

Dante and the Game Film of My Life

Reading the beginning of Dante's Inferno has been remarkably similar in many ways to watching a game film of my life. Watching myself playing volleyball on film this fall, I have realized how slow I move in comparison to how I feel I am moving. Likewise, the results matter less and less the more I watch myself on film. What stands out is how the team got to the end result and what plays were "key." Reading and talking about Dante has provided the ideal opportunity to do a film study and identify moments and situations when I have moved "slower" than I thought I was, and moments when I have moved too far and too fast (acted) for the wrong reasons. Learning from my own mistakes is important, but learning from the mistakes made by figures in Inferno and other pilgrims can also be effective.

In a recent assembly, a speaker made a speech about the importance of "running towards the roar" or attacking problems head on. The lesson was important, without a doubt. However, his two comments about women and another teacher's response to those comments provided me with perfect "game film" moments. My initial response to the speaker's comments about the attractiveness of a woman was laughter. Without a moment to consider *why* I was laughing, I immediately found it refreshing to hear a speaker who was not overly "buttoned up" as I thought to myself. Almost the entire auditorium laughed. He finished the speech and I thought little of other ways his comment could have affected women in the room. After hearing a teacher start a discussion about objectification of women, I was prompted to do some film study.

As Ulysses told his crew before leading them into a fatal storm, "Consider your sowing: you were not made to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge" (Dante, 26.118-119).

While I would not call myself a “brute” for laughing at the objectifying comments and initially finding little issue with them, I think Ulysses makes an effective insight into the importance of careful consideration and thought about the reasons *for* and not just placing focus on the actions themselves. I was forced to consider whether I had laughed at the comment because in some ways I liked the power that laughing at, as opposed to with, another person or group provides. I think laughing at someone’s expense gives an some sort of a false sense of power over them. I wonder if I unconsciously laughed because by listening the speaker demean women, it gave me a sense of “bigness” that made others smaller, a falsely satisfying feeling.

I think that potential triggers for this desire of a “bigness” over another person instead of with another person is the commonly used phrase “good enough isn’t good enough.” While it is always possible to improve in any situation, I think it can be dangerous to want to improve at all costs. I wonder if sometimes stepping back and simply enjoying what I have can be beneficial. I think Ulysses’ mistake was not taking an opportunity to watch his own film and realize that he was moving faster than he perhaps thought he was. He failed his crew by pushing them past reasonable limits in the name of glory. He took undue pride in saying, “of our oars we made wings for the mad flight” (Dante, 26.24-25).

Instead of taking pride in the past journey that he and his crew had been on and allowing his leadership to make himself and the crew members bigger, he just needed more and had to ascend higher. As a captain in the volleyball program this season, I have struggled to deal with pressures, which I believe are mostly internally driven. I have to fight my instincts at times to push too hard on myself or teammates for the wrong reasons. Learning to be a leader who not only works hard, displays the necessary athletic hustle, but also works smart for the “right” reasons has been an enormously difficult task. Unfortunately, at times I have felt myself utterly

consumed by the idea of winning the championship. I almost constantly envision the *feeling* of winning. Reading Inferno, and especially Canto 26, was an especially effective film study for me. It has prompted me to consider the essential nature of motives and why pushing my teammates to “follow” me for the reason that I want the feeling of winning a high school volleyball championship is ineffective and will cause me to “disrespect the journey” as Jwana said in class. Enjoying moments with my teammates, unlike Ulysses, and finding some smaller, more process oriented goals will be essential in the goal of becoming my best self and best leader.

Clearly, Dante has done an extremely effective job of making me a fellow pilgrim on his journey. Reading Inferno is an experience that enhances my ability to give a critical, but fair eye to my “life” film.

Works Cited

Alighieri, Dante, Robert M. Durling, and Ronald L. Martinez. *Inferno*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.