

Hozier's appropriation of Dante's *Inferno* in the *Unreal Unearth* album and *Unheard* EP

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I hope I made you proud.

Abstract

Irish singer-songwriter Hozier released his newest album, *Unreal Unearth* in 2023 and EP *Unheard* in 2024, drawing inspiration from Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*. As done in his previously released songs and albums, this album contains quite a lot of cultural critique and seems to follow a failing relationship. There is no lack of research regarding the appropriation of Dante's *Inferno* within (popular) art, however, there is a gap when looking at the appropriation of Dante's *Inferno* in popular music. To narrow this gap, this research aims to analyse the appropriation of *Inferno* in both the *Unreal Unearth* album and the *Unheard* EP. By using the concept of intertextuality and entextualisation by Jan Blommaert (2005), intertextuality by Fiske (1987) and Gérard Genette's transtextuality (1997) this study analysed all 20 songs, the four music videos and the cover art used for the album and EP by using a multimodal discourse analysis. The results show the different kinds of appropriation of *Inferno* that are found within the album, ranging from structural, textual, and thematic uses. By employing a multimodal approach and the concept of intertextuality by several theorists allowed the multiple layers in the songs, videos, art, and overall album to become clear, revealing complex intertextual relationships between Dante's *Inferno* and Hozier's music.

Keywords: Dante Alighieri, Andrew Hozier-Byrne, appropriation, intertextuality, multimodal discourse analysis

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1. Introduction (Descent)

Ever since I can remember, music has always been a big part of my life. I remember that when I was very young my father played songs on his guitar with *Dust in the Wind* by Kansas being a regular. It was one of those moments where I knew the lyrics of the song without knowing what they meant, probably not even realising it was a whole different language in the first place. As a family we nearly always listened to the Lion King musical cd in the car, and when I was eight years old, I joined a (musical) theatre group just like my brother, which has been a huge part of my life ever since. Even though Broadway tunes are still in my Spotify Wrapped every year, my music taste has expanded a lot over the years – genres like indie, folk, rock, and all of them combined are very often blasting over the boxes. Listening to music and finding new artists, fuelled my already vivid imagination that I had acquired after reading a myriad of books. Something just clicked and made sense when I combined reading and listening to music, as if it enhanced the entire experience of both the book and the song. My interest in how stories were used in songs grew when I started learning about Greek myths, Roman sagas and folklore and recognising those in lyrics. Which is how I stumbled across an Irish singer-songwriter called Hozier.

Andrew Hozier-Byrne, known to the public as just Hozier, was born March 17th, 1990, in Bray, County Wicklow in Ireland. Growing up in an artistic household, he taught himself how to play guitar and was part of his school choir when he was younger (Greene, 2015). Hozier started studying music at the Trinity College Dublin but dropped in his first year as he wanted to focus on writing music instead and recording demos for Universal Music (Legget, 2015). It was with the release of his first solo EP, *Take Me to Church*, a song directly addressing the gay discrimination in the Catholic Church, that he became visible in the public eye.

After finding himself with an international audience, a second EP was released the following spring in 2014, *From Eden* and in September of the same year, Hozier, in collaboration with Columbia Records, released his debut album called *Hozier* ("Hozier", n.d.). The next years of Hozier's career were spent on promoting the release of his eponymous album and toured through Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand (Legget, n.d.; "Hozier concert history", n.d.). Ending his first tour in 2016, he immediately went back to writing new songs, releasing the *Nina Cried Power* EP in 2018, which was followed by the *Wasteland, Baby!* album in March 2019. The same process of his previous album was repeated and 2019 was packed with concerts, right before

COVID-19 made its appearance, forcing the entire world into a lockdown. It was during the lockdown that Hozier began writing new music, releasing a single called *Swan Upon Leda* in October 2022, which was eventually followed by the *Eat Your Young* EP March 2023, which was a first taste of his newest album. In August of 2023, Hozier released his newest album *Unreal Unearth*, which is inspired by Dante's *Inferno*. In 2024 he came with an additional EP, *Unheard*, including four songs that were also written with *Inferno* as a rough inspiration but did not make the original cut of the album.

There are several central themes to be found throughout all his releases, many of which involve literary and religious themes, but also political and social justice stances, which is quite common for Irish artists to do. It is the strong opinions in his songs that made him rise to international attention in the first place with *Take Me to Church* being a response to his anger and frustrations about the gay discrimination and the covering up of child sexual abuse of the Catholic church. Another example is *Cherry Wine*, which is a song about domestic abuse, offering insight to an abusive relationship. The song would later become a clarion call to highlight the issue of domestic violence, with all the proceeds from the downloads of *Cherry Wine* being donated to international domestic abuse charity organisations (Rubyworks, 2016).

Nina Cried Power was created as a protest song "It's about crediting the spirit and the bravery of people whose voices made an impact on our world and put their work and lives often on the line for civil rights".[1] The song was Hozier's way of honouring freedom-fighting singers over the past years, like James Brown, Bob Dylan, and the title inspiration Nina Simone. Featuring on the vocals was Mavis Staples, a civil rights activist who had experiences singing at rallies after Martin Luther King spoke (Warren, 2018). Lastly, another example is *Swan Upon Leda*, an investigation into the dynamics of oppression and the struggle of female reproductive rights across the globe. *Swan Upon Leda* refers to the Greek mythological story of Leda and the Swan – in which Zeus rapes Leda, with the second verse referring to the Irish mythological hero Sétanta. The song was introduced as support for the Iranian protesters who were advocating for civil liberties as well as a show of solidarity after Roe v. Wade was overturned in America and has been connected to the violence and actions of Israel in Palestine (Fargiano, 2022).

[1] Hozier [@hozier]. (2018, September 12). Watch a special video of #NinaCriedPower LIVE over on Facebook now! Nina Cried Power is a protest song. It's about [Video.] Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/hozier/reel/BnouG08HHu8/

1.1 *Unreal Unearth & Unheard*

In his latest album, *Unreal Unearth*, and EP, *Unheard*, Hozier draws inspiration from Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, the first part of *The Divine Comedy*. This album and the EP are the main focus of this thesis. Dante Alighieri was an Italian poet, writer, and philosopher in thirteenth century Florence. His work of *The Divine Comedy* is considered to be one of the greatest literary works in the Italian language, as well as being one of the most important works of medieval European literature (Wetherbee et al., 2023; Poetry Foundation, n.d.). *The Divine Comedy* is Dante's way of depicting Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, with the poem being split up into the three respective parts. *Inferno* entails the journey though the nine circles of hell, with Dante dividing hell into upper and lower Hell. In several interviews Hozier addressed how he picked up the poem at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown, as it has been something that had been on his reading list for a while (Apple Music, 2023; Zach Sang Show, 2023; Q with Tom Power, 2023). He had started writing new songs before the world was effectively shut down, but those did not feel appropriate or made sense anymore for how the world was looking at that time.[2]

Dante's *Inferno* became a source of inspiration, leading to his third album. According to Hozier, the album "is something of a journey into something and on the way out".[3] He explains that "Part as a songwriter [he] was absolutely allergic to writing [songs] about the experience of the lockdown"[4], but felt like he at least needed to acknowledge it and credit how everyone had their own little journey going into and coming out of the pandemic. In multiple interviews Hozier mentions a specific sentence of Dante's *Inferno*, where the protagonist (generally seen as Dante himself) is on the threshold of Hell's entry, *"Through me, you enter the population of loss"*. As Hozier says in the interviews, going into the pandemic, everyone had someone they knew who they could potentially lose, and the entire world was standing at that threshold of potential loss. In his own words, Hozier describes *Inferno* being about a man who finds his way into new conditions and circumstances, which he relates to navigating through the pandemic where the entire world was forced to navigate these sudden and completely different circumstances.

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[2] Lipps Service. (2023, August 29). *Hozier on what Sinéad meant to him, "Unreal Unearth," and the weirdest pronunciation of his name!* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved March 28, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tlup5_S-yQ – 36:12-36:42

[3] Zach Sang Show. (2023, June 22). *Hozier | Eat your Young, Unreal Unearth, Take Me to Church, Unknown* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved March 28, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MloAJbu4Jz8 – 03:52-03:56

[4] Apple Music. (2023, August 28). *Hozier: "Unreal Unearth", Spirituality & Songwriting | Apple Music* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved March 28, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5JpgNIkOz4 – 03:38-04:00

Hozier turned to Dante's *Inferno* for himself, as something that he wanted to read and finally had the time to do so, rather than approaching it as a lyricist, not knowing how inspirational it would end up being.[5] There were about 30 songs written for the *Unreal Unearth* album, with the first draft being too specific according to Hozier himself. He said in an interview that it "felt important making sure that people could just enjoy the songs, that [listeners] did not need to know anything about *Inferno*".[6] *Unreal* Unearth was released in August 2023, with an EP with four additional songs released in March 2024. The songs on the EP were the ones that did not make the original cut of the album but were eventually released to the public.

Next to Dante's *Inferno*, there are also other pieces of literature used throughout the album, some including *A Modest Proposal* (Jonathan Swift, 1729), *The Third Policeman* (Flann O'Brien, 1967), and the mythological story of Icarus. Some ideas for songs, according to Hozier, came to him unexpectedly, whereas others were initially written for someone. Similar to his earlier albums and EPs, his cultural critique and social justice stances are shining through the songs. *Unreal Unearth* allows his cultural critique to appear, as Hozier is known to do but also seems to follow a relationship that is not going to last. Everything in the album, from using mythological stories or historical events as inspiration to taking a stance for social justices, are layers upon layers – but all returning to Dante's *Inferno* and the nine circles of Hell. Even though I was familiar with Dante and *The Divine Comedy*, I had never actually read the poem myself. With this album being a direct reference to a journey through the nine circles of Hell, it made me wonder to what extent all these songs are related to the circles and in what ways Hozier used the poem for the songs. All of these elements carefully moulded into these layered songs is in my opinion very much deserving of being investigated.

1.2 Literature Review

As this album builds on so many different elements, to be able to find any previously done research regarding this topic, it needs to be divided into separate elements. Essentially, this means breaking the research down into smaller pieces to find elements of which previous done research

[5] Apple Music. (2023, August 28). *Hozier: "Unreal Unearth", Spirituality & Songwriting | Apple Music* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved March 28, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5JpgNIkOz4 – 06:00-07:28

[6] Q with Tom Power. (2023, October 4). *Hozier on Take Me to Church and how the nine circles of hell inspired his new album* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved March 28, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6jR0-JjEeQ – 05:11-05:30

exists. The separate elements will be the following: previous research on Hozier, previous research on the appropriation of Dante in the arts, and lastly previous research on both culture critique and music as coping mechanisms.

Starting off, previous research on Hozier is fairly limited to student's theses, with a focus on either his debut song *Take Me to Church,* or his first two albums *Hozier* and *Wasteland, Baby!*. Recurring focus and methodologies/frameworks included lesbian and gay studies and queer theory, as well as a form of literary analysis. Both Begin (2015) and Kela (2021) used a queer theory approach in their theses. The former combined a queer studies lens with a sociology lens to examine the lyrics of *Take Me to Church* in an essay called "(Please Don't) Take Me to Church". She argues that the lyric of the song is an "intentional and powerful resistance against these oppressive behaviours." but also addresses that one does not need to be in a position of power to actively stand up against sexual inequality (Begin, 2015). Kela (2021), while also focussing on the debut song and music video, used a qualitative approach to literary analysis, done by combining the theoretical frameworks of both queer theory as well as lesbian and gay studies and the ideological background of Christianity. Kela (2021) conducts an analysis of both the lyric and the music video, and examined the relationship between the two to find about how they complement or differ from one another and the possibility of finding new interpretations when observing them side by side. Kaan's thesis (2021) has a narratological approach to the eponymous album to understand its meaning making and the literary merits of Hozier. Her thesis argues not only that the songs can be analysed individually, but also the album as a whole.

The second element regarding research on the appropriation of Dante's work in the arts is a very broad and extensive one. It ranges from literature about the Infernal imagery recreation in *Heart of Darkness*" by Joseph Conrad to entire books like *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century: Nationality, Identity, and Appropriation* by Audeh and Havely (2012) which looks into Dante's reception in different forms of media like visual art, literature, theatre, cinema, and music between the eighteenth and the early twentieth century, exploring the appropriations and interpretations of his works. Even though there is a lot of research to be found regarding Dante and older pieces of literature like, *In pursuit of Dante's Shadow:* Jane Eyre *and intertextual referencing from The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri* by Sansalvadore (2020) and *Poetic Theology: Dante and the British Romantic Poets* by Kim (2015), there is also research about other mediums like TV series, video games, and music as discussed in the following section.

Over the Garden Wall (2014) is an animated mini-series that was inspired by Dante's Divine Comedy and in her work, Karissa Doughty (2019) discusses the textual appropriations of the series and the remediation of the original characters as well as analysing how the series challenges the original work and how it repurposes its concepts. Similarly, Camacho and Menchero (2021) come to a similar conclusion in their article by analysing the mini-series as a literary construction. They use the concept of hypertextuality defined by Gérard Genette and Joseph Campbell's notion of the monomyth to demonstrate the reconstruction of *The Divine Comedy* within the text of *Over the Garden Wall*. Going from TV to videogames, the article *Dante and Video Games: The Unrealised Potential of the Virtual* Commedia (2022) Powlesland discusses the digital remediation of Dante's *Inferno* to video games. She explores what establishes a 'faithful' remediation of the poem, how certain effects used are translated into different mediums and what constitutes fidelity to Dante's original poem.

There is no lack of music of different genres being inspired by *The Divine Comedy*. Yet, it seems that there is limited to no research currently existing that discusses the appropriation or interpretation of Dante's work in songs of the twenty-first century. Camacho and del Campo's article (2016) focusses on heavy metal music as a source of mythological knowledge linking the genre with Dante's poem *The Divine Comedy*. The article analyses symphonic metal bands, highlighting the social importance of popular music and how canonical texts, including Dante's Divine Comedy, have been adapted, reclaimed, and transformed to the context of contemporary culture.

The third and last element is regarding music as culture critique and music as a coping mechanism. Cultural critique is something that comes back in all sorts of art and has its own fair share of research done across these different music genres, like jazz music and popular music. Research on jazz music as a cultural critique can be found in the biography of Anthony Braxton by Ronald Radano (1993). The book, *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton's Cultural Critique*, attempts to observe jazz as a part of the interweaving of postmodern culture and analyses the emblematic figure of the cultural crisis, Anthony Braxton. Peter Robert Brown (2015) addresses the cultural critique of the Mekons, a British punk rock band that has been active since 1976 (Wallenfeldt, 2020). *Meet the Mekons: Popular Music, Art, and Cultural Critique* (2015) explores the group's critique of late modernity and consumerism by analysing the intertextuality of the group and how they blend art with popular culture. Staying with the popular music, the

article by Guerra et al (2020) discusses the fact how (young) people have been consistently creating songs regarding social rights and social justices as well as civil rights, women's rights, sexual and ethnic rights (Guerra et al, 2020). These people have done so with creative anger and emotions bringing their point across through the music. The article explores music as a mechanism to challenge and appeal for social justice and does so by using songs addressing crises in several countries, using different music genres (Guerra et al, 2020).

1.3 Relevance of the Research and Research Question

As outlined above, there is an extensive amount of research on Dante and the appropriation or interpretation of his poems. Additionally, the previously separated elements all have their own research, whether it being student theses to entire books. Yet, when combining all the elements (or even just two of them), there are topic areas that are under-researched. This is seen, for example, in the gap of research regarding the appropriation of Dante in popular music. Additionally, there seems to be a lack of research on Hozier in combination with music as culture critique, with the exception being *Take Me to Church*. In his newest album Hozier does not only manage to use these elements again, but also manages to use Dante's *Inferno* as well as several other pieces of literature, whilst also drawing inspiration from his own life and experiences and taking on social justice stances, all at the same time. All of these intertwined layers into one album, is something that is not just impressive, but also something that is super interesting – and is something that has not been researched at all in any shape or form. As there is no previous research on Hozier and Dante, and a lack of research on the appropriation of Dante in popular music, my research can provide new insights on these matters.

To explore Hozier's appropriation of Dante's *Inferno*, this thesis will examine the entire album, taking the *Inferno* poem as its basis, by means of a multimodal discourse analysis. In total, there are sixteen songs on the initial album and an additional four songs from the *Unheard* EP. The *Unreal Unearth* album also includes four music videos, which will also be used both individually as well as side by side with the song. The research question is as follows: *How does Hozier appropriate Dante's Inferno?* The main research question leads to several sub-questions:

- How is Dante's *Inferno* textually and structurally used in *Unreal Unearth* and *Unheard*?
- What kind of themes that appeared in *Inferno* can be identified in *Unreal Unearth* and *Unheard*?

- What does the intertextual relation with Dante add to the interpretation of the album of Hozier?

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

This chapter has introduced the singer-songwriter Hozier with the essential information about the culture critique and coping mechanism found in his latest album *Unreal Unearth* and *Unheard*, in which he uses Dante's *Inferno* as the inspiration. This introductory chapter has given the necessary information about the artist and showed a currently unexplored field of music inspired by Dante, followed up by a research question with additional sub-questions. Chapter two will focus on the essential information of Dante Alighieri needed for the analysis later on in the thesis. Additionally, this chapter will give an outline of the nine circles of hell as explained by Dante. Chapter three will touch upon the theoretical framework and will discuss important concepts like appropriation and interpretation. Chapter four will discuss the justification of the chosen methodology used for the research. The results will be analysed, presented, and discussed at length in chapter five and six and is followed by the conclusion and discussion of this research in chapter seven. The appendix contains the full analysis of all the songs, music videos, and cover art.

2. Dante

Before explaining the concepts that will be used in depth, it is important to dive into Dante's *Inferno* as well. As Hozier used *Inferno* as inspiration for the album and the songs, extensive knowledge is needed about the poem. To be able to answer the research question as to how Hozier appropriates Dante's *Inferno*, this chapter will give an introduction about Dante himself and his works. Additionally, all the Circles of Hell will be explained along with the descending into Hell and the ascension out of Hell. The explanations of the Circles will be accompanied by direct quotes from *Inferno*, referring to the canto and line, using Robin Kirkpatrick's translation from the 2013 Penguin Classics edition. Lastly, as the original text was written in Italian, the translations of *The Divine Comedy* will be acknowledged as well.

2.1 The life of Dante Alighieri

Dante Alighieri, also known in Italy as the Supreme Poet ("il Sommo Poeta"), was born in 1265 in Florence, Italy. Even though he is generally known for his prose and poetry, he was also very active as a literary theorist, moral philosopher, and as political thinker (Quinones, 2024). Important to acknowledge, most of the information about Dante's life is told by Dante himself in his works. As Dante has a strong poetic persona found in his writings, even the information about his biography is depending on the interpretations of his own continual re-crafting of the poetic persona (Wetherbee et al, 2023). Dante was born, somewhere between the months of May and June of 1265, as it was reported that he was born under the sign of Gemini[7] into a family from the lower ranks of the nobility (*Penguin Classics Inferno*, 2013, p. I) Dante's philosophical perspective was powerfully shaped by growing up in late thirteenth-century Florence and always had a strong devotion to Florence. Not only did he hold several political offices, but he also fought as a cavalryman against the Ghibellines and was invested in the cultural and civic life of Florence (Wetherbee et al, 2023).

Ever since the beginning of the thirteenth century, two factions, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, had been competing for the control of Florence. Dante himself allied with the Guelphs, as they were also striving to have political autonomy in Florence (Wetherbee et al, 2023).

[7] *Paradiso* 22.112-120

Not long after the Guelphs defeated the Ghibellines, an infight arose, dividing the faction in White Guelphs and Black Guelphs. The Black Guelphs were committed to papal and aristocratic interests, whereas the White Guelphs opposed the papal influence and wanted to see the city free from papal interference (Wetherbee et al, 2023; Twose, 2021; *Penguin Classics Inferno*, 2013, p. I). Dante became a prominent White Guelph, and when the Black Guelphs came to power in 1302, Dante along with the other White leadership were exiled from the city. When the exile of the White leadership was spoken, Dante himself was absent from the city, if returned to Florence he would be burned at the stake. He never returned to Florence and spent the remaining 20 years wandering Italy. He spent longer periods of time in Verona and moved to Ravenna where he eventually died in 1321 (Wetherbee et al, 2023).

He was married to Gemma Donati when he was about twenty years old with whom he had four children. However, his heart really belonged to Beatrice "Bice" Portinari, a girl he just briefly saw but immediately fell in love with. He met her again, nine years later, when Beatrice had greeted him and to Dante this confirmed his love for her (Poetry Foundation, n.d.). Beatrice died in 1290, and when learning of her death, Dante started writing the *Vita Nuova* (The New Life) in commemoration of her death circa 1292. The work ends with Dante promising to write "what has never before been written of any woman." and Dante's love for Beatrice would go on and become a major theme throughout his poetry.

Poetry was not the only thing that Dante spent his time on, he also wrote theoretical works like discussions of rhetoric, moral philosophy, and political thought, which was shown in his work *De Monarchia* (On Monarchy) c. 1309, presenting his Christian political philosophy (Wetherbee et al., 2023; Poetry Foundation, n.d.). Other known works that he completed are *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (Eloquence in the Vernacular Tongue) a theoretical discussion on the origin of Italian dialects and literary language, c.1304 and *the Convivio* (The Banquet), exploring ethics, politics, and metaphysics, c.1304 (Poetry foundation, n.d.).

2.2 *The Divine Comedy*

His most famous work, however, is *La Comedia*, later called *La Divina Comedia*, (*The Divine Comedy*) which is seen as a landmark in Italian literature and is considered part of the greatest works of medieval European literature (Wetherbee et al., 2023; Poetry Foundation, n.d.). *The Divine Comedy* is made up of a hundred cantos, which are all grouped together into three

major sections, or canticles, *Inferno, Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* and was written between the years 1307-1321. All three sections have 33 cantos, with *Inferno* having one additional canto, which is an introduction to the entire poem. The cantos range from having 136 lines to having 151, using a rhyming scheme called terza rima, which uses three-line groupings. It is argued that Dante chose this on purpose as to include the divine number of three in every part of the work (Quinones, 2024; *Terza Rima*, n.d.; *The Divine Comedy*, 2024). Apart from being a landmark in Italian and European literature, *The Divine Comedy* had a huge influence on the Italian language as it is used today. Dante made the deliberate choice to write *The Divine Comedy* in the Italian vernacular, instead of Latin that was still primarily used for written texts. By using the Tuscan dialect of his time, which would later become the standard literary Italian, Dante heavily influenced the literary development, with Italian even becoming the literary language in Western Europe for some centuries (Wetherbee et al., 2023; Quinones, 2024). It was not until 1802 that *The Divine Comedy* was translated into English (Seaver, 2022)

The Divine Comedy has a fairly simple plot, a man (it is generally assumed to be Dante himself) undertakes an "ultramundane" journey, leading him to visit souls in Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. He is led by the Roman poet Virgil, who guides him through *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* and Beatrice, who he meets on the threshold of *Paradiso*. The work is seen as a Christian vision of the temporal and eternal destiny of humankind (Quinones, 2024). The fictional encounters of the journey take place from Good Friday in 1300 through Easter Sunday, when Dante (the character) learns that he awaits exile. Even though the events of being exiled already occurred, *The Divine Comedy* draws on Dante's own experience of his exile of Florence. Using his own experiences, Dante managed to create a story out of being exiled, and how he came to cope with the hardships of his exile while also offering suggestions to resolve Italy's troubles. Besides suggestions, he expresses a lot of critique throughout the poem as well, and not just critique on the sins people have committed but also critique on the political state of Florence and Italy, and on the church and popes through history.

2.3 *Inferno*

Hell is made out of nine concentric circles, all gradually increasing in the wickedness of the sins – all the way down to the centre of the earth (as shown in figure 1). The souls in each circle are punished with *contrapasso* – a so-called "law of nature" in Hell that says that the punishment

should abide by the severity of the sinner's crime (Kameen, 2009). Hell is divided into Upper Hell, the first five circles, and Lower Hell, the last four circles. The deeper in Hell the souls are, the more severe the sins they have committed are.

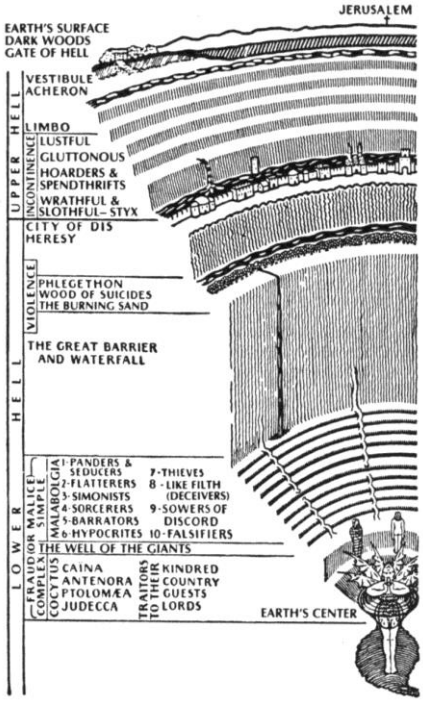


Figure 1. C.W. Scott, Hell's plan, 1949

Inferno starts with the narrator, Dante himself, being lost in a dark wood with the right path lost and blurred. When going up a hill he is met with three beasts that he cannot escape, a leopard, a lion, and a wolf. Dante is saved by the shade of Roman poet Virgil, the writer of the *Aeneid*. Virgil explains how he had been sent by Beatrice to guide him on his journey and together they pass through the gates of hell. They come across the Uncommitted: "the Heavens spurned them. nor would the depths of Hell receive them in," (Canto 3, 40-41). The souls of the people that were neither good nor evil will never be in or out of Hell and reside on the shores of Acheron forever. Charon, the ferryman who transports the dead across the river, allows them on his ferry and Dante promptly passes out, only to wake up when they have arrived at the edge of the abyss.

2.3.1 Upper Hell

In canto 4, Dante and Virgil descend to the first circle, Limbo. This circle houses the souls of people who were virtuous pagans or were never baptised and lived before the Christian age began. Virgil explains to Dante that these spirits "never sinned" (Canto 4, 34) but that they had not

passed the gate to belief that Dante had. Virgil himself also resides in Limbo, and with him four other great poets who temporarily join the two. They come across Homer, the Greek poet credited as the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Horace, a Roman lyric poet also known as Quintus Horatius Flaccus, Ovid, a Roman poet under the reign of Augustus, and Lucan, a Roman poet known for his work *Pharsalia*. After passing through seven gates Dante sees many notable figures from history such as Julius Caesar, Aeneas, Hector, Lucretia. Additionally, they encounter philosophers (including Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato), mythical Greek poets (Orpheus and Linus), Roman statesmen (Marcus Tullius Cicero and Seneca) and others like the Alexandrian geometer Euclid and the Alexandrian astronomer and geographer Ptolemy. The company of six now goes back to two as Dante and Virgil descent deeper into the second circle.

The second circle is the one of the lustful. In this circle they immediately come across Minos judging a crowd of souls to which place of Hell suits them best. The souls in the circle of lust condemned for carnal sin are dragged back and forth by terrible winds: "The swirling wind of Hell will never rest. It drags these spirits onwards in its force. It chafes them – rolling, clashing – grievously." (Canto 5, 31-33). There are yet again a number of notable historical figures such as Dido, Cleopatra, Helen of Troy, Paris, Achilles, and Tristan – all of them committed a varying degree of lustful sins. Dante also comes across Francesca da Rimini, who had an arranged marriage with Giovanni Malatesta but had fallen in love with his younger brother Paolo. Francesca reports how they fell in love and kissed when reading the story of Lancelot and Guinevere (*Lancelot du Lac*) before being caught by Giovanni who stabbed them both to death.

In canto 6, Dante and Virgil enter the circle of the gluttons, the third circle of Hell. They see Cerberus, the three headed hound, guarding the gluttons who are lying in the freezing mire. It is constantly raining, and the circle is accompanied with a revolting smell: "And rain falls there, endlessly, chill, accursed and heavy, its rate and composition never new. Snow, massive hailstones, black, tainted water pour down in sheets through tenebrae of air. The earth absorbs it all and stinks, revoltingly." (Canto 6, 7-12). In the mire Dante has a conversation with a Florentine about the conflict in Florence between the White and Black Guelphs as discussed earlier in this chapter. The Florentine, recognised as Ciacco, "predicts" the White Guelphs being exiled by the Black Guelphs and is the first time that the poem alludes to the political exile of Dante (the Poet).

The fourth circle is guarded by Plutus and houses the souls of the greedy. The souls, divided into two groups, the ones that hoarded possessions and the ones who lavishly spent it, are

condemned to spend eternity fighting each other by pushing great boulders with their chests. "[…] two factions, hollering, this one to that, who rolled great boulders, thrust by rib and tit. Their stones would clash. Then wheeling they'd retreat and yell, across their shoulders, cry, and counter-cry. 'You miser! Why?' 'Why fling it all away?'" (Canto 7, 25-30). Pushing the stones with their chest symbolises their selfish drive without thinking about others. The two do not try to converse with the souls, as the souls are too preoccupied and too absorbed in the activity of fighting each other.

In that same canto, canto 7, Dante and Virgil arrive at the swamp called the river Styx, the circle of the wrathful. In the water Dante sees the souls stuck in this circle actively fighting with one another. "I saw there, plunged within that stagnant fen, a peevish people, naked, caked with mud. Each battered each – and not with fists alone, also with head butts, kicks and charging chests. Their teeth, too, tore them, bit by bit, to shreds." (Canto 7, 110-114). Virgil explains to Dante that anger overthrew these souls and are condemned to an eternity of waging battles with one another. They walk on before reaching the bottom of a tower, where they eventually meet Phlegyas who transport the two across the river Styx. They come across a Florentine, Filippo Argenti, before approaching the city of Dis. The city, completely surrounded by the Stygian march, is the entrance to Lower Hell and is guarded by outcasts of Heaven who refuse to let Dante cross the threshold. Virgil and Dante are threatened by the Furies (Megaera, Alecto, and Tisiphone) and Medusa, before an angel sent from Heaven opens the gate for the two poets to enter Lower Hell.

2.3.2 Lower Hell

The first circle in Lower Hell is the circle of heresy and houses the souls of those who rejected religious or political norms – also known as the heretics. Virgil explains that this circle "is the cemetery for all disciples of the Epicurus school, who say the body dies, so too the soul." (Canto 10, 13-15). The heretics, such as Epicurus and his followers are trapped in flaming tombs and Dante converses with several Epicurian Florentines discussing the Ghibellines and Florentine politics as explained earlier in this chapter. Right before descending into the seventh circle, Virgil shortly explains the remaining plans of Hell. He tells Dante about the three lesser circuits and how each of these circles is filled with spirits of the damned, explaining that the circle of violence is divided into three sub-circles. The second circle nests the deceitful, which is specifically a human wrong and is therefore deeper down and thus tortured worse (Canto 11, 25-26). With the last circle, including Satan, housing the traitors. With that, they are moving towards the next circle.

Right before swiftly entering the seventh circle, they come across the Minotaur who tries to charge them. The first ring of the seventh circle harbours the souls of vandals, looters, tyrants, thugs, and murderers – those who are guilty of violence against others or their possessions. Patrolling the ring are three centaurs, Chiron, Pholus and Nessus, with the latter guiding them along the river Phlegethon pointing out several people trapped in the river of boiling blood and fire. They travel onwards, entering a wood – which is the following ring full squanderers and those who committed suicide. "[…] those who by their own free will strips off your world or gambles all their competence away, and weeps where, properly, they should rejoice." (Canto 11, 42-45). The souls who chose to "throw away their bodies" became dry, thorny sticks and will never be resurrected after Judgement Day, as explained by one of the souls trapped as a trunk. "Keeping what we tore off would not be fair. Our bodies we shall drag back here; and all around this melancholy grove they'll swing, each on the thorn of shades that wrought them harm." (Canto 13, 105-108). The last ring of the seventh circle is named the Appalling Sands (Canto 13, 19) with the eternal falling of flames setting the sand on fire. This ring is the smallest and houses those who were violent against God (blasphemers), violent against Nature (the sodomites) and those who were violent against Art (the usurers). Dante recognises an Italian philosopher and 3 other Florentines to whom he tells the current state of the city. Virgil tells Dante that they must fly down on the back of a monster called Geryon (the monster of Fraud). Geryon descends the cliff, bringing them to the foot of a sheer cliff on the eighth circle.

In the eighth circle, called Malebolge ("evil pockets" or "Rottenpockets"), Dante and Virgil go down the 10 pockets meeting souls who committed various forms of fraud. In the first pocket (or Bolgia) are the seducers and panderers (pimps), they exploited the passions of others for their own interests. Virgil points out the Greek hero Jason who had seduced, married, and deserted several women, including Hypsipyle, who he "[…] left her there, alone, with child." (Canto 18, 94). The second pocket houses the flatterers, those who abused language playing into the desires and fears of others. They are shown in a pit of excrements, where the two travellers meet Alessio Interminei of Lucca (a White Guelph) and Thaïs (a prostitute in *The Eunuch*).

In the third pocket, the one that houses those who committed simony, they come across the souls that are placed head-downwards in holes within the rock, with their feet set alight. The simony in this pocket is exemplified by papal corruption, and the two meet several saints and popes stuck upside down. Soothsayers and sorcerers are housed in the fourth pocket of the eighth circle.

As an attempt to see or to pry into the future they are condemned to walk backwards for eternity as their heads are twisted around on their bodies. Between all the souls walking backwards, they meet soothsayers, augurs, and astrologers.

The fifth pocket houses those who are guilty of corruption in public office (barratry). The souls are immersed in a lake where "[…] a dense black gunge was brought to boiling point, and splashed on all the banks in sticky smears." (Canto 21, 17-18). Additionally, the souls are guarded by demons who are tearing them apart when caught above the surface. In the sixth pocket, Dante and Virgil meet the hypocrites, souls who are condemned to wear robes of lead for eternity. Dante speaks with two Bolognese friars, who point out the High Priest of Israel, who counselled to crucify Jesus, crucified to the floor with every sinner walking upon him.

In the seventh pocket, the one that houses the thieves, the entire pit is filled with reptiles such as snakes and lizards. Their punishment is to be constantly converted from human to a reptile and back again. Dante meets and speaks with several thieves from Florence. In the eighth pocket there are the counsellors of fraud, who made deceitful or destructive use of their intellect and are all transformed into fires. Dante here sees Ulysses and Diomedes punished for multiple accounts of ill advice that led to the fall of Troy.

The ninth pocket where souls, who purposely fomented discord between others, are punished by being mutilated by a demon wielding a bloody sword. The sinners are forced to walk (drag) around the pocket, wounds healing as they walk only to be torn apart by the demon once again. "For, as we pass around this road of pain, each wound is made entire and whole before we come to face him once again" (Canto 28, 40-42). In the last pocket, the pocket of the falsifiers, the souls are punished by diseases, filth, stench, and darkness. It houses those who committed deceit in the form of false science, counterfeiting and impersonations of others. Dante meets the alchemists, imposters, perjurers, and counterfeiters

In the final circle of Hell, those who are guilty of treachery, Dante and Virgil arrive at a frozen lake, divided into four concentric rings. The first ring, Caina, is named after Cain and houses those guilty of committing treachery against kin. Dante recognises several sinners, such as a couple of White Guelphs and Mordred. The second ring, Antenora, is named after Antenor and houses those guilty of committing treachery against the party of state. Again, Dante recognises several Guelphs and Ghibellines frozen in the lake. The third round, Ptolomaea, named after Ptolemy, is the ring that houses sinners who betrayed their guests. The souls trapped in this ring are even

denied the comfort of crying as their tears instantly turn into ice in their eye sockets. “They weep. Yet weeping does not let them weep. Their anguish meets a blockage at the eye. [….] Their tears first cluster into frozen buds, and then – as though a crystal visor – fill the socket of the eye beneath each brow.” (Canto 33, 94-99). The final ring, Giudecca (Judecca), named after Judas Iscariot, houses those guilty of being traitors against sovereigns and benefactors. It is completely silent in this ring, as all sinners are fully trapped in the ice.

They finally arrive at the centre of Hell, where Dante and Virgil come across Satan, referred to as Dis by Virgil. Satan committed personal treachery against God and is condemned to the centre of Hell. As not to freeze, Satan is required to beat his wings for eternity, only to ensure his imprisonment in the frozen lake even more. Satan has three faces, is crying from all his six eyes and each mouth eternally chews on a traitor. Left and right are Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus, both being chewed (as punishment for the involvement of the assassination of Julius Caesar), and in the middle, Judas Iscariot is chewed for eternity with his head inside Satan’s mouth.

Virgil claims it is time to leave Hell, and they both start to travel down along Satan’s fur before passing through the centre of the universe and change direction to climb upward, towards the earth. “We climbed, he going first and I behind, until through some small aperture I saw the lovely things the skies above us bear. Now we came out, and once more saw the stars.” (Canto 34, 136-139).

2.4 Translations of *The Divine Comedy*

It is unsure how many times Dante’s Divine Comedy, or more specifically, *Inferno,* has been translated from the original Italian and into how many languages, but it is a substantial amount. Since there are so many versions, there have been discussions on which translation is the best one to read. There is no simple answer to this question either, as the decision is not only based on the translator but also on the person who is reading the text. Some translations try to stay as close as possible to Dante’s original work, by trying to replicate the rhyming pattern of the Italian version. The rhyming pattern is also interpreted in different ways, some translations feeling less forced than others (Moyer, 2017). Other translators pick a different direction by not following the rhyming pattern, but still keeping the translation form of prose and others taking on a free verse poetry style. The version that might be easier and more enjoyable to read to one person, might be

quite difficult to someone else. So, there is no right answer to which version is the best. However, an interesting option could have been the translation of Ciaran Carson, who was an Irish poet with a number of published poetry collections. Similarly to Hozier, Carson work often included political stances, writing about the violence and troubles in Northern Ireland in the past and more recent history (*Ciaran Carson*, n.d.).

Hozier did not publicly address the translation he started reading in the pandemic and eventually became the inspiration for his newest album. However, by going through several interviews promoting *Unreal Unearth*, it can be argued that he used the translation of Robert Pinsky. In an interview with Grammy.com, Hozier quotes a sentence "Through me you enter the population of loss" which is a translation used by Pinsky (Weatherby, 2023).

Even though it might have been interesting to use Carson's translation, as to stay within the Irish realm as to say, I was unfortunately unable to find a proper edition and since I argue that Hozier did not use his translation either, I decided it was not essential to use Carson's specific translation. However, I was also unable to find a proper edition from Robert Pinsky, so I used the translation and notes of *Inferno* by Robin Kirkpatrick for this research instead. Kirkpatrick is a Professor Italian and English Literature, with a particular interest in the Italian and English literature from 1300 to 1600[8]. He has several published works, including a verse translation of complete work of *The Divine Comedy* which was originally published by Penguin Classics between 2006-2007.[9] In 2012 the translation was published in a revised edition by Penguin Classics, with the edition used for this research published in 2013.

[8] (Professor Robin Kirkpatrick | Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics, n.d.)| https://www.mmll.cam.ac.uk/rk22
[9] Idem

3. Theoretical Framework

As stated in the research question in Chapter 1, this research aims to find out how Hozier appropriated Dante's *Inferno*. To answer this question as thoroughly as possible, sub-questions have been created to divide the research question into manageable pieces. Answering each sub-question will lead to a complete and rich coherent whole to Hozier's appropriation of Dante. But to answer these sub-questions and eventually the research question, extended knowledge on several concepts is needed. This chapter will dive into the concepts of adaptation and appropriation as discussed by Julie Sanders (2015) as well as intertextuality, a concept mentioned in one of the sub questions, and the transcendence of the text as posed by Gérard Genette (1997).

3.1 Appropriation

Adaptation and appropriation are in many ways interrelated and intertwined with one another, yet, as Sanders (2015) argues, it is important to see them as distinct creative activities. An adaptation often shows a relationship between one text and another, which can be through its title or other embedded references (Sanders, 2015). When studying adaptations one can come across a wide lexicon of terms, from interpretation to transformation and travesty to echoing and back, with many different texts under this term. An adaptation can take on many forms and can be seen as an ongoing practice by playing a different role in adaptive modes, such as sequels. Not only can an adaptation attempt to make certain texts more relevant or easier to comprehend, but it is also often involved giving critique or commentary on a source text. Sanders (2015) argues that this is done by "offering a revised point of view from the 'original', adding hypothetical motivation or voicing what the text silences or marginalizes." (Sanders, 2015, p.23). Discussing adaptations one almost always works with the reinterpretation of another text, the other text can simply be an original source, but speaking of novels and films for instance, the original text is often a canonical and well-known text (Sanders, 2015).

Yet, being familiar with the original text is not required to enjoy the adaptation. Staying in the realm of novel to film adaptations, it is not necessary to either know or have read the novel to have a satisfying experience of watching the movie. That being said, having knowledge of the novel (the original text) can allow an enrichment of the viewer's experience of viewing the movie but can also lead to dissatisfaction ('the book was better'). This enrichment can show itself by

recognising an easter egg from the books on which the scene is not focusing on. It can allow viewers to approach and appreciate the work of directors for example and thus enhances (or complicates) the pleasure that is involved in interacting with that text (Sanders, 2015). Essentially, an adaptation has the possibility to prolong the pleasure of the initial encounter – the enjoyment of reading a novel comes back when watching the film adaptation of it.

When comparing adaptation with appropriation, Sanders (2015) argues that "appropriations tend to have a more complicated, intricate and sometimes embedded relationship to their intertexts than a straightforward film version of a canonical or well-known text would suggest." (Sanders, 2015, pp. 35-36). In a sense, appropriation often deals with an entire journey that starts with the original text and ends with a completely new cultural text. It is in many cases still an adaptation as well, based on the fact that the newer cultural text would not have existed without the original one, but falls under another mode of adaptation. Appropriation often deals with a recrafting of the original text, creating all sorts of intertexts (Sanders, 2015). However, not every appropriation makes the relationship between the texts as explicit as mentioning the title. Many interrelations are in fact implicit that only those with the right abilities to decode them can grasp.

Ashely and Plesh (2002) argue in their article that the appropriation of elements was often referred to as an 'influence', however this term has since made way for 'intertextuality'; a term that is seen as a more dynamic concept that has attracted quite some critical attention, as will be discussed in the next section. Appropriation has an emphasis on taking something and creating it into one's own (Ashley & Plesh, 2002), which correlates with Sander's interpretation of appropriation. Originally, the word appropriation comes from the Latin verb *appropriare* which translates into "to make one's own" which has often left the term with a rather negative charge. Appropriation has been seen as a relationship between cultural unequals, in which the dominant culture appropriates in which the weaker culture has no say or control into the representation (Ashley & Plesh, 2002). However, it can also have a more positive connotation, and as put forward by Ashley and Plesh (2002) "cultural meanings must be understood as being in circulation." (Ashley & Plesh, 2002, pp. 7-8). Essentially, every text is the end result of another text, they are all part of other invoked and reworked texts in an ever-moving cultural circulation and by studying these phenomena and their complexities, it allows for an understanding of what has been changed, what has remained the same and what that reveals about either the new or original text.

Returning to Sanders (2015), the appropriation of a text often takes a step (or multiple ones) away from the original or informing text and towards a complete new cultural domain. So, when an artist uses an original text for their own creative purposes, they are appropriating the original text to achieve or accomplish something new, often guided by the motive of the artist. With appropriation, the context and meaning of an original text can change completely, which is the case when looking at Hozier's appropriation of Dante's *Inferno*. The text is lifted from its original source, a poem, and is used for a completely different cultural domain, a music album. The songs from the album and the EP are not a concept album that is a retelling of Dante's *Inferno*. Hozier uses the poem for his own purposes and intentions, and thus recrafts the original text and creates a new cultural text.

3.2 Intertextuality

Intertextuality was first explored in the 1960s by Julia Kristeva as any relation between different texts, which has since been picked up and expanded on by many. As put forward by Mirenayat and Soofastaei (2015), the theory of intertextuality is based on the idea that "No text is self-born and every text of the present is an inter-text with something happening between it and a text of the past.". According to Barthes (1977/1986) and Kristeva (1980), intertextuality is *everywhere,* and all texts are related to other texts one way or another (Folkestad, 2013). When following Barthes's (1977/1986) arguing of "text", he claims that a text is a multi-dimensional space drawing from the innumerable centres of culture and from the perspective of intertextuality, it is the language that speaks and not the author giving the explanation. Fiske (1987) expands on Barthes theory and argues that the relationships between the texts "[…] do not take the form of specific allusions from one text to another and there is no need for readers to be familiar with specific or the same texts to read intertextually" (Fiske, 1987, p.108). Furthermore, Fiske (1987) distinguishes between the intertextual relations: horizontal intertextuality and vertical intertextuality. The former defines a relation between the two texts based on explicit links, such as characters, content, or genres. The latter defines the relationship between the primary text and another type of text that explicitly refers to it, for example, a television programme and the secondary texts such as journalistic features (Fiske, 1987; Folkestad, 2013).

While most theorists use intertextuality almost as an umbrella term for any relationship between certain texts, some have a more restrictive idea of the term. French literary theorist Gérard

Genette uses the term transtextuality of which intertextuality is one of the categories instead of using intertextuality as a whole. Genette defines transtextuality, or the transcendence of the text as "all that sets a text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts". Expanding on Kristeva's study, Genette thus started calling relations between different texts "transtextuality" and divided it into five categories: paratextuality, architextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality and intertextuality.

Paratextuality, according to Genette, has a less explicit and more distant relationship that are binding the texts and can be seen as the relation between a text and its 'paratext (Genette, 1997; Mirenayat & Soofastaei, 2015). This paratext can be understood as the title, subtitles, intertitles, prefaces, postfaces, notices, fore words, notes, illustrations, blurbs, dust jackets, covers – they all provide the text with a setting and/or commentary. According to Genette a paratext is an important component for a text to direct the acceptance of the text by readers. There are distinctions between paratexts, ones from the author (autographic) and those from editors or publishers for example (allographic). Architextuality, according to Genette, is the most abstract and implicit of them all as it involves the relationship that essentially is silent and might only have a paratextual mention (Genette, 1997). It is about the relationship between the text and the text of its kind, in other words the relationship between the text and its genre and how it belongs amongst other pieces in said genre. Metatextuality, as explained by Genette, is either explicit or implicit commentary of one text on another. "It unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it." (Genette, 1997, p.3). The relationship is between a text and another text of criticism chronologically written after the first text. According to Mirenayat and Soofastaei (2015) commentary is never irrelevant to the meaning of a text as a text is never written not to be read or interpreted.

Hypertextuality involves, according to Genette, "any relationship uniting a text B (hypertext) to an earlier text A (hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (Genette, 1997, p.5). The hypertextuality thus represents a relationship between a text and the text/genre on which it was based – often transforming, modifying, elaborating, or extending to the original text. This can include sequels, translations, and parodies. A hypertextual relationship can also take the form of text B, never mentioning text A at all, but text B being unable to exists without text A. Intertextuality is defined in a much more restrictive manner by Genette and entails a relationship of co-presence between the two texts. In other words, if a part of text 1

is present in text 2, their relationship is intertextual. This includes quotations, plagiarism, and allusions. Following Genette's explanation of intertextuality, there are three categories: implicit/explicit, covert/overt, and hidden/open. The categories are about whether the text implicitly or explicitly has an overt or covert presence of one text in another text and whether this is done in the open or not.

However, Genette and Fiske are not the only theorists discussing intertextuality. In his book *Discourse: A Critical Introduction* (2005) linguistic anthropologist Jan Blommaert discusses intertextuality as well as indexicality and entextualisation as essential parts of discourse and discourse analysis. According to Blommaert (2005) the 'pure' meaning of an utterance or text is only a small part of the coherent whole and acts of communication produce an indexical meaning: "[…] social meaning, interpretive leads between what is said and the social occasion in which it is being produced." (Blommaert, 2005, p.11). Indexicality is about saying the same things but in different ways, and therefore carry different meanings. These meanings are detected by people as they are accompanied by verbal and nonverbal behavioural cues that allow someone to put the utterance in the contextual space in which they have meaning (Blommaert, 2005). Yet, most of these meanings are not new at all, which Blommaert (2005) addresses as intertextuality. Every utterance is part of a constant cited and re-cited expression and recycled meanings that might have been given by others and therefore grounds any form of discourse analysis into histories of use. Whatever is said has always been said before and has its own history regarding interpretations as well as how it was used or abused – and these histories are carried with those utterances. Intertextuality urges to "look beyond the boundaries of particular communicative events and see where the expressions used actually come from, what their sources are, whom they speak for, and how they relate to traditions of use." (Blommaert, 2005, pp. 46-47).

Additionally, along with intertextuality, Blommaert (2005) also touches upon something that he presents as entextualisation. This process includes the decontextualisation and the metadiscursively recontextualisation of a discourse, in its turn creating a new discourse associated with a new context (Blommaert, 2005). This new context often also provides a preferred way of reading the new discourse. Discourse is lifted from their original setting and is transmitted together with a new context that allows for new metadiscursive contexts to be added that can suggest all new kinds of things about the text. Blommaert gives the example of citation, quoting a fragment of a theorist in a research article in which that fragment is really important, but might be a

superficial or footnote in the original text of the theorist. The 'unimportant' fragment of text A requires a new meaning and value and becomes important in text B. Entextualisation allows for the creation of something entirely new by the fact of repetition (Blommaert, 2020). Both these concepts can be found for specific singular words as discourse, but it does not have to be limited to one singular word.

When discussing the different approaches to intertextuality by these theorists, it becomes evident that there is quite some overlap between their ideas of what entails intertextuality. What Blommaert (2005) calls *intertextuality* is what Genette (1997) calls *transtextuality*. Similarly, *entextualisation* has similar features to *vertical intertextuality*, *hypertextuality*, and *intertextuality* posed by Genette (1997). Table 1 gives an overview of Blommaert (2005), Fiske (1987), and Genette's (1997) approaches of their intertextuality/transtextuality theories and where they overlap.

When combining intertextuality (or transtextuality using Genette's lexicon) and entextualisation, it gives the instruments to set specific utterances or texts within the larger historical frames, both the text itself and the interpretations of said text (Blommaert, 2005). These tools, as Blommaert (2005) explains, presents us with the opportunity to see the connection between the micro-level events and the macro-patterns of which they are part of. It allows people to understand the singular text (discourse/utterance) within the contexts of the social, cultural, and political (Blommaert, 2005). The intertextuality of Hozier's album and EP and his entextualisation of Dante's *Inferno* are key for this research. Using these concepts will allow me to understand the album and EP as a singular utterance, but also placing it within the contexts of the social, cultural, and political approaches that Hozier used as inspiration or catalyst of the songs. By analysing the songs and identifying which approach of intertextuality or transtextuality where possible, will allow me to see and understand how structures, texts or even characters from Dante's *Inferno* are used in *Unreal Unearth* and *Unheard* which is a crucial part to finding out how Hozier appropriated the poem.

<table>
<tr><th>Blommaert (2005) - Intertextuality</th><th>Genette (1997) - Transtextuality</th><th>Fiske (1987) - Intertextuality</th><th>Blommaert (2005) - Entextualisation</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="5">Every utterance (text) is part of constant cited and re-cited expressions and recycled meanings given by others. No utterance or text is self-born and within each text there are intertexts with the text(s) of the past. The origin of the expressions, their sources, whom they speak for, and their traditions of use are all important aids to realise the meaning of the utterance or text.</td><td>Paratextuality
The relationship between a text and its ‘paratext’ (titles, notes, illustrations, preface etc.) to provide the text with context.</td><td>Horizontal Intertextuality
Relation between two texts based on explicit links (by content, characters, and genres) expressed in the same medium.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Architextuality
The relationship of a text and the text of its kind. The text and the genre to which it belongs.</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Metatextuality
The relationship of a text and a text of criticism chronologically written after the first text (either explicit or implicit).</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Hypertextuality
The relationship between a text B (hypertext) and an earlier text A (hypotext). Often transforming or extending the original text.</td><td>Vertical Intertextuality
Relationship between the primary text and another text that explicitly refers to it expressed in different media.</td><td rowspan="2">Entextualisation
The decontextualisation and recontextualisation of a discourse or text. Lifted from its original setting into a new transformed context.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Intertextuality
The relationship of co-presence between two texts. The presence of one text within another (like quotes, plagiarism, and allusions).</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Table 1. Overlap of the intertextuality theories of Blommaert (2005), Genette (1997), and Fiske (1987)

When zooming in intertextual practices in popular music, Middleton (2000) argues, similarly to Barthes (1986), Fiske (1987) and Kristeva (1980), that intertextuality is the idea that texts make sense based on the relations (either explicit or implicit) with other texts. Therefore, Middleton (2000) concludes that "the best umbrella term for the popular music practises […] is probably intertextuality.". Taking the definitions of intertextuality posed by these theorists and applying it within a musical context, it appears that the intertextuality of songs or even an entire album relies on the relationships between the different texts whilst the process of creating said song or album. These texts are not limited to the written words only, but also include other practises like the music, the visual art used for the covers and the performance (Folkestad, 2013).

Staying within the realm of musical texts, context is always relevant to the discussion of how texts came to be, and how they indicate or reference to other texts (Ingham, 2022). Many musical artists writing their own songs, often include many references to events or places, and of course other creative (literary) works. By doing so, the artist enriches their songs with hyperlinks (Ingham, 2022) to either shared knowledge and representation of the world or to knowledge that is only known by the artist themselves. Any reference to previous songs, locations, events, texts, or titles creates an intertextual relationship which can be decoded by listeners. This, however, does depend on the ability of the listener to recognise the references. Even if a listener does not pick up on these clues, it does not take away from the ability to enjoy the music, however, having the knowledge of the literary elements of a different text in the song can allow for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the song's meaning (Ingham, 2022). As with most other texts, the reception can be very varied depending on what the listener knows, what they tried to look up, and simply their ability to decode the verbal and nonverbal signs of the respective (fictional) work that has been musicalized. While using the respective work for their songs, artists might choose to step away from the original chronological narrative order to enhance the song, by for example using repetitions in a chorus. Musical artists do not have to tie themselves to the sequence of events like a fictional narrative should.

4. Methodology

As explained in the introduction chapter, Hozier is not new to using literary texts or mythological stories in his songs. Yet, what is new with this particular album (and EP) is that Hozier used one particular literary text as source for the entire album. This has not been the case with his previously released albums. Even though using several other literary texts and references throughout the album, all the songs are interconnected by Dante's *Inferno*. This chapter will address the data collection process and will address the use of a multimodal discourse analysis that will aid in finding the answer to this hermeneutical research.

4.1 Data Collection

At the start of this research, the data that would be analysed consisted of the *Unreal Unearth* album, containing 16 songs, and the four music videos that were released with the album. The album can be seen as a complete whole with the additions of the videos, as it was chosen to be released by Hozier, the producers, and the record label (Rubyworks). As explained in Chapter 1, Hozier himself said that there were over thirty songs written for this album with only those 16 songs making the cut. However, as of March 2024, Hozier released another four songs that were written with Dante's *Inferno* as a reference source. Since my research question inquires how Hozier appropriates Dante's *Inferno* and those additional four songs are also part of Hozier's appropriation of Dante, albeit not making the original cut, the decision was made to include those songs into the analysis for this research as well. With that, the analysis will include twenty songs, each one appointed to their respective circle of Hell, the four music videos that have been released along with the original album and its cover art.

Additionally, next to using Hozier's songs from the two releases, this research will also make use of interviews that he has done to promote the new album. Several of these interviews have already been discussed in Chapter 1, addressing how Dante's *Inferno* became Hozier's inspiration, how it acknowledges the COVID-19 pandemic but how he did not want the songs to be about the lockdown experiences, and how he wanted listeners to be able to enjoy the album without needing extensive knowledge on Dante's *Inferno*. In some of the interviews, Hozier gives a short in-depth explanation about some of the songs as to why he wrote them and what they are about. Furthermore, I will also refer to several YouTube videos from Hozier's Official Artists

Channel, as it has released several Behind The Song videos. In these videos Hozier himself gives insight into what the song is about and what other inspirations it had, as well as the reflection of the songs. All the information on the songs given by Hozier is essential to create an extensive whole, which is as complete as possible, as this is needed to be able to observe and interpret the ways in which Dante's *Inferno* was used in creating this album. By using these videos, reviews and interviews, I try to get as close to Hozier's own interpretation of the songs as this will give a clear view of Hozier's appropriation of *Inferno*. There is also a lot of information given about the songs by Hozier during concerts for instance – this kind of information can be important if it has not previously been stated by him before. Information like this often ends up on the website Genius.com. A website that, in their own words, "[…] celebrates More Than The Music", and is a platform for artists, creatives and superfans alike to discuss the stories behind the making of the music. However, a complete interpretation of every song might not be available and will be added to by my own interpretation where necessary.

The album and the EP are available on most all music platforms but will, for this research, be accessed through the Spotify app and YouTube. Since there will not be a focus on the actual music arrangements or melodies, the streaming quality will not affect the interpretation of the songs. As for the actual lyric, both the Song text option on Spotify and the Official Artist Channel of Hozier will be consulted. On both platforms, the official lyric is posted with YouTube having official Lyric Videos of every song with the correct lyrics. Interviews are accessed through YouTube as well, all of which were found by using the search bar inserting "Unreal Unearth Hozier Interview".

As most albums, *Unreal Unearth* and *Unheard* are copyrighted property of the artist. I have not obtained direct permission from either the artist or the record label to use the content of the album and the EP for my research but will rely on the fair use doctrine that allows limited use of the text for, amongst other things, scholarly reports. As to find out how Hozier appropriated Dante's *Inferno*, extensive analysis needs to be done on the album as an entirety and well as all the songs individually. This means that certain lyrics from the songs will be used and discussed at length as an interpretation of Hozier's appropriation. The analysis done on the songs and the music videos will allow for new meanings, interpretations, and insights to be formed and thus the analysis can be seen as a transformative use. Throughout the following chapters, when using direct lyrics

from the songs, the appropriate citations and references will be used according to the citation style used for this research.

4.2 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Discourse is everywhere to be found, in every shape, form or colour and has over the years been explained in several ways. According to Cameron (2001) discourse can be seen as the language above a sentence (often found in linguistics for example). In other words, language above a sentence can be understood as the context of the utterance. Cameron (2001) claims that discourse should be seen as "[…] language in use: language used to do something and mean something, language produced and interpreted in a real-world context" (Cameron, 2001, p.13). Similarly, Blommaert treats discourse as a "general mode of semiosis – meaningful symbolic behaviour" (Blommaert, 2005, p.2). In his book *Discourse: A Critical Introduction* (2005), Blommaert argues that to him, discourse compromises "[…] all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity in connection with social, cultural, and historical patterns and developments of use." (Blommaert, 2005, p.3). Both Cameron (2001) and Blommaert (2005) explain how discourse not just about *what* is being said, but also about *how* something is said – it is about language in use (or language-in-action as Blommaert presents it) and when analysing said discourse, both language and the action should be taken into consideration.

As put forward by Blommaert (2005), Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) have worked on semiotic works showing how instead of focussing and analysing one specific object (or mode), one should incorporate the intricate connections between the semiotic modes to come to a much richer analysis. The modes that are discussed by Kress (2012) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) include, but are not limited to, gestures, speech, images, music, writing and colours. These modes, for example, are easily found in videos posted on platforms such as Instagram or TikTok. However, this research does not make use of videos found on the internet, yet there are still modes to be identified. Discourse goes beyond the "pure" meaning and in this case that means going beyond the traditional verbal and musical elements of a music album. Modes used in this analysis for example is the visual imagery, such as the album artwork, but also the music videos and the cultural contexts of the album and the individual songs.

These modes, or textual threads as Kress (2012) calls them, are woven together into a coherent whole. With a multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), it is then possible to provide insights into the relation of the ensembled modes given by the agentic work of the maker. As Kress

(2012) explains, speech or writing are only partial meanings of the coherent whole – they are just one amongst many other available means for meaning-making. Multimodal discourse analysis extends the study of just language (discourse analysis) and combines it with those other modes or threads. By using MDA it will be possible to analyse the different modes and how they create a coherent whole (O'Halloran, 2011). Thus, there will be a focus on the inter-modal relations that arose with the interactions of the modes (O'Halloran, 2011). By referring to the concepts addressed in Chapter 3 and combining it with MDA, it allows one to look beyond the boundaries and see how the discourse is lifted from their original setting and how it is used in a completely new setting and context. Using a multimodal approach, the actual analysis will be separated into three rounds to get in-depth knowledge which will allow an interpretation of how Hozier appropriates Dante's *Inferno*.

The first round will be more formal and uses Dante's *Inferno* as a starting point. This round will analyse how Dante is structurally and textually used throughout Hozier's album. There will be a focus on if, when, and how lines of the poem are embedded either into the lyrics or the titles of the songs. Additionally, as addressed in Chapter 2, Dante's *Inferno* is structurally divided into several parts: descending into Hell, the nine circles of Hell, followed by ascending out of Hell in the last canto. The first round of analysis will enquire into the structure of the album, analysing how it follows the same structure of the circles of Hell. Several circles in Dante's work are divided as well, which will also be incorporated when analysing the songs and their respective circle.

The second round of analysis will take a step away from Dante, and towards Hozier. The focus will lie on Hozier and his approach to the songs. This means each song will individually be analysed and will have its individual interpretation. When needed the additional literary works or mythological stories that were used for the realisation of the songs will be discussed at length. By appropriating Dante, Hozier creates opportunities for his cultural critique to shine through, which needs to be placed into the broader picture. To be able to do this, interviews and Behind The Song videos will be used as explained earlier in this chapter. This round of analysis can be found in the appendix.

The final round of analysis will address the interrelationship between Hozier and Dante and will look into if intertextuality strengthens the message that Hozier tries to bring across in his songs. As addressed in Chapter 1, Hozier wants his listeners to enjoy the newest album and EP on its own, without needing extensive knowledge of Dante's *Inferno* to understand the song. By

clustering the songs into themes that have been identified by the last round of analysis, a clear divide will be made. The analysis done in this round will look into the themes identified while analysing, and it will be explored what role they played in Dante's *Inferno* and what Hozier did with those themes. Additionally, the possible added value that the intertextuality brings will also be discusses. Each round will return to Blommaert's (2005) intertextuality and Genette's (1997) approach of transtextuality to inquire to the background and the histories of the album and the individual songs.

5. Structural & Textual use of *Inferno*

This chapter will dive into the actual analysis of the album *Unreal Unearth* and the EP *Unheard*. Chapters leading up to the analysis have discussed the necessary background information on Hozier as an artist, Dante and his poem, as well as several concepts that will be key to this research. Parts of this analysis are based on the broad explanation given by Hozier in interviews and Behind the Song videos, but have been taken into further detail by my own interpretation of the song lyrics, music videos and cover art. This chapter focuses on the structural and textual use of Dante's *Inferno* throughout the album and EP and will address the different forms of intertextuality that is most applicable to that specific song.

5.1 Structural use of Dante's *Inferno*

As explored in Chapter 2, Dante's *Inferno* is structured around the nine circles of hell, divided into Upper and Lower Hell, with the first three cantos of the poem describing the descent through the Gates into Hell and the last seventy lines of the final canto including the ascent back to earth. This very specific cyclical structure of Hell is used by Hozier in the *Unreal Unearth* album. Some songs and to which circle they belong to are addressed by Hozier specifically in interviews (Apple Music, 2023; Zach Sang Show, 2023; Q with Tom Power, 2023). Additionally, in the Behind The Song videos on Hozier's Official Artists Channel, Hozier addresses 4 songs specifically and to which circles they belong. On the official vinyl edition of the *Unreal Unearth* album, the entire track list is shown with their respective circles, including those that belong to the descent and the ascent. When it was announced that four new songs would be released in March 2024, subscribers received snippets and titles of the songs via Hozier's email updates. The day of the EP's release, the subscribers received an email[10] which included pictures of a handwritten note from the artist himself. In the note it is described that the new songs were also written with Dante's *Inferno* as inspiration but did not make the cut for the original album. This means, however, that these songs too belong in a specific circle, as was read in the note. An overview of the songs from both *Unreal Unearth* and *Unheard*, their respective circles and which songs have a music video can be found in table 2.

[10] The email is kept in my personal archive and can per request be sent to the reader.

Respective Circle	*Unreal Unearth*	*Unheard*
Descent	De Selby (Part 1) De Selby (Part 2) Music Video	
First - Limbo	First Time	Wildflower and Barley
Second - Lust	Francesca Music Video I, Carrion (Icarian)	
Third - Gluttony	Eat Your Young Music Video	Too Sweet
Fourth - Greed	Damage Gets Done	
Fifth - Wrath/Anger	Who We Are	
Sixth - Heresy	Son of Nyx All Things End Music Video	
Seventh - Violence	To Someone From a Warm Climate (Uiscefhuarithe) Butchered Tongue	Empire Now
Eighth - Fraud	Anything But Abstract (Psychopomp)	
Ninth - Treachery	Unknown / Nth	
Ascent	First Light	Fare Well

Table 2.Overview of "Unreal Unearth" & "Unheard" songs and their respective circles

Additionally, I would argue that Hozier used another structure from the poem as well. As explained in Chapter 2, Hell is divided into Upper Hell and Lower Hell, with the City of Dis being the entrance to the lower part of Hell. Similarly, Hozier has placed the song *Son of Nyx* as the first track of circle six, Heresy, right after the circle of Wrath. This particular song is the only song on the album and EP that is completely instrumental, apart from very short fragments of the choruses or hooks from the songs. All of the fragments are detuned and distorted, creating an echo-like effect, as if the songs are floating around coming closer and drifting further away. By placing the song at this specific point in the album, implies that *Son of Nyx* can be seen as the descent into the lower or darker parts of Hell. It can thus be argued that the song runs parallel to Dante and Virgil entering the City of Dis and continuing with Lower Hell, the second part of their journey.

In the seventh circle of Hell, it is explained to the character Dante that the circle has 3 sub-rings, with each ring punishing the souls who committed different forms of violence: against others

or their possessions, against themselves and against God, Nature, or Art. Each ring has its own different punishment, as discussed in Chapter 2. When looking at table 2, it becomes clear that the seventh circle has been assigned three songs: *To Someone From a Warm Climate*, *Butchered Tongue* and *Empire Now*. It has not been said by Hozier that each song lines up with a sub-ring, and even with the analysis of the songs, which will be discussed later in this chapter, there is no actual direct link that ties each song to a specific sub-ring. I therefore argue that the seventh circle on the album having three songs might actually be a coincidence, as the *Unreal Unearth* album originally only had two tracks instead of three and only received the third track when the *Unheard* EP was released. Nevertheless, it does line up with Dante's seventh circle having three sub-rings in *Inferno*, thus Dante's structure (whether coincidently or not) is present in Hozier's seventh circle.

5.2 Textual use of Dante's *Inferno*

As the album and EP together contains twenty songs, of which four also have an additional music video, there are many things to uncover and address regarding the textual use of Dante's *Inferno*. To keep everything clear and in order, the songs and music videos will be analysed in two parts, Hozier's Upper Hell containing the first ten songs (descent, circle 1-5) and Hozier's Lower Hell containing the other ten songs (circle 6-9, ascent). In the two parts, the structure of the circles will be followed as found in table 2. Even though the music videos might not have structural or direct textual references to *Inferno*, I will mention references to Dante with their respective song when recognised in the videos.

5.2.1 Hozier & Dante's Upper Hell

Starting with the Descent into Hell, *De Selby Part one* and *Part two*. The main theme that repeats itself through these two songs is darkness, or at least the absence of a light source, which is very applicable in relation to Dante's *Inferno* which is discussed in the Behind the Song video (Hozier, 2023c). Within the Biblical stories, light is something that God created, hence the absence of it when entering and journeying through hell. *De Selby (Part 1)* begins with the following lines: "At last, when all of the world is asleep / You take in the darkness so deep / That God, at the start, couldn't bear" (Hozier, 2023). I think that the imagery of this first verse has several similarities to *Inferno*'s first canto in which Dante (the character) wanders around a dark wood. "[…] I came around and found myself now searching through a dark wood, the right way blurred and lost. How hard it is to say what that wood was, a wilderness, savage, brute, harsh and wild." (Canto 1, 2-5).

Both the song and the first canto take place in a dark and lonely environment, and eventually addresses the stepping over the threshold of Hell – walking from the lightness of the earth to the darkness of inferno. I interpret verse 3 of *De Selby (Part 1)*, "No closer could I be to God" to be a foreshadowing of the next circle, Limbo. As the souls in this particular circle do not have a place in Heaven but also do not necessarily belong in Hell and are thus in fact as close to God as they can be by residing in the first circle. *De Selby (Part 2)* continues with the theme of darkness, "let all time slow, let all light go" (Hozier, 2023) which refers to Dante being submerged in the darkness when crossing the threshold of Hell, but has no further textual references. I would argue that the music video of *De Selby (Part 2)* also repeats that theme of darkness like *Inferno*. Not just based on the fact that the video is entirely in black-and-white but also based on how the video portrays the idea of burying oneself to stay within that darkness. In terms of intertextuality, I would argue that the closest form that is applicable to these two songs is the horizontal intertextuality posed by Fiske (1987). It does not fit the description entirely as the explicit link I recognise between the poem and the songs to be the thematic content of darkness but is quite obviously expressed in different mediums.

The first circle, Limbo, follows the Descent. As briefly explained in the Descent, Limbo is the circle for those born before the age of Christ or those who were never baptised. These souls have not truly sinned, but have not been named before God either, therefore they do not have a place in Heaven, but also do not actually belong in Hell either. This song has not received much explanation throughout the interviews and the following claims are my own interpretations, but it was mentioned by Hozier as a song trying to capture the feeling of being lifted by an experience and then the ending of that experience(*Unreal Unearth by Hozier on Apple Music*, 2023). Even if not said directly, I interpret *First Time* as a song that plays with the concepts of death and rebirth. "Some part of me must have died / The first time that you called me 'baby' / And some part of me came alive / The first time that you called me 'baby' " (Hozier, 2023). Baptism in itself is often referred to as the death of the 'old' person and their rebirth as a child of Christ. In the chorus the River Lethe is mentioned, which is a river in the underworld which is referenced in Canto 34. The lines "This life lived mostly underground / Unknowin' either sight or sound" (Hozier, 2023) are creating an image of Limbo where it is completely dark and no one speaks (or cries) at all – there are only sighs to be heard (Canto 4, 25-34). These souls are not physically tortured or caused pain as punishment, only that of the emptiness of hopeless desire. This punishment is referred to in the

last verse of *First Time*, "are there limits to any emptiness?" (Hozier, 2023), as the souls are in fact punished with eternal sorrow and hollowness. *Wildflower and Barley* is the first track from the *Unheard* EP (following table 2) and does not have many textual references apart from mentioning "riverboat" in the first verse, which can refer to the actual riverboat of Charon in *Inferno*. I would argue that it does however create an image of the world in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic that is very similar to Limbo, especially regarding the sorrows and not knowing when it would end, this will be further addressed in the next chapter. Similarly to the first two songs, I recognise the explicit links based on content in these two songs which would argue for Fiske's horizontal intertextuality, but again in different mediums. Blommaert's approach of intertextuality can also be applicable looking at just the last song in terms of the utterance of riverboat, as it has a history within Dante's *Inferno* and is now re-cited in this song.

The circle of Lust introduces the first actual character from Dante's *Inferno* in *Unreal Unearth*. As explained in Chapter 2, Francesca and Paolo reside in the second circle of Hell as they gave in to each other and were swept off their feet by their feelings for one another and are therefore punished by terrible winds battering them for eternity. For one, the song *Francesca* obviously refers to the character Francesca in *Inferno* canto 5. Knowing that this song directly refers to a character in this canto made an interpretation of the song a bit easier. Starting with the lines, "That this might've shook the love from me" and "My life was a storm since I was born / How could I fear any hurricane?" (Hozier, 2023) are both referring to the punishment of being swept off their feet in the terrible winds. "shook" refers to the fact that the love has not been shaken from them even when being caught in a hurricane, and the second line might actually refer to how Francesca's life had been a whirlwind from the beginning, as a young woman in Italy being married off to a much older man, only to fall in love with his younger brother. The line refers to the fact that the hurricane that they are in now is nothing new. Therefore, the lines "I'd tell them, 'Put me back in it' / I would do it again […] / I'd go through it again" (Hozier, 2023) all using *it*, I would argue to be a reference to the hurricane and the terrible winds. Additionally, I would argue that the music video of *Francesca* also references the storm from canto 5. Through the windows in the abandoned building, flashes of light can be seen. Along with the dark interior of the building and the white light flashed, I would argue that the building can be seen as being in the middle of the storm. The flashed are the lightning that often accompanies hurricanes and storms. The first two lines of *I, Carrion (Icarian)*, "If the wind turns, if I hit a squall / Allow the ground to find its

brutal way to me" (Hozier, 2023) also seem to reference the terrible storm that has captured all the souls, who are constantly battered around, undoubtedly crashing into the floor before being picked up again by the wind. This song is about Icarus, who is not mentioned in Canto 5 (circle of Lust) but can still be seen as a reference to Dante's *Inferno* in my opinion. Icarus is mentioned by name in Canto 17 describing the story how his wings melted and how he plummeted to his death, and Icarus's father, Daedalus, is mentioned by name in Canto 29. Neither of them is residing in a circle of Hell and are only mentioned to explain why others are in their circles. However, since they are characters that have been called by name, I would argue that they can still be seen as a reference to the poem. As both songs have characters that are found in the original text, these two songs again come closest to Fiske's horizontal intertextuality despite being in different mediums, but also to Genette's intertextuality based on the co-presence of the poem in the song. However, I would argue that Genette's hypertextuality and Blommaert's entextualisation can also be found as there is a clear relationship between the hypertext (the two songs) and the hypotext (*Inferno*). Both of the songs are using the characters in a different way than was used in the poem, therefore is lifted from the original text, and is transformed into a new context.

The third Circle, the Circle of Gluttony, starts with the track *Eat Your Young*. The song mentions the feast-like preparation of food for the table, but with a rather sinister undertone. Hozier revealed that this song tries to show the idea of sacrifice, in this case the young, for short term gain (Genius, 2023). He explains how from the beginning that there is an unreliable narrator, and which I interpret in several lines throughout the song. "Pull up the ladder when the flood comes" and "It's a kindness, highness / Crumbs enough for everyone" (Hozier, 2023) both show the morality of the narrator, knowing that crumbs are not enough as a meal or that pulling up the ladder has dire consequences for those who could not reach the ladder. Therefore, with an unreliable narrator, the first line, "I'm starvin', darlin'" (Hozier, 2023) can then be interpreted that they are not actually hungry, they are just greedy for more. This is emphasised by the following lines of the pre-chorus: "I won't lie if there's somethin' to be gained / There's money to be made, whatever's still to come" and "I won't lie if there's somethin' still to take / There is ground to break, whatever's still to come" (Hozier, 2023). Both these fragments can be interpreted that if there is anything in it for the narrator, they will take it – no matter the consequences. This really just shows how their need to always have more or gain more is the most important, not minding how it impacts others. *Too Sweet* is the second track from *Unheard* that we come across working through all these circles.

This song has less direct lines that are referring to Dante's *Inferno,* yet I would argue that the entire song describes gluttony in all of its senses, hence its place in the third circle. The song talks about two people both with a very different lifestyle, both of them almost trying to convince the other to join their side. One is indulging too much, staying up late, sleeping in, working until late, drinking alcohol and caffeine, the other is over consuming routine, always waking up before the sun is up, going to bed early, restricting what they consume. They are polar opposites, yet both are overindulging in their own ways. Both of these songs are using the thematic content of gluttony from *Inferno* for which I would argue comes closest to Fiske's horizontal intertextuality similar to previous songs.

The next two circles both have just one song, starting with the fourth Circle, the one housing the souls of the greedy. As discussed in Chapter 2, this circle houses either those who hoarded their possessions or those who lavishly spent all their possessions. I would say that *Damage Gets Done* has both these perspectives, seemingly in two different moments of time that are being compared with the other. Verse one and three are about the narrators being younger, at a time when they barely had anything to their names but what they had was more than enough: "Without shame, two outfits then to my name / You'd end up in one when you'd stay / We had nowhere to go and every desire for goin' there", " Oh, if the car ran, the car was enough / If the sun Shone on us, it's a plus / And the tank was always filled up / only enough for our gettin there" (Hozier, 2023). They did not have much to go by but what they had was enough and was spent the way they wanted to. The second verse, however, is them looking back realising that now that hoarding their money and possessions changed things, and not necessarily for the best. "We knew what our love was worth (When we had nothin') / Now we're always missin' somethin'" (Hozier, 2023). I see these lines as them looking back realising that they are missing things from their youth, something that cannot be filled with money or other possessions. This particular song uses both the avaricious and the spendthrift from the poem, but as the same person just a different moment of time. Instead of there being different people, it is combined and therefore I would argue that Blommaert's entextualisation is the most applicable as it is lifted from the original text to a new transformed text.

The last circle before descending to Lower Hell, is the circle of Wrath and includes the song *Who We Are*. I would say that there are no direct references to *Inferno* in this song, which might be as the circle is only very shortly addressed at the end of the seventh canto. This circle has

again two types of souls, those who are still actively wrathful, the ones that are fighting each other at the surface of the river Styx, and the sullen ones who have come to terms with their misery and are just underneath the surface. The lines "So much of our lives / Is just carving through the dark / To get so far / And the hardest part / Is who we are" (Hozier 2023) could be referring to the two different types of souls. An argument then can be made that the first three lines are addressing the active wrathful who are still fighting tooth and nail in the dark swamp of the Styx, and the last two lines addressing the sullen ones, who have come to terms with their misery and themselves and are taking in the pain of who they are. As I recognise these two types of souls in my analysis, I would argue that Fiske's horizontal intertextuality can be recognised despite it being in a different medium.

5.2.2 Hozier & Dante's Lower Hell

The first song within the sixth circle is *Son of Nyx*. As mentioned before, this song is completely instrumental with some short fragments floating around in the song from previous and future songs of the album, but no lyrics that can be analysed. However, the title can be understood as a reference to a character from *Inferno.* In an interview Hozier revealed that the title refers to Nyx, the Greek goddess of Night and her son Charon (Travis, 2023). Charon ferries newly deceased people across the river Styx and Acheron and can be found in the third canto of *Inferno*. I would argue that using the goddess of Night in this particular context complies with Blommaert's approach of intertextuality as the utterance makes use of the meaning and its sources and is re-cited in the context of this song.

The second song in the Circle of Heresy is *All Things End*. Heresy is often seen as a belief that disagrees with the other generally accepted beliefs one might have; however, it can also be understood as an action that goes against someone's principles or what they think is just wrong. Both these forms seem to appear in this song. Starting with the latter, this song can be understood as a break-up song according to Hozier (*Unreal Unearth by Hozier on Apple Music*, 2023), which can be seen as heresy towards a relationship that is so strong. Yet the title which is repeated in the chorus multiple times, "And all things end" (Hozier, 2023) can also be understood as heresy based on a religious meaning. Those who believe in God, Heaven, and Hell, often believe that they are all eternal, and saying that all things end can thus be seen as very heretical, leading to the circle of the heretics. The following line from the song can be interpreted in two ways, one of them being

a reference to *Inferno*. “Should not change our plans when we begin again” (Hozier, 2023) I think can be a reference to the Last Judgement Day that is mentioned in Canto 10. The “begin again” can be a reference to the souls receiving their final judgement of God who will decide if they will get to begin again. The other interpretation will be discussed in the next chapter. This song uses the heretical content found in *Inferno*, and I would argue that it makes use of the horizontal intertextuality of Fiske (1987) but in a different medium.

The seventh circle, the Circle of Violence, houses three songs and starts with *To Someone From a Warm Climate (Uiscefhuarithe)*. As explained earlier in this chapter, the circle of violence has three sub-rings, with this song coming the closest to the one that commits violence against themselves. This is portrayed in the song as the violence of loving someone dearly and losing them. “And I wish I could say / That the river of my arms have found the ocean / I wish I could say the cold lake water of my heart / Christ, it’s boilin’ over” (Hozier, 2023). This creates the image of almost desperation to have found a place to belong, the river finding the ocean, which is not the case. Additionally, I would argue that the boiling over can be seen as a reference to the river of boiling blood in the first sub-ring. The second song in this circle is *Butchered Tongue* and can potentially be placed in the second sub-circle, violence against someone else but can also be seen as a commentary on the general acts of modern violence. The second verse shows actual violence committed to someone else, “The ears were chopped from young men if the pitch cap didn’t kill them / They are buried without scalp in the shattered bedrock of our home” (Hozier, 2023). This is a direct reference to the violent form of pitch capping as a way of execution of Irishmen by order of the British forces, and the last line refers to the fact that after they were executed, they were denied proper burial (Thévenet, 2023). Therefore, this song can be placed within the second sub-circle as the song does show violence against others. The last song in this circle is the third song we come across from the *Unheard* EP and is called *Empire Now*. I would argue that his song also belongs in the sub-circle of violence against others, as it is about the British Empire and its control over Ireland. “Our martyrs of our revolution / Their spinning caused the earth to shake” (Hozier, 2024), martyrs are those who have been killed for having other beliefs, and as this song addresses the Irish independence. The martyrs of the revolution are thus the people who fought for an independent Ireland, and were killed by the British, which is undeniably part of violence against others. As all of these three songs are using *Inferno*’s theme of violence but not the actual violence from the poem, relating it more to modern type of violence I would argue that

Blommaert's entextualisation is most applicable as something from the original text is used in a completely new setting and context.

Circle eight, the Circle of Fraud, starts with *Anything But*. At first glance it seems like there is no reference to *Inferno* at all, and that it is a love song. Yet the reason of belonging to the Circle of Fraud does not come from what is being said, but what is being implied. In the interview with Apple Music, Hozier explains that the lines that seem sweet on paper are actually not sweet at all. "If I was a riptide, I wouldn't take you out", "If I was a stampede, you wouldn't get a kick" and "If I had his job, you would live forever" are all ways of saying the person actually does not want anything to do with the other. The song, seemingly an upbeat love song, is in reality saying that even regarding revenge, they do not want to know, see, or hear them ever again. Essentially, the lyrics tries to trick the listener, an argument can then be made that this song belongs in the second Bolgia which houses the Flatterers who corrupted language to play upon the desires of others. The other song that has a spot in the eighth circle is *Abstract (psychopomp)* and I would make an argument that it has a spot in the sixth Bolgia, the one of the Hypocrites. The hypocrisy coming from the person who has just mortally wounded an animal as they hit it with their car and is now trying to comfort the animal acting as a psychopomp, the additional title of the song. A psychopomp is a guide for those who have recently deceased navigating their journey from their living world to the afterlife. Charon, the ferryman transporting the dead across the river Acheron in Canto 3, is a psychopomp. Yet, it can root itself even further within fraud. I interpret the lines "The cold wet of your nose, the earth from a distance / See how it shines / See how it shines" (Hozier, 2023) as something that can also imply that the earth looks beautiful from a distance, how it shines, yet the shining beautifully conceals all the suffering and pain at the surface. The beauty cannot be separated from the suffering and disaster and can therefore be seen as a part of Fraud. Similarly to the previous three songs, these two songs are using the theme found in the eighth circle, Fraud, but are using it in different ways. They are using fraud as a concept, not direct instances of fraud from the poem, and are using it in a different setting and context. Therefore, I would again argue that Blommaert's entextualisation is most applicable.

The very last circle, the Circle of Treachery, has only one song; *Unknown / Nth*. As explained by Hozier this is essentially a breakup song (Zach Sang Show, 2023), realising that after all this time they never truly knew their partner – something that can be seen as treacherous. After having several songs that did not have direct lyrical references to *Inferno*, I would argue that this

song has several of them. Starting with the second line, “I swam a lake of fire, I’d have walked across the floor of any sea” (Hozier, 2023) is a direct reference to the river Phlegethon, or the river of boiling blood found in the Circle of Violence. The last lines of the first and second verse are referring to Satan/Dis: “So I thought you were like an angel to me” and “Where you were held frozen like an angel to me”. Satan, a fallen angel, is the ultimate prisoner trapped in the very centre of Hell, frozen up to his waist where he desperately tries to get out by flapping his wings, only to get more stuck in the ice. In verse 3, there is a reference to Satan chewing on the three traitors, Brutus, Cassius, and Judas: “You called me ‘angel’ for the first time, my heart leapt from me / You smile now, I can see its pieces still stuck in your teeth” (Hozier, 2023). The narrator is drawing a comparison between their lover and Satan, with instead Satan chewing on the three biggest traitors, the lover is chewing on the narrator’s heart, pieces still stuck in their teeth. As argued with other songs, as this song uses direct references to the poem, I would say that Genette’s hypertextuality and intertextuality are present. There is a presence of the hypotext (*Inferno*) in the hypertext (*Unknown / Nth*) which also acts as a copresence.

This leaves us with the final two songs, which belong to the Ascent out of Hell. The first song, *First Light*, really captures the re-emergence from Hell into the Light again, as Hozier wanted (Travis, 2023). “The sky set to burst, the gold and the rust / The colour erupts, you fillin’ my cup / The sun comin’ up / Like I lived my whole life / Before the first light” (Hozier, 2023). I interpret this as the idea of not knowing what the sunlight looks or feels anymore after coming out of a very long period of darkness, which can be connected to Dante. After seeing Satan, the darkest part of Hell, Dante is suddenly faced with the ascending out of Hell, through a tunnel back to earth where Dante arrives in the early morning, stars still visible but with the sun ready to come up– from the darkness back to the light. The final song, which is also the final song of *Unheard* is *Fare Well* which is first and foremost an obvious wordplay on farewell. It is almost as if the song is saying goodbye to the listeners or maybe even saying goodbye to Dante as inspiration for the journey, giving it closure. The song uses the line “Any solitary pleasure that was sorrow in disguise / Let the sun only shine on me through a fallin’ sky / I’ll be alright” as a plea for even the tiniest bit of joy amongst disaster. This can be a reference to Virgil being Dante’s guide throughout the whole journey, but can also refer to Beatrice, Dante’s idealised true love who sent Virgil as a guide. Both can be seen as a shred of hope and joy amongst the very difficult journey Dante had to take. With these last two songs I would again argue for Fiske’s horizontal intertextuality despite being in

different a medium, based on the context of stepping into the light as well as saying farewell as the ending of the journey.

6. Hozier's appropriation of *Inferno*

This chapter will look into the final two sub questions that were phrased in the introduction. This will be done by giving a brief summary of all the songs and the themes that come forward throughout the songs. A more extensive and complete analysis of Hozier's approach to the songs and the music videos can be found in the appendix, including my own interpretations when needed. Following will be placing songs in the themes that have been recognised in the first part of this chapter. These threads or common themes throughout the album will be discussed by putting them into song clusters, which will allow me to see how they interact with each other. Additionally, this will allow me to explore if these themes follow Dante's structure as well. Lastly, this chapter will dive into how Hozier appropriates Dante, looking into how the original poem shines through this new text and the possible added value that comes with that. This step will also go back to the theory and concepts discussed previously.

6.1 Song content and themes

Looking at the entire album, Hozier has discussed how there are many themes addressed in this album. He calls it an eclectic album where the songs do not have to be about the same things, this allowed him to explore songs and themes, letting the songs be what they need to be (NME, 2023). Starting with *De Selby Part 1* & *Part 2* the common theme is Darkness, as previously discussed in chapter 5. These two songs are playing with the imagery of losing oneself to the freedom of the darkness, which turns into a more romantic love song idea where two do not know where one begins and the other one ends.

First Time can be understood as a relationship song in which the narrator feels like they come alive when their partner calls them by their name. However, this song also has foreshadowing that the relationship did not last.

Continuing with *Wildflower and Barley*, this song directly references the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects it had on the earth, both in a negative way and a more positive way. It also addresses a part of Irish history, with barley being a symbol of regeneration and resistance of the Irish revolution.

Francesca has the most direct references to *Inferno* and is about the narrator communicating that no matter what, even when given another choice, they will always choose to love their partner – even if they will end up in hell. One of the lines, however, can also be interpreted as a subtle nod to the queer community, which can therefore be seen as culture critique.

I, Carrion (Icarian) is a love song in a kind of way as it tries to capture the lightness that one can feel when falling in love with someone. The imagery of Icarus and the lightness of falling in love also includes the possibility of the relationship not working out.

The next song, *Eat Your Young*, is one with a lot of culture critique mostly based on how people in positions of power are using youth as pawns in culture wars. This song also includes Irish history and the artificially created condition of poverty.

The second song from the EP is *Too Sweet* and comes from an Irish expression saying that someone is too sweet to be savoury. The song is about the narrator rejecting the other person as they are a bit too disciplined and too positive when the narrator prefers someone more jaded.

Damage Gets Done is the next song and includes culture critique of the older generations not listening to the younger generations and just blaming them how they are harming the world – when in reality it is not the youth that brings on the most damage as they are just trying to face all the problems that the older generation caused.

The last song before Lower Hell, is *Who We Are* which tries to show the feeling of investing a lot of time and effort into something, thinking it will bring happiness when fulfilled, but in the end realising it was not real. It describes picking a path as it is deemed a correct path for success for everyone, when in reality it is not the right path for everybody.

Entering Lower Hell, starting with *Son of Nyx* is a tribute to the father of Hozier's bass player Alex Ryan, named Nick hence the title of the song.

The next song is *All Things End* can be seen according to Hozier as a breakup song. The song tries to capture the moments of a relationship falling apart even when the narrator believed that this was a relationship that would last forever. It is about accepting the end and giving up their faith in the relationship.

To Someone from a Warm Climate is supposedly a love song that tries to make sense of love after losing the relationship and the experience. The relationship did not work out even if the narrator wished it had.

Butchered Tongue is full of culture critique and starts with a focus on how ancient cultures are forgotten more and more, with people living in such places not realising what it means. However, even if these cultures are not practised anymore, there are still traces that have remained. In the second part of the song Irish history is mentioned again, specifically the rebellion of the Society of United Irishmen in 1798 and the practices of pitchcapping as a way of execution.

Staying in the realm of Irish history, *Empire Now* reflects on one hundred years of Irish Free State. It also includes culture critique on how people in positions of power are taking advantage of problems instead of solving them and a reference to climate change.

Anything But includes several Irishisms with the narrator at first glance portraying kindness to someone, when in reality they do not want to do anything with them or even come close to them at all. The narrator is trying to reject the other person as they do not appreciate what the other person is doing at all.

The next song is *Abstract (Psychopomp)* and is made up of multiple memories of Hozier's childhood. It includes the memories of falling in love and how instinctual it came, similarly to human instincts taking over when in a moment of brutality. Even if the feeling did not last, they are grateful for having that short moment.

Unknown / Nth is another breakup song, but in the highest form as the narrator realises that they never even truly knew the other person. The narrator went above and beyond to be with the other person but has finally accepted that it is not worth the pain trying to uncover this person's intentions.

The penultimate song, *First Light*, is the last song of the original album. This song tries to capture going from the darkness into the light and how after such a long time of darkness that seeing the light feels as if it is the first time.

Fare Well is the last song of the EP and gives several prompts in which the creature or person would not fare well. It ends with the narrator wanting to take the opportunity to feel everything that earth has to offer, the good and the bad.

6.2 Song clusters

Now that it has become more clear what kind of themes are resurfacing throughout the album and EP it is possible to start putting them into specific song clusters. Starting with the first cluster, which is also a complex one, the pandemic. In the interviews Hozier has given he spoke about how he did want to credit the pandemic as it was a very important period that people went through but did not want to write songs about the experience of lockdown. During the analysis, it became clear that there is only one song that explicitly refers to the COVID-19 pandemic, *Wildflower and Barley*, which is the song from the *Unheard* EP. The song refers to the world lying fallow and harrowed creating the image of the empty fields as a metaphor of the cities being empty. There is a more direct reference to the absence of people in the second verse of the song: "The canal banks are empty again / The grass cryin' out to be heated by bodies / The streets for the laughter of young women and men" (Hozier, 2024). As people were staying at home to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus, it left the streets empty. These lines are referring to how there were no people by the canal banks, no people in parks eating and drinking with friends or people chatting and having fun in the streets. With no other songs referring to the lockdown period, this is a very small cluster that does not branch out. However, even with only one song referencing it, there is one major reference to the pandemic – the entire album itself. The album as a whole being an allusion to Dante's journey through hell is also referring to the journey that Hozier himself, and everyone else, went through during the pandemic. It was a time of uncertainty, a lot of misinformation and being surrounded by death for many months, and many people came out a lot differently than how they went in. Some maybe for the better, realising there are other important things than just work or their careers, some for the worse, realising that they could not deal well with being so isolated and away from everybody. And those thinking they were not changed at all realising in the midst of a very loud and crowded room that they do not like being with so many people in one room anymore. Whatever the effect COVID-19 and the pandemic had on people, everyone went through their own journey similarly to Dante's journey. Everyone came out different than how they went in and had to deal with those effects, which is what Hozier tried to

capture with this album – the idea of going into something and then coming out of it. With this first cluster I would argue that the structural use of the descent, journey, and ascent is a form of Blommaert's entextualisation as well as Genette's hypertextuality. It takes a particular part of the text and recontextualises it in a new transformed context but the hypotext is still recognisable in the new hypertext.

The next cluster touches upon the darkness, which is a common theme from the very beginning of the album, as it is in Dante's *Inferno*. This cluster has more songs to it, however not all in the same way. The darkness starts in *De Selby (Part 1)* and *De Selby (Part 2)*, with the first part reflecting on the darkness as something freeing, creating a space of freedom as discussed by Hozier in the Behind the Song video. The second part continues this idea by creating the imagery of staying in the darkness in any way possible, the darkness is wanted and welcomed with open arms. This is portrayed by the narrator saying that they want to kill the lights, they want to run against the spinning world to stay in the darkness of the night, they want to outpace the dawn and beat the morning – these are all ways of trying to stay within that darkness. Looking at the music video of *De Selby (Part 2)* the darkness is present as well as the entire video is in black-and-white and touches upon the idea of burying oneself alive which can be interpreted as hiding away from the light of day and merging into the darkness. However, taking a small jump to right before descending into the lower parts of Hell, *Who We Are*, the idea of darkness is becoming more desperate and suffocating. The narrator in this song reflects on how so much of time of someone's life is carving through the dark just trying to find a glimpse of who they really are. They are often putting effort and time into something thinking that will be the thing that brings them happiness or fulfilment and they will have the best lives they can, only to realise that it was never truly real. They have been carving through the dark, thinking they were close to the light but in reality, they are not. They were following something thinking it would bring them euphoria, but realised too late that the dreams they were chasing were never theirs and are still left in the dark of who they really are. Jumping to *Unknown / Nth*, the narrator is realising that the darkness is a place where when unobserved the true identity of people come out, Yes, as previously thought in *De Selby (Part 1)* and *(Part 2)*, the darkness still creates a space of freedom, but instead the space being pleasant the narrator now realises that it can be a treacherous place. They come to terms with the fact that in this place, dark truths can thrive when they are wilfully ignored. Ignoring problems, leaving them in the dark, they can only fester and return as a bigger problem. This song is followed by

First Light where the narrator is reflecting on being in the darkness for so long that seeing the light feels like a first-time experience. It is about the narrator accepting that it is not possible to leave the darkness fully behind but seeing that it is not a way to live and saying that they do not want to go back into that darkness anymore. This is a stark difference from the beginning where the darkness was welcomed to the last song where the darkness is metaphorically shown the door. Even with the darkness not explicitly addressed in every song throughout the album or EP, this cluster shows the construct of going into something and getting out a changed person. The journey through the darkness realising that it was not something that was good for them but was something they might have needed to experience to truly realise that. Next to all the songs having darkness as a theme, the cover art also displays that theme. The images are of Hozier in the ground, trying to leave the earth's surface, or his face completely buried in dirt with just his teeth holding a flower being visible. Figure 4 shows a sunset which forebodes the falling of the night and the beginning of the journey. Similar to the previous chapter, I would argue that the thematic use of darkness plucked from Dante's *Inferno* is a form of Fiske's horizontal intertextuality. However, the presence of descent, journey, and ascent like the last cluster would make an argument for Blommaert's entextualisation and Genette's hypertextuality as well. This shows that (structural) themes from Dante are actually recontextualised in more than one way.

The third cluster is one that Hozier is very familiar with and is present in several songs of the album and EP, culture critique. There are different kinds of culture critique throughout the songs, some of them returning in other songs and sometimes there are multiple ones in one specific song. As to keep a clear overview, I will first address the recurring lines of culture critique found in the songs in the order of the album and EP, after which I will address the more loose snippets of culture critique. The first branch within this cluster is the Irish history in the songs as a form of culture critique. Starting with *Wildflower and Barley* as the first mention of Irish history which stems mostly from barley and its symbolisation. Within the Irish landscape, over time, the unusual growing of barley has become a symbol of the Irish revolution. As it grew in the spots of mass graves, it was eventually seen as the part of the revolution that could not be stopped or killed – neither by men nor time. *Butchered Tongue* is the second song that addresses Irish history, specifically referring to the rebellion in 1798. This particular rebellion many Irish men were tortured and executed by means of pitchcapping and were denied a proper burial. If the pitch cap had not killed the person, they ended up being scalped and often blind as the tar would have gotten

in their eyes. The last song mentioning Irish history is *Empire now* and reflects on the hundred years of Irish Free State. It mentions the empire, referring to Brittain, and tries to create a nightmare-esque image of the world where even in their graves the martyrs of the revolutions are used and exploited. The martyrs are so upset they start turning in their graves and instead of solving the problems someone is hooking them up to generators, creating a new power source. These three songs are all falling back on Irish history but are trying to bring across different things. I interpret the first song as saying that fighting for what is right can have an effect and years from now people will look back at the demonstrations and will still fight for those whose rights are being violated. There is always some part of the revolution that can be found back and cannot be killed no matter how hard someone might try. This relates to the second song as it quite literally talks about the erasure of ancient culture and voices, including the Irish revolutionaries. The last song I see as a way of showing how far they have come but that there are still problems that need solving. That despite the work the martyrs have done to get where they are now, it is time to take on that role and keep fighting for what is right.

The next branch in this cluster is aimed at people in power not listening to the youth along with generational trauma. Starting with *Eat Your Young* as the first song, Hozier himself explained, the song is about the sacrifice of the future of other people purely for their own gains often with children becoming the ground of culture wars. Children are becoming the ground of culture wars and are used as pawns by those with positions of power. This can be seen with the discussion on gun rights, with all the school shootings endangering the lives of the students which is only followed by another debate whether or not people should be allowed to carry weapons. I argue that this song has a similar satirical take as *A Modest Proposal* by Jonathan Swift in which it is argued that Irish babies should be consumed or sold like animals to the elites. It is making a comparison how the Irish were not treated as anything important and were not listened to, and I think this can be compared to how these people in positions of power are not listening to youth. They are not listening, not making different choices, and are therefore sacrificing any future of people purely for short term gain. They are not changing or taking responsibility so they might as well just eat their young as their futures have been sacrificed already. The last song in this branch is *Damage Gets Done*. In this song the younger generation are told that they are responsible for the problems of the world, that they are causing harm and will be the end of them – when in reality this is not true which is explored later in the song when they are realising it was not being young and reckless

that brought on the damage. The younger generations that are getting blamed are just trying to solve the problems that the older generations brought along and are trying to do their best with what they were given.

Next branch I identify as a part the culture critique cluster contain being forced by society to follow a specific path that is deemed as the 'correct' path. With *Francesca*, I would argue that my interpretation of "Heaven is not fit to house a love like you and I" makes this song part of this branch. In my analysis I argued that this line is not just about Francesca and Paolo but can also be interpreted as a subtle nod to the queer community. Queer people are often told that by having same-sex relationships or attractions (or any other relationship including LGBTQIA+ people) will not go to Heaven and will end up in Hell. They are not accepted by people and are seen as outsiders not following 'society's norm' of being heterosexual. They are punished for being who they are and loving someone, just like Francesca and Paolo. The norm that was set by those who believe anything different from their belief is fundamentally wrong, is not a norm that everybody should abide by. Being brought up a vegetarian and thinking killing animals for meat is wrong does not mean that therefore everybody should be a vegetarian just because someone says it is bad. Everybody is entitled to their own belief but should not be forced onto someone else who has a different belief. This idea is often seen however within religious practices but also within different generations of family, as can be seen in the *Eat Your Young* music video. The video explores generational trauma that is thrown on the newest generation and the effects that it can have. Several elements in the video are enforcing these gendered norms put up by society, the wardrobe with masculine presenting outfits for the man including a policeman, a butcher, a mine worker, and a soldier, whereas the wardrobe of the woman shows outfits that are usually seen as feminine roles, like a nurse, a baker and two more pretty dresses. The video also presents the beauty standards that women are trying to obtain. By showing a statue of Venus, the ultimate symbol of beauty, and the woman starting to change her appearance to look more like the statue to me argues that she is trying to fit within the absurd high beauty standards and is willing to go far to reach the standard. This is again a norm put up for women that they should live for and are shamed when they do not fit in this norm, for example being plus-size or being very muscular while being feminine. These boxes that are created by society are not made for everyone and will shame those who fall outside these boxes. In the video a boy appears, their son, and when he is presented with a table full of toys, he picks the doll. He is happy, smiling as he holds the doll, only for the doll to be ripped out

of his hands by the man and is thrown away. This returns to these gendered norms in which boys are supposed to play with cars or trucks and not with dolls as those are for girls. By the father taking away the doll, he is forcing the boy into his premade box with severe consequences. The parents are not happy with their position in society and are angry at the world and instead of changing it, they take their anger out on their child forcing him in the same way they were most likely forced – which is where the generational trauma comes through. Lastly, *Who We Are* has a similar idea of the right path that people need to walk. "You and I burned out our stem / Chasing someone else's dream (Hozier, 2023). In the song the narrator explains how they were chasing someone else's dream thinking it will bring them happiness when in reality it can cause harm when forcing oneself onto that path, into that box, when that box was never meant to fit them in the first place. It is hard to find a path that works for them when being bombarded by norms and high expectations of society.

Lastly, there are some loose threads of culture critique throughout the album that do not necessarily branch together with other songs. Starting with *Wildflower and Barley*, in my analysis found in the appendix, I have explored the meaning of the world lying fallow like a piece of land left unplanted, letting it rest so it can get back some nutrients after being worn out. The pandemic created that opportunity for the world. By saying that in the pandemic, the world was lying fallow, it can be argued that before there was a mandatory lockdown, we as inhabitants, had been exhausting our planet and using up all its resources to its limit. There is dangerous air pollution in extremely busy cities, animal habitats are burned and chopped down to create more space for humans for more buildings and agriculture. I would argue that this is a cultural critique on how we are treating the earth, as if we have other habitable planets reserve, when Earth Overshoot Day keeps being earlier in the year, with for some countries it being as early as February or March.

Looking at *Butchered Tongue* the cultural critique is about losing the native language and meaning of things as those native people were chased away from their lands, were hunted, and killed. It is about forgetting about the history of those people, the hardships, and the joy they went through, their mythological stories, their culture. Yet even when others have tried to erase those ancient cultures, parts of it are still around. There are echoes that can still be in that one specific cultural dish, or a town name that people do not know to pronounce. The butchered tongue is still singing above the ground. I think this is applicable for today when many minority groups with long historical cultures are still being discriminated against and forced to abandon those cultures.

These ancient cultures being erased is something that has happened a lot in history and is something that is still happening today when people instead should be fighting to keep these cultures alive.

Lastly, in *Empire Now* there is a single line that I interpret as culture critique: "The future's so bright it's burnin'" (Hozier, 2024). I understand this in two different ways, the first one the world is burning with flames of revolt, with people fighting for their futures, but also as flames of the climate change that keeps getting worse having more disastrous effects on the earth. Unlike the previous cluster, the entire cluster of culture critique branches do not have an ascent, a coming out, which I find very fitting. These are all problems, problems that have not yet been solved, so why would they already have the coming out of the journey part when in reality we are still in the middle of that journey – it is unclear if it is even possible to get to the coming out part. Even if it does not follow Dante's structure of descent, the journey and ascent, it does follow the structure of the problems we are facing and not being close to actually solving them. For all these ways of including culture critique, an argument can be made that this cluster includes Blommaert's entextualisation. As found in *Inferno* Dante himself was not shy of letting his opinion known either and throughout the poem he expresses a lot of culture critique as well. So even if the songs containing culture critique do not follow the structure of *Inferno*, I would argue that it fits very well with Dante's approach to *Inferno* which contains a hefty amount of culture critique on many things. This point will be further discussed in the next part of this chapter.

The last cluster I identified is the more obvious one, as Hozier has given insight to several of these songs. This cluster is all about a relationship that can be followed throughout the album – a relationship that has not lasted. Starting with *De Selby (Part 1 & Part 2)* the narrator is talking about how with someone else they are starting to transform together, becoming one and the same. They are blurring the lines of individuality and are creating, as Hozier named it, a romantic space, where two people feel part of each other, they are metamorphosising together – and is the start of their love story. *First Time*, as I interpreted in my analysis, is also about love, a relationship, and how the lover of the narrator made them feel alive. Something dies and something comes alive, which can be seen as the narrator feeling reborn when being in that particular relationship. This song, however, already foreshadows the ending of the relationship by saying that there was a final time that their partner called the narrator baby. Jumping to *Francesca* and *I, Carrion* next, the former about loving someone unconditionally and picking someone over and over again and the

latter about how it feels to fall in love and the lightness that one can experience. Both these songs are love songs, the narrator telling their partner everything they would do for them and that nothing bad can happen as long as they are together. They are about unconditional love, a love felt like no other and in the moment the narrator feels like this is their future and they will be together for the rest of their lives. The narrator will choose that person over and over again at this stage of the journey, however, descending into Lower Hell, the love songs turn into breakup songs and are not as light anymore. Starting Lower Hell with *All Things End*, with the title of the song already speaking for itself. This song shows how the narrator had faith in the relationship and the heartbreak that comes with realising that the two together are not working. However, the narrator is coming to terms with the loss of the relationship and understands heartbreak as part of the human experience. Even though the plans that were made are washed away, the narrator is still glad for the experience. I argue that the same idea is present in the music video, as it is about an ending of something, the flatlining of an experience yet there is still something afterwards that is worth it. It does not take away the pain or the experience, but the future will bring new things which should not be avoided just because they can potentially be hurtful. Similarly, *To Someone from a Warm Climate (Uiscefhuarithe)* is about accepting how easy it was for the narrator to love their partner but that it is time to accept that they did not work together. The contrast of warmth and cold was too much, and even if they are hurting now and how much the narrator wished for the relationship to work, loving the other came just as naturally as letting them go. *Abstract (Psychopomp)* is partially about a memory of being in love, and how the narrator (based on Hozier's memories) has no choice but to love the other person. At the same time, the song is about a spiritual guide, guiding people, or other beings from one phase in their lives to the next which can refer to the ending of the relationship. The narrator is saying that despite their love has died, they are still glad that they knew the other person. However, I would argue that that feeling is quite short-lived heading into the next song, *Unknown / Nth*. Again, this song can be understood as a breakup, getting one's heart broken and realising they do not know the other person as they thought they did. The narrator has been ignoring the issues (scarlet flags) of the other person trying to get to know them and be with them, while the other person only created an illusion of caring for the narrator. This treachery has caused the narrator to finally give up on getting to know the other person as it is simply not worth the pain and effort anymore. *First Light* can be understood as the coming out of the relationship, realising that the narrator has changed because of their relationship but has recognised that it was

not a good relationship. They have come out of the dark and into the light, and even though they will carry that relationship with them for the rest of their life, they will not go back into that darkness again. This cluster does follow the journey structure from Dante, getting into a relationship and coming out of it as a changed person. Last note about this cluster, *Anything But* could be argued to be part of this cluster, in the sense that it is about not wanting anything to do with the other and wishing the other to be as far away as possible – but is less convincing than the others mentioned before. Like the second cluster, this cluster also follows the descent, journey, ascent structure as seen in Dante's *Inferno*. Therefore, the same as I argued before, I would say that Blommaert's entextualisation and Genette's hypertextuality are present and only reinforce my previous statement that the structural themes from Dante are recontextualised in multiple ways.

6.3 Dante & Hozier's interrelationship

As mentioned occasionally, the themes that have come forward in this research are not just themes that Hozier decided to put into his new album and EP. These themes of darkness, culture critique and even relationships have come forward in Dante's *Inferno* as well. Darkness as a theme is early on established, not only because of the falling of the night, but also because all light leaves Dante and Virgil the moment they step through the gates of Hell. As briefly discussed in Chapter 2, Dante himself did not shy away from expressing his opinion on the affairs of Italy and Florence, and all the other instances he considered to be wrong. Even the relationship, albeit very limited, is mentioned when Virgil talks about Beatrice, the woman with whom Dante was completely enamoured, despite being married. After analysing all the content of the album and EP, I would argue that when reading this poem, Hozier was not just inspired by just the structure of the poem but also by the actual content and the themes in the poem. He took the concept of darkness and used it in different ways, especially at the start where the darkness is welcomed – unlike in *Inferno* Dante has no other option to undertake the journey which I would argue as not necessarily being welcoming of the darkness. The romantic (and most likely one-sided) relationship of Dante and Beatrice is only mentioned a couple of times very briefly throughout the poem, yet that theme of relationship was taken by Hozier and made into a considerable part of the album and EP. However, I would not argue that the culture critique found in the songs and videos, as discussed previously, is part of the album purely because Dante's *Inferno* contained a lot of culture critique as well. As addressed in the introduction, Hozier has never been afraid to show his opinion and critique

through his songs, like many other Irish artists. With songs like *Swan Upon Leda* and *Take me to Church* he shows his anger against the struggle of female reproductive rights and the gay discriminations and sexual abuse of the Catholic church – even *Nina Cried Power* shows his stance on the fight for civil rights. As he has always been an artist with a lot of culture critique in his songs, it would be unjust to argue that his reasoning for culture critique in these songs are just because of *Inferno*. I do think he might have been inspired by the amount of critique on Italy and Florence by Dante, that he included quite a lot of culture critique about Ireland.

Returning to the concepts that have been used in this analysis, I would like to focus on the title of Genette's book in which he discusses the transcendence of the text, *Palimpsest*. According to the Cambridge dictionary, a palimpsest is a "very old text or document in which writing has been removed and covered or replaced by new writing" ("Palimpsest", 2024). Because parchment was quite expensive and not always available, people scraped off the previous writing and started writing a new text. Yet scraping off the text did not completely erase it and the old text often shone through the new text. This is very applicable when looking at Dante's *Inferno* and *Unreal Unearth* and *Unheard*. Even though the new text is at the foreground and has a completely different take, style and medium, traces of the original text are still clearly visible. Like a palimpsest, by using something that has previously been created and used by someone else can allow for these intricate layers to be formed. Layers which some people are trying to uncover as to make sense of the new text and its meaning.

Before starting this research, I had not read *Inferno*, I just knew about the Nine Circles of Hell and Satan being trapped in the lowest circle. Listening to *Unreal Unearth* for the first time, and the six months after that, was done without having the extra knowledge of Dante's poem. However, having read Dante's *Inferno* multiple times now I would argue that having read the poem it does create added value to the album. Especially with the songs that are referencing Dante the closest, like *Francesca*, without knowing how Francesca is portrayed as an historical figure in the poem, the listener is unable to know how Hozier almost rejects Dante's portrayal and makes her a complete human individual making her own choices. Some songs have quite simple references to Dante's *Inferno*, like *Wildflower and Barley* or *De Selby*, taking over just simple concepts like naming a riverboat. Other songs like *Francesca* and *I, Carrion (Icarian)* are taken from the poem and are completely recontextualised, having a completely different meaning, yet the old text still shines through the song. When taking a step back and looking at the album and EP as a whole

picture, I think that there is a lot of added value having read the poem in the first place. When reading the poem, the songs will make sense as to why they are part of that specific circle and will create another layer of storytelling. Not just that, it also adds something to Hozier as a singer-songwriter. By using Dante's *Inferno* so closely and yet still creating a complete new cultural text is very impressive – Hozier has used the poem as a device, letting it inspire him and instead of it becoming a retelling or an adaptation, it has become its own thing entirely.

7. Conclusion and Discussion

This research used several approaches of intertextuality with the aim to identify the ways in which Hozier appropriated Dante's *Inferno* in his latest album *Unreal Unearth* and latest EP *Unheard*. As stated before, the research question is as follows: *How does Hozier appropriate Dante's Inferno?* Based on a qualitative, multimodal discourse analysis of the twenty songs, four music videos, and four different types of cover art, it can be concluded that there is not one specific way in which this is done. By creating several rounds of analysis to focus on specific elements based on information given by Hozier in interviews and my own interpretation, this research outlined several ways how Dante's *Inferno* is appropriated in his latest releases. Starting with the clear structure of the album, as Hozier used Dante's descent, Nine Circles of Hell, and ascent structure to order his songs. *Unreal Unearth* is divided into these sections and when the *Unheard* EP was released it was communicated that these four songs also had their respective songs. The first analysis round also revealed that many songs had a form of textual appropriation from *Inferno*. While in some songs this link was very implicit or limited, there were also songs in which the textual use of *Inferno* was explicitly clear. By using several theorists with different approaches to intertextuality, each of the songs, based on textual use, were analysed to which description they would fit the most.

The thematic use of Dante's *Inferno* took different forms as well, starting with themes like darkness that was identified throughout the album. As the darkness plays a significant role in the poem, with Dante leaving the earth and the light to journey through Hell, and that idea of going into the dark and then coming out of it, is also present in the album and the EP. The idea of a relationship also being present in *Inferno*, albeit not too much at the foreground, was also very much present in the album. Additionally, both these thematic uses of Dante in the album, respectively go through the structure of descent, the journey, ascent as well. This not only shows that Dante's themes shine through in the new text as if it were a palimpsest, but it also shows that the structure from Dante is recontextualised in more than one way as it applies to and is present in different layers of *Unreal Unearth* and *Unheard*. Lastly, the thematic use of culture critique in the songs and videos are not only present because of the culture critique that is present in *Inferno* but also because of Hozier as artist. He has been including culture critique from the very beginning of his career, starting with *Take me to Church* and has been very vocal regarding his opinions in his

music. However, my argument still stands on the fact that the amount of culture critique towards Italy and Florence in the poem, has inspired Hozier to include more of his critique towards the past and current state of Ireland. So, when returning to the concepts, the album and EP are an appropriation of Dante's *Inferno* (and not just an adaptation) as it took a step away from the original text and created a new cultural text. Hozier used the poem for his own creative purposes and intentions, and with that he created a new cultural text in a different domain. Lifted from its original source and recrafted into a new text. This is done by the multiple layers of intertextuality that are found within the songs but also with the album as a whole.

During the analysis it became clear that all the slightly different approaches of intertextuality were needed to analyse all the songs individually. None of the theories from the theorists would have worked when used individually without the others. When looking at the album and EP as a whole, a singular use of intertextuality can work as it would be looking at the album in a broad sense. However, when trying to analyse the songs individually, none of the approaches given by the theorists are specific enough to point out the ways in which the intertextuality plays a role. Looking at Fiske's (1987) with the horizontal and vertical intertextuality, which have been identified several times, this issue is evident. The vertical intertextuality is too broad to point out smaller details of Dante's *Inferno* that were used in the songs. The horizontal intertextuality was much more specific but has the issue that it is supposed to be a link between texts in the same medium – which makes it increasingly harder. I deliberately chose to still identify intertextual links based on characters or content as Fiske's horizontal intertextuality even though the poem and the album and EP differ in medium. This choice was made based on the fact that this research has quite a unique position as it is trying to analyse a part of popular culture but is done with older intertextuality theories. Nearly all theories that have been used for this approach are more than twenty years old and applying that on current popular culture can have its issues. The intertextual theories that have been used are all needed to create an extensive analysis to uncover all the intertextual relationships between the two texts. Even though this research analysed several different theories and created a table overview to see the overlap between them all, there are still many different approaches to intertextuality by other theorists. For further research that aims to find how text A is appropriated in text B, an even broader perspective of different theories can be applied to see if certain elements can become more distinct.

This research aimed to fill the gap in research regarding the appropriation of Dante in popular music. A first step is made with this research and can become a stepping stone for other research to be conducted regarding this topic. Dante's *The Divine Comedy* is a landmark in Italian and European culture for a reason, and research should not be limited to movies and video games. A different medium can allow for a completely different take on the original text, changing the story or creating a different point of view. Besides adding to the field of research of appropriation of Dante, this research also added new insights into research about Hozier as existing research has only been about his earlier albums or one specific song. However, as there was a focus on how Dante's text was appropriated, other texts that were used by Hozier have not been acknowledged. Further research could include an analysis of all the inspirations and texts used to realise an album. More detailed research could be done by using Hozier's entire discography, in which the songs can be divided into themes similar to this research.

Even though I have made the argument that having read the poem and listening to the album does have added value and can enrich the experience of listening to the songs, I am not saying that it is a requirement to enjoy the music in the first place. Hozier is an artist who wants his music to be heard and enjoyed, and as he himself said he did not want his songs to become something that can only be understood with knowledge of Dante's *Inferno*. I would argue that, like with many other artists, one does not *need* to understand the content or context of a song to be able to enjoy it. Circling back to the introduction of this thesis, I did not understand any of the lyrics of *Dust in the Wind* when my father would play when I was just a couple of years old. When I hear the song on the radio, I enjoy it because of the memories that are attached to it, rather than the lyrics or the context of the song. Which is exactly what Hozier expresses in the Belfast Telegraph. The songs are starting from a personal place and experience but are let loose to become what they need to become (Egan, 2023). In the end it is the listener that finishes the song, bringing their own experiences and new meaning to it. There is no need to know the context to be able to enjoy music, however knowing the context, which in this case is Dante's *Inferno*, can allow for a deeper appreciation of the song and multilayered modalities which can lead to a deeper appreciation of the artist itself.

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Appendix

This appendix contains an extensive and comprehensive analysis of Hozier's approach to the songs. All songs have been addressed in an interview in some way or form. Some of them many times, others just once. The explanations of the songs heavily rely on the interviews, reviews, and videos of Hozier himself and thus his interpretation and reasoning for making the songs. Some lines however are interpretations of my own and will be addressed as such. *Inferno* is not the only inspiration for many of the songs, many of which are not useful to answer the research question. Therefore, other sources and texts used for the songs will only be discussed and explored when needed.

Album & Album Cover Art

Starting with the title of the original album, *Unreal Unearth*, in an interview with NME Hozier shortly addresses the inspiration for the title as at the time of the pandemic the world did not feel like itself. The world, according to Hozier, felt almost surreal, like stepping into a new world or world (NME, 2023). However, it was also a playful take on the noun Unearth, as the album has a lot to uncover and reveal. Hozier calls it an eclectic album, an album composed of elements from many different sources, that in its turn created songs that did not discuss the same things as the previous ones. By using Dante's Nine Circles of Hell, Hozier was able to allow the songs what they needed to be, almost letting the different voices from the songs speak from the earth as spirits (NME, 2023; Travis, 2023). The songs and the themes could be explored, knowing that the following song might have a different theme.

Before starting with the actual analysis of the songs, the cover art needs to be discussed as well. There were three types of cover art used for the *Unreal Unearth* album and can be found on CDs, the vinyl editions and music streaming services (Figures 2-4). The EP *Unheard* has one cover used for all platforms for all the different mediums (Figure 5). The first figure shows Hozier himself, buried in dirt surrounded by several items such as gold coins, a cracked mirror a book and couple of bullets. At the bottom there is some type of vegetation and bellow that blue and pinkish-purple colours can be seen. When one would turn the image upside down it would create the idea of the earth with the blue and pinkish colours to be the sky either showing a sunset or dawn, with Hozier going down away from the earth's surface. I interpret this as a reference to Dante's *Inferno*

with the character Dante leaving the earth's surface and starting the journey of going through the Nine Circles of Hell. The items seen in the image are references to certain songs, with the bullets, for example, referring to *Eat Your Young* and the golden coins to *Damage Gets Done*. I would argue this image shows the beginning of the journey, going deeper into hell and leaving the earth behind. Figure 3 shows Hozier's mouth coming from the earth with a flower between his teeth. In his interviews Hozier explained that all the songs felt like different voices speaking from the earth (NME, 2023; Travis, 2023). The mouth from the earth can thus be interpreted as a voice communicating the album to the listeners. It can also be related to *Inferno* as Dante the character went through the journey of descent, the Nine Circles, and the ascent, writing it as the poem – which can be loosely interpreted as a voice that came from the earth telling a story. The next image (figure 4) has similar hues as figure 2 creating a sunset type of idea, going from purple to a darker red. It features Hozier sitting, seemingly looking down. If figure 2 and this figure can be seen as part of a complete picture, it can be argued that Hozier is looking back at himself, with Hozier in figure 2 at the start of the journey and Hozier has come out of the journey and is looking back at it. It can also be a reference to *Inferno* again with the sunsetting being a forebode to the falling night and the beginning of the journey. "Daylight was leaving us, and darkened air drawing those creatures that there are on earth from all their labours." (Canto 2, 1-3). The last album cover is from *Unheard* and is actually a black-and-white image showing Hozier again lying on the ground covered in dirt. Apart from the earth referencing the journey of leaving the earth's surface descending into Hell mentioned before there are no other references to Dante in this image.



Figure 2. Cover art of Eat Your Young EP



Figure 3. Album cover Unreal Unearth



Figure 5. Cover art Unreal Unearth



Figure 4. Album cover Unheard

De Selby Part 1 & Part 2

The Descent starts with *De Selby part 1 & part 2*. In the last chapter it was explained how the text references Dante by means of darkness, how Hell is so far away from God and thus light, it is completely dark. Hozier expands on this thought in the Behind the Song video on his YouTube channel, "It is song reflecting upon darkness and the falling of night, viewing it as something very freeing in which all things are lost […]".[11] The lines of the second verse reflect that idea of darkness, "Your reflection can't offer a word / To the bliss of not knowin' yourself / With all the mirrorin' gone from the world" (Hozier, 2023). It plays with the idea of not being able to see yourself as addressed in the third line, and with that space or freedom that comes with it there is an infinite space to reckon with (Travis, 2023). In the Behind the Song video, Hozier reflects on the idea of not seeing where someone hand starts ends and the darkness begins, that they bleed into each other – becoming one and the same. The outro, sung in Irish Gaelic, reflects on that idea even more, but in the sense of a love song describing not knowing where one person ends and the other begins. "Bhfuilis soranna Sorcha / Ach tagais 'nós na hoíche / Trína chéile / Le chéile, claochlaithe" which translates to "Although you're light and bright / You come to me like nightfall / You and I metamorphosised" (Hozier, 2023). These lines enforce the idea two people starting to

[11] Hozier. (2023c, August 16). Hozier - De Selby (Behind the Song) [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3GVayXeFVY 0:45-01:00

transform together, becoming one and the same as well. Which is then further explored, more lyrically, in *De Selby (Part 2)*.

With this song, the idea of metamorphosising together – feeling part of the same whole, is explored in a positive way, similarly as how the darkness in these two songs is experienced as something good as it can be very freeing in a way. Both "And your heart, love, has such darkness / I feel it in the corners of the room" and "I don't need to know where we begin and end" (Hozier, 2023) show this romantic space where two people feel like they part of, how they are metamorphosised. They are blurring the lines of individuality, creating one whole - referring to the Irish Gaelic lines of *De Selby (Part 1)*. The positivity, the willingly or the need to be in the darkness become clear in the pre-chorus and chorus of the song: "And I want to be so far from sight and mind / I wanna kill the lights / I wanna run against the world that's turnin' / I'd move so fast that I'd outpace the dawn / I wanna be gone / I wanna run so far, I'd beat the mornin'/ Before the dawn has come, I'd block the sun / If you want it done" (Hozier, 2023). These lines are made up of different ways of finding ways to stay in that darkness. "Killing the lights" would ensure that there is not light and thus darkness, "run against the world that's turnin" as the world is always spinning (turning) the narrator wants to run against the spinning world to stay in the darkness instead of the sun coming up to shine on them. This is accentuated by saying that they want to "outpace the dawn" and "beat the morning". There is a desire to stay within that darkness, fading into it along with the other person.

De Selby (Part 1) also has a music video, completely black-and-white and stars Irish actor Domhnall Gleeson. The character he plays finds himself on a cliff, completely covered by dirt, confused how he got there. The character finds a shovel and runs around trying to find out where he is, coming across a ruin, a lake, and empty fields. Throughout the video it becomes clear that he is trapped in a time loop or a time warp. He is being buried alive and wakes up on the cliff again, which gets repeated over and over again. It is finally revealed that the character is actually the one who has killed himself and as a punishment is forced to do it again and again. He is forced to kill himself, digging his own grave over and over. I think this fits both with the lyric of the song as well as the entire theme of the album. The song as interpreted above, is about the darkness and losing one's identity to the darkness, but at the same time seeing it as something very freeing. I interpret this music video as the character giving into the darkness thinking it will be a space of

freedom, lets the darkness in, and the character is shown to be lost in that time warp which I identify as the dark. Additionally, as the entire video is in black-and-white, with a storm brewing in the background seen in the many clouds and the lightning in the sky, it also relates to Dante's *Inferno* as there is no light in Hell as it is the furthest place from God and thus from light, creating grey and ashy setting.

First Time

Compared to the first two songs, *First Time* is a song that has not been giving much explanation by Hozier throughout all the interviews he has done. This song belongs to the circle of Limbo and there is a heavy presence of the cycle of death and rebirth, which has been discussed last chapter. As was communicated by Hozier, on the Apple Music webpage of the *Unreal Unearth* album, it is stated that the song is about "being lifted by an experience and then that experience ending and it feeling like your world collapsing in on you, and then going again" (*Unreal Unearth by Hozier on Apple Music*, 2023). If we look at the lyrics, this idea of the experience starting, ending, and going on afterwards is present. The first verse explaining how the name of the narrator did not sound right before their partner said their name, something dies and is reborn hearing the name called by their lover (discussed in the previous chapter). Yet the second verse, at least narrative wise, is the first time that it is referenced of the 'main character' or narrator being dead. In its turn, this could be interpreted as foreshadowing that the relationship of the narrator did not last. "These days, I think I owe life / To flowers that were left here by my mother / Ain't that like them, giftin'life to you again / This life lived mostly underground / Unknowin' either sight nor sound / Till reachin' up for sunlight just to be ripped out by the stem " (Hozier, 2023), my personal interpretation of these lines is that the mother of the narrator is leaving flowers on their grave. The mother giving life to the narrator in the first place and doing it again and again by leaving flowers and these flowers being the only thing to which the narrator owes their life. The second pre-chorus can be interpreted as a final act of defiance. "Sensing only now it's dyin'/ Drying out, then drowning blindly / Bloomin' forth its every colour / In the moments it has left / To share the space with simple living things / Infinitely suffering, but fighting off like all creation / The absence of itself, anyway" (Hozier, 2023) these lines, reference to what Hozier said about the experience ending and the narrator giving a last effort to keep things working in the relationship, desperately trying to keep it alive. Yet, I would argue that it can also be seen as an observation of nature (and humanity)

as an act of trying to ward of death. Instinctually, living things do not want to die - nature wants to survive and thrive. “Bloomin’ forth its every colour / In the moments it has left” (Hozier, 2023), these lines feel like a last attempt to escape death and trying to do everything before death does eventually arrives. There is this cyclical nature between life, but also relationships, along with that instinct to stay alive and keep going. Yet, as the last chorus reveals: “The final time you called me ‘baby’”, this relationship did not survive, even with the final act of defiance of the narrator.

Wildflower and Barley

Wildflower and Barley from the *Unheard* EP is the only song that directly references the COVID-19 pandemic – which is also the reason I think it did not end up on the original album. In several interviews Hozier mentioned he wanted to credit the pandemic without actually having songs directly addressing the experience of going through lockdown, which is exactly what this song does. “The world lyin’ fallow and you are so apart from me”, “Low and harrowed lie the fields and the heart of me” (Hozier, 2024), both instances are referring to the effects of the pandemic and the lockdown. The first line refers to the world lying fallow, which is a term used when a piece of land left unplanted, as planting crops year after year can cause the land to lose its nutrients. As this is a song about that time in the pandemic, I interpret this line as the earth having the opportunity to catch her breath in a way, trying to restore some of those nutrients. When everyone was forced into isolation, there was less air traffic and less cars on the roads, which resulted in a dramatic reduction of air pollution in many cities like in India (figures 7 & 8), and animals wandering into the deserted streets and cities like in Llandudno, Wales, where a hoard of 122 Kashmiri goats ventured the streets (Figure 8) and in Santiago, Chile, where there were at least three instances of cougars wandering around in the empty streets (Figure 9) (BBC News, 2020a; BBC News, 2020b). In both cases, the animals were not fleeing for humans or sudden noises such as cars, simply because there were none. The animals sense the lack of noise and start wandering around looking for food and water (BBC News, 2020a; BBC News, 2020b). The earth had a unique opportunity, and was given space to rest, just like the fallow field in the lyrics.



Figure 7. Delhi, India. Before the 2020 lockdown



Figure 6. Delhi, India. During the 2020 lockdown



Figure 8. Llandudno, Wales. Kashmiri goats strolling through the empty streets



Figure 9. Santiago, Chile. Cougars wandering around residential neighbourhoods of the city

In the chorus the following lines can also refer to the earth catching her breath: "The healers […] Are healin' / The diggers are digging the earth". I interpret these lines in two different ways, the first as mentioned before, the earth healing itself with all the animals having the space to unearth the ground without being scared away by humans and loud car noises. My second interpretation, however, is much more morbid, and refers to all the doctors and nurses trying to heal the people affected by COVID-19 and the diggers referring to all the extra graves that were needed as so many people passed away in a short amount of time. "The canal banks are empty again / The grass cryin' out to be heated by bodies / The streets for the laughter of young women and men" (Hozier, 2024), this line refers to how empty and deserted the streets were when everybody was forced to stay inside. There were no people at the canal banks, or people picnicking

on the grass or chatting and laughing in the streets. But it does not just reference to the pandemic, in a video where he is answering questions that audiences sent in, Hozier addresses the second layer of the song which mostly stems from the word barley as part of the title of the song.[12] Both that video and in the Behind the EP video, Hozier explains that there is a folksong called *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* which reflects on the mass graves of the Irish revolutionaries. They would keep raw barley oats in their pockets for when they were on their way and when they were killed and buried in these mass graves, after some time barley started to grow. In the Irish cultural landscape, these unusual growing of barley became a symbol of the part of the revolution that could not be killed or cannot be buried. Barley regenerates and it gives live to something that cannot be stopped while being underground. One line that can directly refer to that, in my opinion, could be "I feel as useful as dirt, put my body to work". I interpret this as putting their bodies to work, giving life from the ground and in that sense still fuelling the revolution, becoming that symbol of resistance.

Francesca

Francesca is the song with the most direct references to *Inferno*. Both Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta are actual historical figures that Dante used in his poem for the circle of lust. As explored previous chapter, the lyric is clearly referencing the hurricane that the souls are trapped in in the second circle of Hell. Yet, instead the idea of being trapped in the hurricane as a punishment, the songs put the punishment on its head. In the Zach Sang Show interview, Hozier reveals that the song was actually written for someone, but that the poem adds another layer to the song. He continues to say that there are not many people who he would write a song for as itis a quite intimate form of communication but that the poem becomes a device to distance himself from the personal place where the songs starts.[13] Hozier explains, that the song gives a voice to Francesca as a human individual that made her own choices, instead of positioning herself as a victim. Instead of being trapped in a hurricane with the person they loved is not seen as a punishment, the song captures the idea of two people choosing each other despite the risks or consequences and would make the same decision again when given the chance – they are together

[12] Thévenet, N. [Nathalie Thévenet]. (2023, September 22). Hozier's YouTube Premium "De Selby Part 2" video Afterparty Full HD 60fps [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_3a87zrjwE 35:30 – 41:00
[13] Zach Sang Show. (2023, June 22). *Hozier | Eat your Young, Unreal Unearth, Take Me to Church, Unknown* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved March 28, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MloAJbu4Jz8 14:24-20:05

and that is what they wanted. This sentiment becomes very clear with specific lines throughout the entire song. Starting with the first verse, “Do you think I’d give up? / That this might’ve shook the love from me”, “How could you think, darlin’, I’d scare so easily?” and “There’s not one thing I would change” (Hozier, 2023), all these lines are referring to the narrator, which can be seen as Francesca or Hozier, arguing that no matter what is thrown at them, it will not scare them away from loving their person. Their love will be taken away by some hurricane and they refuse to change anything about their situation, in fact they would do it again if they would have to make that decision again, which becomes clear in the following lines. “If someone asked me at the end / I’d tell them, ‘Put me back in it’ / I would do it again / If I could hold you for a minute / I’d go through it again / I would still be surprised I could find you, darlin’, in any life” (Hozier, 2023), this chorus makes the idea of choosing someone over and over again quite evident. “Put me back in it” and “I would do it again” are speaking for itself with the narrator clearly stating I would do this again if I was given the choice even if it is to only hold their person for a minute it will be worth it no matter the consequences. In the outro the following lines are sung, “I would not change it each time / Heaven is not fit to house a love like you and I”, which are yet again referring to the narrator not changing anything if given the opportunity and saying that Heaven is not a place where they can be together and they would pick Hell over any Heaven any day if it means that they will be together. However, I think this might also be a subtle nod to the queer community, as Hozier has spoken out for it multiple times. People from the queer community often get told that they will not end up in Heaven for having something other than a heterosexual relationship. They are not accepted by some people and are told that they will go to Hell for what they are doing, when in in fact all they do is just loving someone.

Francesca is the second song having an Official Music Video but differs from the first one. Instead of is telling a story like *De Selby (Part 2)* did, this video shows the band performing in an abandoned building. The set up looks like one that could be on a stage with all the instrument changes and the electronica. So, unlike *De Selby (Part 2)* there is not a lot to analyse based on the cinematography, however, something that I think does refer to Dante’s circle of Lust is the flashing of light that is seen through the windows of the building that they are in. I interpret this as lightning being part of the hurricane that is found in the second circle which has been discussed in Chapter 5. I would argue that as the song is supposed to be Francesca’s voice, that the song is sung from the hurricane that she is trapped in along with Paolo.

I, Carrion (Icarian)

I, Carrion (Icarian) is the next song on the album and similarly to the previous song, this song too was initially made for someone as a gift. Both in the interview with Apple music and in the Belfast Telegraph he discusses how it started out as a long song written for someone, more in a love song kind of way (Egan, 2023).[14] Hozier explains that he tried to create that feeling of the lightness that one can feel when they fall in love with someone, a feeling that has never been experienced before that is terrifying at the same time (*Unreal Unearth by Hozier on Apple Music*, 2023). The song plays with the idea of experiencing the full extent of falling in love also should include the possibility of it not working out and everything collapsing in itself, and this is done by making it a love song while also using the mythological story of Icarus. Icarus is a character from Greek mythology and is son to the inventor Daedalus who created wings to escape their imprisonment on Crete. Daedalus ordered Icarus not to fly to high in the sky as his wings would melt, Icarus did not listen to his father and as he flew higher in the air the wax on the wings started to melt causing the wings to fail which ended with Icarus falling into the sea and drowning. In the song there are several lines show the love song idea that Hozier expressed as well as a denial of danger: "I feel lighter than I Have in so much time / I've crossed the border line of weightless", "And though I burn, how could I fall / When I am lifted by every word you say to me? / If anything could fall at all, it's the world / That falls away from me" (Hozier, 2023). Especially the second example shows the denial of being in danger saying how could they possibly fall as they are lifted by the things that their partner is saying. Nothing bad can happen, if anything that happen it is the world turning on its head and falling away – but not to the narrator. The narrator is so caught up in the ecstatic feeling of soaring in the air that they are not realising the imminent threat that is heading towards them. By using the song lyric as a love song saying "I only pray, don't fall away from me" (Hozier, 2023) and using Icarus and his ending to show the idea of the relationship not working out, it is almost as if Hozier took both the experience of lightness of flight and the experience of collapsing and crashing into the sea in either hand, just playing with that imagery and how that would ultimately end up being like.

[14] Zach Sang Show. (2023, June 22). *Hozier | Eat your Young, Unreal Unearth, Take Me to Church, Unknown* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved March 28, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MloAJbu4Jz8 39:30 - 40:00

Eat Your Young

Arriving at the third circle, the Circle of Gluttony, starting with *Eat Your Young*. This song might be the one with the most information from Hozier himself, which asks for less interpretation on my part. This song is discussed in several interviews, but most importantly has an official lyric and meaning video on the Genius.com YouTube channel in which Hozier himself explains the verses and the chorus of the song. Before diving into the first verse, Hozier starts with explaining the overall idea of the song, stating that it is about the idea of sacrificing the future of other people for short term gain (Genius, 2023). He includes the idea of children becoming the ground of culture wars, and how adults are using them as pawn giving the examples of arms dealing, the school shootings that are followed by another debate on gun rights (Genius, 2023). Starting with the first verse, he explains that it sets the tone for the rest of the song in terms of misleading, with an unreliable narrator with a voice of power who shrugs of the responsibilities to any future that anyone has. The lines "Honey, I wanna race you to the table / If you hesitate, the getting' is gone / I won't lie if there's something to be gained / There's money to be made, whatever's still to come" (Hozier, 2023) are explained by Hozier as a race to the bottom, with the narrator trying to find new ways to extract the most out of something in the cheapest way possible no matter the challenges that the others might end up with – challenges that can last for the next 30 years. The line "Seven new ways that you can eat your young" is explained as a clickbait title with Hozier referring to Buzzfeed as an example as they have clickbait titles often. The chorus is explained as people, who are not going to be here for much longer, are playing with the lives of children and their futures purely for their own political gains. "Pull up the ladder when the flood comes / Throw enough rope until the legs have swung / […] / Skinnin' the children for a war drum / Puttin' food on the table, sellin' bombs and guns / Its quicker and easier to eat your young" (Hozier, 2023), with the explanation of Hozier, I interpret these lines as people in positions of power who are creating an illusion of salvation without actually trying to work towards that salvation to help those that are suffering the most – or supporting achievements or demonstrations of the youth but not doing anything to actually support them. For the second pre-chorus Hozier brings in the Irish history explain how for a long period of time Ireland was under colonial power and occupation (Genius, 2023). In that time, they suffered an artificially created condition of poverty as they were not allowed to own property or a house, were not allowed to vote or even speak in the Irish language (Genius, 2023). As a response, Jonathan Swift wrote a critical and satirical essay with the argument

that Irish babies should be sold and consumed as animals showing how at that time the Irish were not treated as human beings. That sentiment, in my opinion, is woven into the entire song with the idea of people with power not listening to their youths when they are the ones who have to face the consequences of the decisions that are being made. Youths are flooding the streets demonstrating for climate change, LGBTQI+ rights, gun laws, and they are congratulated on showing their voices but very little is done to support them and for what they are protesting.

This song has a music video as well, starring Hozier and Ivanna Sakhno. In a letter written to his listeners Hozier explained that this video is about a small theatre piece consisting of two stages working in tandem with one another. To make the analysis understandable a more detailed image of the video will be described. One stage is viewed by the adults in which the characters lose something as they engage with their world, the other stage, watched by children, where that which has been lost becomes visible. In short, the entire video, in my opinion, explores generational trauma and is shown by the man and woman and their child in the video. The stage with the adult audience shows a man and a woman revealing each other's wardrobes, with the man having more masculine presenting outfits, like a police man, a butcher, a mine worker, and a soldier, whereas the woman has a wardrobe consisting of a nurse, a baker and two pretty dresses. Throughout the video the limbs that are lost show up in the puppet theatre, the stage viewed by the children. The man loses his arm due to the war, and the woman "cuts of" her arms to change herself to be more like the statue of Venus shown on stage (done by putting on a black glove so it seems that she misses a limb against the black background) – which I interpret as the current beauty standards that women are trying to fit into as Venus is a symbol of ultimate beauty. Both their arms appear on the puppet stage, first just the arms finding the other before they are switched by puppet versions of the man and woman. On the adult stage, the man and woman reveal a child, who is then presented with a table full of toys. The boy picks up the doll and smiles while he holds it before the man rips the doll out of his hands and throws it away. The boy angrily starts destroying the other toys before the woman stops him and "cuts off" his arm putting on a black glove. The child's arm appears on the puppet stage and rips of the soldier outfit of the puppet of the man, revealing a butcher outfit. The child then is shown in the same outfits as the man at the beginning, police, butcher, mine worker, and soldier before the man and woman make him disappear under a black blanket. This is the end of the performance on the adult play, with the audience applauding them, however in the middle of the stage a meat hook is shown dangling. The stage the children

are facing is not done yet, with the arm of the child appearing again, revealing a locker of some sort and when opening there is blood dripping out of it – ending the performance with the children running away. I interpret the adult stage telling one story, and the arms, the things that have been lost, telling another story to the children. I would argue that this is very in line with the song as the adults are seeing perpetuated hurtful illusions, things that they lived through themselves and will keep repeating, while the children are seeing the horrible truth and run away from it while the adults are just cheering on the same violence.

Too Sweet

The second song in this circle is *Too Sweet* from the EP and is shortly explained in the Behind the EP video on Hozier's YouTube channel. He describes an expression from Ireland which is used when they are put off by somebody's outward sweetness that it becomes unnerving – "Too sweet to be savoury". [15] In the video Hozier also explains that the voice of the song is someone who overindulges too much rejecting someone who has their life a bit too much together and essentially over consumes discipline. Some of the lyric seem close to teasing or calling the other out for their disciplined behaviour telling them they do not need to pretend. "You know you don't gotta pretend / Baby, now and then / Don't you just wanna wake up, dark as a lake" (Hozier, 2024), I interpret these lines as the narrator seeing the discipline of the other person as a mask, something that they are trying to keep up, and saying that that perfect image that they are trying to create is not truly who they are. The chorus is made up of a repetition of the following lines "I think I'll take my whiskey neat / My coffee black in my bed at 3 / You're too sweet for me". I would argue that the narrator is (over)consuming things in their purest form, black coffee and neat whiskey are untouched in the sense that there is no attempt made to make it sweeter. It is bitter but it seems like the narrator actually prefers and appreciates it that way and I would suggest that there is a parallel between how they like their untouched beverages and their relationships. They do not want someone that is super sweet and so positive, they would prefer someone more jaded, someone who does not shy away from the bitter parts of life. This is supported in the pre-chorus, "Pretty as a vine, as sweet as a grape / If you can sit in a barrel, maybe I'll wait / Until that day" (Hozier, 2024). When putting grapes in a barrel they will lose most of their sweet taste as the fermentation breaks

[15] Hozier. (2024, April 18). *Hozier - Unheard (Behind the EP)* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lYzI7Bn0lAc 0:00-0:42

down the sugars, creating a more bitter and alcohol taste. As the narrator is saying that the other person is too sweet but that maybe if they could sit in a barrel and thus lose some of that sweetness, they might be open for something.

Damage Gets Done

The next circle is the Circle of Greed which includes *Damage Gets Done* and is discussed in an interview with Belfast Telegraph. Hozier explains in the interview that the song reflects on the "negative space between being you and silly and being reckless – and the actual harm that is done in the long term of life on the planet or in society." (Egan, 2023). That first sentiment of being reckless and silly when being young is translated in the first verse, "Without shame, two outfits then to my name / […] / We'd go out with no way to get home / And we'd sleep on somebody's floor and wake up feelin' like a millionaire" (Hozier, 2023). As youngsters, they had no shame, they did not care to constantly wear the same outfits – they just wanted to go on adventures, not caring about where they would end up, how they would get back or where they would sleep for the night. The pre-chorus and the chorus give more insight to the other side of the story when they have grown up. "Wish I'd known it was just our turn / Being blamed for a world we had no power in", this is the adults looking back and realising that it was not their fault, they were blamed by their elders for a world or even generation turned mad when in reality they had no power over what was happening in the world whatsoever. They made do with what they were handed. In the Belfast Telegraph interview Hozier explains that the song plays with the idea of generations looking back at teenagers and blaming them, how they cause harm and will even be the end of them – when in reality that is not what actually happens (Egan, 2023). "But I know bein' reckless and young / Is not how the damage gets done" (Hozier, 2023) shows that sentiment that it is not the youth (or their time) is bringing along the most damage, but the older generations blaming them for handling life the best they could while faced with all the problems that were brought on by the older generations.

Who We Are

The last circle before heading into the lower parts of Hell, is the Circle of Wrath which includes the song *Who We Are*. In an interview with EW.com Hozier explains that this song has the voice of having put so much effort and time into something or someone thinking it will bring them happiness or fulfilment, only to realise that it was not real (Travis, 2023). "You only feel it when

it's lost / Getting' through still has a cost / Quietly, it slips through your fingers, love", I would say that the beginning of the song shows the pain of losing something important or deemed important in the first place. Whether this is interpreted as the thing that was invested in, or just sort of lamenting on the pain of human experiences, it shows that often the pain is only felt when it is actually lost as imaging losing something or someone when it is still there does not create a similar feeling. I argue that the chorus the song, "We're born at night / So much of our lives / Is just carving through the dark / To get so far / And the hardest part / Is who we are" (Hozier, 2023), shows the reality of human existence. Such a big part of everyone's life consists of finding out who they are, finding a purpose, it is quite literally carving through the dark to make a living or figuring out their future. The hardest part of it all is just being themselves, which comes up in the second verse. "You and I burned out our stem / Chasing someone else's dream / […] / This phantom life sharpens like an image / But it sharpens like a knife" (Hozier, 2023), the first two lines can be interpreted that they were following the path that society had chosen for them as the right path, a path that is not the right path for everyone and can cause damage when forced to head in its direction anyways. The last two lines I would interpret as realising that the fulfilment and the happiness they were chasing by investing time and effort into somethin/someone is not actually real – the phantom life is coming into focus, and it is hurtful and can cut deep like a knife.

Son of Nyx

The first song of the sixth circle is *Son of Nyx*, the only instrumental song on the album portraying the descent into the lower parts of Hell. There is no lyrics to analyse, however Hozier did reveal the thoughts that went into making this song and putting it on the album with EW.com. He talks about how the song is not only a reference to Greek goddess of night, Nyx, and her so Charon but is also a tribute to the father of Hozier's friend and bass player Alex Ryan (Travis, 2023). The song starts with a piano piece played by Ryan shortly after his father had passed away. Hozier explains that Ryan's father was named Nick, so he being a son of Nick is also referring to the title of the song as a way to honour him (Travis, 2023).

All Things End

The next song in the Circle of Heresy is *All Things End* and is a song that according to Hozier started from a personal place and can be seen as a breakup song. On the Apple Music webpage of the album, it is explained as a song that captures the moments of a relationship that is falling apart

and slipping away from the narrator even when they truly believed the relationship would make it. They had faith in the other person and their relationship and with the relationship crumbling it is not happening – the song tries to capture the idea of accepting the end of the relationship and comes close to giving up their faith which is the reasoning for the song being in the Circle of Heresy (*Unreal Unearth by Hozier on Apple Music*, 2023). Specific lines of the song support the image of it being a breakup song, "If there was anyone to ever get through this life / With their heart still intact, they didn't do it right / The last time I felt your weight on my chest, you said / 'We didn't get it right, but, love, we did our best'" (Hozier, 2023). These lines do not only show that the relationship did not work even though tried their best, but I also interpret these lines as heartbreak being a part of the human experience. Experiencing life to the fullest including the pain of losing someone and giving up their faith in the relationship. The chorus show how the idea of that nothing is ever truly permanent but that it should not mean the narrator has to avoid these experiences. "And all things end / All that we intend is scrawled in sand / And slips right through our hands / And just knowin' that everything will end / Should not change our plans when we begin again" (Hozier, 2023), the first three lines I see as a way of showing that even the biggest plans that someone has but in much time and effort and had faith in, can be washed away by the waves of the sea – like a sandcastle taken out by the upcoming tides. However, knowing that it might end should not mean that someone should avoid starting a new (romantic)relationship to keep them safe from the possible heartbreak – just because the sandcastle might not last forever, there is still joy in creating it.

This is the last song that has a music video, and now knowing the context of the song, the video can be interpreted as the portrayal of the relationship essentially dying. This is shown by Hozier lying in an operating room receiving open heart surgery but flatlining and passing away even if the surgeons tried to resuscitate him. It is a difficult end the relationship and it feels as if his heart has stopped beating. I would argue that Hozier uses death as a somewhat universal symbol of all endings, the struggle and the grief that can come with endings in general. I think the next part of the video where the colour suddenly drops out and the surgeon ensemble starts to dance is therefore very fitting as things can be very bleak when coping with loss and grief. It is perfectly normal to grieve and feel the loss of the other person but there will be a moment for acceptance and moving on – grief will not last forever. This idea from the song is portrayed in the video by the surgeons cleaning up the surgical tools that were used and covering the body with the sheet

before it is pulled away and the colour drops back in, showing Hozier in a suit and the surgeons in surgical choir/gospel gowns. When relating it to the interpretation of the song, the lead surgeon could be the other person in the relationship trying to solve the problems, with Hozier being the narrator grasping her arm and telling her that it is over, that he is calling it – which is similar to calling the time of death in a hospital when someone passes away. The end with Hozier in a suit singing before briefly switching back the body that has died can be interpreted as the acceptance stage. I would argue that this is not an alternate ending or even Heaven, as the body shows that the death actually happened, but shows that there is potential for finding new things, new love, when moving on. The ending hurts but should not keep one from starting something new again just to avoid getting hurt.

To Someone from a Warm Climate (Uiscefhuarithe)

The next circle is the Circle of Violence and has three songs in total, starting with *To Someone from a Warm Climate (Uiscefhuarithe)*. Hozier claims that this is a love song, but in the sense that it is trying to make sense of love after losing this experience. He explains that the lyric is based on his childhood memories of trying to warm up the bed as to not shiver for too long, and that the song was written for someone from a warmer climate who had never had to experience that before (*Unreal Unearth by Hozier on Apple Music*, 2023). There is a contrast in the song with the narrator being associated with the cold and the other person with the warmth. In the first verse is explaining how to go from the cold to the warmth, " Wrap the blanket over you and keep your head within / Let your breath heat the air until you'd feel it getting thin" (Hozier, 2023), but going to the second verse it is the opposite, going from the warmth to the cold "In summer's heat, I learned to dread the comin' of the night / […] / You'd press your body to the concrete when you were small" (Hozier, 2023). As the other person is associated with warmth, I argue that the first line of dreading the heat is foreshadowing the end of the relationship and that they just did not match even though loving the other came easy and naturally. The bridge, "And I wish I could say / That the river of my arms have found the ocean / I wish I could say the cold lake water of my heart / Christ, it's boilin' over" (Hozier, 2023), shows how the relationship did not make it. The word *wish* makes it clear that the narrator wished for this relationship to work but that loving the other came just as naturally as now letting them go.

Butchered Tongue

The next song in this circle is *Butchered Tongue* and has some violent imagery in the lyrics. In the interview with NME, Hozier explains that the song tries to capture the experience of seeing these names of places and no one knowing what it means.[16] The first verse captures the idea of coming across place names, noting the difference in how to say these names. "How the mouth must be employed in every corner of itself / To say 'Appalacicola' or, 'Hushpuckena,' like, 'Gweebarra' / A promise softly sung of somewhere else" (Hozier, 2023). In the chorus however it becomes clear that the people living in these places with a lot of history, not nearly know everything about that history, about those who lived there before them. "And have my foreign ear made fresh again on each unlikely sound / But feel at home, hearin' a music that few still understand / A butchered tongue still singin' here above the ground" (Hozier, 2023). Most people do not know what took place where they are living, the history and the hardships that the people before them had to go through – yet those people before are not completely erased and are still showing their voice through the names of the places, "A butchered tongue still singin'" even after they have been gone for a long time. I see this as languages or pronunciations long been lost, but the voices of the original people living in these places or speaking those languages are still echoing their history. There are still traces of the ancient culture, no matter from how long ago, to be found, as if they are still wanting to be heard even if they are not there anymore – they have been butchered but they continue singing above the ground. The second verse then refers to the Irish history, more specifically to the rebellion of the Society of United Irishmen in 1798 which resulted in the torture and execution of many Irish men (Gráinséir, 2018; Britannica, 2024b; Thévenet, 2023). "The ears were chopped from young men of the pitch cap didn't kill them / They are buried without the scalp in the shattered bedrock of our home" (Hozier, 2023). The lyric is about pitchcapping which is a way Irishmen were executed with in the rebellion. It involves a cap made of boiling tar or pitch that were placed on the heads of the captivities and would be set alight. If the pitch cap did not kill them, they would be scalped when the cooled tar was taken off and ended up blind as the boiling tar would have gotten in their eyes (Gráinséir, 2018; Thévenet, 2023). After they had been killed, they were denied proper burial as well.

[16] NME. (2023, August 19). *Hozier on new album "Unreal Unearth", viral single "Take Me To Church" and maintaining his privacy* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HlEYnU8n7g 07:05-08:17

Empire Now

The last song in this circle is *Empire Now* from the EP. This song is also bringing in the Irish history, as explained in the Behind the EP video on the official YouTube account.[17] He explains how he started writing this song in 2022, which marked about one hundred years of Irish Free State and how the song reflects on the issues that are yet to be resolved. The song starts with a chorus repeating the lines: "Sun comin' up on a dream come 'round / One hundred years from the empire now / Sun comin' up on a world that's easy now / One hundred years from, one hundred years from" (Hozier, 2024) which refers to the British Empire and the 100 years since the Irish Free State. In the video he explains that he tried to create a nightmare-esque picture of the world as we know it but with a much more grotesque idea behind it. "The martyrs of our revolution / Their spinning caused the earth to shake / The problem brought on its own solution / They power now the world we've made" (Hozier, 2024), Hozier explains that these lines are meant literally, and does not have another poetic meaning. The dead are disturbed and are rising, the martyrs are so upset that they start spinning in their graves so much that it causes the earth to shake. The problem is then solved by hooking them up to generators to create a new power source. This picture that Hozier creates is definitely a grotesque, nightmare-esque version of the world that we have now but can also be interpreted as someone taking advantage of a problem and instead of actually solving the issue they are exploiting it. I interpret the pre-chorus, "After all, darlin', I wouldn't sell the world / The way things are turnin' / If it falls, I would hold on for all its worth / The future's so bright it's burnin'" (Hozier, 2024), as the accepting fate and experiencing all that earth has to offer. The last line I argue can both be understood as the flames of revolt and those of climate change. Embrace the chaos and fight for the future of those in need and the earth.

Anything But

We enter the eighth circle, the Circle of Fraud, which starts with *Anything But*. While answering questions from fans, Hozier explains how the verses at first glance can be read as kindnesses, but actually means something completely different. [18] He explains it is an Irishism, something mostly

[17] Hozier. (2024, April 18). *Hozier - Unheard (Behind the EP)* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lYzI7Bn0lAc 01:32-02:33

[18] Thévenet, N. [Nathalie Thévenet]. (2023, September 22). Hozier's YouTube Premium "De Selby Part 2" video Afterparty Full HD 60fps [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_3a87zrjwE Time stamp!

used in Ireland, as a way of speaking about someone undesirable in an unkind way. As explored in the previous chapter, the lines, “If I was a riptide, I wouldn’t take you out”, “If I was a stampede, you wouldn’t get a kick” and “If I had his job, you would live forever” (Hozier, 2023) are Irishisms for saying they do not want anything to do with that person and want to be as far away from them as possible. If the narrator were a riptide, they would not touch that person, and if they were a stampede not one kick would be given to the other as they do not even want to hurt them as that would mean getting to close and too much contact. The last line, the *he* that is referred to is death, with the narrator explaining that they would not even come close to get their soul as it would be too close. They would not even bother them with death as long as it means that they can be as far away as possible from that person. The chorus, “But I would do everything just to run away / I don’t wanna be anything like this at all / But I would do everything if you’d hear me say / Oh, yhea, hey / Go look another way” (Hozier, 2023) I interpret as the narrator encouraging the other person, who they clearly do not want anything to do with, to find trouble some place else as they do not appreciate what they are doing and want to be as far away from that person as possible.

Abstract (Psychopomp)

The other song in the eighth circle is *Abstract (Psychopomp)* which is made up of multiple memories of Hozier himself. In an interview with Belfast Telegraph, he explains that one of the memories it is about is the memory of watching an animal being hit in Greystones, a place in Ireland, another one of coming across a dead sheep when he was young and also the memory of being in love (Egan, 2023). The beginning of the song, “Sometime, it returns like rain that you slept through / That washed off the world, the streets looking brand new” (Hozier, 2023) can be argued to be about a feeling or memory that is dormant, or pushed away, that sometimes just washes over the narrator. I argue that the next lines, “I will not be great, but I’m grateful to get through / The feeling came late, I’m still glad I met you” can be interpreted both in the memory of seeing an animal get hit by a car and someone rushing to help it and the memory of being in love. I see this as the narrator saying that they will not be perfectly fine and that the situation is still very sad, but despite what happens they are still glad that they had the opportunity to meet this person. Similarly, with the memory of an animal getting hurt and trying to sooth its pain, the narrator can still be glad that in that moment of terror and pain, they had the opportunity to try and help the animal and guide them to the next part as a psychopomp. As discussed in the previous chapter as

well, the lines “The cold wet of your nose, the earth from a distance / See how it shines / See how it shines” (Hozier, 2023) can also be interpreted that from a distance, away from all the politics, war and harmful industries, the earth can be quite beautiful. But I think it can also be interpreted in the memory of the animal getting hit, that instincts take over when faced with moments of brutality and that those natural instincts are beautiful. In its turn can be linked to how falling in love with that person was instinctual for the narrator as well. This is backed up in the second verse, “Sometimes, there’s a thought like you choose what you’re doing / But it comes naught when I look back through it / I remember the view, streetlights in the dark blue / The moment I knew I’d no choice but to love you / The speed that you moved, the screech of the cars”. The person had an instinctual reaction running into the streets to get to the animal getting hurt, trying to help it, that instinctual reaction is the same for the narrator having no other choice but to love the person that they were in love with. Even though the feeling did not last, they are still grateful for having the opportunity to have known and loved them.

Unknown / Nth

The ninth, the Circle of Treachery has only one song, *Unknown / Nth*. In the Zach Sang Show interview, Hozier reveals that the title comes from Nth, as an unknown but large number – but also recalls the ninth circle as Nth can be seen as an abbreviation of ninth.[19] He further explains that this song can be understood as a breakup song, from person experiences, and discovering that the narrator never truly knew the other person. This can then also be referred back to having one’s heart broken by someone many times – to the Nth degree. The song tries to capture the coldness from the circle. The lines, “You know the distance never made a difference to me / I swam a lake of fire, I’d have walked across the floor of any sea / Ignored the vastness between all that can be seen / And all that we believe / So I thought you were like an angel to me” (Hozier, 2023), I interpret these as the narrator telling the other person that they never minded the emotional distance and that they would have done anything to be with them. They went the extra mile and ignored the truth of who they were and what they believed in. The second verse, “Funny how true colour shine in darkness and in secrecy / If there were scarlet flag, they washed out in the mind of me” (Hozier, 2023), I interpret as the idea that in the darkness, when people are unobserved, their true identity

[19] Zach Sang Show. (2023, June 22). *Hozier | Eat your Young, Unreal Unearth, Take Me to Church, Unknown* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved March 28, 2024from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MloAJbu4Jz8 48:36 – 49:00

comes out. Dark truths can thrive when they are left untouched and wilfully ignored by the other person in the relationship. However, as much as the narrator wants to do for the other, that person only created an illusion of cherishing the narrator. “You called me ‘angel’ for the first time, my heart leapt from me / You smile now, I can see its pieces still stuck in your teeth” (Hozier, 2023), the imagery of the other person smiling can be interpreted as a lack of remorse on their side, they do not care or are maybe oblivious to the fact what they have done to the narrator. In the bridge towards the end of the song, the narrator tries one last time to show how much they would do for the other person. “Do you know I could break beneath the weight / Of the goodness, love, I still carry for you? / That I’d walk so far just to take / The injury of finally knowin’ you?” (Hozier, 2023), I see this as the final effort of the narrator to make to work, to try to make the other understand how far they would go for them. With the last two lines of the song, “You know I’m good on my own / Sha-la-la, baby, you know, it’s more the being unknown / And there are some people, love, who are better unknown”, I would interpret as the narrator arriving at the acceptance phase. They understand that they do not know and maybe have never known the other person, and they are finally able to let it be as it is, to not try and uncover more about this person as it is not worth the pain – it is easier for the narrator to leave it as the picture they have of the other person.

First Light

The last song on the original album, capturing the ascent out of Hell, is *First Light*. In the interview with EW.com, Hozier explains how this song tries to conjure a feeling of being cleansed by the sun – coming out on the other side after a long period of darkness and starting a new relationship with the sun as something the narrator does not want to hide away from (Travis, 2023). It is a form of celebrating and seeing or understanding the light in a different way than before, as if it is the first time they are actually seeing the light. “The sky set to burst, the gold and the rust / The colour erupts, you fillin’ my cup / The sun comin’ up / Like I lived my whole life / Before the first light” (Hozier, 2023), I would argue that these lines are creating that picture of coming out of the darkness that has been around for so long, and finally seeing the light and appreciating it so much as if it is the very first time that they have seen the sunlight. On the Apple Music webpage of the album, Hozier reveals how in his opinion the album needed a song like this, a song that captures that feeling of being in a oppressed space for so long and finally seeing the sky again, almost as an opening of an open and bright space where there is the opportunity to move on from that dark

place (*Unreal Unearth by Hozier on Apple Music*, 2023). The second verse, "One bright mornin' goes so easy / Darkness always finds you either way / It creeps into the corners as the moment fades / A voice your body jumps to callin' out your name / But after this, I'm never gonna be the same / And I am never going back again" (Hozier, 2023), I interpret these lines as the narrator admitting that completely leaving the darkness behind might not be possible and that there will be moments where it will creep in, but that they are never going back to that dark oppressed space they have been trapped in for so long. The darkness changed them, but they refuse to be absorbed back into that darkness and will appreciate the light for its brilliance.

Fare Well

The last song on the EP is *Fare Well*, it is a wordplay on farewell as in goodbye as it is the last song of the EP and was a possible option for the ascent on the original album. In the Behind the EP video Hozier explains how it is a more archaic saying used in Ireland that someone would not fare well or do well in a certain thing.[20] This expression comes back in the first and second verse: "And I, I couldn't fare well / Hedgehog-under-a-van-wheel kind of wouldn't fare well / Out here tryin' to feel good again / And I, I wouldn't fare well / A kitten-cosy-in-the-engine type of wouldn't fare well / A dog-deep-into-the-chocolate kind of wouldn't fare well" and "And I, I wouldn't fare well / A whale-swimmin'-up-Sumida-Gawa wouldn't fare well / Critic-hopin'-to-be-remembered wouldn't fare well" (Hozier, 2024). All these prompt are things that do not end well, like a hedgehog being ran over by a van, or a kitten in the engine heating and not able to get out of the engine, a dog eating chocolate that is highly dangerous and poisonous, a whale trying to swim in a river that has a lot of maritime traffic and lastly a critic posting a controversial opinion piece desperately trying to be remembered. All these scenarios are not ones that are likely to have a good ending. To me, the post-chorus, "Joy, disaster, come unbound here / I'll deny me none while I'm allowed / With all things above the ground" (Hozier, 2024), shows how the narrator wants the opportunity to feel everything that life and the world has to offer, experiencing everything including the bad and the good while still being above the ground to actually experience it.

[20] Hozier. (2024, April 18). *Hozier - Unheard (Behind the EP)* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved June 6, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lYzI7Bn0lAc 02:35-04:09