

The Library of All Stories: Purgatory,
Therapy and Character Arcs in Dante and in
Great Expectations, *One Hour Photo*, *The
Third Man* and *Sunrise*, in Camus' Novel *The
Fall*, and in Edgar Allen's Poe's Short Stories

For a moment let's ignore the religious intent of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and see his massive phantasmagoric construction in a different, purely secular light. Picture his three linked zones not as a real place but instead as a meta-dramatic edifice that we might call The Library of All Stories Ever Lived and That Will Ever Be Lived. Since Dante has designed this grand metaphysical machine to accept and sort all lives that will ever be lived, it can organize and hold all possible human stories. And because it can evaluate people's lived stories and thus slot them into spatial planes with many concentric zones of overlapping actions and appropriate punishments, Dante's construction claims to be meta-narrative: by claiming to properly archive all dramatic life stories, it also claims to reveal the building-codes that determine the dramas of life. All "shelved" inhabitants of a zone are grouped there by their specific type of character arc, and this arc determines the kinds of spaces to be found within that "library" zone and that decides what stories arrive there. In other words, because it is designed as a kind of walkable grand library that will organize and hold all human tales, with their specificity preserved but all properly arranged, linked and shelved by common themes and story arcs, his *Divine Comedy* is a massive architectural construct that aspires to contain all narrative space.

We see this most directly in Hell's city of Dis, which is both an early instance of centralized city planning and also an infinite city: we may

meet the exemplar of a ring's neighborhood, the pedagogically-shaped spokesperson for a specific bad behavior and hellish suburb, but really the land runs off infinitely behind them, always ready to hold more. In each of Dante's three zones there is space to hold billions because it is actually *story* space, an empty plot zoned and deeded and waiting for you to build your own lot in life.

In this chapter we take Dante's building-codes secularly and yet seriously. In fact we will argue that after Dante there are three basic zoning laws to Western narratives, three main forms of story arc for characters: hellish, purgatorial, and heavenly. Each form of arc corresponds to one of Dante's spatial zones, which means that his Hell, Purgatory and Heaven reflect certain building-codes of narrative that we will need to better understand our topology of story space. Here we will examine hellish arcs and stories, while later chapters of Part II focus on purgatorial stories. In Part III we examine heavenly arcs and stories. Again, the intent is to lay bare some of the dramatic building-codes that undergird so many Western narratives today, to show in a sense how his Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, shorn of their claims to an afterlife, exist in story and also make claims on our real lived lives.

ARCS THAT BEND TOWARDS HELL, HEAVEN AND PURGATORY

First, a tour of Hell. As we have noted already, every single one of Hell's characters is in a specific geography in Hell because his or her life story contains an arc that is simply Hell-bent on its completion.¹ But it is also important to notice another aspect of their situation: no-one Dante meets in Hell is going anywhere. No matter how long they suffer, this is where they stay because dramatically their stories are over. Hell is final.

A similar dramatic finality, an inertia of the soul, also settles on the occupants of Heaven. Unlike the gods of the ancient Greeks who seem to live lives full of fascinating and world-changing adventures, the characters in Dante's Heaven are easily the least dramatic of *The Divine Comedy*. Even their life-stories are far less interesting than those of the other two zones: it seems as if these characters have all dodged the slings and arrows of misfortune to arrive here unsullied, ready to take their place in a flat, unremarkable place unmarked, unburned and unbent by her or his particular character history.

However, by contrast to the closed fates of both hellish and heavenly inhabitants, each of the characters in Purgatory, that distinct zone

linking Heaven and Hell, has a chance to escape, a second act, a dramatic possibility to undo the mistakes committed in life and then rise to Heaven. Some carry stones for an age before ascending, others must come to some great revelation or insight before they can move on, others must simply pay the price of their sins in pain. But in all cases, the arcs of the inhabitants of purgatorial space are dramatically still alive. His Purgatory introduced a new form of story arc that was only primitively realized before Dante—the purgatorial arc, which we discuss in the following chapters of Part II.

To round out our overview of these character-arc zones, it might be useful to revisit the concept of the character arc itself. Earlier we defined a character arc as a change in, or a final failure to change, one's core tendencies. In a dramatic character arc the outcome of the arc will directly affect the character's possibility for happiness, and possibly the lives and happiness of others. As the writer and narrative theorist Charles Baxter notes so crisply (Baxter 2012), our dramas tend to focus on arcs like that of Lady Macbeth, who says in the penultimate moment in her character arc that "What is done cannot be undone." Baxter asks us to imagine a door that, once we walk through it we cannot go back to where we were; this, he suggests, is the defining quality of dramatic moments where a character arc becomes fixed and cannot be changed. Many examples of this exist in life, ranging from losing one's virginity to committing a murder.

In Dante's world, all the characters in Hell and Heaven have already walked through such doors in life. Now those doors are solidified "*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate*: Abandon all hope, you who enter" is written on the archway into Hell: it implies not only the tortures ahead but that your own story and your character arc are now coming to a fixed conclusion. While smoldering dramas may lie ahead, any further changes in your character do not: you have already walked through all of your dramatic doors in life.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE HELLS

If this were their only building-code, Dante's zones would be clear and simple. But there is another dramatic wrinkle in his plan, a wrinkle that carries over to all of our stories. In Hell we run into many unchanging dramas, but they fall into two kinds: passive and active.

On the one hand, many of the characters in his hellish spaces have given themselves up to their new fates. Think of Farinata, or of the

characters in the sullen ooze: these are people who now lie supine or defeated in their imprisoning space, knowing and accepting their fate while suffering through it. They have all become what writers would call passive characters, characters without an active objective. Lacking any goal to struggle towards, seeing no escape and no alternative to their fate, they simply suffer, doing nothing to resist their suffering. We meet such people in life and literature.

CAMUS' NOVEL *THE FALL*

Consider for example Clamence, the protagonist of Camus' novel *The Fall*. Clamence is a famous lawyer who at first leads a very active life fighting for the poor and the oppressed. But one night, coming home after visiting his mistress and crossing the Pont Royal bridge—which spans the Seine where it flows like a giant canal through the heart of Paris—Clamence sees a woman dressed in black standing on the bridge's edge. He knows just what the woman is about to do, yet he walks on. He reaches the street at the other side of the bridge before he hears the sound of the splash and the scream behind him. He does nothing but listen, frozen to the spot as she drowns. This moral and physical immobility becomes the Dantean moment for our main character, and is the turning-point of *The Fall*.

Years later he is passing near the same spot one evening when he hears laughter. And now his suppressed memory returns with a vengeance: though rationally recognizing that the laugh must have come from some passing pair of friends, he cannot escape the conviction: "I could still hear it distinctly behind me, coming from nowhere unless from the water."

And with this the anonymous dead woman in black becomes not just a ghost but a shade that comes to inhabit him and change his perceptions and his career, locale and life. His spirit crushed under the weight of this moral crime, our successful, highly-respected lawyer now quits his practice and leaves Paris to live in foggy London. Then after years of ironic stances and itinerant moral clowning he finally comes to rest in Amsterdam, drawn to its constant existence under sea level, to its dark foggy nights and its reputation for unsavory urban squalor, becoming not only an habitu   but a fixture of its Inferno-like ring of canals and of the bar *Mexico City* in its infamous red-light district. Without work, he is now a connoisseur of the depths of depravity, a night-walking fl  neur and a debauched, self-immolating character straight out of Dostoevski, a self-abasing Stavrogin, a man who has dived not only underground but

under sea level, drifting listlessly through the canals and gutters of a wet nocturnal Amsterdam as if hoping to find some Mack the Knife character who will put him out of his misery.

It is a moody and sometimes gothic novel, a cross between Henry Miller and *The Third Man*. It is also a classic example of a Dantean space: a city becomes a visual, sensual and even aural projection of a specific Dantean moment that our main character cannot get beyond. It is a Hell in the classical Dantean sense not only because of its specific visual and sensual references, overtly drawn in the novel itself, but because it uses the same deep architecture of Ugolino: it expresses the inner conflict, turmoil and guilt of a paralyzed main character. Here Amsterdam is not an active space: our narrator is not pursuing any specific goals or overarching external objectives. Nor is it in any way a purgatorial space: our narrator is going nowhere and will never overcome his crime of immobility on the Pont Royal. This paralysis may explain why the novel has never been made into a film: once Clamence walks away from the suicidal woman he becomes passive, a metaphor for a paralyzed Europe after the Holocaust.

Other stories have a similar self-abasement arc but use different spatial strategies: think of *Barfly* (1987) which constructs grotesque Dantean spaces that are smeared and caked theatrically with grime and cracks to reflect the self-abasement of the committed alcoholic Bukowski. Contrast that film with *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995) which, while also featuring a similarly self-abasing alcoholic protagonist, instead remains in unheightened dramatic spaces as we watch the character drink himself to death. The spaces in *Barfly* are a reflection of the inner life of the character, while *Leaving Las Vegas*'s are indifferent backdrops that convey little emotional information (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2).



Figs. 5.1 and 5.2 The Dantean space of *Barfly* (1987) vs. the dramatic space of *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995)

HOW TO STAY ACTIVE IN HELL

But it's important to note that not *all* characters in Hell are as passive as these examples from *The Fall*, *Barfly* and *Leaving Las Vegas*. Many do not simply accept their fate: some struggle fiercely against it. They are like Ugolino, who never gives up his drive and his goal: in a sense he is quite excited to finish telling Dante his short tale so he can get back to gnawing at the skull of the archbishop. He is still seized by rage, by a burning sense of revenge, still maddened by his own desperate guilt and grief. Though he may not understand how defeated he is, Ugolino is very dramatically active. In fact his activity is a fundamental part of his hellish trap. Like Capaneus, his emotions still construct and are the burning energy of his architected space. Characters do not only make and be their own Hell: they can at the same time constantly generate it all around them, constantly feeding it with their fierce energies, constantly trapped like Sisyphus in a loop they themselves make and yet cannot step out of or recognize.

Often in our dramas this is a problem of Self-cognition. We know Ugolino is in Hell, but does he? It is an open question. We can easily imagine that if he did himself understand he is in Hell then he might in this moment of revelation give up his struggle and lie there sobbing next to the archbishop. Perhaps some part of his mind knows this and drives him on: to stop gnawing on the archbishop's skull would be to face the death of his children and so to face himself. Perhaps he knows that would be a level of Hell that he cannot move to without becoming permanently shattered and incoherent. And besides, who would then punish the archbishop? Better to continue the vengeful relationship between them, better to have an objective. And so as often happens, revenge holds the vengeful together, becoming a shield against overwhelming grief and the fear of psychic destruction.

INFERNO ARCS: ARE YOU STUCK IN HELL? WOULD YOU KNOW IF YOU WERE?

Now we visit some Dantean characters that are already in Hell when we first meet them in a story.

Consider Miss Havisham in her many cinematic realizations (1946, 1998, 2012): she has no desire to leave her gothic Dantean space. She could simply walk out into the sunshine at any time but, she stays

a social isolate in her house, like Ugolino unable to confront her situation, the passing of time in the world and her own shame at being abandoned, instead fixating on taking revenge against men. Like Ugolino, she has both a fierce shame *and* an activating passion that glue her to her space. But unlike him, who has his enemy trapped in front of him, Miss Havisham cannot ever find her jilting suitor, and so she has instead decided to inflict pain on all men. The novel's main character, young Pip then stands in for her suitor: as object of her vengeance Pip is her latest instantiation of Ugolino's archbishop. Note that while the vengeful Miss Havisham is active in the story, she is like Ugolino nevertheless passive towards her own Dantean space; neither fights to get free of it.

ONE HOUR PHOTO

Other characters in empathetic Dantean spaces are actually trapped there and have only a passive relationship to it even if, like Miss Havisham, they have quite an active role in the plot of their stories. This describes Norman, the protagonist of *Psycho*, but it also applies to the story of Sy, the protagonist of the thriller *One Hour Photo* (2002). This is the story of a clerk who runs the one-hour photo lab at a drugstore, who discovers through a family's photos that the husband is having an affair. Sy tries to insert himself into the family, then violently intervenes in the family's life, punishing the father and his lover by forcing them to pose for naked photos. Sy is then arrested and interrogated.

As an adult Sy is a highly controlling person. We know this largely because of how he is framed, and this sense of control is violated both psychologically and spatially as he begins to crack up and confuse his own past with the truth of the family he is obsessively observing. As his psychic pressure builds and he enters psychological spaces that convey his sense of danger, he feels compelled to force his own sense of right onto this unsuspecting family in an attempt to rewrite his own memories.

We learn at the film's end with the investigating cops that Sy's father abused him as a child, forcing him to pose naked for pictures. Knowing about this Dantean moment, we begin to see that Sy has been confusing the history of his own horrible childhood with the present story of the family that he happens to meet: Sy, we realize, has like Ugolino been living in two periods at once. Even though we now recognize how this has made him a danger to those around him, we nevertheless find him empathetic: in fact, all of the empathetic machinery of Dantean space is invoked in *One*

Hour Photo. We realize that Sy, while wanting to care for others and while needing a family of his own, will always be lonely. Because we see no character arc for him, no change in how he relates to the world, no self-reflection on his actions, no way out of his childhood trauma, we know that his future efforts to help others will also only alienate them from him. And yet we realize his motives are actually rather admirable—he was actually trying to save the family—and we also realize he deserves our pity. Sy is on his own in a Hell he did not make and cannot escape. He is in the end rather like a less dangerous version of Norman at the end of *Psycho*.

As the example of Sy shows, a character trapped in Hell can spread his own torture and pain far and wide without ever facing his condition, yet if we are granted access to his Dantean space we can still find him empathetic. But this film also shows something else: it illustrates how the frame is used in unique ways to take us into the Dantean space of a character. To see how, we should first discuss the use of the frame in cinema and television in some depth.

SPACE AS EXPRESSED THROUGH MIS-EN-SCÈNE AND THE FRAME

First, in any moment of empathetic reaction we experience in a narrative we might ask ourselves the following question: what is triggering my empathy here? Am I empathizing with the situation or with the character? With the moment and the spectacle or with the underlying themes? With the music? With the production design? With the framing? And how do these elements all work to make me cry or cheer?

In this book we have proposed some tools for revealing the roles of empathy, character and emotion in story. But is it right to ask broadly about the machinery of empathy in story, or is this too broad a question? Do film and television differ fundamentally from myths, epic poems and novels in their use of emotional machinery? Does the nature of a visual medium separate it permanently from space in spoken and written story? This question is deeply connected with another: what is the role of the filmic mis-en-scène—of the framing, sound design and music—in creating our empathy?

Let us for example consider some categories of space that are useful for teaching cinematographers and production designers, categories that don't obviously appear in spoken and written story, though they may

appear in static form in the set-design of plays. Below are seven spatial oppositions that can help describe most mis-en-scène.²

A frame can be described as a matrix of:

1. Balanced vs. unbalanced.
2. Chaotic vs. organized.
3. Open vs. closed.
4. Flat vs. deep.
(Shallow vs. deep VOLUMES)
5. Wide vs. long.
(Shallow vs. deep FOCUS)
6. Centered masses vs. distributed masses.
7. Foregrounded materials vs. a clean foreground.

We can look at a few examples here. Take two that represent psychic disorder and violence. *Apocalypse Now* (Fig. 5.3) tends to use unbalanced, open, chaotic, deep and wide frames, with its masses distributed, while *One Hour Photo* (Fig. 5.4) uses closed, organized frames with centered masses.

Take two other films that are both high in tone: *Amelie* tends towards organized, closed, flat and often deep frames with distributed masses, while *Raising Arizona* (Fig. 5.5), which imitates the cartoons of Wiley Coyote, uses an often-distorted open frame with centered masses and the deep volume of a distant horizon.

These categories *can* carry specific tropes with them: for example, consider neurotic characters like Sy, who often are too committed to reality and try to control it, as opposed to psychotic characters, who are often lost in their own world where their emotions stalk with freedom.



Figs. 5.3 and 5.4 A chaotic open frame vs. an organized closed frame = *Apocalypse Now* vs. *One House Photo*



Fig. 5.5 *Raising Arizona* uses spatial categories, landscape and performance tropes reminiscent of the comedy WB cartoon *Road Runner*

It is often true that the spatial representation of neurotic characters tends to use balanced, organized, closed frames, indicating their own need to control their worlds, while psychotic characters are often represented by a kind of chaos intruding into the world's order. We actually see this equation of balanced with control in many of the neurotic characters and spaces we will discuss in this book, such as *Star Wars*, *One Hour Photo*, *50 Shades of Grey*, *Pleasantville*, *Mad Men* and, arguably, *The Graduate*. And we will see the equation of psychosis with chaos in *Apocalypse Now*, most Bond movies and in the documentaries *Tarnation* (2003) and *Waltz with Bashir* (2008). But still this is not by any means an incipient meaning of the frame: the same categories of balanced and organized frames are used by contrast to represent safety and life in *Aliens* and in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, for example. It is the underlying character that determines the meaning of these deployments of frame and not vice versa.

To think of another example, an open frame can represent freedom (a trope of Westerns) or poverty (a trope of some neorealist films) or danger or the future or an infinite number of other associations, and these associations are largely determined by the demands of plot and by the history of the characters as well as by genre tropes. Like a color palette, these categories carry many and often contradictory histories and associations, but can also be determined by vivid backstories and personal histories, and so these frame categories do not reduce to a code of dramatic meanings independent of specific stories. In fact, their meanings

are best understood by seeing when and how they grow as we follow the development of a film from idea to treatment to script to rewrites to visualization.

The visualization and the visual book usually comes into being only once the project has been funded and the cinematographer and production designer join the team, which usually happens after months if not years of hard work crafting a character and the oppositions and alliances that character finds in a world. Frame choices almost always come quite late in the conceptual process of filmmaking and so we will treat the process as largely determined by a story's character and plot, categories that are usually determined much earlier in any story's fashioning.

The crucial point is that character links frame and space: once a menu of framing devices becomes linked to an emotional state of a character, this empathetic linkage then allows for other frames in the story to hark back to this moment or to these emotions. Different scenes with similar or clearly-opposing spaces then become linked and defined by these emotional associations. In many films, e.g. *Amelie*, these categories link the overall look to create a specific emotionally-charged world, while in others these linkages shift precisely because they track and inform us about the changing story and character arc of the film's protagonist.

EMPATHETIC LINKAGE OF DANTEAN FRAMES

This brings us back to *One Hour Photo*: this film illustrates how a Dantean sequence in an otherwise realistic-seeming film can have clear residual effects: Sy's Dantean dream, which comes well into the film, makes other scenes and framing suddenly resonate emotionally. A quiet set of gridded lines in the background of an earlier ordinary shot now feel like Sy's attempt to control his world's chaos. The attributes of mis-en-scène that this frightening dream highlights—a balanced frame, plain white and blue surfaces, receding perspective lines, and a total lack of the earth tones given to the family's life—have been seen in the film from the start, but after Sy's nightmare they acquire significance. Now we know they express Sy's attempts to keep control of his inner demons by seeing the world as devoid of disturbing, messy human relationships. That suspicion is confirmed in the final scene by his joy over his final stack of photos, quotidian pictures of the clean objects and white walls of his hotel room. This tactic is also there in *Batman Begins*, where a set of umbrellas at Bruce's parents' funeral suddenly announce themselves as

echoes of his childhood run-in with the bats in the scene that opened the film. In such films we are turned into emotional detectives, looking for clues and then linking residual emotional signals among otherwise realistic settings. (As we will see, the film *The Third Man* also has something of this residual framing effect in its final shot, which harks quietly back to the earlier sequence in the sewers to imply that Holly is, in some psychological and moral sense, still trapped in that murky environment.)³

One Hour Photo becomes alternately more balanced *and* more chaotic as Sy wrestles with his demons. Thus the spatial frame in a film, although it can be relatively unchanging, can also be harnessed to the development of the character's sensibility, fears, hopes and situation so that it dynamically expresses character conflicts and changes. In empathetic spaces framing tends to become more baroque and non-realistic, often in order to both announce that we are entering the experiential point of view of a character and to convey something about how this character is under psychic stress. These changes, usually married to a change in sound effects and in music, often intentionally break from the earlier pattern set in the film, and set a series of visual flags for the viewer in subsequent scenes, creating an empathetic linkage.

This is seen and felt in Sy's dream in the middle of *One Hour Photo* (Fig. 5.4). This non-realistic scene brings us into his sensibility, which in turn gives a new meaning to some of the film's location, situation, sound, music, color and framing. But note that Sy is not in conflict with his space: even if he is active he cannot change, and so this is a passive Hell, one he was thrust into long ago as a child and will never leave. He is dangerously active in his story but passive towards his Dantean space.

SPACE IN THE MAKING: HOW TO BUILD YOUR OWN DANTEAN SPACE

“She may be going to Hell, of course, but at least she isn't standing still.” This great line by E.E. Cummings⁴ gets to a core question at the heart of the films we look at in this and the next four chapters. In this remark there is an admiration for characters who refuse convention, who fight against something, who dare, but it also has traces of the sentiment that people create their own hell by choice and decisions, a sentiment that Dante shared.

Consider examples of characters that aren't standing still and suffering passively in their own Hell but are running towards it. We begin by

considering stories that use Dantean space to make this journey empathetic. In many of these stories a character's Dantean space is created before our eyes, usually because we witness them constructing their own Dantean moment and then experience it in increasing sensory and acoustic detail as it settles into them and seals their character arc, freezing their character in place.

DANTEAN SPACE IN EDGAR ALLEN POE

Edgar Allen Poe has two short stories that show a character meditating on committing a murder, then committing it and covering up, and then being haunted by the killing in a powerful spatial and aural way that leads to their conviction. These stories are very reminiscent of Dante, of course, in part for their clear and grotesque pedagogical horror.

In *The Black Cat* a husband who develops a hatred for his wife's cat blinds the animal and then murders his wife. He hides her dead body by putting it up against the wall and covering it with a new concealing stone wall. But then as the days go by, a horrible keening scream begins to come from the wall. He can hardly believe it, but neighbors too hear it and start to tear down the wall, to find not only the dead wife's body but also the blinded yowling black cat perched on her head.

In a similar short story, *The Tell-tale Heart*, the protagonist kills a man and then hides him under the floor in his house. And now over the course of days he begins to hear the beating heart of the dead man. Finally, when the neighbors convene in the room to discuss what to do about the disappearance of the man, the sound of the beating heart grows so loud in the mind of our protagonist that he finally pulls up the floor in desperation, thus revealing the corpse and condemning himself to death.

Both stories use their spaces to project guilt, rather like Camus used Amsterdam in *The Fall*. Guilt is a highly cognitive emotion that is the force behind so many hauntings in life and drama, and it plays this role because guilt marks a break in the self-perceived character arc of an individual. In these stories by Poe guilt is married to a Dantean moment in the life of the protagonist: the action of murder and concealment of the dead body is such a strong experience that it returns in sensorial and aural form, interpenetrating all later experiences, becoming the unvanquishable aural and visual evidence of this character's deed, and finally making life so unbearable that it leads to the revelation of the crime and punishment of its perpetrator.⁵ These characters actually wrestle with their own Dantean spaces as they struggle with their own murderous actions.

RACING TOWARDS HELL ONLY TO AVOID IT
AT THE LAST MINUTE: MURNAU'S *SUNRISE*

We can compare the two Poe short stories we discussed above, which feature characters living in a dread of their own making, with the protagonist of Murnau's *Sunrise* (1927).

Here too we have a protagonist living under a cloud of guilt: he plans to murder his loving, innocent wife. But here guilt is working very differently: reflecting yet another aspect of its deeply cognitive nature, the guilt in *this* film is not looking backwards to a crime committed but rather looks forwards, to a crime imagined and planned in some detail but not *yet* committed. This is the narrative space of dread: here our protagonist has not yet done anything wrong but is literally bent under the weight of his plans to murder his wife, abandon his child and run away with another woman.

This heavy cloud of guilt is heard from the moment the music starts under the opening titles; when we meet him our main character is already living in the shade of his coming Dantean moment. He knows what lies ahead and yet he runs towards it anyway, but the knowledge of what will happen has already turned his world dark, strange, tense and fearful. His plan twists his face and clouds his vision, darkening the world and the music that beats in his ears. By embodying his own dread and guilt, this space foreshadows the moral disaster he is knowingly propelling himself towards.⁶ In a sense he is like the people Dante meets in Hell: like them he is full of moral knowledge of his deed even if, unlike them, he hasn't yet committed it. And so this man rows onwards towards his own Dantean moment, against the current of his wife's long-suffering understanding and love, even while knowing that his intended action will break his life in two. So this film and its revolutionary, thickened air of psychological space is about a Dantean moment; though that moment lies ahead his future fallen state is already vividly imagined by our protagonist, creating the taut noir tension by threatening repeatedly to hove into view and settle permanently in his mind.

With this film we can see how different guilt is from other self-generating emotions that envelope the spaces we will discuss.

In life and drama, guilt is a deeply cognitive emotion because it is about planning and self-judgement. Its side-effect is to make us feel uncomfortable in our own skin and come to hate ourselves and seek for a way out. Because guilt involves us in judgements about our planning and our actions, guilt in drama about one's external objective is a strong

foreshadowing force, as the tension of Murnau's *Sunrise* makes very clear.

Guilt, in both life and drama, is usually resolved only by either rejecting some planned action that intends to cause someone harm, or by somehow paying for or undoing the damage of an accomplished harm, even in cases when the protagonist didn't fully intend the harm he caused. When the guilt is about an accomplished action, the protagonist must engage in a kind of balanced erasure of the event, a kind of penance or redemption, a purgatorial event of some kind, as we see in Dante's Purgatory, and in stories from *Lord Jim* to *Jaws* to *Spider Man* to *Toy Story* and *Gran Torino*. And when the guilt is laced with a strong intention, when it results from a plan to do someone harm, as in *Sunrise*, the guilty protagonist must reject and fully deliver himself from the plan. Only then can he deliver himself and his wife from this Hell: only then can the sun finally rise again.⁷

We can make a few further useful distinctions now about the different kinds of relationships a character can have with her space. In stories like *Amelie* the space is an expression of the character's best side, of hope and dream and joy: we might call these inviting spaces. But for Poe's two murderers and the character in *Sunrise*, their Dantean space becomes an expression of the antagonist they are struggling against. We might call such places abrasive spaces, spaces that rub against the character to provoke pain.

There are also hellish spaces that are not abrasive, exactly. For example, the hero of *The Fall* and the Bukowski character in *Barfly* seem comfortable in their Hell: in fact these protagonists have engineered or sought out this particular space and now treat it as a kind of nest that they do not want to leave. We might call these clearly unpleasant yet sought-out spaces self-abasing spaces. These are a kind of mirror of what the character feels he deserves, or has become, a willingly-chosen space of self-judgement. Our next example shows how a character comes to actively and knowingly devise his own hellish self-abasing space.

THE THIRD MAN

The Third Man (1949) is the tale of a man who knowingly heads into his own Hell; once again we witness a man who constructs his own Dantean space before our eyes. Here our protagonist experiences a Dantean

moment by causing the death of his friend and thus condemns himself to an existential Dantean space for the rest of his life.

When we first meet Holly Martins he is not in Hell nor is he entertaining the idea. A breezy winsome innocent American with no real understanding of the recent holocausts that have swept Europe, Holly arrives in post-war Vienna at the behest of his hero and childhood friend Harry Lime. In short order he learns Harry is dead, falls in love with Harry's grieving girlfriend Anna, learns Harry faked his death, and finally that Harry is a sociopathic crook, responsible for the murder and maiming of children and a stand-in for the destroyers of Europe.

As these external events unfold they produce a major inner change in Holly. We learn at the start that Harry is dedicated to his friends and to a morality as simple as the dime-store westerns that he writes for a living. But by the end of Holly's story (shown so powerfully in the famous long last shot of the film) we realize that from now on Holly's life will be quite different, that it has been broken into two parts. The innocent life of that rather jokey carefree Holly who loved and idolized his friend Harry is over, replaced now by this lonely, knowing life that began when he lured Harry to his death in the sewers under Vienna.

Again this break comes thanks to a Dantean space that is made before our eyes. A cloud of guilt hangs over Holly after he betrays Harry to the police in the sewers of Vienna: this becomes a traumatic Dantean moment. After all, by even his own simple childhood morality Holly has violated the code of the West and killed his friend, and even if he has done this for the right reasons, he can never be sure if his jealousy over Anna (who is still in love with Harry) was also a factor in this choice. From now on our protagonist will move through the world in a thicket of the emotional space of Harry's killing in the sewers. Harry is now a shade that will never leave Holly's side.

We feel the shade of the sewers in the film's famous last shot in the graveyard, that minutes-long shot of the long lines of the broken trees in which Anna approaches Holly as if from the end of a long tunnel and then walks past him as if he too were dead. Now she is gone forever and he is here forever: in a sense Holly will never get out of those sewer tunnels. This is Hell in the post-war existential era, where people do the right thing under the shadow of vast evil yet are nevertheless unable to escape its shade.

We can compare the glow of the ending of *Sunrise* to the harsh light and broken trees of this final graveyard setting in *The Third Man*.

Coming only twenty years later, *The Third Man* clearly takes place after the vast moral earthquake of the Holocaust and World War II. In the far simpler morality tale of *Sunrise*, good and evil are fixed oppositions and our protagonist neatly sidesteps the abyss of evil and steps back to his wife and into the sunlight. But in *The Third Man* by contrast the simple oppositions of good and evil are echoes of our childhood, will-o-the-wisps, tricky lures that conspire to pull us into a bottomless gap, illusions that only the protagonist still clings to. Holly is not the film's moral center: unlike the domestic drama of *Sunrise* which features only one man's moral wrestling, Vienna's rubble-filled landscape is peopled by Giacometti-like survivors and the ghosts of hundreds of millions of dead and dying. The children that Harry Lyme has crippled and killed reveal the real landscape of a desperate Vienna that grounds the film.

As a result there is a metalyptic difference between the placeless location of *Sunrise* and the real location of post-war Vienna of *The Third Man*, which is so geographically, historically, socially and morally anchored in a specific world-historical place and time. As we will see, crafting a Dantean space with such elements can lead to real-world effects on viewers and a transposition and deep characterization of those spaces in the popular imaginary.

Now we open the gate to Purgatory, a different story realm from Hell, a place where some very different demands of closure come to shape an arc. This next zone is easily the most storied zone of our culture today. But as we leave Hell and enter Purgatory, we only point out how Dante's Christian spatial zones and their associated dramatic rules and arcs have become so ingrained by the consumers of Western story structure that they remain invisible by being so assumed and naturalized. Hopefully the realm of Purgatory and its distinctive purgatorial arcs, spaces and stories might help to reveal some of these tenacious structures that have become so instinctual.⁸

NOTES

1. Dante's Hell is not only populated by Dantean spaces. In Dantean spaces, this Hell-bent action then actually bends Hell into his own special, personal shape, but many other parts of Hell—fiery lakes, swampy devil-filled zones—are highly populated and not architected by any individual sinners: their occupants have ended up there for simple shared sins such as theft or counterfeiting.

2. This is a non-exhaustive list drawn from various books on cinematography and painting, and I often use them in class to sharpen the conversation and clarify the visual book as well as help to determine the storyboard designs. (Note these categories can also help in the design and depiction of the *acoustics* of a space: some in fact can also be used to describe the music or the mix desired in a scene.)
3. By contrast there is no such Dantean empathetic linkage with the protagonist of *Young Adult* because Mavis never receives Dantean mis-en-scène: her subjective inner life is not expressed in the frame or the sound design but comes through in the disjunctions between her dialogue and others, between her sharp cutting affect and their casual calm. While *Young Adult's* Mavis is a Dantean character in a dramatic space, Sy is a Dantean character in a Dantean spaces of varying intensities and self-protective alienation.
4. Cummings (1958, p. 98).
5. Poe's marriage of psychological realism and Dantean technique, where guilt is a specter of hallucination, ghosts and shades, soon became a trope of horror fiction, of detective stories and eventually of noir films. These influences are seen in for example in Victor Hugo's naturalistic and Dantean novel *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), which, thanks to its many atmospheric aural and visual dimensions, was also turned into a successful play in 1873.
6. The use of cinema space to echo his tension is everywhere—note the suddenly—intruding silhouetted horsehead at 18:01 married to an emotional startle in the soundtracks of a short, muted cymbal clash. The repeating theme here too is used emotionally to express the antagonist, a repeating, low-note two-tone heart-beating melody on brass and strings that is so reminiscent today of the iconic, similarly-repeating two-tone cello-bass melody on *Jaws* and the low repeating beat-melody that announces the antagonist of the *Terminator* films. He suffers from a psychomachia-like version of the evil woman, who at minute 22 appears in ghost form to tempt him and propel him back to his murderous objective.
7. As Miss Havisham's example shows, some secondary characters through their hellish or heavenly state are physicalized, foreshadowing warnings for the story's other characters. Sometime, however, a character is trapped in a passive Dantean space in order to be rescued by the protagonist: think for example of the overt Dantean example of *What Dreams May Come* (1998), where the Orphic task of the protagonist Chris is to rescue his wife from her personal hellish mental trap.
8. Dedicated to Andy Beinen.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alighieri, Dante. 2006. *The Divine Comedy*, trans. and ed. Robin Kirkpatrick. London: Penguin.
- Aristotle. 1986. *Poetics*, trans. S. Halliwell. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Baxter, Charles. 2012. Undoings: An Essay in Three Parts. *Colorado Review* 39 (1): 96–110.
- Camus, Albert. 1991. *The Fall*. New York: Vintage.
- Cummings, E.E. 1958. *A Miscellany*, ed. George Firmage. New York: Liveright.
- Dickens, Charles. 2002. *Great Expectations*. Penguin Classics.
- Dostoevski, Fyodor. 2003. *The Brothers Karamazov*. London: Penguin Classics.
- Dostoevski, Fyodor. 2004. *The Idiot*. Washington: Penguin Classics.
- Egri, Lajos. 2005. *The Art of Dramatic Writing*. New York: Bantam-Dell.
- Field, Syd. 2005. *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, rev. ed. Delta Press. New York: Bantam-Dell.
- Shakespeare, William. 2003. *Macbeth*. Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library.