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Pondering the Celestial Bridge

In Canto 27 of *Paradiso*, Dante arrives in the “Primum Mobile,” a celestial sphere that connects time to eternity and serves as the final bridge between earthly and heavenly elements. Pondering this notion of a celestial bridge that connects the mortal to the eternal has made me draw connections to what might be examples of a “Primum Mobile” in our lives as pilgrims. Music, in my opinion, represents this bridge. It’s the closest we may come to paradise, and, while those of us who create and listen to music come and go, the music remains eternal and “passed on” (Tom Chapin). Just as music connects our temporary, material lives to eternity, it has also given me an avenue to connect my personal experiences to Dante’s world of eternal values. Reading Dante has allowed me to identify elements of my life that directly correspond to the pilgrim’s journey. Looking back on my musical career, I notice how vividly my ascension from inexperience to mastery of the guitar mirrors Dante’s journey from *Inferno* to *Paradiso*.

The early stages of learning guitar, much like experiencing *Inferno*, are by no means pleasant, yet they represent a necessary component of the journey. I distinctly remember my frustration upon witnessing the disobedience of my hands as they refused to play the chords I wanted them to play; the dissonance and the discomfort of a missed note; the unnecessary anger; the calluses and blisters that lined both my hands; the hours and hours spent with no reward visible in the near future. No other feeling on earth matches this kind of frustration. I’d used these hands all my life to achieve far more difficult things than playing guitar, and yet when I told four of my fingers to assemble into the shape of a G chord, they did the “dance of the wretched hands” instead (*Inferno* XV, 131). These early stages can be summed up with one

simple word that plays a substantial role in *Inferno*: against (Mr. Christian during class discussion). In retrospect, I was playing against my guitar, against myself, and against other musicians whom I envied.

Naturally, I improved with time and practice. I learned that, in order to understand, I needed to “stand under.” I had to recognize that I wouldn’t reach mastery of the guitar in the blink of an eye, and that I would be dependent on others to eventually achieve that goal. Like climbing Mount Purgatory, learning guitar took time, effort, and, above all, love. Ultimately, it was a love for music, for the sound that echoed from my guitar kept me focused and allowed me to climb my own symbolic Mount Purgatory.

This summarized journey brought me to my current relationship with music. It’s brought me to a place where I, too, can connect to eternity by writing my own songs and creating a distinct sound that is uniquely mine: my own slice of paradise. Like Dante in *Paradiso*, I have an inherent thirst for more knowledge, which Beatrice informs believes is a critical trait and a natural one. Amidst all of this “climbing” and desire to learn more, however, I’ve realized that I sometimes lose track of the big picture.

The other day, I sat in my living room while the sun was setting, alone in the house, and pulled up the song “Feels So Good Now” by my favorite band, *Dispatch*. It’s a simple song; three chords, two short verses and a chorus, which read:

*I've waited so long for the sun to rise
This afternoon I see it in your eyes
The sky is opening
The world is shining
On your day*

*It feels so good now
Feels so good now
Feels so good now
Feels so good now*

*Can you believe it?
 He's in our lives
 You make my heart fill with light
 The sky is opening
 The world is shining
 On your day*

*Feels so good now
 Feels so good now
 Feels so good now
 It feels so good now*

In my mind, I imagine this tranquil, delicate piece of music playing whenever Dante is “overcome” by Beatrice’s beauty when he looks in her eyes. While the pure beauty of the lyrics alone should, in my opinion, place this song “among the angels,” hearing them accompanied by the instrumentation brings the song to a whole other degree of paradise (it’s no surprise the song comes off the album “Circles Around the Sun”). I sat in my living room strumming and singing along, enjoying music for music’s sake as the sun’s beams stretched across the room, when suddenly a quote mentioned in class popped into my head. I thought of the Cabby, from C.S. Lewis’s *The Magician’s Nephew*, who said “I’d ha’ been a better man all my life if I’d known there were things like this.”

That quote consumed my mind, making me think of the long journey it took for me to get to that point. The hard work, the frustration, and the anger seem trivial when put into perspective. The reality is every endeavor I undertake in life ultimately leads me to one of these “feels so good now” moments. Of course, there are temporary setbacks, failures, and moments when it doesn’t “feel so good,” but I’ve learned, through music, that these are all absolutely essential to the process. The beauty of these moments lies in the fact that I find myself “blissfully satisfied,” even though they are not always objectively blissful moments. In Canto III of *Paradiso*, Piccarda Donati tells the pilgrim, “the virtue of charity quiets our will and causes us to wish for only what

we have and thirst for nothing more” (27). Finding this virtue of being content with what I have and making a “feels so good now” moment out of something ordinary has been a key lesson that music has certainly helped me attain.

Most importantly, I look to these “feels so good now” moments as a reminder to be a better person. Reminding myself of that afternoon in my living room keeps me grounded and gives me a better perspective of the bigger picture. It reminds me that these moments are earned, not only through patience and effort, but more importantly through kindness and unconditional love towards others, as I’m just as dependent on them as I am on myself. I can learn from the Cabby and choose to be a better person because I know that these moments await me.

Music is only one way I can connect eternal values with temporal values and, through Dante, learn more about myself and become a better person. If I am to continue being a “fellow pilgrim on the road,” it will be important to identify elements of my life that allow me to see the whole and ultimately bring me to my “feels so good now” moments.

Works Cited

- Alighieri, Dante. *Inferno*. Trans. by Stanley Lombardo. Reprint ed., Hackett Publishing, 2009.
- . *Paradiso*. Trans. by Stanley Lombardo. Hackett Publishing, 2017.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Magician’s Nephew*. HarperCollins, 1983.