Guelphs, the Black Guelphs, organized a coup d'état thanks to the support of Pope Boniface VIII and exiled all the members of the enemy party from the city, including obviously Dante. From that moment on, for the next nineteen years Dante wandered through the courts of central and northern Italy, working as a diplomat, advisor or simply being hosted by the noblemen. It was while he was in exile that he composed his greatest masterpiece, the Divine Comedy, which guaranteed him a place in the Olympus of writers and poets. He died in 1321 in Ravenna while still in exile.

FOR THE CURIOUS ONES

For those who already had in mind to start reading the Divine Comedy or for those who were intrigued by my videos or by these few lines (I would be immensely proud and flattered) there may be a desire to delve deeper into the subject matter. Immediately the first response to satisfy this idea would be to read the Divine Comedy itself and in this case I would like to make you slow down for a moment and give you some humble advice. First we must state the obvious: the Divine Comedy is a decidedly mammoth text, especially for someone not used to poetry (because yes, the poem as such is written in poetry verses, even though it is narrative and therefore more flowing), and it has a unique complexity. Its size and this complexity of themes, concepts and references make it impossible to read the Comedy without an excellent commentary by an author or an authoritative critic. Also because by reading it "on your own" you would understand, and with difficulty, only a tiny part of the work, perhaps even leading you to consider it overrated. A good comment is therefore essential, but if you decide to follow a

similar path it means that your interest is really great (and commendable), but I don't want those who have lit only a small torch of curiosity, but who do not wish to undertake such a reading challenging, turn it off and move on. There are many other ways to approach Dante's masterpiece that do not involve a direct reading (and in my opinion they should not be subject to criticism or underestimation), from summary videos to simplified editions.
Whatever way you come into contact with it, Dante's poetry is a turning point in the life of a reader open to his teachings and his depth, whether Christian or not, because although the literal protagonist of the Divine Comedy is Dante Alighieri, as he himself wrote in a letter (epistle XIII) the symbolic and therefore most important protagonist of the book is the entire human race, in its journey towards its own ascension and self-comprehension.

I really hope you enjoyed the document (I apologize for possible grammatical or syntax errors, as you know English is not my strong point) and thank you very much for reading it. I conclude with the last words of the Inferno, which tell of Dante and Virgil's exit from the horrendous otherworldly realm:

