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Enlightening Moments

Lately, something is different. Moments seem longer. My eyes seem to be wider, and I feel lighter.

This “something different” has been following me everywhere I go. It has caused me to stand up a little straighter, and to speak a little louder. Most importantly, it compels me to think more often and more deeply. It did not truly occur to me why this “something different” was changing me, or what it was, until towards the end of Class Thirty-Three when Mr. Christian posed this question: **At what point do we decide to change our lives because of what we read?** This was not the first time that I had been asked this question; however, this was the first time that I understood its reality. I began to think that maybe my “something different” was a result of the books I was reading. In past English classes, I separated myself from the characters in the books that my classmates and I read. I tried to analyze metaphors and note the allusions in class because that was all I thought I could find. Although this semester, the stories I have read have taught me more about myself than any old metaphor. I entered that mysterious “point”, and I began to let what I read change *me*.

In Canto Four of *Paradiso*, Dante and Beatrice discuss absolute will. Instead of focusing on their gestures or descriptions, as I was reading I began to wonder about what my absolute will could be. I began to ask myself questions. What do you want to do? What do you love? What do you believe? At that moment, and now as I write, I do not know absolute answers to my questions; however, finding what I am looking for is a journey. Since reading that passage, I have thought about those questions everyday. I think it is important for me to draft my answers

because they will bring meaning to my life and decide what I do and think about each day.

When it has come to religion, I have always assumed that my constant doubting is a sign that believing is not for me. Beatrice counsels Dante that, “our doubting blossoms like a shoot out from the root of truth; this natural urge spurs us toward the peak, from height to height” (4, 130-132).” Here, Beatrice is claiming that doubting is not only a natural act, but also a necessary one. Doubting is part of the knowing process. Without doubt our world would be less exciting as we would never have to take a leap of faith. Understanding doubt has led me to reconsider my relationship with religion, a partnership that I have avoided for many years.

In Canto Nine, Cunizza states, “...in myself I pardon happily the reason for my fate; I do not grieve” (9, 34-35). Cunizza’s ability to “pardon happily” is beautiful. She accepts herself as she is, and how she has lived. She does not care or worry about what others think of her because she knows herself and loves the truth. This is an important mind-set to master because we have to live as ourselves for our whole lives! And if you are going to live a happy and fulfilled life, then I think that loving who you are, and your world, is the first step. This past week, my family and I have taken on a challenge presented to us by a TED talk on positive psychology. A group of scientists conducted a study in which participants completed five tasks every day for twenty-one days. The five tasks were as follows:

1. Meditate
2. Write down 3 things that you are grateful for
3. Exercise
4. Journal about a positive experience of that day
5. Perform an act of kindness (An example of this is thanking a person in your life.)

After twenty-one days, the participants had practiced focusing on the positive parts of their lives,

and had proven to be in a happier state. After reading about Cunizza, I noticed that I too frequently am unable to “pardon happily.” This Twenty-One Day Journey Towards Happiness was my first attempt at working towards a mind like Cunizza’s. To be honest, the transition has been really hard. I am able to focus on the beauty around me quite easily; however, when it comes to myself the imperfections are hard to avoid.

Over the past couple of months, Dante’s *Divine Comedy* has taught me a lot about myself and others. I have begun to reflect on myself in deeper ways than ever before, and I am discovering new things every day as a result of the poem’s words echoing in my head. For instance, I have decided that humans are actually a lot more similar than I have always thought. In fact, I have even grown to be more comfortable around new people because I feel more connected to them. Now that I have seen that I can reach the point of being deeply affected by what I read, the question is: **How did I decide to be at the point?** I think the answer is not that I decided to be where I am, but that I allowed myself to get to this place. For a long time, I separated myself from the pages I read, not because I was content or satisfied with myself, but because it was habit. Slowly as I grew and saw the bigness of the world I live in, I became open to change. For this change, I continued to watch my parents and siblings because, honestly, I did not know that I could find inspiration *for myself* in books. I think this year was different because, for the first time, I was ready to open myself to the unfamiliar. Dante has taught me that in my life I *always* have choice, and I *always* have control. These discoveries spurred those feeling of “something different,” and encouraged change and self-confidence. I am so thankful for the experience I have had this semester with Dante. I am excited to continue to read Dante and to find new discoveries; however, after writing this post class reflection, I am also afraid that I may have to reread all of the books I have ever read. (Starting with *Peef: the Christmas Bear*.)

Works Cited

Alighieri, Dante, and Allen Mandelbaum. "Canto 4 Line 130-132." *The Divine Comedy of Dante*

Alighieri, Paradiso. New York, NY: Bantam, 1988. N. pag. Print.

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