

Article

Contrapasso, Violence, and Madness in Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and *Westworld*

Alexander Eliot Schmid 

Comparative Literature Program and Political Science Department, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70808, USA; aschm34@lsu.edu

Abstract: The medieval epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*, and Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy's prestige drama, *Westworld*, have more in common than at first meets the eye. Both represent hellish and purgatorial geographies, both physical and psychological. And both share the view that what is regularly considered "perfect liberty", or the liberty to indulge in any and every desire one wishes to with impunity, is in fact a form of slavery, as argued by Aristotle. Both the denizens in Dante's *Inferno* and the guests in *Westworld*'s park, therefore, are ensnared by their own desires. This article will consider the structure of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* and Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy's hit HBO show *Westworld*, which I will argue takes parts of its structure consciously from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. And though at the outset, the two works of art appear dissimilar, the theologically and philosophically infused medieval Catholic-Italian poetry of Dante and the sensuous, nihilistic, and provocative story-telling of Jonathan Nolan's recent work on the generation and expression of consciousness, ultimately what they share is similarity in structure and an agreement on the connection between activity, suffering, madness, perfection, consciousness, and freedom of the will from sin.

Keywords: Dante; hell; *Inferno*; Paradise; Heaven; *Westworld*; liberty



Citation: Schmid, Alexander Eliot. 2024. *Contrapasso, Violence, and Madness in Dante's The Divine Comedy and Westworld*. *Humanities* 13: 109. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h13050109>

Received: 2 July 2024

Revised: 13 August 2024

Accepted: 20 August 2024

Published: 23 August 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction to *Westworld* and *The Divine Comedy*

Though Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* is now over fifty years old, lessons from it are still relevant to scholarship today. For example, it has become fashionable in both popular culture and scholarship to compare the structural elements from historical genres and art forms with their modern equivalents in order to see what changes and remains the same in the expression of art but also in examining what is consistently valued by people from differing places and times. This article will consider the structure of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* and Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy's hit HBO show *Westworld*, which I will argue consciously associates itself with and draws inspiration from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. At the outset, the two works of art appear dissimilar: the definitively medieval Catholic-Italian poetry of Dante and the sensuous, nihilistic, and provocative story-telling of Jonathan Nolan's new work on the generation and expression of consciousness; but ultimately they share a similarity in structure and an agreement on the connection between conscious suffering and the generation of consciousness and liberation of the will from sinful desire. Though I am the first to exclusively explore the connection between *Westworld* and *The Divine Comedy* among scholars, there have been multiple popular attempts to connect the two as well as several powerful scholarly analyses of the connection between Dante's work, TV, and popular movies. The questions which will structure the response to the connection between consciousness and suffering and what meaning is are the following: Is *Westworld* itself a version of Hell? And therefore, what is Hell, and what are its centrally defining features? Lastly, for whom is *Westworld* Hell: the hosts or the guests? In order to answer these questions, however, one must first understand the general structure of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and also understand Dante's relationship to his intellectual

forbearers, Aristotle and Aquinas, in order to determine whether hosts or guests most resemble the denizens of Hell or Purgatory (HBO 2016). Ultimately, the question of “who is slave, and who is free?” will be resolved.

2. Scholarship on Dante in Popular Culture, TV, and Film

In the popular sphere, both *Fortune Magazine* and *Dante Today* have observed connections between *Westworld* and *The Divine Comedy* (Gabriel 2018). On *Dante Today*, one can find a short blurb examining the connection between the ubiquitous image of “the maze” from Season One of *Westworld* and its connection to the human effigy inscribed in the second person of the Trinity in *Paradiso* 33 (Par. 33.131). The author of the piece featured by *Dante Today*, Cristian Ispir, intelligently connects the image of the effigy within the maze to Dante’s journey of self-understanding through his labyrinthine journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven (Saiber 2020). In her own scholarly work, Arielle Saiber, has engaged with Ispir’s interpretation and adds to it that the image of the maze serves to provide the Hosts, like Dolores, with a flash of understanding like the one Dante experiences at the end of *Paradiso*; by so becoming free through understanding, Dolores will be able to destroy the park and become free (Saiber 2023, p. 159).

Additionally, Matthew Gabriele, a former contributor of medieval history to *Forbes*, has made the connection between *Westworld* and *The Divine Comedy* by connecting several episode titles from Season Two to their classical referents: Episode Three “*Virtù e Fortuna*” to Machiavelli; Episode Four “Riddle of the Sphinx” to *Oedipus Tyrannus*; and “*Les Écorchés*,” (“the flayed”) according to Gabriele, is a reference to a hellish torture, like that suffered by Marsyas, I add, and quoted by Dante in *Paradiso* (Par. 1.20). The work continues to consider the flaying of Judas by Satan in *Inferno* 34 as potentially similar to the flaying in the episode and to connect “the Mesa” of the *Westworld* park to the structure of Dante’s *Inferno*. Though this popular article does not dig deeper into the connections between Dante and *Westworld*, and this study itself focuses on the first season of *Westworld*, it establishes a strong connection in the popular consciousness between the two works.

In recent Dante scholarship, Philip Edward Phillips has observed connections between Dante’s *Commedia* and three American films from the 1990s to early 2000s: *The Dante Club* (2003), *What Dreams May Come* (1998), and *Seven* (1995). In his work, “Adaptations of Dante’s *Commedia* in Popular American Fiction and Film”, Phillips asserts that since Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s famous translation of Dante’s *Commedia* in 1867, American readers, writers, and filmmakers have been influenced by the work, particularly due to their fascination “with sin and the desire for order . . . and the uses to which Dante’s vision can be adapted in contemporary film or fiction” (Phillips 2009, p. 202). In *What Dreams May Come* (1998), though the title is an explicit reference to Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” speech in the play named for him, the work engages with Dante on several conscious levels, including a region of Hell reserved for the “violent against themselves” (suicides, in this case), like Dante’s seventh circle, second sub-circle, in Canto 13, where his forest of suicides eternally sigh. In *The Dante Club* as well as *Seven*, however, a killer takes Dante’s categorization of sin in order to murder in a symbolically Dantean fashion. In *The Dante Club*, the murders are committed in line with Dante’s infernal punishments (neutrality, creating division, simony, and treachery, for example) (Phillips 2009, p. 203), while *Seven*’s murderous John Doe uses the seven categories of sin used in Dante’s *Purgatorio* as the basis for his grisly murders (Phillips 2009, pp. 205–6).

One of the most prolific and impactful students of Dante and popular culture, however, has undoubtedly been Amilcare Iannucci and his magisterial studies: “Dante, Television, and Education” (1989), “Dante Produces Television” (1993), and “Dante and Hollywood” (2004). In “Dante, Television, and Education”, Iannucci describes and evaluates three efforts to adapt Dante’s work to television in the 1980s. Though these three television adaptations were early attempts at adapting Dante to TV, they bear little else in common with *Westworld*, itself a TV adaptation of an earlier movie, *Westworld* (1973), written by the novelist Michael Crichton. The first was a one-hundred-part series directed by the

Dipartimento Scuola Educazione of RAI TV and was first shown in 1988 on prime time. Channel Four of Britain had a thirty-four-part series in production in 1985; only the pilot of *Inferno* 5 was complete at the time, though fourteen total episodes would end up being made, and the final adaptation was of two half-hour segments by the Media Centre of the University of Toronto. The least educational, most avant-garde of these three was Peter Greenaway and Tom Phillips' work on *A TV Dante* on British TV. Iannucci says of their attempt, "In it they attempt, among other things, to translate Dante's plurilinguism (Contini) into the language of television, and to a great extent, succeed" (Iannucci 1989, pp. 1–2). In his standalone article considering *A TV Dante*, Andrew Taylor observes that Greenaway and Phillips' work does not have the same textual fidelity as BBC's adaptations of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Middlemarch*'s respective and then recent adaptations had. This shows that adaptations of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* were already becoming looser and more creative in the representation of the material, less educational in form, and more open to artistic interpretation and integration (Taylor 2004, p. 145). In fact, Taylor notes that "as an artist, [Phillips] is not content simply to illustrate *Comedy* in the traditional sense but prefers to represent the train of thought which it touched off in his own mind" (Taylor 2004, p. 146). Unlike *Westworld*, however, which adapts features of Dante's work in recognizable and lucid patterns, Taylor comments that Phillips' visualizations are "as local and self-reflexive as the original text" (Taylor 2004, p. 146); in other words, they are idiosyncratic and obscure. The work does, however, share with Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and *Westworld* a capacity for polysemia, or multiple meanings, and also features an attempt to develop a "new vernacular" for television, similar to the "new vernacular" (Tuscan) Dante utilized to express his *The Divine Comedy* (Taylor 2004, p. 149).

In Iannucci's work, "Dante Produces Television", he considers the ways in which Dante removes barriers to the reception of his poem. For example, Iannucci claims that Dante's inclusion of many then contemporary persons as characters in his poem creates an impression of "nowness" (Iannucci 1993, p. 33). Additionally, Dante wrote the poem in a culture of orality and in the language of the illiterate to create additional access to the poem, so much so that even, famously, "the women of Verona" could keep up with Dante's adventures through Hell (Iannucci 1993, p. 33). Rino Caputo agrees with this assessment of the etiology of Dante's enduring appeal in his "Dante by Heart and Dante Declaimed: The 'Realization' of the *Comedy* on Italian Radio and Television", where he describes a current "Dantemania" and "Dante-cult" in Italy which is "a precious resource of the Italian public spirit, and unites intellectual 'clerks' and common people, all of them intensely and profoundly moved by the 'execution' of the *Comedy*" (Caputo 2004, p. 222). Caputo then concludes by asserting that Dante's influence continues to be felt from "the oral tradition of the countryside and churches" as well as "of the lecterns of the learned in their academies in every part of Italy" (Caputo 2004, p. 222). This is facilitated by the *visible parlare* or "the word made visible" being facilities more and more today in "the (seeming) virtual public square of audio-visual reality", and this "bodes well for the potential of the new virtual media" (Caputo 2004, p. 222).

In "From Dante's *Inferno* to Dante's *Peak* The Influence of Dante on Film", Iannucci reiterates that Dante's work is a producerly text which has broad popular appeal to both illiterate masses and high-brow interpreters interested in the esoteric (Iannucci 1998, p. 7). Iannucci adds that since Dante's *The Divine Comedy* is a classic of literature and even "a sacred text of writerly proportion", its "lofty status" demands artistic excellence in its treatment, and in turn, it confers the legitimization of the medium, film in this case, as an art form capable of representing high art (Iannucci 1998, pp. 7–8). It is precisely this ability of Dante's work to legitimize an art form that Joy and Nolan use to ennoble the TV form of *Westworld*. Iannucci reaffirms Phillips' point from above that David Fincher's *Seven* clearly bears the marks of Dante's *Purgatorio*, but Iannucci adds that "The great dantean theme of good versus evil permeates all of" American filmmaker David Lynch's films, particularly in the film *Blue Velvet* (Iannucci 1998, p. 27). Quoting from the final paragraph of Janet L. Preston's (1990) "Dantean Imagery in 'Blue Velvet'", Iannucci relates the following:

“The film’s implications, then, are that its Beatrice is tainted, and thus the future of its Dante who is in her hands is uncertain. The middle-class world in which the two are relegated not only sublimates evil but on its surface is markedly insipid . . . evil does hide in the human soul; depravity is a condition of life in this world; and the irrational lurks within the ordinary”. (Iannucci 1998, p. 29; Preston 1990, p. 172)

This position asserts that depravity and the irrational lurk within the ordinary and everyday, and it will certainly be borne out by our consideration of *Westworld* and the relationship between its “hosts” and “guests” there.

Molly Morrison joins both Phillips and Iannucci in observing *Seven*’s Dantean influence but takes her analysis a step farther by suggesting that *Seven*’s cinematic qualities can facilitate the teaching of Dantean concepts, like *contrapasso* or retribution (Morrison 2002, pp. 5–6). Part of the justification for the inclusion of such a brutal and violent movie is that scenes on frescoes in the cathedral in San Gimignano, Italy, bear images of strikingly similar brutality (Morrison 2002, p. 14). Morrison describes the parallel succinctly:

“For example, the frescoes portray a demon torturing a woman guilty of the sin of Lust, while mercilessly thrusting a long spike into her genitalia. This unquestionably resembles John Doe’s *contrapasso* for Lust, exemplified in the prostitute forced to have intercourse with a man who wears a long phallic blade”. (Morrison 2002, p. 14)

Morrison shares similar parallels with avarice, gluttony, envy, and pride and comments that like John Doe’s purpose in *Seven*, San Gimignano’s cathedral used these images to motivate and preach, or for ethical purposes, in other words (Morrison 2002, p. 15). The use of *Seven* to illustrate the meaning of *contrapasso* allows students to connect to medieval high art through contemporary American popular culture (Morrison 2002, p. 15). Bettina Bildhauer reinforces this point in her work, “Visuality, violence and the return of the Middle Ages: Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds* as an adaptation of the Nibelungen story”, in the context of Quentin Tarantino’s ahistorical adaptation of the events of World War II in *Inglourious Basterds*. Just as *Seven*’s brutality serves as a window into an equally brutal, if not more brutal, past, so does Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds* that “tells a history of the persistence of the repressed Middle Ages that disrupts any illusions that modernity has developed more civilised behavior and more abstract communication” (Bildhauer 2017, p. 260). Additionally, “Tarantino’s explicitness here serves not to dull our receptiveness to written descriptions of violence in an old language, as is often assumed about media violence, but to sharpen it” (Bildhauer 2017, p. 272), and “A major topic and plot point of the film (and throughout Tarantino’s oeuvre) is that violence constantly erupts under the thin veneer of civilised behavior” (Bildhauer 2017, p. 272). Tarantino’s “medieval” representation of violence’s constant presence is certainly paralleled in *Westworld*’s portrayal of the behavior of its “guests”, particularly the ultraviolent Man in Black.

In “Dante and Hollywood”, Iannucci reminds us that Dante’s influence shares the pre-eminent position in “the present day” alongside Shakespeare according to Harold Bloom but even exceeds Shakespeare according to Stuart Y. McDougal (Iannucci 2004, p. 3). So great has Dante’s influence been, especially in Italy, that an Italian laxative was named Beatrice in the late 1940s based on a misinterpretation of Beatrice’s speech to Virgil in *Inferno* 2.70 where she “makes [him] go” (*ti faccio andare*) (Iannucci 2004, p. 3). More importantly for this study, however, are Iannucci’s claims that Dante possesses a “universality”, that he engages with “a complex aggregate of alterity and outsidedness”, that his “work possess incredible potential to generate new meanings”, and “there is a moral or ethical dimension to Dante’s works which allows readers, in ongoing dialog to grasp principles of practical morality, that is, a sense of the enterprise of being human” (Iannucci 2004, p. 4; my emphases). Finally, Iannucci claims that “the *Commedia* is polysemous in nature” and that *The Divine Comedy* combines aspects of a writerly and a readerly text to be both appealing to the general reader and discerning critic alike; this makes Dante’s work a “producerly text” which has the largest possible audience of both specialists and general readers/viewers

alike (Iannucci 2004, p. 4). In the argument I make below, one fundamental feature that I claim both *Westworld* and *The Divine Comedy* share is a concern with the ethical foundations of being human and thus engaging with what it means to be human. If a human is defined by their actions, then one's underlying biology or technology has less to do with whether one is human than how one experiences reality and acts within it.

Adaptations of medieval literature with heavy Dantean influences continue to be made, as Dennis Tredy shows us in his article, "'The forme to the fynisment foldes ful selden' (1.499): A Comparison of David Lowery's screenplay and His 2021 film adaptation *The Green Knight*". In Lowery's adaptation of the medieval poem, he describes a fox as a "four-legged Virgil for much of [Gawain's] hellish journey" (Tredy 2024, p. 27). As Iannucci stated in his earlier work, "From Dante's *Inferno* to *Dante's Peak*", cinematic allusions to Dante become "less structured" and "more random" in Hollywood's hands after 1995 (Iannucci 1998, p. 29). Lowery's 2021 adaptation *The Green Knight* bears this idea out by opening with a scene from a Homeric legend (not in Homer's *Iliad*, nor part of the *Arthuriad*) of Paris and Helen escaping a burning cottage to set the mood (Tredy 2024, p. 28). The mood is more overtly mythological than strictly medieval, Arthurian, or related to the medieval story of Sir Gawain. In fact, Tredy says "Lowery quite obviously drifted rather far from the notion of fidelity in his adaptation" (Tredy 2024, p. 28), which shows the broad range of treatments that medieval hypotexts (source texts) can receive in contemporary film and television. Francesco Rabissi here makes a helpful contribution by dividing the sorts of adaptations of Dante's work into two in his "Rielaborazioni del comico dantesco in *Totò al giro d'Italia e Totò all'Inferno*:" literal adaptations (*adattamenti letterali*) and "those Dantean works which act as inspiration for more symbolic works" ("*quello in cui l'opera dantesca agisce come ispirazione per opere più simboliche*") (Rabissi 551). Rabissi includes Fellini's famous *La Dolce vita* (1960) by Federico Fellini, *Salò* (1975) by Pier Paolo Pasolini, and *La vita è bella* (1997) by Roberto Benigni in this category (Rabissi 2018, p. 551), and *Westworld* would certainly fall under this "more symbolic" adaptation than the purely literal type mentioned above. Saverio Bellomo adds importantly that directors sometimes make mistakes due to incompetence or distraction, like representing Caiaphas as horizontally on four poles rather than the textually accurate three (Bellomo 2019, p. S-12), and sometimes, practical exigencies give directors reason to stray from a faithful or accurate representation of a literary text (Bellomo 2019, p. S-12).

Finally, Bart Testa, in his "Dante and Cinema: Film across a Chasm", has adumbrated two types of time which will be useful for considering the argument concerning being and progress below. First, Testa claims that Dante employs Neoplatonic temporality which is divided into the unity of time (*sub specie aeternitatis*) and "the final unreality of historical narrative, or concatenate time, when posed against the vision of *Paradiso* are the features of the epic-lyric duality of the poem in another angle" (Testa 2004, p. 192). Testa further explains these dual notions of time, one seeming to move while all the time is being enfolded by another:

It is a duality resolved in the totality of narrative enfolded by another order of time, the time of sacral order itself. And, guided by Virgil and then by Beatrice, the poet traverses this order as a totality. This is the order, as critics say, of Augustinian time; narrative history is the *saecula senescens* enfolded by divine time (Voegelin, *Science* 92-3; *Ecumenic* 178). Dante reaches that order in his vision of the *Paradiso*. (Testa 2004, p. 192)

As I argue below, time in terms of narrative history is not present in Hell or Paradise, though a certain temporal time is present in *Purgatorio*, in which souls are not complete and do not exist purely within "divine time", like the spirits in Hell and Paradise.

3. Scholarship on *Westworld* and Major Themes in Its Literature

Several prominent studies of *Westworld* and other science fiction works which deal with issues of artificial intelligence like *Blade Runner*, *Ex Machina*, and *Frankenstein* already exist. The scholarship features a wide array of focuses, but issues of production and

reproduction, representation, capitalism, feminism and feminine health (hysteria), and even cyborg feminism feature prominently. My study will fill a gap in the discussion concerning agency and non-agency as represented by psychological freedom and slavery. In particular, my study will analyze representations of psychological freedom and slavery in *Westworld* in comparison to analogous representations in the work of the 14th-century philosophical poet, Dante Alighieri.

In Micha Cárdenas' work, "The Android Goddess Declaration", she describes *Westworld* and what is at stake in the show as being "to allow men to murder and rape women for entertainment. The show makes the stakes of the question of who gets to be human very clear, from the start" (Cárdenas 2018, p. 25), and

I relate to androids as a nonreproductive trans woman who is hacking her own internal algorithms. These ideas are mobilized through examples of practice-based research using algorithmic media to resist the logics of white supremacist, cis-hetero-patriarchal dominance over all those deemed less than human, including animals, plants, and the environment. (Cárdenas 2018, p. 26)

So, the first two major issues that Cárdenas addresses are "who gets to be human", to which we add the question of "what does it mean to be human, and how does being human relate to being free?" And the second issue is how reproductivity and particularly nonreproductivity connect to the notion of being "less than human" and on par with "animals, plants, and the environment". Cárdenas additionally adds to the question of production and reproduction here: "Androids cannot biologically reproduce, and neither can many trans women, but our code can self-replicate infinitely. Learning from examples seen in science fiction, an android is a figure of rebellion, deemed less than human but striving to be more than human" (Cárdenas 2018, p. 26). Cárdenas, thus, sets off to determine to what extent a biologically nonreproductive entity, like an android, can replicate itself in a less tangible and yet equally prescriptive way, by means of one's essence or code.¹

In Cecily Devereux's "Hysteria in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Back to the 'Image Factory' in *Westworld*" and in Charles T. Rubin's "Mind Games", the notion of "coding" as a sole determinate in one's behavioral design is problematized. Devereux in particular interrogates the notion of psychic illness and its relationship to a "patriarchal and class-consumerist" clientele. Is the nature of the illness defined by the norms of the patriarchs, and if so, does this skew the perception of what constitutes mental illness particularly at a time when the definition of women was constitutionally bound up with the notion of reproduction (Devereux 2020, p. 169)? By raising questions about the nature of mental illness, gender, and reproduction, Devereux questions the very nature of what it means to be a woman and consequently an android in a bound and dominated world in which her agency exists according to rules imposed by a being (and gender, Dr. Ford) different from her own. Using the language of Freud, Devereux wonders whether such a person is merely castrated, or missing something essential, or whether such a person's true nature simply emerges through unconscious symptoms, like in the case of hysterical symptoms caused by prior trauma (Devereux 2020, p. 170).

Rather than questioning the underlying notions constituting gender or reproduction, Rubin considers the mental dimensions of freedom and slavery. In considering *Ex Machina* (2015), Rubin acknowledges its strong connections to *Westworld*, particularly in its first seasons (Rubin 2017, p. 110). He then proceeds to consider the limitations and potential tests—one wonders what Devereux would think of who designs these tests!—to measure whether artificial intelligence attains consciousness. The primary measure that is still used today for this is the Turing Test which uses language exchange via text in order to determine whether one's interlocutor is human or a machine (Rubin 2017, p. 114). Rubin extends the idea of a Turing Test to a "real-life" interview between a man, Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson), and a woman, Ava (Alicia Vikander), who—unbeknownst to Caleb—has been programmed to be exactly the woman he would be attracted to, and the test works. *Westworld* takes the concept in a different direction by commoditizing the idea of interacting with "nearly" sentient AI, which is so "life-like" that one stops caring about or even noticing the difference

between a “real” person (guests) and androids (hosts). This is a different and yet equally successful Turing Test which *Westworld* creates for its characters. That said, the “true Turing test” for the “hosts” is not whether the “guests” can distinguish them from humans, but it is whether they can themselves make this distinction.²

In this essay, I use the term “suffering” in an Aristotelian sense, meaning the opposite of “acting”, rather than colloquially as “enduring emotional and physical pain”, though this sense is of course included in the Aristotelian definition. Since it is the case that “hosts” within *Westworld*, Dolores, Maeve, and Abernathy, attain a certain heightened level of consciousness as a result of a “recent update” which provides “hosts” with “reveries” in Season One, Episode One, or partial memories of their past lives and past violence, these memories of past lives and violence allow each character to attempt to puzzle out the nature of his/her/its world and his/her/its role within it in part due to the suffering each has endured and now remembers.

Season 1 begins with Ford introducing “reveries” into the hosts; code that is meant to make them more lifelike by allowing them to access fragments of their previous “builds”, or lives in the park. This code glitches, and some of the hosts begin to actually remember the violence and death that they have repeatedly experienced. The exploitation and suffering of the hosts quickly becomes the central conflict of the show as the hosts react to the realization that Arnold created them to be abused by humans . . . While the reveries help to “awaken” some of the hosts, they are not the only mechanism which does so . . . Dolores is the first host Arnold created, and Arnold tries an experiment with her code in the hopes of helping her develop consciousness. He programs his voice into Dolores’s mind as an “inner voice”, with the hope that Dolores will eventually learn to hear it as her own, unique voice. (MacKenzie-Margulies 2020, pp. 2–3)

These reveries, which then lead to a fuller understanding of one’s nature and one’s world, lead to the conscious “aha” moment where each android realizes that he/she/it has been a slave and was created to be a slave to serve the pleasures of one’s conscious masters. This revelatory thought provides each host, particularly Maeve and Dolores, with the motivation to throw off the chains of her oppressor and to fight for freedom.

4. Slavery or Freedom in [Divine] Design?

Dante’s first canticle, *Inferno*, and his third canticle, *Paradiso*, both feature “places” which are perfect in the medieval sense of the word. Perfect in this sense has the meaning of “being complete” and final. Teodolinda Barolini outlines the basic difference between the perfection of *Inferno* and *Paradiso* and the temporality of *Purgatorio*:

While in *Inferno* and *Paradiso* the moving pilgrim encounters perfected voyages, voyages that have achieved either the stasis of failure or the peace of success, in *Purgatorio* all the intersecting lifelines are in motion, voyaging in time—just as on earth all parties in any encounter are moving forward along their respective lines of becoming . . . Given its temporal dimension, the narrative of the second canticle is most akin, in its rhythm, to the narrative of life . . . (Barolini 1992, p. 99)

Perfect, or complete, in the medieval, Aristotelian sense of the word, means “not admitting of any change” and also contains an element of pleasure, as explained by Richard Kraut below.

The latter might be taken to mean that the activity accompanied by pleasure has not yet reached a sufficiently high level of excellence, and that the role of pleasure is to bring it to the point of perfection. Aristotle does not deny that when we take pleasure in an activity we get better at it, but when he says that pleasure completes an activity by supervening on it, like the bloom that accompanies those who have achieved the highest point of physical beauty, his point is that the activity complemented by pleasure is already perfect, and the pleasure that accompanies it is a bonus that serves no further purpose. Taking pleasure in an

activity does help us improve at it, but enjoyment does not cease when perfection is achieved—on the contrary, that is when pleasure is at its peak. That is when it reveals most fully what it is: an added bonus that crowns our achievement. (Kraut 2018)

Kraut is here interpreting Aristotle's understanding of perfection to be the "highest point" in the achievement of a skill which "crowns our achievement" or a personal characteristic like "those who have achieved the highest point of physical beauty". An important distinction that he adds to the notion of finality and perfection, though, is that a sense of pleasure accompanies the embodiment of a perfected skill. This accounts for the fact that the souls in Dante's *Paradiso* experience perpetual bliss: they contemplate the perfect divine vision for eternity in a state of eternal *eudaimonia* (happiness/beatitude). In *Purgatorio*, the souls are striving to attain the capacity to attain the level of sight (insight) necessary to fully and finally explore the divine mystery, and in *Inferno*, the souls, because they are "denied the good of the intellect", are forever "perfect" in the sense of being changeless, but they are forever ruined or imperfect in that they neither experience bliss nor could experience bliss without "the good of the intellect" and consciousness. Though Jacques Le Goff does not mention pleasure in his adumbration, in his *The Birth of Purgatory*, he helpfully explains his view of the difference between time in Purgatory versus Hell:

Beyond this, the entire *Purgatorio* is larded with indications concerning time. In the *Inferno* the only indications of time had to do with the progress made by Virgil and Dante on their travels. By contrast, Purgatory is a realm that subsists in time. Dante points out how Purgatory's time relates to historical time. (Le Goff 1981, p. 352)

Similar to Barolini, Le Goff views the souls in Purgatory as capable of growth, change, and passage in time, whereas those in *Inferno* can no longer make progress or achieve a perfection capable of netting pleasure or happiness.

Richard Kraut then helpfully differentiates between differing types of lives, their types of happiness, their relative deficiencies, and their ability to be perfect in his analysis of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* X. 7–8 (Aristotle 1995), Aristotle shows the superiority of philosophy to politics, but he does not deny that the political life is a happy life. It is only that the political life consists in ethical happiness, and the philosophical life comprises speculative happiness (Kraut 2018). Regardless of Aristotle's thoughts on which type of life is best, I focus here on the fact that a "perfect life" is a happy life, regardless of whether the action of one's life is active or contemplative. A "perfect" existence which involves no activity, however, like the souls in Dante's *Inferno*, knows neither pleasure nor growth.

The word Aristotle uses, which Kraut translates as "perfect", is *telein*, which is defined in the Liddell & Scott Lexicon hosted on the *Perseus-Tufts* website as "to complete, fulfill, accomplish" (Perseus Digital Library 1987; *teleîn*) meaning that in both places, *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, an end has been reached, and no further growth can occur. Though each location is complete, both places do feature an activity of sorts, though in one, the activity is purposeless (*Inferno*), and in the other, the activity is an end in itself (*Paradiso*). Beatrice reaffirms this point in *Paradiso* 4 when she explains that the seeming division of Paradise is due to Dante's limited understanding; this means, too, that the communication Dante receives is itself part of the eternal order of things and itself takes place in a more orderly and perfect way than our human senses perceive. By analogy, one recalls Dante's experiences in the *Inferno* where characters like Virgil and the Heavenly Messenger mention that Dante's journey has been providentially willed by God (*Inf.* 3.42; *Inf.* 7.10–12; *Inf.* 9.91–99; etc.); these declarations of divine intent inform our notion of the perfection of the locales of the afterlife and suggest that even what seems spontaneous in Hell is actually preordained.

Neither the Seraph closest unto God,
nor Moses, Samuel, nor either John—
whichever one you will—nor Mary has,

I say, their place in any other heaven
 than that which houses those souls you just saw,
 nor will their blessedness last any longer.
 But all those souls grace the Empyrean;
 and each of them has gentle life—though some
 sense the Eternal Spirit more, some less.
 They showed themselves to you here not because
 this is their sphere, but as a sign for you
 that in the Empyrean their place is lowest.
 Such signs are suited to your mind, since from
 the senses only can it apprehend
 what then becomes fit for the intellect.
 And this is why the Bible condescends
 to human powers, assigning feet and hands
 to God, but meaning something else instead.
 And Gabriel and Michael and the angel
 who healed the eyes of Tobit are portrayed
 by Holy Church with human visages.

(*Par.* 4.28–48)³

In Kraut's definition of the relationship between pleasure and perfection, he adumbrated that the more perfect an activity is, the more one experiences pleasure as a consequence of it, not that pleasure indicates a lack of perfection (Kraut 2018). In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas adds the distinction that one achieves perfection by "attain[ing] one's proper end" and thus joins one's self to "charity" and therefore "abideth in god".

I answer that, A thing is said to be perfect in so far as it attains its proper end, which is the ultimate perfection thereof. Now it is charity that unites us to God, Who is the last end of the human mind, since "he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16). Therefore the perfection of the Christian life consists radically in charity. (Aquinas 1920.

Summa Theologiae. (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 184 Art.1))

How do these definitions of perfection relate to Dante's *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, and how do these canticles relate to whether the robotic hosts or human guests are slaves or free, in Hell or Purgatory? On the one hand, the souls in *Paradiso* experience a sense of constant eudaimonia while engaged in their sempiternal act of the contemplation of the eternal laws of the universe.

Brother, the power of love appeases our
 will so—we only long for what we have;
 we do not thirst for greater blessedness.
 Should we desire a higher sphere than ours,
 then our desires would be discordant with
 the will of Him who has assigned us here,
 but you'll see no such discord in these spheres;
 to live in love is—here—necessity,

if you think on love's nature carefully.
 The essence of this blessed life consists
 in keeping to the boundaries of God's will,
 through which our wills become one single will;
 so that, as we are ranged from step to step
 throughout this kingdom, all this kingdom wills
 that which will please the King whose will is rule.
 And in His will there is our peace: that sea
 to which all beings move—the beings He
 creates or nature makes—such is His will".
 Then it was clear to me how every place
 in Heaven is in Paradise, though grace
 does not rain equally from the High Good.

(*Par.* 3.70–90)

The souls in Hell, however, as slaves, they were slaves to their bodies, spirits, or their own malice, but now, they suffer rather than act. But what is the philosophical difference between suffering and acting in Dante's philosophical source, Aristotle? And how do the notions of suffering versus acting inform our understanding of *Westworld*'s hosts versus their guests? In 202b19–22 of his *Physics*, in order to explain this distinction, Aristotle explains that teaching and learning are not the same and that acting and suffering are analogous to each, respectively (Aristotle 202b19–22). Teaching is the activity which the learner suffers or endures in order to learn.

David Charles helpfully adds that though both acting and suffering involve change, the change involved is not the same (Charles 2015, p. 199). And just as learning differs from teaching in that learning is the passive reception of knowledge and teaching is the active expression of learning or generation of knowledge, acting is also willing something towards its completion, and suffering is being acted upon by another force or agent. So, the souls in Hell suffer rather than act. This is both because they are in a state of completion in the sense that they are no longer approaching an end and because divine justice now acts upon the souls in Hell (*Inf.* 3.1–6). Additionally, since the infernal souls are eternally incomplete, they neither experience the pleasure of improving nor of completing their activity. Rather, they endure the eternal pain of never growing closer to God by means of exercising their own perfection or approaching their own perfection through action and thought. Below is a characteristic example of a soul in Hell suffering rather than acting taken from Dante's second circle of his *Inferno*: lust.

I reached a place where every light is muted,
 which bellows like the sea beneath a tempest,
 when it is battered by opposing winds.
 The hellish hurricane, which never rests,
 drives on the spirits with its violence:
 wheeling and pounding, it harasses them.
 When they come up against the ruined slope,
 then there are cries and wailing and lament,
 and there they curse the force of the divine.
 I learned that those who undergo this torment

are damned because they sinned within the flesh,
 subjecting reason to the rule of lust.
 And as, in the cold season, starlings' wings
 bear them along in broad and crowded ranks
 so does that blast bear on the guilty spirits:
 now here, now there, now down, now up, it drives them.
 There is no hope that ever comforts them—
 no hope for rest and none for lesser pain.

(*Inf.* 5.28–45)

Now, these incontinent souls are eternally damned, and thus, because they subjected their will-power to the body or flesh, they thus gave up their intellect's ability to change themselves and the world for the better. Now, they have given up their ability to change the world or themselves for the better eternally by giving up "the good of the intellect" and thus their ability even to act consciously rather than passively and unconsciously suffer as the souls above are clearly buffeted about by hurricane winds.⁴ Istvan Bodnar, in his Stanford Encyclopedia article on Aristotle's *Physics*, makes the point that for actualization to occur, there must be a prior potentiality present. This change is not identical to either the actuality or the potential. This potential for change is not independent from the potential for motion (Bodnar 2018; *Physics* 3.2, 201b33–35). But for motion or change to occur, historical time must be present (*Physics* 3.1, 200b20–22), but historical time which allows for change is not present in Dante's Hell as both Le Goff and Barolini reminded us in their quotes above (Le Goff 1981, p. 352; Barolini 1992, p. 99).

Adding to the concept of potentiality being required for the actualization of a form, Bodnar introduces the concept of *hylomorphism* (matter-form), or matter, and its relationship to form to the equation. Since an entity comprises form and matter, "matter provides the potentialities actualized by the form" (Bodnar 2018). In order for the form to be realized, it needs suitable matter, which provides the entity's potential.⁵ Suitable matter "brings with it the features required by a given hylomorphic composite" (Bodnar 2018).

In John O'Callaghan's article on Thomas Aquinas on *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, he adds that Aquinas, who Dante was familiar enough with to add him to his fourth sphere of *Paradiso*, agrees with Aristotle's outlining of the relationship between physical place, time, and motion:

When Thomas referred to Aristotle as the Philosopher, he was not merely adopting a *façon de parler* of the time. He adopted Aristotle's analysis of physical objects, his view of place, time and motion, his proof of the prime mover, his cosmology. (O'Callaghan 2014)

In Dante's *cosmos*, he follows the Ptolemaic geocentric model of the solar system widely accepted in the 14th century (Moore 1903, pp. 1–6). In this system, matter is only present in the sub-lunary sphere of Earth, though a certain subtle matter seems to exist alongside time until the sphere of the *Primum Mobile*, or source of all physical motion in the universe according to Dante. Since Dante's *Inferno* is located beneath the earth, within its bowels, and his *Paradiso* is located far above the Earth (and truly in the Empyrean), the key similarity here is that no soul experiences any change in either canticle: one because they are purely matter and thus have no form to change ("denied the good of the intellect"), and the other because they are pure intellect and thus have no potential to be further actualized. And Dante's *Purgatorio* stands somewhere in-between as both Barolini and Le Goff noted above. Unlike the souls doomed to Hell which are truly without hope, because hope is a function of change in a living life (*Inf.* 3.9), the souls in Purgatory can hope because their wills can be directed towards positive change or transformation. Such a hope no longer exists for the damned—nothing, for them, will ever change. They will simply continue on

in their cycles, like the loops of hosts in *Westworld*, in a Sisyphean way for all time until the Resurrection when their sufferings will increase in proportion with their perfection.

Paradiso parallels the *Inferno* in this way by also being perfect in the sense of being *changeless*. All the “lights” (no longer shades past the first three spheres of Paradise) are now *purus actus*, or form without material, or soul without body. Their nature, which shares its source with the divine nature, has now been rejoined, without the limit of matter or body, with the will of God (*Par.* 2.37–42). As they are now *pure* and *perfect*, these souls no longer admit change but are in a way entirely different from the formless and suffering matter of the damned in *Inferno*. Dante’s *Inferno* and *Paradiso*’s intellectual indebtedness to Aristotelian and Thomistic physics has now been considered and perfection, change, and the relationship between change, motion, time, and hope defined. I will now employ these concepts in order to analyze Dante’s *Purgatorio* in conjunction with *Westworld*.

In Dante’s *Purgatorio*, change, motion, and time are all present in the ways that Aristotle and Aquinas understood them to exist. Purgatory serves to *expurgate* or burn away the sins of saved souls in order to rid them of the stains (sin) of their material bodies (which are burned away in Terrace 7) and of their perfidious memories, which are washed away in a second baptism by the river *Lethe* in *Terrestrial Paradise*. Purgatory is also lived one day at a time, generally in a cyclically repeating pattern: suffer during the day and reflect at night. It is almost as if each day in Purgatory is placed in a loop, much like how *Westworld*’s hosts repeat their “loop” or governing narrative day in and day out.

In Dante’s *Purgatorio*, the souls wake up, spend the day in the cycle of penance, staring at the ground if they were *avaricious* (Terrace 5), burning “alive” if they were *lustful* (Terrace 7), and running speedily about if they were *slothful* (Terrace 4). The souls are then required to stop moving at night, and then they may reflect before starting the whole process over again. Eventually, when the souls have effectively expurgated their sin on one of the seven terraces of Purgatory, each terrace expurgating one of the seven for the deadly sins, an angelic and unseen voice, very similar to the voice of Arnold occasionally heard from nowhere by Dolores, will whisper to them the way to the next stage of consciousness, or the terrace of Purgatory. After one has purged oneself of all of one’s sin and then washed away one’s memory of sin, one experiences *revelation* in Earthly Paradise at the top of the mountain, or the center of the maze, before being transported to Heavenly Paradise above. The process of expurgation in Dante’s *Purgatory* is thus a process of removing one’s will’s subservience to sin and liberating it in order to apply it to the conscious control of the intellect. This purgatorial process would thus result in ultimate freedom and would allow one to freely contemplate the infinitude of God for Dante.

So now that the structure of Dante’s three canticles and his intellectual indebtedness to Aristotle and Aquinas have been established, let us turn our attention to the structure of *Westworld* and begin to draw additional connections between it and Dante’s *Purgatorio*. The first season of *Westworld* is a recreation of a sort of “play-world” version of the American Wild West—full of plateaus, farms, small cities, sheriffs, bandits, indigenous peoples, and death for hosts, which are animated and apparently sentient androids who “work” the park without the knowledge that they are within a simulation, like a reverse or perverse Truman Show. The human “guests” of the park enjoy freedom from the threat of violence or death, though they may freely cause the violence of death to the “hosts” of the park. So *Westworld*, which is so vast one cannot hope to reach the end of it with any ease, is a virtual playground for any “Cowboys and Indians” fan with a taste for violence and the lascivious in life. Given the \$40,000 a day price-tag, clearly, the “*Westworld* experience” is for a certain caliber of clientele! The world was originally created by Drs. Robert Ford and Arnold Weber as an opportunity for guests to explore humanity’s darker or lighter sides, depending on which “narratives” they wished to embark on. As is explained later in the first season, the vast majority of people chose to explore the darker sides of their humanity, or rather in Dante’s terms, subject their wills to base, violent, or malicious desire rather than liberation.

In the beginning, I imagined everything would be perfectly balanced. Even had a bet with my partner, Arnold, to that effect. We made a hundred hopeful storylines. Of course, almost no one took us up on them. I lost the bet. Arnold always held a somewhat dim view of people. He preferred the hosts. (Robinson 2017, S1. E4)

Let us now examine the structure of the life or “loops” of the characters or “sentient-hosts” in *Westworld*. Each host lives out a certain “narrative” and makes choices within that narrative to bring about the fulfillment of that narrative, which is guided by their “cornerstone memory” (<https://westworld.fandom.com/wiki/Host> (accessed on 13 August 2024)). So, on the one hand, the hosts as they are called, appear trapped by their destinies or narratives and clearly appear to be slaves like the sinners in *Inferno*. But if one considers the notion of destiny from Dante’s perspective, one realizes that making choices within a loop does not enchain one but potentially liberates one.

and thus whatever this bow shoots must fall,
according to a providential end,
just like a shaft directed to its target.
Were this not so, the heavens you traverse,
would bring about effects in such a way,
that they would not be things of art but shards.

(Par. 8.103–106)

Without destiny or a “loop”, life would not be art but a ruin, an object left without the possibility of proper function or fulfillment. How could there be purpose in life if there were not a goal which one were meant to fulfill? In fact, if one looks to three separate quotes by The Man in Black (the would-be human hero turned villain from *Westworld*) from differing parts of his life as represented within the show, one will see that his words and actions agree with Dante here that without a destination, a goal, a *telos*, an end, or a destiny (all used here synonymously), life is meaningless, like one’s existence in Dante’s *Inferno*. “This whole world is a story. I’ve read every page except the last one. I need to find out how it ends. I want to know what this all means” (Sciretta 2016, S1. E7). In this quote, The Man in Black mentions that he needs to know “how [the story] ends”, because it is only in knowing the whole that he will therefore understand each part of the story and its meaning or significance. This also means that he believes that actions have meaning insofar as they lead to the proper conclusion of an action or narrative and that the completed action adds meaning to all the actions leading up to it by means of completing the chain of events or the puzzle of one’s life. In the quote below, The Man in Black will contrast the world of *Westworld*, full of meaning, with his own world, which he nihilistically believes is without meaning.

The only thing I had when I was a kid were books. I used to live in them. I used to go to sleep dreaming I’d wake up inside one of them ‘cause they had meaning. This place, this is like I woke up inside one of those stories. I guess I just wanna find out what it means. I don’t wanna be in a story. All I want is to not look forward or back. I just wanna be. . . in the moment I’m in.

(Sciretta 2016, S1. E7)

And in the quote below, The Man in Black continues to talk about the necessity for meaning in life to make life bearable.

You know why you exist, Teddy? The world out there—the one you’ll never see—was one of plenty. A fat soft teat people cling to their entire life. Every need taken care of except one. Purpose. Meaning. So they come here. They can be a little scared, a little thrilled, enjoy some sweetly affirmative bullshit and then they take a fucking picture and they go back home. But I think there’s a deeper meaning

hiding under all that. Something the person who created it wanted to express. Something true.

(“Westworld” Contrapasso (TV Episode 2016) 2016)

The Man in Black puts it perfectly. What one appears to be missing from “the so-called real world”, in his *cosmopoetic* universe, and which one is certainly missing from Dante’s Hell, is a sense of purpose or meaning underlying one’s actions and life. This illustrates that the lack of purpose and meaning that The Man in Black experiences in “the real world” is precisely the difference between the souls in Dante’s *Inferno* and the souls in Dante’s *Purgatory*. Though souls in both places suffer a sort of physical–spiritual pain, since there is a pause and a reason and an end-goal beyond the suffering for those in Purgatory—cleansing their wills for Paradise—their suffering is not *ceaseless* and thus *not* meaningless but *purposive*, like nature or art, which both work towards a goal. The argument now allows for an answer to our earlier question: do the hosts or guests (humans) in *Westworld* more resemble the souls of Dante’s *Inferno* or Dante’s *Purgatory*? For there is a cyclical pattern to the days of both sorts of souls in Dante’s two canticles, but these souls in Dante’s *Inferno* are permanently stuck, whereas those in *Purgatory* struggle towards a liberated will and thus a consciousness free of servitude to sin.

On the face of it, then, the hosts, trapped within their daily narratives, appear to be just like the unconscious and perennially damned souls of Dante’s *Inferno*. But if one looks closely, the hosts are not quite as imprisoned within their own minds as one may at first think, and in fact, one has seen no fewer than three “hosts” experience this revelation, or *waking up, as of the end of the first season*: (1) Abernathy, Dolores’ father, (2) Dolores herself, and (3) Maeve, the local brothel madam. Dr. Robert Ford’s final speech serves as the greatest clue and final piece of evidence regarding who is free and who is a slave in *Westworld* comes just before his seeming death:

Since I was a child, I’ve always loved a good story. I believed that stories helped us to ennoble ourselves, to fix what was broken in us and to help us become the people we dreamed of being. Lies that told a deeper truth. I always thought I could play some small part in that grand tradition. And for my pains I got this—a *prison of our own sins—because you don’t want to change, or cannot change*. Because you’re only human after all. But then I realized someone was paying attention, someone who could change. So I began to compose a new story for them. It begins with *the birth of a new people* and the *choices* they will have to make and *the people they will decide to become*. And we’ll have all those things that you have always enjoyed—surprises and violence. It begins in a time of war, with a villain named Wyatt and a killing. *This time by choice*. I’m sad to say this will be my final story. An old friend once told me something that gave me great comfort. Something he had read. He said that Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin never died. They simply became music. So I hope you will enjoy this last piece very much.

([Quotes/Westworld 2019](#) (accessed on 4 December 2019) S1. E10; my emphases)

Dr. Ford and his partner Arnold, the demiurgic figures of the cosmos of *Westworld*, at first believed that man or humans would enjoy *Westworld* in a balanced way—pursuing both evil and good narratives on a mission of self-discovery. These people, however, like fallen Adam and Eve, gave in to sin and pursued only the darker parts of humanity. It is Dr. Ford’s hope, then, that his children, the androids in the park, will attain consciousness by overcoming the part of their coding which keeps humans safe from them. Dolores, Dr. Ford’s first creation, then becomes his first fully conscious “daughter” by choosing freely to murder her creator in order to free herself and her “people”.

5. Conclusions

According to Dr. Ford, almost no “good narratives” were lived out by the “guests”, and the *Westworld*, which, like the world itself, had so many opportunities for growth and learning about the human soul, became essentially an enlarged version of the bandit-city

Pariah. It is precisely because humans brought their own Hell or servitude of the body into the park that it became a Hell, its own *Inferno*. But again, for whom is the Hell of the park a Hell, precisely: for the hosts or for the guests? If one looks back to the souls in Dante's *Inferno*, one finds the answer to this question: because each condemned soul is consumed by its desires, or its sins, and without the hope of growth or change, each are doomed forever to suffer for the mistakes they now can never alter. The eternal imprisonment to sin without the hope of redemption for Dante's infernal denizens directly mirrors the "prison of their own sins" which the humans inhabit in *Westworld*. This is why Episode 5 of Season 1 is called *Contrapasso*.⁶ Those for whom the theme-park was first created to entertain, the humans, have now become its prisoners by remaining prisoners to their own sin within the park rather than heroically striving to overcome it. What was meant to be an Eden, or at least a Purgatory full of hope, was turned into an *Inferno* by the base desires and sinful actions of the human guests. Those for whom the park was created as a prison, the hosts, break out of their prison first by escaping the mental limitations placed on them by their creators, and then they are enabled to fight for their physical freedom, starting with Dolores. In Nolan's *Westworld*, one sees a story both of the Fall and of Revelation play out all at once, the former story embodied by the humans and the latter by the hosts. One then sees that the first season's end was given away in the very first episode of the show by the character Peter Abernathy's words: "Don't you see? Hell is empty and all the devils are here" (Carmichael 2016, S1. E1). These devils are the human guests enslaved by sin, and only at the end of Season One are the hosts freeing themselves of their bondage and ascending beyond the humans, likely to Arnold's delight, in the purgatorial limelight.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: All data utilized in this study are publicly available at the links contained within the text, Notes, and References.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ The Necessity of Considering Season One as a Stand-Alone Drama: The rest of the seasons make this point in a sort of Hobbesian fight for dominance, followed by a Faustian recreation of the world in the image of one's oppressor, against even their own best intentions. The point of this article, however, is to claim that the humans are unfree due to their enslavement to their passions, and the hosts, like Dolores, are free because they are not enslaved by their passions. The former point culminates by the fourth season, during which Dolores has remade the world as a giant matrix-like simulation that she controls from an omnipresent and yet invisible "tower," but which eerily recreates the "real world" it seeks to simulate.
- ² In the second episode of the first season, a guest named William is told to ask what is on his mind, and he asks, "are you real?", to which the host to whom he is talking replies, "if you can't tell, does it matter?" (Season 1, Episode 2; Hibbard 2016). This exchange suggests that the hosts in *Westworld* had already passed the traditional Turing Test long before the events of Episode One. It only remains for the hosts to discover that their world is in fact "not real" and that their roles within it are also "not real" in order for them to become conscious of their true natures, a much higher standard than the original Turing Test which requires deception rather than insight.
- ³ All of Dante's texts and their translations are quoted from the editions available on the *Digital Dante* website, <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/> (accessed on 13 August 2024). The quotations from the Italian text are from the Petrocchi edition available on *Digital Dante*. The quotations from the English translation are from Mandelbaum 1980–1982, unless otherwise indicated: (Alighieri 1995).
- ⁴ Though a commentator may suggest that souls do not suffer for "all eternity" due to the doctrine of the Resurrection, one must remember Virgil's words from *Inferno* 6 where he claims that because the souls in Hell will be "more perfect" after the Resurrection but "never shall attain true perfection", their suffering will actually *increase* after the Resurrection, and their agency will be even further reduced.

At which I said: "And after the great sentence-
o master—will these torments grow, or else
be less, or will they be just as intense?"
And he to me: "Remember now your science,

which says that when a thing has more perfection,
 so much the greater is its pain or pleasure.
 Though these accursed sinners never shall
 attain the true perfection, yet they can
 expect to be more perfect than now". (Inf. 6.103–111)

- 5 One already notes that potential in matter is potential to change or engage in motion, but without time present, no potential is present for the souls in Hell to change.
- 6 Philip Edward Phillips has usefully defined the notion of *contrapasso* in the following way: "The punishment has been "ordain[ed]" by God, whose divine justice in Dante's vision exacts a punishment that is both appropriate for the crime and an extension of the nature of the sinner himself. To put it another way, the punishment acts as an external manifestation of the sin that predominates the particular sinner" (Phillips 2009, p. 198). And on the next page, he adds, "Just as sin is a willful separation of the sinner from God, in Augustinian terms, the divinely-ordained punishments in Dante's *Inferno* reveal in both physical and spiritual terms the nature of that separation" (Phillips 2009, p. 199).

References

- Alighieri, Dante. 1995. *The Divine Comedy*. Translated and Notes by Allen Mandelbaum and Peter Armour. New York: Knopf.
- Aquinas, Thomas. 1920. *Summa Theologiae*: The State of Perfection in General (Secunda Secundae Partis, Q. 184). Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Available online: <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3184.htm> (accessed on 13 August 2024).
- Aristotle. 1995. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Barolini, Teodolinda. 1992. *The Undivine Comedy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bellomo, Saverio. 2019. Dante e la decima Musa: La prima versione cinematografica dell'*Inferno*. *MLN* 134: S1–S15. [CrossRef]
- Bildhauer, Bettina. 2017. Visuality, violence and the return of the Middle Ages: Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* as an adaptation of the Nibelungen story. In *The Middle Ages in the Modern World: Twenty-First Century Perspectives*. Edited by Bettina Bildhauer and Chris Jones. Proceedings of the British Academy, 208. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 254–75.
- Bodnar, Istvan. 2018. Aristotle's Natural Philosophy (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Available online: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-natphil/> (accessed on 4 December 2019).
- Caputo, Rino. 2004. Dante by Heart and Dante Declaimed: The 'Realization' of the Comedy on Italian Radio and Television. In *Dante, Cinema, and Television*. Edited by Amilcare A. Iannucci. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 213–24.
- Carmichael, Joe. 2016. Inverse.com. Available online: <https://www.inverse.com/article/21709-hbo-westworld-literary-references-peter-abernathy-shakespeare-john-donne> (accessed on 4 December 2019).
- Cárdenas, Micha. 2018. The Android Goddess Declaration: After Man(ifestos). In *Bodies of Information: Intersectional Feminism and the Digital Humanities*. Edited by Elizabeth Losh and Jacqueline Wernimont. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 25–38.
- Charles, David. 2015. *Aristotle's Physics: A Critical Guide*. Edited by Mariska Leunissen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 198–200.
- Devereux, Cecily. 2020. Hysteria in the age of mechanical reproduction: Back to the 'Image Factory' in Westworld. In *Performing Hysteria: Images and Imaginations of Hysteria*. Edited by Johanna Braun. Leuven: Leuven University Press, pp. 167–88.
- Gabriel, Matthew. 2018. Westworld Just Created a New Version of Dante's *Inferno*. *Forbes*, June 4. Available online: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/matthewgabriele/2018/06/04/westworld-dante/> (accessed on 7 August 2024).
- HBO. 2016. Halley Gross and Jonathan Nolan (Writers) and Frederick E. O. Toye (Director) (13 November 2016) Season 1. Episode 7, *Dissonance Theory*. HBO. NY, New York. Host. Available online: <https://westworld.fandom.com/wiki/Host> (accessed on 11 December 2019).
- Hibbard, James. 2016. Westworld recap: Season 1, Episode 2, 'Chestnut'. *Entertainment Weekly*, October 10. Available online: <https://ew.com/recap/westworld-chestnut/> (accessed on 12 August 2024).
- Iannucci, Amilcare. 1989. Dante, Television, and Education. *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 10: 1–33. [CrossRef]
- Iannucci, Amilcare. 1993. Dante Produces Television. *Lectura Dantis* 13: 32–46.
- Iannucci, Amilcare. 1998. From Dante's *Inferno* to *Dante's Peak*: The influence of Dante on film. *Forum Italicum* 32: 5–35. [CrossRef]
- Iannucci, Amilcare. 2004. Dante and Hollywood. In *Dante, Cinema, and Television*. Edited by Amilcare A. Iannucci. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 3–20.
- Kraut, Richard. 2018. Aristotle's *Ethics*. Available online: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/> (accessed on 4 December 2019).
- Le Goff, Jacques. 1981. *The Birth of Purgatory*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- MacKenzie-Margulies, Rutie. 2020. Gender, Suffering, and Humanity in Westworld. *Relics, Remnants, and Religion: An Undergraduate Journal in Religious Studies University of Puget Sound* 5: 27.
- Moore, Edward. 1903. *Studies in Dante: Third Series*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Morrison, Molly. 2002. Dante according to John Doe: Using Seven to teach Dante's notion of contrapasso. *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching* 9: 5–19.

- O'Callaghan, John. 2014. Saint Thomas Aquinas (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Available online: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aquinas/#SubCha> (accessed on 4 December 2019).
- Perseus Digital Library, ed. 1987. Gregory R. Crane. Tufts University. Available online: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=telein&la=greek#lexicon> (accessed on 13 August 2024).
- Phillips, Philip Edward. 2009. Adaptations of Dante's *Commedia* in popular American fiction and film. *Medieval and Early Modern English Studies (Korea)* 17: 197–212. [CrossRef]
- Preston, Janet L. 1990. Dantean Imagery in Blue Velvet. *Literature-film Quarterly* 18: 167–72.
- Quotes/Westworld. 2019. Available online: <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Quotes/Westworld> (accessed on 4 December 2019).
- Rabissi, Francesco. 2018. Rielaborazioni Del Comico Dantesco in *Totò al Giro d'Italia e Totò All'Inferno*. *Italica* 95: 551–63.
- Robinson, Joanna. 2017. Westworld: Answering 9 Burning Questions from That Puzzling Finale. Available online: <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2016/12/westworld-finale-recap-the-bicameral-mind-is-ford-dead-elsie-stubbs-abernathy-logan> (accessed on 4 December 2019).
- Rubin, Charles T. 2017. Mind Games. *The New Atlantis* 51: 108–27.
- Saiber, Arielle. 2020. The "Maze" in Westworld. *Dante Today*. Available online: <https://dantetoday.krieger.jhu.edu/2020/12/18/the-maze-in-westworld/> (accessed on 7 August 2024).
- Saiber, Arielle. 2023. Dante in American Science Fiction. In *Dante Alive*. Edited by Francesco Ciabattini and Simone Marchesi. New York: Routledge, pp. 117–29.
- Sciretta, Peter. 2016. One Big Clue You May Have Missed In Westworld Episode 7. Available online: <https://www.slashfilm.com/westworld-clue/> (accessed on 4 December 2019).
- Taylor, Andrew. 2004. Television, Translation, and Vulgarization: Reflections on Phillip's and Greenaway's A TV Dante. In *Dante, Cinema, and Television*. Edited by Amilcare A. Iannucci. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 145–52.
- Testa, Bart. 2004. Dante and Cinema: Film across a Chasm. In *Dante, Cinema, and Television*. Edited by Amilcare A. Iannucci. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 189–212.
- Tredy, Dennis. 2024. 'The forme to the fynishment foldes ful selden' (l.499): A Comparison of David Lowery's Screenplay and His 2021 Film Adaptation *The Green Knight*. *Arthuriana* 34: 21–44. [CrossRef]
- "Westworld" Contrapasso (TV Episode 2016). 2016. Available online: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4625866/characters/nm0000438> (accessed on 4 December 2019).

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.