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An Artist on a Quest

I am an artist. My first impulse was to dilute the previous sentence to comply with standards of humility; however, that is silly. I live artistically, I think artistically, and I see artistically; therefore, I am an artist. I spend hours upon hours of my days staring into space, wandering aimlessly into the crevices of my mind, searching for my muse. I like to call this exercise “Self - Pollination.” Each moment I spend in this agonizing yet deeply peaceful practice, I am pollinating every particle of my being with creative stimuli. Then, bam! In the moment I least expect it, the inspiration zips before my eyes, perhaps open or closed, and the real joy begins.

Beethoven on. Smock suited. Paints out. Canvas ready. Brush in hand. Slowly, I enter into a “world without people” (26.116-117). My eyes are wide open, nourishing the precision and care I require, but I am seeing the visions of my mind, not my reality. The moment my brush touches the canvas, I begin to sculpt a universe of my own, which resides solely on the canvas and in the depths of my imagination.

Art is the fertile ground for creativity. It is mindful exploration. Through art I journey alone to places unreached, for there I may edge closer to experiencing understanding of my world here. I was “made . . . to follow virtue and knowledge,” so it is no surprise to me that I only find myself comfortable in moments spent trekking through worlds made to offer truth: art, literature, and music (26.118-119). I am on a quest to learn, so I journey relentlessly. I stand proud to mirror the ethos of Ulysses, and I refuse to believe that this makes me a damned soul, as Dante seemingly does.

I challenge Dante, for Dante offers me to challenge him. Not only does he offer me to, but he dares me to. I stumbled upon his first tempt as the pilgrim bends “towards [the flames of Hell] with desire” (26.68). If the pilgrim, who is led by the higher powers, is lured by Hell’s sins, Dante must be creating an opportunity for the reader to think twice, and so I shall. How could Dante ever deem journeying for the light a damned act? Simply, he could not. First, Ulysses was a man who could never be content with just “sweetness,” “compassion,” and “love,” for a great fervor to “gain experience of the world” was that which captivated him (26.94-97). He was lost amidst the calm of his life, so he found solace in the exploration of uncertainty. Second, the pilgrim is a man whose “straight way was lost” and journeys through the divine realms – the most uncertain of them all – to find the light (1.2). Finally, Dante (I presume) wrote *The Divine Comedy*, a poem that outlines the depths of the universe far unknown to any living being, for readers, like myself, who are on a mindful expedition of their own. In effect, Dante created an outlet for those who wish to evade their realities, and by creating this literary work of art, Dante crafted an alternate universe by the powers of his own imagination. Ulysses, the pilgrim, and Dante each take on a journey of his own to an unknown place in order to search for meaning. All three travel to a “world without people;” Ulysses, literally; the pilgrim, in essence, for the people who he meets are no longer living beings; Dante, through art (26.116-117). If it is true that Dante means to damn Ulysses, then, by deduction, he would be damning the pilgrim and himself as well.

Surely, this cannot be so. Each of these three men travel to a place where others are not to be found; therefore, the population becomes the traveler. The exploration is means to experience and see and understand life, but in order to grasp life he who travels

must first grasp himself. It is a journey for the light of wisdom and knowledge of the world, but first that light must be reflected from the clarity of the being. Ulysses did not take on a fraudulent voyage, for he was to learn about himself out there in the untouched world. Ulysses cannot be damned by Dante, rather he is celebrated by everything Dante preaches.

When I paint and I read and I listen, I escape. I escape for perhaps just a moment so that I can reconnect with “the rays of the planet that leads us straight on every path” (1.17-18). I populate a world of my own, and I craft it to my thoughts and desires and fears and hopes. I self - pollinate. My mindful exploration is the seed of my creativity, which will grow to be the sweet fruit of knowledge. New knowledge means more thought and curiosity and creativity, and so I go on growing.

I am an artist. I have the power to craft the course of my life, and I will choose to do so as Ulysses did. I will look into space and I will wander and I will paint and I will explore and I will listen and I will read and I will think and I will grow. I am not damned by Dante, for within the authority of interpretation, my deduction is my own “correct” deduction. I am not damned by Dante, for I value that which I believe he values. I am not damned by Dante, for I celebrate the journey I believe he celebrates as well, and that is something to embrace.

Works Cited

Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Inferno*. Trans. Robert M. Durling. Vol. I. New York: Oxford U, 1996. Print.