

THE DIVINE COMMUNION OF SOUL AND SONG: A MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF
DANTE'S COMMEDIA

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And just as it often happens that a man goes looking for silver and apart from his intention finds gold, which some hidden cause presents, perhaps not without divine ordinance, so I who sought to console myself found not only a remedy for my tears but also the words of authors, sciences, and books.

(*Convivio* Bk.2, Ch.12)

In writing this thesis I did not intend to find “gold,” but within its pages rests the very treasure of my college education. Dante’s words have transformed me; in them I have found comfort and wisdom. This 700 year old poem has elevated me from a student to a scholar and

aided me in proving to myself capabilities beyond my original perception; a final word of thanks to the Honor's College for this tremendous opportunity to hear within these ancient lyrics a sweet, new song.

INTRODUCTION

The explosive musical energy of the Romantic era materialized an unprecedented number of musical representations inspired by the *Commedia* of Dante Alighieri. Dante's heart-wrenching portrayal of Francesca da Rimini in particular, who met her tragic end at the hands of her husband and appears in the lustful circle of the *Inferno*, birthed more than thirty operas between 1800-1850 in Italy alone. Tchaikovsky's shockingly tortured rendition in *Francesca da Rimini* in 1876 amazed listeners as they felt they could hear her deathly wailings represented in the woodwinds. Francesca was also the inspiration for the 1906 Rachmaninov opera and the 1914 Zandonai opera (Wright). Her desperate and passionate words, "*there is no greater pain, than to remember, in our present grief, past happiness*" even found their way into Rossini's revisioning of *Otello*, set in hell (*Inf. V.* 121-124; Lansing 905). Verdi's *Quattro Pezzi Sacri* (Four Sacred Pieces) 1888, included a textual setting from the last canto of the *Paradiso* for four female a cappella voices (Martin 255). Even Puccini's comic one-act, *Gianni Schicchi*, written in 1918 in the late-romantic style, is set in 1299 and centers around a devilish thief, mentioned in the thirtieth canto of the *Inferno*, who swindles the Donati family (to whom Dante was related by marriage) out of their fortune (Davis 264; Jacoff 232-235).

For over 700 years, the *Commedia* has compelled artists everywhere to find inspiration within its pages. Dante's imaginative and self-referential masterpiece is fertile ground for creative cultivation, rich with recondite themes of religious ecstasy, redemption, and forgiveness, among others, in such a way as to entertain and instruct.

These themes have attracted Dante scholars and Medieval musicologists alike who recognize the musical references within the poem as “an essential component of the allegory” (Ciabattini 3497). Despite these efforts, it has been rarely, if ever, studied as a musical composition, *per se*. The purpose of this thesis is to deconstruct the way in which the *Commedia* itself is a musical composition, constructed in three parts and dedicated to the instruction of its listeners.

In doing so, we must consider Dante Alighieri not merely as a poet, but as a composer outlining in the *Commedia* an illustrious musical curriculum beginning at the basics of human sound production and arriving at exalted harmony.

To consider the composition, we must consider the man. Dante Alighieri was born in 1265 in Florence, Italy during a brutal and politically tumultuous time. As an eager child of twelve he met Beatrice, his muse whom he loved from a distance, and for whom he composed many poetic works. As a young man, he studied the great arts: music, poetry, literature, and politics. After a short time serving in political office, he was deceived by his enemies and banished from Florence (Boccaccio 7-21).

Leaving the city he loved, Dante spent the rest of his life wandering the Italian countryside. He writes in the *Convivio* (*Banquet*), an unfinished poetic work predating the *Commedia* that speaks of science, music, philosophy and virtue, that he travelled as “a stranger, almost as a beggar” (Bk.1, Ch.3). On these lonely travels, he encountered numerous Italian dialects, helping to shape his philosophies of language and of the written word. In the *Convivio*, Dante reveres the powers of Orpheus who, exercising his ability as a musician, commands and tames all of creation. The story bears a deeper

meaning as well: “that the wise man, by using the instrument of his voice...can tame hard hearts and persuade the uneducated to do his will” (Shaw 79-92). To employ such a mighty power, one must uphold the purest and noblest of intention.

Fueled by noble desire and revolutionary ideas of language, the poet worked at establishing a common ground between the various regional linguistic variations while still maintaining the beauty befitting of poetic construction (Shaw 207). The *Commedia* would be a work read by a mass audience including the *non litterati*, those not speaking Latin, a poem that would simultaneously wield linguistic authority and command respect for the ordinary language. Therefore, it must creatively be able to stand true artistic test, in both spoken and written word. Medieval poetry was intended for performance.

Through song or chant, at times accompanied by instruments, it could be recited and recanted among those with little or no education. Distributing the work in the vernacular coupled with oral tradition of the time, Dante devoted himself to ensuring that all of Italy had access to his artistry (Shaw 96).

In a particularly revealing anecdote of the poet’s passionate dedication to his craft, Franco Sacchetti, a Florentine writer born within twenty years of Dante’s death, tells of an instance wherein the poet was invoked to rage. He shares that Dante was walking past the Porta San Piero, when he encountered a blacksmith hammering at an anvil and singing his verse, albeit poorly, “leaving out lines here and there” (Toynbee 147). This so aggravated the poet that, fuming, he seized the anvil and hurled it into the street. The blacksmith howled at Dante:

‘What the devil are you doing? Are you mad?’ And Dante replied, ‘What are *you* doing? If you do not want me to spoil your things, do not spoil mine.’

(Toynbee 148)

Dante, a craftsman of poetic verse, was intolerant of anyone who could not respect the tools of his trade.

This uncompromising passion led to the *Commedia*, which challenged the “comfortable linguistic expectations,” pushing forward progressive ideas of artistic potential (Shaw 225). Each canticle is abundant with meter, rhyme and rich musical metaphor. Moreover, Dante calls his collection *canti* or *songs*, wherein he incorporates a sophisticated mastery of pure vowel sounds and a variety of other unmitigated musical textures distinguishing the *Commedia* as fundamentally sonorous. This is not merely the work of a fantastic wordsmith but rather the intentional and specific choices of a great musical linguist.

In furthering the analysis of the *Commedia* as a musical composition, I am utilizing Aaron Copland’s book, *What to Listen for in Music*, written in 1939. It is an overall educational manual to assist listeners in articulating what is experienced when encountering complex musical works. The principal aim is to benefit those interested in becoming educated listeners of music or as he terms, *intelligent* listeners (Copland 515).

Aaron Copland was a prominent and influential composer in his own right. His most notable composition, *Appalachian Spring*, a ballet commissioned in 1941, invokes the iconic imagery of rural America, capitalizing on traditional Shaker dance music,

while incorporating the jazz influence of his Brooklyn-bred upbringing. It earned him both the New York Critics' Music Award and the 1945 Pulitzer Prize for Music. His distinguishingly uncomplicated compositions forever influenced the future of American composition. Copland is widely credited as establishing the *new style*, working diligently to compose in what he deemed "the simplest possible terms" (Huscher 2-3). Similar to Dante, Copland dedicated himself to accessing a wider audience, expanding the appreciation and education of American classical music.

In an attempt to elevate the listener, Copland forges a path between the listener and the composer. His book remains a relevant and passionate guide for approaching musical complexities, by simplifying the fundamentals of intelligent music listening and dividing the act of listening into three planes: the *sensory*, the *expressive* and the *sheer musical* plane (Copland 449).

The initial *sensory* plane presents raw, energetic sound. Copland asks us to imagine ourselves in a silent room, wherein a single note struck on a piano can change the atmosphere. Sound is a potent and necessary force that draws the audience into a listening experience. The *expressive* plane deals with the major themes and moods of the composition, communicating musically these abstract notions and compelling the audience to engage emotionally. And finally the *sheer musical* plane builds upon the previous planes of both sound and expression, presenting the complex musical design (Copland 546-549). I have drawn a correlation between Copland's three listening planes and the three canticles of the *Commedia*: the *Inferno* and the *sensory* plane, the *Purgatorio* and the *expressive* plane, and the *Paradiso* and the *sheer musical* plane.

Considering Dante's *Commedia* as a musical masterpiece in three movements, it therefore requires one to understand the importance of musical structure or *form*. The idea of *form* in music is rather abstract. Composers cannot be bound to the confines of musical structure; if this were the case, all progression of musical innovation would cease. However a musical composition can hardly be without its relative configuration, abstract or not, for "it is the planned design that binds an entire composition together"; as we examine the *Commedia*, we will see the binding elements start to emerge (Copland 1391). Dante's poetic structure is organized in three movements each containing thirty-three verses, *canti*. Each canto is written in *terza rima*, stanzas with three lines, with the first and third line rhyming and the second line rhyming with the first line of the following stanza (Forman, Spring 24-26). However, for the purpose of examining the musical structure within the *Commedia*, I will be concentrating primarily on Copland's two essential concepts: "1) form in relation to the piece and 2) form in relation to the separate, shorter parts of the piece" (Copland 1439). In examining Dante's composition, the audience must consider each movement in terms of its individual musical structure: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso*, in addition to each movement in relationship to the musical construction of the whole.

As is common in Dante criticism, I will be distinguishing between Dante the poet and composer of the *Commedia*, and Dante the pilgrim, the protagonist of the piece. Copland's trifold method will aid the audience in unveiling the many manipulations of sound and music in Dante's three movement composition.

CHAPTER I: INFERNO

The evocative opening words of the *Inferno* provide the setting for an exploration of the senses. Dante the pilgrim begins his journey in a state of fearful bewilderment as he tries to comprehend his surroundings in a bizarre and unidentifiable place. He cannot tell how he came to be in this particular forest or yet ascertain his purpose for being here:

In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself within a dark wood where the straight way was lost. Ah, how hard a thing it is to tell of that wood, savage and harsh and dense, the thought of which renews my fear! So bitter is it that death is hardly more. But to give account of the good which I found there I will tell of the other things I noted there.

(*Inf.* I. 1-12)

The descriptive language that follows is rich and energized. The pilgrim, drowsy and exhausted, with “labouring breath,” exhibits a vivid array of emotions ranging from terror as he narrowly escapes three beasts to exhilaration at the fortunate rescue by famous Roman poet, Virgil (*Inf.* I. 23). Virgil explains that he was commissioned by Beatrice, to show him “another road...if thou wouldst escape from this savage place” and the two prepare for the arduous “descent to greater wretchedness” (*Inf.* I. 91; *Inf.* VII.99). Much like the pilgrim, the audience is immediately submerged into a world of rich, sensory detail. The initial energy of the *Inferno* is alarming, the time frame unsettling.

In the opening phrase “In the middle of the journey of our life” at first seems just a common *topos* of Medieval epic poetry utilized by poets in order to plunge the audience

into the action (Forman, Spring 24). However, our poet manipulates this familiarity, not to define the setting for the action, but almost to hijack it. We begin, not only *in medias res* or “in the middle of things” but in the middle of Dante’s own life, in the middle of his exile, in the middle of physical, psychological and spiritual uncertainty (Forman, Spring 24). This phrase flings both pilgrim and audience into the middle of the *selva oscura* or *dark wood* of wholly indiscernible and pitchy surroundings. Without hesitation, the poet leads the audience on a journey in which our pilgrim’s vision is impaired. The “descent into the blind world” as Virgil identifies, begins here in this somber forest where the pilgrim must listen in order to determine his way (*Inf.* IV.13).

The *sensory* plane manifests for the listener in the total absorption of the senses. Copland tells us that this experience is the first and most necessary step in listening to music. Sound is the enticing voracity of music, not inherently melodious in and of itself, but it captivates us nonetheless, drawing us to itself like a moth to a flame. Sound is the primal, raw, crucial element that forces change (Copland 449). Akin to infatuation, our foremost step in listening to any composition is to brainlessly bathe ourselves in the sound itself. We need not try to interpret the meaning or analyze its musical properties yet. Our chief concern is that of experience. This initial stage of listening is where we “hear music without thinking” (Copland 449-464).

Unfortunately, many scholars cannot find a “systematic use of music in the entirety of the *Commedia* because they found no music in the first cantica” (Ciabattoni 742). However, it is not that Dante the poet failed to compose a soundscape, the lack of ‘*music*’ is an intentional feature in the overall design of the composition. The sounds of

the *Inferno* provide a specific and purposeful significance within the larger work. As Copland reminds, “dissonance is only relative to the place it holds in the piece as a whole...the proper mixture of consonance and dissonance is a matter to be left to the composer’s discretion” (Copland 1038). The composition, is a musical journey that must begin in dissonance to arrive at consonance. Accordingly, the audience will not find *pleasure* in soundscape largely “antithetical to human music” but will later come to understand its *purpose* (Roglieri).

Edoardo Sanguineti (1930-2010), Italian poet, writer and translator, coined the term “anti-music” to describe the horrifying and disturbing sounds of Dante’s underworld (Roglieri). Sanguineti notes, that “Dante is a wayfarer who explored with the ear more than with the eye” and the pilgrim begins to detect, as does the audience, an entirely opposing musical presence at play (Ciabattini 772). Music idealizes and magnifies, anti-music disparages and minimizes; in this way, sound is manipulated by the poet in a disturbing, musical monstrosity. In order to experience the soundscape of the *Inferno* we must reject everything we know to be true about music.

The unsettling nature of the *Inferno*’s anti-music is an overbearing but essential exposition, for which Dante provides a disclaimer: “to give account of the good which I found there I will tell of the other things I noted there” (*Inf.* I.9-10). The *good* music our poet promises us, will emerge if we are able to patiently endure the frenzied and troublesome particulars of hell. This is a disorienting thought, but it need not be discouraging. Take heart listener; as Copland reminds, let the senses do the work, our job right now is not to find meaning, but rather to simply imbibe.

On this primary level of listening, even though the audience is merely soaking in the soundscape, a modicum of familiarity of the fundamentals of music is necessary:

Music has four essential elements: rhythm, melody, harmony and tone color. These four ingredients are the composer's materials. It is their combined effect--the seemingly inextricable web of sound that they form--with which listeners are concerned...

(Copland 676)

The composite of these four elements creates a musical experience for the audience.

Remember, however, that the sounds of hell are the *anti-music*. The manipulation of and opposition to these elements is what the audience experiences.

Encountering the soundscape of the *Inferno* with these elements in mind is no easy task. At each precarious and shocking circle of the descent, Dante the poet constructs an increasingly dreadful labyrinth of sound. As the pilgrim and his guide approach the gate of Hell, inscripted with those infamous words: "Abandon every hope, Ye that enter," the audience is instantaneously deafened by the noise:

There sighs, lamentations and loud wailings resounded through the starless air, so that at first, it made me weep; strange tongues, horrible language, words of pain, tones of anger, voices loud and hoarse, and with these the sound of hands, made a tumult which is whirling always through that air forever dark, as sand eddies in a whirlwind.

(*Inf.* III. 22-30)

Twice in the above passage the air is mentioned. Many translations include the word, “timeless” (Ciabattoni 1178). This is best noted in the Italian, “*sanza stelle*” *without* stars and “*sanza tempo*” *without* time. The poet is not describing time in the linear sense, as in the time it takes to get from here to there because the afterlife is eternal. He intentionally draws our attention to the absence of rhythm.

Most music historians agree that of the four elements of music, rhythm is the most primal in nature. For centuries the rhythm of vocal music, “from the time of the Greeks to the full flowering of Gregorian chant” mimicked that of natural speech (Copland 691). In the centuries prior, rhythm was associated to physicality, such as the beating of one’s own heart. Even the planets and their routines are governed by specific rhythmic patterns; one could argue that rhythm even existed before humans. Rhythm itself is eternal. The Greeks believed it to be the basic structure of reality (Crosby 2268). A place *sanza tempo* is unnatural. Our poet broadcasts to the audience that something is terribly, inexplicably wrong about this place, which is no place. Even the beating of the pilgrim’s own heart is abnormal here (Devlin 121).

In the medieval world, the idea of “measured music” was not truly introduced to Western civilization until around 1150 (Copland 691). Prior to this development there was no way to truly reproduce a composer’s rhythmic intentions. The intellectually driven idea of rhythmic dictation allowed music to exist as a wholly independent and repeatable art form. The most notable achievement to spring from the ability to transcribe systematic rhythms was, however, “the subsequent contrapuntal, or many-voiced music, unthinkable without measured metrical units” (Copland 676). In other words it changed

music forever, bringing about musical possibilities never before conceived. A world without rhythm is a hopeless place indeed, because it is a place without possibility. Dante the poet communicates a fundamental deficit: this place is not simply *anti*-music, in this place music *cannot* be created. There is only one term reserved to a world bereft of musical order: chaos.

Chaos. Disruption. Disorder. Disarray. Our pilgrim sees nothing, but detects the dreadful surge of this chaotic air, delivering an inhuman and “unholy racket,” rendering him powerless to his tears (Ciabattoni 747). Virgil describes this great variety of noise as a “caitiff choir,” a mass of many voices, creating a wicked and anguished song (*Inf.* III. 37). Robed in the extinguished hope for beautiful music, our choir produces the opposite of harmony: *cacophony*, or a harsh, discordant mixture of sounds (Ciabattoni 757). This chorus of damaged, harsh and strained voices makes the audience cringe in pain at the “tones of anger” our poet describes (*Inf.* III. 26-27).

Throughout the *Commedia*, consideration must be appointed to our poet’s use of tone color or *timbre*. Copland instructs, “the active listener has two objectives concerning timbre and tone: to gain a better appreciation of the composer's expressive purpose in using any instrument or combination of instruments” (Copland 1070). A composer chooses specific instruments in order to best communicate the idea of the music, just as a painter selects paint for his canvas. Each instrument has its own unique tone color. Vocal tone color is something far more mysterious, nevertheless similar. Vocal cords, depending on their size, produce sounds of varying pitch. The vocal instrument then employs the use of both air and the resonating cavities of the mouth and nose to project

that sound. In both speaking or singing, one can manipulate the vocal qualities by managing breath flow and physical sensations within the face, mouth, nose and throat (Ware 167).

An array of voices is necessary to establish a chorus and Dante the poet employs use of many unique voices to create the overall soundscape of hell. The “tones of anger” produced by the wicked mass are more than bothersome, they are disconcerting. The cacophonous choir isn’t merely *not singing*, but rather producing audible cries of distress. Dante the pilgrim, horrified, asks, “Who are these people who seem so mastered by their pain?” (*Inf.* III. 32-33). These voices are damaged, unhealthy, ruined. Voices shouldn’t sound the way these do, “strained.” This choir, in which agony is maestro, draws “all together on the accursed shore” awaiting the demon Charon’s boat to take them into hell, gnashing their teeth at his cruel words and “weep[ing] bitterly” (*Inf.* 97-110). These “wretches, who were never alive” (*Inf.* III. 64) perform their endless concert on the “tearful ground” or *terra lagrimosa* (*Inf.* III.133), howling so loudly that their voices become “hoarse.” This depraved parade coupled with a startling earthquake provokes our pilgrim, senses overcome, to faint and our poet to sweat in terror (*Inf.* III.130-136).

When the pilgrim revives, he must re-establish himself in his surroundings. The scene is reminiscent of the opening Canto; Dante is groggy and perplexed:

A heavy thunder-clap broke the deep sleep in my head, so that I started like one who is waked by force, and, my eyes being rested, I stood up and looked about me, then set my gaze steadily to know where I was. I found myself in fact on the brink of the abysmal valley of pain, which resounds

with noise of countless wailings; it was so dark and deep and full of vapours that, straining my sight to the bottom, I could make out nothing there.

(*Inf.* IV.1-25)

The disturbance is still distant, as the weary pilgrim casts his gaze unto the forbidding valley. Souls here have “no hope of death” (*Inf.* III. 46). Immediately following the *heavy thunder-clap* the composition takes a sudden decrescendo as the travelers enter Limbo, this is the calm before the storm. The “brink” of this endless vale with its echoing cries provides the audience with an ethereal sensory experience. The valley, “dark and deep” feels more like an ocean, although drained of its majestic waters and “full of vapours” and the audience has the sense that they are adrift. The pilgrim’s vision is impaired; he must rely on his ears to lead him into the wafting brume:

Here, so far as I could tell by listening, was no lamentation more than sighs which kept the air forever trembling; these came from grief without torments.

(*Inf.* IV. 25-30)

The breathy sighs that “kept the air forever trembling” in this, the first of nine circles, are vague and harrowing, suggesting the pendulous nature of hell’s vestibule. The idea of Limbo, was an invention of the early church which provided an explanation for those who, although blameless, died without knowledge or anticipation of Christ (Sinclair 68). Our pilgrim walks grief-stricken among the “people of much worth who were suspended”

and the entire Canto delivers the sense of floating atop the oceanic sound of pain below (*Inf.* 43-45).

Limbo is the eternal dwelling of Virgil, who was given special permission to take our pilgrim on his journey and whose voice in the dark wood of the initial Canto at first “seemed weak from long silence” (*Inf.* IV. 63). A voice cries out to Virgil in recognition, as the two make their passage and the pilgrim is invited to converse with great poets of “honourable fame which resounds in thy life above”: Homer, Horace, Ovid and Lucan (*Inf.* 75-90). On the steps of “the noble castle” surrounded by both meadow and moat, our pilgrim shares an intellectual and artistic moment with these famed, poetic shades who “spoke seldom, with gentle voices” (*Inf.* IV.108-110; *Inf.* IV.114). The silence in which these poets now reside, indicated by the serene surrounding, opposes the lifetime these great minds spent on earth singing “the loftiest song” and our poet draws specific attention to the *sola voce* or solo voice of poetry that they share (*Inf.* IV.92). The oppressive sorrow that our pilgrim carries for these artists is maintained by the surrounding fog of melancholy exhalation.

With this heavy heart, our pilgrim descends into the second circle of hell proper, guarded by Minos who “judges and dispatches” the souls into the nine circles below and whose voice is “horrible and snarling” (*Inf.* V.4-6). He growls a warning to the pilgrim, which earns a protective rebuke from Virgil, whose words practically evaporate against the crescendo of a torrential squall:

Now the notes of pain begin to reach my ears; now I am come where great wailing breaks on me. I came to a place where all light was mute and

where was bellowing as of a sea in tempest that is beaten by conflicting winds. The hellish storm, never resting, seizes and drives the spirits before it: smiting and whirling them about, it torments them. When they come before its fury there are shrieks, weeping and lamentation.

(*Inf. V.28-35*)

The poet incorporates an interesting imagery of senses: “all light was mute.” Hell is not, as he describes, a “silent” place, our pilgrim’s ears overwhelmed. But the poet makes a point to describe the light as voiceless, a seemingly helpless victim.

This endless barrage of noise thrusts the audience into this circle of hell reserved for the lustful, who lived with misdirected devotion, “subject reason to desire” (*Inf. V. 37-40*). Dante the poet uses specific linguistic choices impressing upon the audience their untenable passion. “*Di qua, di la, di giu, di su li mena*” or “hither, thither, downward, upward, it drives them” mimics the mercurial, tempestuous nature of this hysterical, emotive tornado (*Inf. V. 43-44*). The souls, a flock of doves whose voices are characterized through the *dolenti note* or “notes of pain,” are vacillating prisoners of desire, eternally captive to their carnal nature (*Inf. V. 82*). The ravenous gale “seizes” and “drives” them. The sound is a desperate and perpetual storm, once again reminding the audience that “there is no rest for the wicked” no measurement of music, of keeping of time (*Zondervan, NIV Bible, Isaiah 48:22*).

The soundscape “bellows” ruthlessly forcing the audience to endure the “wailing shades borne on these battling winds” (*Inf. V. 46-49*). The listeners, like the souls here, are powerless against the mesmerizing turbulence as it “breaks on” the pilgrim. Through

this vivid and unforgiving sensory experience Dante the poet victimizes the audience, who like the sun is “mute,” defenseless against the fitful shrieks “beaten by conflicting winds.”

Francesca, the most sympathetic sufferer, who met her untimely end alongside Paolo her lover, both slain by her husband for their infidelity, cries in affliction, “Love, which is quickly kindled in the gently heart...Love, which absolves no one beloved from loving, seized me so strongly” (*Inf.* V.100-105). Love as Francesca describes, is something that takes by force not shared or freely given. Her voice echoes, *Amor...Amor...Amor...* vainly into the tempest of desire which envelopes the flock of souls in their common fate. Her cry is but an echo of a virtue. “There is no greater pain than to recall happy time in misery” Francesca tells the pilgrim, who faints in exhaustion for the second time (*Inf.* V.122-142).

The elaborate escalation of sound continues as each circle of the *Inferno* has its own unique tone quality. Our pilgrim, fatigued and crestfallen continues to the third circle of the gluttonous:

I am in the third circle, of eternal, accursed rain, cold and heavy, never changing its measure or its kind; huge hail, foul water and snow pour down through the gloomy air, and the ground that receives it stinks.

Cerberus, a beast fierce and hideous, with three throats barks like a dog over the people that are immersed there...the rain makes them howl like dogs...

(*Inf.* VI. 7-18)

Gluttony, the poet writes, is the second sin of incontinence, where again, souls appear as powerless to the mastery of their addiction. They lie helpless to the poisonous deluge that, in our persisting lack of tempo, never abates. The souls “howl like dogs” in their torment, invoking the Biblical imagery from Proverbs 26:11: “As a dog returns to its vomit, a fool repeats his folly”; in this punishment, the sinful are condemned to redundancy (*Zondervan, NIV Bible*). In the “foul mixture of the shades and the rain” (*Inf. VI. 100-103*), Cerberus, the guard dog of Hades, with his triple throated bark “thunders at the souls that they would fain be deaf” assuring their fate continues (*Inf. VI.32-33*; Leeming 196).

Musically, the image of the three throats barking over the howling shades may have been an intentional reference to a *hocket*. The term *hocket* derives from the French *hoquet* and the English *hiccup*, and was a multi-voiced style “in which one voice sang while another rested, and then vice versa--rapidly” (Crosby 2508). Medieval theorists and religious leaders found this more than appalling, it was sacrilege. Jacques de Liege would later write in his *Speculum Musicae* (c.1300) a critique of hocket that sounds as if it came directly from the pages of Dante’s *Inferno VI*:

Some hocket too much...in the manner of dogs they howl, bark, and like madmen nourished by disorderly and twisted aberrations, they use pitches alien to nature.

(Leach 182)

Liege was not the only opinion on the matter. Use of the hocket in liturgical settings had been spreading in both popularity and opposition for more than fifty years and would

have been well-known in Italy at the time Dante the poet was in exile and writing the *Inferno*. The controversy finally culminated in Pope John Paul XXII's papal decree in 1322 forbidding the use of this "depraved" polyphony in services (Crosby 2508).

Capitalizing on the popular opinion of this disputable technique would have been a vivid interpretation of a crude and obscene vocal texture. Cerberus and his three barking throats audibly punishes the sinners, which is a disturbing image to even present day audiences.

The sinister and upsetting aberrations continue throughout the hellish infrastructure, which is divided in half between upper and lower sections. Greed and wrath, like lust and gluttony are for the poet considered sins of incontinence, however Greed and Wrath bear a *collective* destructiveness that the previous levels do not. As our pilgrim and guide pass through the last levels of upper hell, they encounter Plutus and his "clucking voice" (*Inf.* VII. 1-2).

Plutus, who in Greek mythology is the god of wealth, in Dante's composition does not bring abundance to mankind, but emerges contrary to classical depictions, as an "accursed wolf" (*Inf.* VII. 8). Plutus is not a blind god bringing peace and prosperity without judgment, but rather a bloated, savage and unruly creature. He is slave to a cruel master and announces the arrival of the visitors like a parrot on shoulder of a captain: "Pape Satan, Pape Satan, aleppe!" His voice is baffling to the audience, materializing not as a growling wolf, but rather an irritating and bothersome bird (*Inf.* VII.1). This marks the unveiling of the perverse nature of this underworld, in which we witness the undoing of health, wealth, beauty and strength (Wilson 338). Much like the strained voices of our caitiff choir, this is yet another instance in which instruments do not perform as intended.

The choir appears once again in the fourth and fifth circles of this gloomy musical descent, as the travelers partake in yet another staggering concert:

As do the waves there above Charybdis, one breaking against each other when they meet, so must the souls here dance their round. Here I saw far more people than elsewhere both on the one side and the other, with great howls rolling weights by main force of chest; they clashed together when they met and then at that point each turned about and rolled his weight back again...shouting at each other again their taunting chorus.

(Inf. VII. 22-35)

The roaring shouts of the “taunting chorus” crash like waves as the audience senses the oscillation between wealth that saves men from starvation and greed for wealth that suffocates men under its mighty weight (*Inf. VII. 35*). Greed in the *Inferno* is the beast Plutus incarnate. In life, prosperity must be tamed and subdued with moderation. In the eternal death of Dante’s afterlife, with no possibility of moderation, greed delivers, according to playwright Aristophanes, “wickedness that knows no bounds” (Henderson 560).

As the sludge thickens, the wrathful chorus, “fixed in the slime,” leads the circles of upper hell to a close with a “hymn they gurgle in their throat,” together in one collective voice, sinking into the quicksand of hell’s filth (*Inf. VII.120-126*).

Whereas in Dante’s composition, upper hell is reserved for those who commit sins of weakness, lower hell caters to those who commit willing acts of destruction.

Those willing acts include: violence, fraud and treachery. The music follows suit, displaying an amplitude of raw and unusual sounds for the audience.

The slope into the assorted circles of the violent, are guarded by a Minotaur of “bestial rage” who presents here the introduction of a new idea: the unnatural desire for human destruction (*Inf.* XII.33). Lust, gluttony, greed and anger are brought forth by misdirected passions for those noble human attributes (Wilson 338). Although destructive in their own right, these sins, according to our omnipotent poet, are beget from human failings and the punishments therefore less severe. Violence, however, is a sin borne from the absence of love and no other circle musically articulates this more than that dwelling devoted to those who commit violence towards themselves. As the sins of hell become more destructive in nature, so the soundscape continue to deteriorate. The anti-music takes us there, where we once witnessed victims of sound now we hear instruments of sin.

The anti-music of this Canto with vain echo denoting such an absence: “*non era ancora...non fronda verde...non rami schietti...non pomi v’eran...non han si aspri;*” or “No green leaves, but of dusky hue; no smooth boughs, but knotted and warped; no fruits were there, but poisonous thorns” (*Inf.* XIII. 1-10). For the audience this repetition is reminiscent of Francesca’s heartbreaking echo of *amor* in the torment of lust, although now the effect is discreet and impersonal, recited directly from the narrator as he observes his all too familiar wooded surroundings (Sinclair 176).

Dante the pilgrim is once again in a *selva oscura*. This peculiar and barren forest with its lifeless trees, “knotted and warped” that fall prey to frightening bird-like

creatures, is firmly affixed atop “horrible sand” (*Inf.* XIII. 1-22). There is *no* path, *no* vegetation, *no* foliage in which to halt the reverberating cries of the “wailings that poured forth” (*Inf.* XIII. 22-24). The pilgrim, failing to identify a source for the sound, takes instruction from Virgil to “break off any little branch” (*Inf.* XIII.28-30). Tearing a thorny sprig from the tree, the trunk cries out:

‘Why dost thou tear me? Why manglest thou me? Hast thou no spirit of pity? We were men and now are turned to stocks’ ...As a green brand that is burning at one end drops from the other and hisses with the escaping wind, so from the broken splinter came forth words and blood together; at which I let fall the tip and stood as one afraid.

(*Inf.* XVIII. 33-45)

In perhaps the poet’s most haunting use of sound imagery yet, the *blood and words* spilling from the broken branch leaves pilgrim and audience alike, petrified. Dante the pilgrim is largely silent in this circle save one line directed not to the tree, but to his guide, “Do thou ask him again of what thou thinkest will satisfy me; for I cannot, such pity fills my heart” (*Inf.* XIII. 82-84). A disconnectedness exists in the pilgrim’s interaction with the forest that implies the feeling of severance caused by suicide. Violence of this kind breaks one from his inalienable right of life; souls “violently separated from the body” in a willful uprooting are here fixed eternally in remembrance of the life squandered (Sinclair 176). The sound here is personal and harsh, both internal and external.

The audience senses this dichotomy, hearing the *hissing* in the air, producing the illusion of life, coupled with warm blood, birthing sound. Breath, the life support of the voice, is here represented where the body is not. As “the wind became a voice” the sound palate in the forest of souls establishes a detached, horrifying effect for both pilgrim and audience (*Inf.* XIII. 91-92). The vocal instrument, a precious gift to humans over all other creatures, is reduced to the lowest living form, a wicked demotion in an unyielding land that produces neither fruitful song nor lyric, merely unsubstantiated breath (Spitzer 83). In these lower levels of Hell, the anti-music denotes the effects of torture, music itself mutates into punishment.

The frenzied tyrannical lower levels of hell are marked by excruciating and undiluted pandemonium. The musical punishment crescendos in the last two circles reserved for the fraudulent and treacherous. Interwoven as a laboriously vexing soundscape, the audience hears a waterfall and a swarm of bees, “people moaning... [and] puffing with their snouts” and increasingly lamenting voices leading further into the deep (*Inf.* XVI. 1-6; *Inf.* XVIII. 103-105).

The soundscape reveals a perverse and comical recreation of a military scene where they encounter the demon, Malacoda, rousing and rallying his disparate mob. The entirety of this scene reads as a circus act:

I have seen the movements of raiding-parties, clash of tournaments and running of jousts, now with trumpets and now with bells, with drums and with castle-signals and devices our own and foreign; and never yet have I

seen horsemen move at so strange a bugle.

(*Inf.* XXII.1-12)

As if accompanied by the medieval version of a kazoo, the clownish demons dance and whistle and grind their teeth, causing all sorts of horrible atrocities (*Inf.* XXI-XXII).

Satan's satirical army is finally corralled by 'general' Malacoda who signals to them with his "strange bugle" by making "a trumpet of his rear" (*Inf.* XXI.139).

The mention of a trumpet in conjunction with the demonic flatulence transmits a terrible irreverence to the audience, considering as it is the trumpet that according to Christianity will indicate the Apocalypse, signaling the army of the Lord and releasing souls to their final resting place (Ciabattoni 821). Malacoda's "trumpet" is a worthless and vulgar signal, with only the authority to rally an ineffective battalion of fools.

The raucous comedic relief of this devilish sequence is short-lived as the audience is once again submerged into nightmarish horrors. The grisly wailings become oppressive, the ruthless lamentations so loud that our poet covers his ears and remains speechless at the sight of the mutilated bodies, exposed throats and slit tongues (*Inf.* XXIX.45; XXX.133-141).

Travelling past these maimed souls, our pilgrim encounters "one shaped like a lute" (*Inf.* XXX.49). Master Adam, in life was a Florentine executed for counterfeiting the gold florin, a powerful representation of prosperity and power for Florence (Shaw 223). In death, he remains captive to this feverish, sickly and swollen silhouette.

The pilgrim listens to a verbal altercation between the counterfeiter and Sinon of Troy, famous for lying about the Trojan horse. Mere conversation falls to disarray

beneath the suffocating slab of anti-music. Sinon strikes Master Adam's bulbous "leathery paunch" which resounds like a drum (*Inf.* XXX.103). The sanguine lute, is manipulated against its intended function, disloyal to its ability to bring beautiful chords to the ear. Much like Plutus, Master Adam's body looks like one instrument, but sounds like another; a fitting, albeit distressing punishment for the faithless counterfeiter, who spent his life devaluing the authenticity of Florence.

The sight of such mutilations and mangled figures induces a confused, dream-state, as both audience and pilgrim plead for composition's end, longing "for that which is as if it were not" (*Inf.* XXX. 133-141). An intrusive and untimely horn-blast breaks the stunned attitude of the moment as the travelers confront the giant, Nimrod:

"Raphel may amech zabi almi" began the savage mouth to cry, for which no sweeter psalms were fit; and my Leader towards him: 'Stupid soul, keep to thy horn and vent thyself with that wen rage or other passion takes thee...Let us leave him there and not talk in vain, for every language is to him as his is to others, which is known to none.

(*Inf.* XXI.67-72)

Nimrod, whose name in Hebrew means *rebel*, established the kingdom that would eventually be responsible for the building the tower of Babel. It was Nimrod's rebellion that, according to scripture, "led to man's linguistic fall" (Benfell 77). "Raphel may amech zabi almi" is incoherent babbling, language "which is known to none." Nimrod's punishment is "linguistic isolation" and the desperate, thundering blast is nothing more than an ill-fitting noise (Benfell 78). The horn's single, pathetic note embraces the

incapability of producing anything melodious, indicating the musical devolution that has taken place.

Through the disintegration of the musical fundamentals, the poet delivers the audience to an inharmonious chasm, not only incapable of creating beautiful music, but existing *before* music or speech acquisition, a place of nonsensical babbling. In this eternal pre-verbal stage, our poet struggles to find the words, “for to describe the bottom of all the universe is no enterprise to undertake in sport for a tongue that cries mamma and babbo” (*Inf.* XXXIII. 1-9). The imagery conjured in these lines is of a baby crying “mommy” and “daddy” as souls, such as Nimrod, are imprisoned in an infantile eternity.

As the *Inferno* draws to a conclusion, the soundscape dissolves into nothingness. In “the deepest and darkest place, farthest from the heaven that encircles all” it is truly silent (*Inf.* IX.28-30). This innermost pit of Hell is an icy core, where many shades appear numb, their eyes sealed in frozen tears, enslaved to “empty litanies” (*Inf.* XX.7-9). The audience waits with bated breath as the pilgrim gazes upon the three-headed fallen angel:

‘Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni towards us,’ my Master said: look forward,
therefore, if you discern him.’

(*Inf.* XXXIV.1-3)

Vexilla regis prodeunt or ‘The Royal Banners Advance,’ the parody of Venantius Fortunatus’s well-known hymn in these last moments of the canticle, enacts the irony of holy celebration (Ciabattini 780). The hymn’s lifeless pronouncement crowns the infernal king in isolated darkness as the weeping finally surrenders to the silence. Our

pilgrim and his guide scramble over the body of Satan and safely into the night sky as the audience breathes a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER 2: PURGATORIO

The opening of the *Purgatorio* is both refreshing and cleansing, a much needed departure for our ears. The discordant sounds of the *Inferno* must be reconciled and a new song cultivated. Through music, sins are purged and lessons learned. *Purgatorio* is essentially a “school of souls” where music is the curriculum (Sinclair 129).

Against a backdrop of the vast and calming sea, the pilgrim and his guide are met with the “sweet hue of the oriental sapphire which was gathering in the serene face of the heavens” (*Purg.*I.13-14). In this tranquil moment, marred only by the sound of crashing waves upon the shore, nature prepares for the sunrise as Dante the poet surrenders to the muses:

To course over better waters the little bark of my wit now lifts her sails,
leaving behind her so cruel a sea, and I will sing of that second kingdom
where the human spirit is purged and becomes fit to ascend Heaven. But
here let poetry rise again from the dead, O holy Muses, since I am yours;
and here let Calliope rise up for a while and accompany my song with that
strain which smote the ears of the wretched pies so that they despaired of
pardon.

(*Purg.* I.1-12)

Dante composing the canto appeals to Calliope, the “greatest of the Muses,” for a powerful and divine lyric that, like hers that conquered through song the rebellious sisters who stood in praise of the rebel Titans, would repeal the cacophony of the *Inferno*

(Sinclair 27). The tempest of hell is behind our pilgrim now, the song is fresh like the sea, teeming with a serene but expansive new energy: hope.

Hope is a peculiar axiom, however, and one that requires great fortitude in withstanding the tension between that which we have overcome and that which we aspire. This “little island, roundabout its very base, down there where the waves beat on it” exists somewhere in between the murky pit and shimmering heavens (*Purg.* I.100-102). The *Purgatorio* is the journey from here to there, the labor of love betwixt two opposing realms of eternal dwelling. The island is fixed and ancient, but the music that exists here is ever-changing, ever-moving.

In this meditative prelude, Virgil patiently and gently reaches “both hands outspread on the grass” and tenderly cleanses the pilgrim’s “tear-stained cheeks” with the morning dew (*Purg.* I.125-129). Bending to the earth, the guide grasps a plant and another springs up in its place (*Purg.* I.130-136). On the humble shore of this enduring rock, “poetry rises from the dead” like beauty from the ashes and the possibility of new growth abounds (*Zondervan, NIV Bible, Isaiah 61:3*).

As our pilgrim shakes off the ashes of hell, the audience must rise to a second plane of listening in order to meet our poet on his higher theme. The soundscape of the *Inferno* rocked our senses with its aggressive intensity, vigorous pace and dynamic variation; in *Purgatorio* the tempo is much slower, more methodical, and deliberately pensive.

On this new plane of listening, the audience begins to observe the composer’s use of the musical elements to convey deep ideas, moods, and themes:

All music has expressive power, some more and some less, but all music has a certain meaning behind the notes and that the meaning behind the notes constitutes, after all, what the piece is saying, what the piece is about.

(Copland 498)

On the hopeful, singing mountain we find the deepest expression of the work.

As an intelligent listener, it is our task to develop a conceptual understanding of the musical meaning within a piece, in order to participate in the active nature of what is presented. The act of listening still involves sensation; however, on the listening plane of *expression*, the listener discovers a new awareness. The audience must remain fluid in listening, open to the possibilities, the direction the piece may take; “composition is, after all an organism. It is a living, not a static thing” (Copland 2774). The *Commedia* is a living composition, escorting the audience through music on a journey of transformation. As a listener opens his or her mind to the emotional bearings of a piece of music, an emotional connection with a composer blossoms, the piece becomes alive. Like the plant flourishing in the sand, the composition thrives in our understanding of the music therein.

The first moments of *Purgatorio* elucidate this fluidity of composition and open our ears to new music. Dante the pilgrim and Virgil, “still beside the sea, like those who ponder on their road, who go on in heart and in body linger” catch sight of the radiant, silvery white sails of the ship of souls appearing atop the water “as wings” against the crimson sky (*Purg.* II, 10-26). No sooner do they see this, but they hear a great chorus: “*In exitu Israel de Aegypto*” sung “together with one voice” forcing the pilgrim to his

knees (*Purg.* II, 44-48). In stark contrast to the “tones of anger” wailed in torment by the blasphemous choir of the *Inferno*, the ship of souls brings new sound: a melody and voices singing that melody together, *una voce*, one voice (*Inf.* III.26; *Purg.* II.47).

As the souls crowd onto the shore, one steps forward “with such affection” and the pilgrim recognizes the ghost as his friend, Casella, a Florentine musician, well-known for setting love poems to song (*Purg.* II-76-87; Lewis 1613). Three times he desperately attempts to embrace the shade with no avail. Dante the pilgrim pleads with Casella to share a moment with him on the shore:

He answered me: ‘Even as I loved thee in my mortal flesh, so do I love thee freed; therefore I stay. But thou, why art thou on this journey?’

(*Purg.* II. 88-90)

Although the pilgrim had been questioned before as to the nature of his journey, these earnest words from a cherished friend seem different, distinctively important. Casella’s question arrives on the shore of this new passage, the dawning of a new day, forcing a reflective moment about what was experienced and what is yet to come. This marks for the audience a particular individual quality that will define this canticle.

What differentiates the souls in this afterlife from the souls in the last? It is the opportunity for change. The souls on this shore are still not fit for heaven, but unlike in Hell, they differ extensively in individual attitude (Luke 43). The *Inferno* howls of the soul’s eternal bondage, the *Purgatorio* by way of penitence and individual purgation of sin, sings of the soul’s liberation (Sinclair 27). *Why art thou on this journey?* This is not

an easily answerable question, but one that every individual on the brink of personal change must face.

The act of purgation is a solitary and perplexing experience. The audience is heartbroken for the pilgrim in his fruitless attempt at human connection, frantic to embrace his friend. However, the poet is quick to remind that on this mountain there is a greater connectivity at work. The pilgrim's soul is weary from the arduous journey and he requests a song of the musician:

‘If a new law does not take from thee memory or practice of the songs of love which used to quiet all my longings, may it please thee to refresh my soul with them for a while, which is so spent from coming here with my body.’ *Love that discourses to me in my mind* he began then, so sweetly that the sweetness sounds within me still. My Master and I and these people who were with him seemed as content as if nothing else touched the mind of any. We were all rapt and attentive to his notes...

(*Purg.* II. 106-119)

With this song request and Casella's comply, "so sweetly that the sweetness resounds," the audience senses a change of direction: an intimate new relationship emerging.

The sweet sounds in *Purgatorio* indicate the *dolce stil novo*, or the 'sweet new style' of Italian lyric love poetry which Dante invented, composing in linguistic musicality. His poetry embraced a multi-faceted style: *Novus*, the 'new' or innovative nature, *stilus*, 'style' or "content and form" and *dulcis*, the 'sweet' or "aurally pleasing phonic qualities" (Lansing 308). For Dante, poetry was triune in nature, a harmony of

these three characteristics. Casella's song, *Amor che nella mente mi ragiona* or "Love that discourses to me in my mind" are lyrics originating from the *Convivio* illuminating the affectionate friendship between truth and virtue, composed in this harmonious style. Casella's solo is the sweet, new sound which illustrates this relationship.

Music is a relationship and an extraordinary one at that, a *holy trinity* of sorts, between the composer, the interpreter and the listener. A composer relies on the interpreter and audience in order to unfold the full potential of the work; in other words, a song, a singer and someone to hear it. All three must be present for true expression to take place (Copland 2726). The *Commedia*, is an interesting example of this unique exchange. Dante is our composer, but also our centrifugal character, interpreting the song in his pilgrimage; we are the audience, the listeners. In the impromptu concert on the shore, Dante's words are graciously and freely performed by a dear and loving friend. In a perplexingly mystical moment, Dante and Casella share a spiritual embrace of one alive and one departed, in a transcendent communion of artistic collaboration.

Furthermore, Dante himself, in this blissful reunion also embodies all *three* components of the musical relationship trinity: the poet composing the *Commedia*, in which he, the pilgrim, participates in the audience to a love song for which he, the poet, supplied the lyrics through his previous work. *Love that discourses me in my mind*, becomes a conversation, connecting verse to verse in *discourse* within the mind of our poet. In this moment, Dante is composer, interpreter and audience.

The audience is "rapt," enthralled with the divine mystery of this relationship that musically unveils past, present and future artistry, with one voice, singing in an intimate

and immortal moment of connectivity. Dante, both poet and pilgrim, finds much needed comfort and refreshment for the soul, spurring himself on towards greatness and inspiring others to participate. Casella's song on the shore of hope, the precipice of growth, represents not only the musical relationship, but a far greater connection: communion of soul and song...is that not the role of music?

The suspension and "self-quotation" of the song, allows Dante the pilgrim and poet an important pause for self-reflection; he is able to meditate upon his previous philosophical learning and the meaning behind his current journey (Ciabattini 1527). In the *Convivio*, Dante illuminates this idea of self-reflection:

No one is a better friend than one is to himself; therefore it is in the chamber of one's thoughts that a person must reprimand himself and bemoan his faults

(*Convivio*, Bk.I, Ch. 2)

It is in the quiet of one's own mind that one comes to terms with his past, present and future motivations. These moments of introspection, reveal purpose and transform context. The love that once discoursed in Dante the poet's mind, motivating his lyric, is transforming into a new type of love, motivating a divine lyric. The song is changing.

Casella's compelling solo on the shore, opens this possibility for a shift of perspective in our pilgrim. In the *Inferno*, the pilgrim and guide were merely captives to the bombardment of sound through sensory observation. In requesting a song from Casella, the pilgrim has now become a willing participant in the relationship of music.

Although Dante is alive whereas the shades are not, our pilgrim is granted a special opportunity to participate in the purgation process. The travelers approach the gate to the mountain, guarded by an angel who takes his sword and draws seven times the letter “P” on Dante’s forehead. “P” here stands for *Peccatum*, the Latin word for sin. Seven scars for seven sins that must be healed on the seven tiers of the mountain. The angel swings open the “heavy and resounding metal” gate:

I turned away, intent on the first note, and ‘*Te Deum laudamus*’ I seemed to hear in voices mingled with the sweet sound; what I heard gave me the same impression we sometimes get when people are singing with an organ and the words are now distinguished, now lost.

(*Purg.* IX. 112-145)

Although recognizing it as “sweet” to his ear, the pilgrim does not quite understand the music presented.

Our poet allows the audience just a taste of what is to come, a distant chorus singing in harmony. The gate of the mountain is one of optimism, offering an earful of the heavens to inspire audience and pilgrim alike; however, the pilgrim along with the souls must learn how to listen and participate in music. The climb to the “voices mingled with sweet sound,” although forthright, is not painless. In *Purgatorio*, our pilgrim is freed from the cacophonous suffering of hell, only by “accepting another kind of suffering” on the mountain, the hardship of change (Luke 39).

Upon hearing those initial heavenly sounds, our pilgrim takes his first steps through the opening in the rock and onto the steep face of the mountain:

From its edge bordering on the void to the foot of the lofty bank which rises sheer would measure three times a man's body... I perceived that the encircling bank, which was perpendicular and impossible to climb, was white marble and adorned with carvings such that...nature would be put to shame there.

(*Purg.* X. 22-30)

This sharp bank, is where the root of all sin, pride, must be cleansed. Pride is a sin of perspective, measuring oneself as better than another, the "measure of morality" (Garmon 87). Dante the poet is quick to integrate other forms of measurements in the opening of this canto. Unlike the infinite abyss of Limbo, this cliff, although vast, is somehow quantifiable, "perpendicular," measuring "three times a man's body."

Man must free himself from his limited understanding and consider a new concept of measurement here on the mountain. "It is not enough to see what lies before the eyes," as Boethius says in his *Consolation of Philosophy*. Paul's letter to the Romans presented a different kind of perception, proposing that sobriety of judgment comes from accepting the "measure of faith" bestowed by God (Rom.12:3). Again, sight is secondary to hearing to the pilgrim, who in hearing new songs, must transform his perception to what can and cannot be quantified in *Purgatorio*. Like King David, the humble psalmist "dancing mightily before the Lord," who in humility and nobility was "both more and less than king" the pilgrim must conquer the sin of comparison (2 Sam. 6:15; *Purg.* X. 66). Only in doing this will he experience pure, limitless, immeasurable potential, without reservation.

Contrary to the pilgrim's initial perception of the bank, "impossible to climb," a new perspective must replace the old. The purgation on the terrace of pride brings about a renewal of our poet's mind through song:

When we were turning our steps there, '*Beati pauperes spiritu*' was sung in such tones as no words would tell. Ah how different these passages from those of Hell, for her the entrance is with songs and there with fierce lamentation!

Now we mounted by the sacred stairway, and I seemed to be far lighter than before on the level, so I said: 'Master, tell me, what weight has been lifted from me that I find almost no labour in going?'

He answered: 'When the *P*'s that are still left on thy brow all but effaced shall be wholly removed, as the one has been, thy feet will be so mastered by goodwill that not only will they feel no labour but it will be their delight to be urged upward.

(*Purg.* XII. 109-136)

"Blessed are the pure in spirit" our new choir sings, a joyful and buoyant contrast to the caitiff choir wailing in "fierce lamentation" at the gate of the *Inferno*. With the first wound healed, the sin of pride, our pilgrim is ready to embark upon the remainder of purgation in true humility. His feet are "lighter" than before and Virgil reminds, they will be lighter yet:

And he said to me: 'This mountain is such that it is always hard at the start below and the higher one goes it is less toilsome; therefore when it will

seem to thee so pleasant that going up will be as easy for thee as going downstream in a boat, then thou shalt be at the end of this path.

(*Purg.* IV. 88-94)

The task of becoming is a strain, but “the higher one goes it is less toilsome.” This mountain, which balances the measurable with the immeasurable is a stark contrast to the *Inferno* and the chaotic air, *sanza tempo*. There is a beginning and an end to this hike. This steep crag beseeches souls to surmount its enormity; the celestial heavens await.

In 1245, Gossoin of Metz calculated that a man could walk to the stars in 713 years, providing that he walked 25 miles a day, a fact that might have come in handy for a medieval pilgrim’s considerations of measurement; furthermore, Roger Bacon calculated that a person walking 20 miles a day could reach the moon in roughly 14 years (Crosby 338). However, this is not a journey that exists in linear concepts, or quantified in the numbered steps of man. In music, the *measure* holds together the groupings of notes, according to their value and the governing time signature of the composition. The tempo that exists here is a *measure of faith*, the souls here are valued by their purity, held together by a higher purpose. The choir moves to a greater structure of time in the “steps slow and short” towards purification (*Purg.* XX.16). With a new perspective of *measure*, the pilgrim sets out to conquer the impurities of the soul.

Our pilgrim’s shift from pride to humility is a transformation of the mind and heart, the foundation of changes to follow. The remaining sins to be purged on the mountain: envy, wrath, sloth, greed, gluttony and lust, although individually cleansed, are *communal* in nature. As we heard in the music of the *Inferno*, man through sinful actions,

detaches himself from others ultimately devolving into silence and isolation. Climbing the mountain to harmony, sinners must work in concert to heal.

At every terrace of the mountain souls participate in this choir, singing together a new melody; learning the fundamentals. This musical education allows them to take the sound and make it music, wherein the penitent must put the “backward steps” behind them, marching upward, singing new songs:

I turned my face, and my steps not less quickly... and lo, ‘*Labia mea, Domine,*’ we heard wept and sung in tones that brought delight and grief. ‘O sweet Father, what is that I hear?’ I began; and he: ‘Shades, perhaps, that go loosing the knot of their debt.’

(*Purg.* X. 21-23; XXIII. 7-15)

Each new song unveils a lesson which, once learned, can “loose the knots of debt.” The practicing of these hymns brings liberation for its participants marching steadily towards purification. The purging of sins through song is the backbone of the curriculum here at the *Purgatorio* School of music.

The Medieval school of music developed slowly from intellectual study. For centuries of the early church liturgical chants were performed from memory: “Unless sounds are remembered by man they perish, for they cannot be written down” St. Isidore wrote (Crosby 560-636). While the number of chants increased without a system for writing and preserving music, studying music was a grueling and repetitive process. It took a student of Gregorian chant ten years of apprenticeship and even then mastery was

insufficient to meet the growing demands of the art. Early notation was intellectually born out of this necessity (Crosby 2303).

Early music theorist and pedagogue, Guido of Arezzo (991-1033) developed the early musical staff to reduce problems arising in his choir; “we often seem not to praise God but to struggle among ourselves.” He gave students well-known hymns and organized them on the staff in order to better help them hear and repeat. Guido encouraged his students towards musical progression, teaching that “music at its best must proceed on two feet: the foot of practice and the foot of reason” (Crosby 2337-2356).

Even music students today devote an extensive amount of mental, emotional and physical energy to learning to perform their instruments. As Guido taught his students, it is through practice and reason that music flourishes. The souls at the *Purgatorio* School of music practice their hymns again and again:

After that hymn was sung to the end they cried aloud...then softly began the hymn again; when it was finished they cried...then returned to their singing...

(*Purg.* XXV. 27-34)

The truly committed students know that the discipline of vocal study is exhausting at times, however, triumphs are built on perseverance. *Purgatorio* is a school built on the nature of memorized music:

And meanwhile people were coming across the little slope in front of us,

singing the *Miserere* line by line...

(*Purg.*V. 22-24)

The students marching here must learn the basics of humanity through repetition and memorization, *line by line*. The *Miserere* was a liturgical setting of Psalm 50-51 commonly sung in the Medieval church settings, to remind sinners that the beginning of the redemption process is confession of sin (Ciabattoni 1065). *Have mercy on me, O God* sung collectively, further represents the attitude and recognition of sin among the penitents of *Purgatorio*.

The process of singing as well as the process of confession is individual to each student; songs are sung until familiar, personalized and intimate:

It was now the hour that turns back the longing of seafarers and melts their heart the day they have bidden dear friends farewell and pierces the new traveler with love if he hears in the distance the bell that seems to mourn the dying day, when I began to cease hearing his words and to gaze at one of the souls that had risen...‘*Te lucis ante*’ came from his lips with such devoutness and with notes so sweet that it drew me out of myself, and then the rest joined him sweetly and devoutly through the whole hymn keeping their eyes on the celestial wheels

(*Purg.* VIII. 1-18)

This is a markedly spiritual moment for our pilgrim as the music “draws him out of himself” with “notes so sweet.” The uninhibited praise offered by the soul against the wistfully setting sun *melts hearts* and inspires what our pilgrim towards change. “*Te lucis*

ante terminum” was typically the last song sung in the course of a day by devout monks and is a request for protection against bad dreams: “from all ill dreams defend our eyes, from nightly fears and fantasies” (Neale). The evening closes and time is marked through the singing of this ancient hymn.

This further elaborates contradictions between the measurable and the immeasurable *Purgatorio*. The audience senses, upon hearing the mountain echoing with hymns that mark specific hours, the day to day tension of opposites and the urgency in their succession (Luke, 42). Time is both kept and lost here. But what is *time* in a place such as this? Saint Augustine meditated on the idea of time in a related fashion in his *Confessions*:

Yet we speak of a long time or a short time, applying these phrases to only past or future...But in what sense can that which does not exist be long or short? The past no longer is, the future is not yet... Let us consider, then, O human soul, whether present time can be long for it has been given you to feel and measure time’s spaces.

(*Confessions* XI. XV)

The audience as well as the souls on the mountain, “feel and measure time’s spaces,” however, past and present does not exist here. The souls on the mountain stay until they have learned the songs and are liberated from sin, the length of time is quite relative to the individual process. Dante the pilgrim has the opportunity to complete his purging, as a human, in a matter of days, whereas Roman poet Statius has been on the mountain for more than 500 years (*Purg.* XXI. 67).

Having restored virtue where was once sin, healing the wounds from the seven *P's* through song, each soul reaches the last terrace of the mountain and must endure one final act of spiritual purification:

The day, therefore was departing when God's glad angel appeared to us. He stood outside the flames on the terrace and sang, '*Beati mundo corde*' with a voice far clearer than ours; then: 'There is no way farther, holy souls unless first the fire's sting is felt; enter into it and be not deaf to the singing beyond.'

(*Purg. XXVII. 7-12*)

The glad angel with his clear voice sings, "Blessed are the pure in heart" as the pilgrim is puzzled and frightened as may be the audience at this agonizing thought of walking through fire. Virgil comforts, "My son, here may be torment, but not death" (*Purg. XXVII. 20-21*). The *Refiner's fire* is a familiar theme in Christianity (*Zondervan NIV Bible*, Mal. 3:2). Peter writes about the "faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire" (*Zondervan NIV Bible*, I Peter 1:7) and Paul writes to the church in Corinth:

Their work will be shown for what it is, because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.

(*Zondervan NIV Bible*, I Cor. 3:3)

The final task for a soul on this mountain, through this refining fire, is to reveal the quality of the work accomplished here, the measure of faith presented in each soul's step and song. The education, if truly loved and learned will materialize the greatest treasure.

As Dante the pilgrim follows Virgil into the fire, his comforting guide before him, he recognizes the glad angel's warning, to "be not deaf to the singing":

Guiding us was a voice that sang beyond, and giving all our heed to it we came forth where the ascent began. '*Venite, benedicti Patris mei*' sounded within a light that was there, such that it overcame me and I could not look at it.

(*Purg.* XXVII. 55-60)

Courage, comfort and the "voice that sang beyond," the voice of Beatrice, leads our pilgrim through the flame and into the open meadow. The voice sings, "Come, ye blessed of my Father" assuring Dante that the quality of the work performed on this mountain is good. He has been made pure. As the pilgrim arrives "where the ascent began," Virgil, upon this final act, delivers one last speech:

Thou hast come forth from the steep and the narrow ways.

See that the sun shines on thy brow; see the grass, the flowers and the trees which the ground here brings forth of itself alone...

(*Purg.* XXVII. 127-135)

For a third time, Dante the pilgrim finds himself in a wood, surrounded by "grass, flowers and trees which the ground here brings forth of itself alone." This time not the *selva*

oscura, the dark wood where he began his journey, not the lonely wood of self-violence, where he nearly lost his path...but a divine oasis.

Our poet incorporates stylistic reminders to the other two forests as well. The audience is engulfed in the sensibilities of this holy forest:

Eager now to search within and about the divine forest green and dense
which tempered to my eyes the new day, I left the slope without waiting...
A sweet air that was without change was striking on my brow with the
force only of a gentle breeze, by which the fluttering boughs all bent
freely... that the little birds in the tops did not still practice all their arts,
but, singing, they greeted the morning hours with full gladness among the
leaves, which kept such undertone to their rhymes...

(*Purg.* XXVIII. 1-18)

Surrounded by water and life the “divine forest green and dense,” breathes an air not chaotic or trembling but “sweet.” As the birds greet the dawn, our pilgrim feels the cool breeze on his face and senses the innocent renewal of his surroundings:

Those who in old times sang of the age of gold and of its happy state
perhaps dreamed on Parnassus of this place; here the human root was
innocent, here was lasting spring and every fruit, this is the nectar of
which each tells.

(*Purg.* XXVIII. 138-144)

This *selva antica* or “ancient wood” with its “lasting spring” is a place where “the human root was innocent,” an earthly paradise where man was once without corruption (*Purg.*

XXVII. 23) . This is a place of blameless, virtuous, childlike wonder. In this “living air” which “makes the wood, because it is dense, resound,” the pilgrim hears the sound not as an echo of empty space, but rich and warm, *re*-sounding again and again in its sweetness (*Purg.* XXVII.108-109).

In this Eden, the audience is introduced to a voice that embraces all of the qualities of the wood:

With feet I stopped and with eyes passed over beyond the streamlet to look at the great variety of fresh-flowering boughs, and there appeared to me, as appears of a sudden a thing that for wonder drives away every other thought, a lady all alone, who went singing and culling flower from flower... As a lady turns in the dance with feet close together on the ground and hardly puts one foot before the other, she turned towards me on the red and yellow flowerets...approaching so that the sweet sound came to me with its meaning.

(*Purg.* XXVII. 34-60)

Singing and working amidst the “fresh-flowering boughs” of the innocent wood, this beautiful creature provides a sublime image of life’s abundance. She describes the wonder of the *selva antica* as a place where the air is pregnant with possibilities and “conceives and brings forth from diverse virtues diverse growths” (*Purg.* XXVII. 113-114). The birds in collaboration with the leaves, embrace new creative capabilities. Every inhabitant of this place was born to sing and sing it shall. Eden, the place of man’s separation from God through original sin--what should be the darkest of all places, is

restored. Humanity that broke communion with perfection is here, delighting in musical pleasure. The “sweet sound” comes to the pilgrim, revealing all of its “meaning.” Finally Nimrod’s infantile babbling is reconciled in the forest of linguistic and musical prospect. “You are new here” she says as Dante the pilgrim yields himself to the music of the “Earthly Paradise” which sings to him of endless possibilities (*Purg.* XXVIII.76).

The audience hears it also, everything is right again, save one absence. The pilgrim turns to share the moment with Virgil, who is gone. Virgil, his sweet guide who bade him begin this journey has left the pilgrim one last solitary act: crossing the river to his beloved Beatrice (*Purg.* XXXI). His grief is heavy, but short lived as the angels accompanying Beatrice begin to sing, “*In te Domine speravi*” or “In Thee, O Lord, I have hoped” comforting him (*Purg.* XXX.83-95). As the pilgrim crosses the river to join them, the lady of the forest baptises him, singing sweetly. The final canto of *Purgatorio* features an angelic ladies’ chorus singing, “*Deus, venerunt gentes*” a hymn of praise (*Purg.* XXXIII.1) as Dante the pilgrim emerges from the holy waters, “remade, even as new plants renewed with new leaves, pure and ready to mount to the stars” (*Purg.* XXXIII. 142-145).

From the *selva oscura* to the *selva antica* the forest like the pilgrim is the same, yet *transformed*. The audience does not leave without feeling the many tense albeit refreshing expressions of this piece. This ‘Rock of Ages’ full of contradiction and renewal reclaims the voice which was lost to the night and teaches it to sing again. As our pilgrim is comforted, purified and renewed, the audience hears a delicate invocation of celestial harmonies. The heavens are here at last.

CHAPTER 3: PARADISO

Paradiso opens in a triumphant proclamation of praise. Unlike previous canticles, the poet provides the audience direct and unfettered music. *Paradiso* is an elaborate hymn, of spiritual order and intricate design. Greek legend has it that a blacksmith hammering in his workshop inspired the study of the musical heavens and what ultimately grew into music theory (Zeigler 18). Our poet's celestial revelation bears no less humble a beginning:

The glory of Him who moves all things penetrates the universe and shines in one part more and in another less. I was in the heaven that receives His light and I saw things which he that descends from it has not the knowledge or the power to tell again; for our intellect, drawing near to its desire, sinks so deep that memory cannot follow it. Nevertheless, so much of the holy kingdom as I was able to treasure in my mind shall now be matter of my song.

O good Apollo, for the last labour make me such a vessel of thy power as thou requirest for the gift of thy loved laurel...

(*Par. I. 1-15*)

What was true on the *Inferno*'s dark slope and on the steep winding incline of *Purgatorio* where the paths were demanding and circuitous, no longer applies. Our poet communicates with direct earnestness the "matter of his song" which will be as much of a challenge for his skills as it will be for our ears. "Intellect," that which discourses in his

mind, Dante the poet tells us, has tenacity far beyond the feeble capabilities of memory, but for the sake of the audience, he will do his best.

The opening canto prepares the audience, not only to listen to the music of the heavens, but to hear the heavens themselves, complex and astounding. *Paradiso* is not for the faint of heart, he offers a disclaimer:

O ye who in a little bark, eager to listen, have followed behind my ship
that singing makes her way, turn back to see your shores again; do not put
forth on the deep, for perhaps, losing me, you would be left bewildered.
The waters I take were never sailed before.

(*Par. II. 1-4*)

Our poet reminds the audience that listening to the music up until this moment may not have required a keen ear, yet in following his music of the heavens, we may be left “bewildered.” The complex musical ideas put forth in *Paradiso* require an intelligent listener, one who has learned the songs on the mountain and can hear the acute manipulation of the elements with an awareness of “the melodies, the rhythms, the harmonies, the tone colors in a more conscious fashion” (Copland 515). The new song requires new ears. Listening is an art; one must learn to hear the exquisite detail and recognize perfection just as a jeweler recognizes the beauty of a gemstone. But that was what the mountain school taught us. Now we are ready to sail the open skies and receive their harmonious marvel. In other words the composer warns, if you are not ready to listen, *turn back* now.

The pilgrim is not exempt from this stern chide either. Beatrice offers him subtle instruction, “open thy mind” and later she bids him to “turn and listen” (*Par.* V. 40; XVIII. 20). Music in the poet’s heavenly realm is best listened to with broadened consciousness, “to lend oneself completely, inevitably” to the complexity of the art (Copland 2808). Listeners must embrace thoroughly the highest plane of listening, the *sheerly musical* plane, relinquishing themselves fully to the composer’s cohesive musical design. This is not an experience, as the poet reminds “for a pilot who would spare himself” (*Par.* XXIII.68-69). *Paradiso* is both like and unlike what we have heard before, and he asks only for our willingness to listen.

As mentioned previously, the Greeks envisioned a musical cosmological structure for the heavens that began, as legend says, from the sound of a blacksmith’s hammer: first sound, then music. Pythagoras, seeking mathematical answers for the higher and lower pitches that the hammer made against the metal, theorized about the music of the celestial bodies and the divine numbers that he believed were a basis for establishing both melody and harmony (Wilson 119). Plato would later expand this idea, defining a perfect music that reflected both “order and proportion”; the planets moving in tandem, accompanied by musical tones, created the ‘music of the spheres’ a sort of “cosmic harmony” (Ciabattoni 3135). From the *Inferno* to the *Paradiso*, our poet incorporates this profound notion, transforming the seed of sound, nourishing it, until it becomes full, flowering music.

As Dante the pilgrim ascends into the celestial cosmos, a spiritual transfiguration of body and mind ensues, enabling him to grasp the structure of this perfect afterlife:

Beatrice stood with her eyes fixed only on the eternal wheels, and on her I fixed mine, withdrawn from above. At her aspect, I was changed within, as was Glaucus when he tasted of the herb that made him one among the other gods in the sea. The passing beyond humanity cannot be set forth in words... Love that rulest the heavens, who with Thy light didst raise me. When the wheel which Thou, being desired, makest eternal held me intent on itself by the harmony Thou dost attune and distribute, so much of the sky seemed then to be kindled with the sun's flame that rain or river never made a lake so broad. The newness of the sound and the great light kindled in me such keenness of desire to know their cause as I had never felt before...

(*Par. I.* 64-84)

In *Purgatorio*, the purifying fire brought a spiritual transformation, however now he is physically “changed” as “Glaucus” who was granted permission to cross worlds and into the sea, he is given new perspective, new senses, new ears (Sinclair 29). When at the beginning of the journey, his sight was impaired and his ears betrayed him, the *Paradiso* can offer what the *Inferno* never could. Seeing *is* hearing and the newness of sound is divine.

With this metamorphosis, the pilgrim has access to the heavenly realm and senses the divine order that “rules the heavens” with “harmony.” The heavenly Love presented in the *Paradiso* is a presiding musical mastermind, “attuning” and “distributing” the

cosmos as a “sweet lyre...which the right hand of Heaven tightens and relaxes” (*Par.* XV. 1-6). *Paradiso* is a celestial concert orchestrated by a divine maestro, *Love*.

Our pilgrim’s mount to the stars is the culmination of what has been a journey of love. Dante the poet musically illustrates that it is love that drives all human action, whether honorable or depraved. On the terraces of *Purgatorio* the penitent sinners purified the various misgivings of love: “love misdirected, love too weak, love too strong” (Shaw 108-117). Dante’s love for Beatrice motivated his journey through the isolating bowels of hell and her loving voice guided him through the purifying fire. It is “Divine Love” that sets all things in motion (*Inf.* I. 39). The *Commedia* is our poet’s love song which finally culminates in *Paradiso*, its final movement.

Dante the pilgrim, attended by Beatrice ascend into the cosmos which radiates in the diverse brightness of ten heavens: the moon, the seven planets, the sun and the fixed stars. The ethereal quality of the composition gives the impression of a placid ocean, as the pilgrim watches the souls lit by the dim reflection of the moon. They emerge as calm reflections in serene waters, glassy and tranquil. A gentle and eager soul identifies herself as Piccarda:

As through smooth and transparent glass, or through limpid and still water
not so deep that the bottom is lost the outlines of our faces return so faint
that a pearl on a white brow does not come less quickly to our eyes, so
many faces I saw, eager to speak... And I directed myself to the shade that
seemed most desirous of speech...

With the other shades there she first smiled a little then answered me with such gladness that she seemed to burn in the first fire of love: ‘Brother, the power of charity quiets our will and makes us will only what we have and thirst for nothing else. Did we desire to be more exalted, our desire would be in discord with His will...Nay, it is the very quality of this blessed state that we keep ourselves within the divine will, so that our wills are themselves made one; therefore our rank form height to height through this kingdom, as to the King who wills us to His will. And in His will is our peace, it is that sea to which all things move, both what it creates and what nature makes...

She spoke thus to me, then began singing, *Ave Maria* and singing vanished, like a weight through deep water. My sight, followed her as long as it was possible...

(*Par.* III.10-130)

Piccarda Donati, sister of Corso Donati--Dante’s great enemy, lived as a nun until “man more used to evil than to good” unwillingly forced her to leave the cloister and marry (*Par.* III.6-7). A sweet and tender girl who fell victim to such cruelty of others, is a conflicting personification of the idea of desire and choice. In Piccarda’s speech the Italian word *voglio* or *will*, in reference to *divine will* is repeated eleven times as she explains lovingly that in the heavens “our wills are themselves made one” and the *will* is bent to God through music.

The hushed seascape and Piccarda's gentle but ardent speech is reminiscent of Francesca in the lustful circle of the *Inferno* (Shaw 261). In *Paradiso*, however, the *sea* is not a wicked tempest of desire, but peaceful as "the power of charity quiets the will." The delicacy of her nature is illuminated with her soft and flowing solo, *Ave Maria*. As Piccarda sings, she withdraws as mysteriously as she appeared, surrendering to the cosmos as one yields his will, like "a weight through deep water."

Just as Casella's solo represented a profound mystery on the shore of the mountain, Piccarda's solo defines the subtle perplexity here. The *Paradiso* is a musical metaphor, harmony is capable when voices are able to yield to one another. The "mingling of sweet sounds" hinted upon at *Purgatorio*'s gate can now be fully realized as humble souls bend in complement of one another, transforming both will and song (*Purg.* IX. 113).

At long last, the celestial choir sings, delivering Music that the audience craves, as the pilgrim approaches the planet of Venus, of *Love*:

And as within a flame a spark is seen, and within a voice a voice is distinguished when one holds the note and the other comes and goes, I saw within that light other lights in circling movement swifter and slower, in the measure, as I believe, of their eternal vision. From a cold cloud winds never descended, visible or not, so swiftly as not to seem hindered and slow to one that had seen these divine lights come to us, leaving the dance first begun among the high Seraphim; and among those that appeared in

front sounded a *Hosanna* such that I have never since been without the desire to hear it again.

(*Par.* VIII.16-30)

The souls are “dancing lights” against the spiraling infinite cosmos as they spin and move towards the pilgrim, singing “Hosanna.”

Dante the poet describes “lights within a light” just as a voice sings “within a voice,” marking an immaculate conception of Music, as the *una voce* of the mountain expands. In this musical idea, a progression from a singular line of music becomes something much more complex. Furthermore, the idea of a “voice within a voice” in Medieval music would have been a relatable metaphor. As multi-voiced music developed, liturgical chant was flourishing with new additions. One of the earliest changes incorporated the inclusion of a vocal part *on top* of an existing chant melody. The lower voice acted as a drone or *cantus firmus* (firm song). The traditional chant acted as the foundation on which the other voices could play. It was a simple change but one that would influence not only the future music of the church, but the court and countryside as well (Crosby 2356). Our poet incorporates the use of music’s relevance: “within a voice a voice is distinguished when one holds the note and the other comes and goes” implies the progressive nature of the music sung by the heavenly flames. Furthermore, the content of the music has progressed as well, moving away from the cry for help or *Miserere* to the recognition of praise for one who has saved, “Hosanna” (Ciabattoni 2297).

The poet continues to illustrate the progression of music and his understanding of these innovative notions that were at the forefront of learning in the late thirteenth century; our pilgrim is awe struck by the sounds of this choir:

And as viol and harp strung with many chords in harmony chime sweetly
for one who does not catch the tune, so from the lights that appeared to me
there a melody gathered through the cross which held me rapt though I did
not follow the hymn.

(*Par.* XIV.118-123)

Voices producing “chords” together, as a “viol” or a “harp” were in the Middle Ages, something of wonder. The development of the harmonic sense is one of the greatest phenomena in musical history. Most people fail to realize that harmony gradually evolved from intellectual conception, with music theorists paving the way. *Organum*, an early form of harmony, emerged the 9th century, although it would have been just starting to flourish in Dante’s lifetime (Copland 914). These early musicians were scientists, experimenting with voices singing separate pitches to create “chords”; they challenged tradition and pushed the boundaries of what music could sound like (Crosby 2438). Harmony wasn’t just something pleasant to the ear...it was musical revolution!

Moreover, the poet’s celestial choir is comprised of “diverse talents” (*Par.* XIII. 72). Heavenly souls appear as bright and shining flames, *dolci in voce*--“sweeter in their voices that shining in their aspect” (*Par.* X. 66). Each voice displays a specific quality indicative of the pleasing choral tone: “loving,” “sweet,” “deep,” “gentle” and even the voices of “children” make up this chorus (*Par.*XVIII.7; XVI. 32; XV. 38; XIV. 35-36;

XXXII.47). The audience listens to the fascinating assortment in the celestial choir of

Paradiso:

Diverse voices make sweet music, so diverse ranks in our life render sweet
harmony among these wheels.

(*Par.* VI.124-126)

The music is sweet, bringing pleasure to the audience and pilgrim as they listen to each
unique voice resplendent in the collective chorus, joined together in song.

In *Paradiso*, the choir appears in the grand concert of a Divine Maestro. The
celestial choir which appears in nearly every canto displays a specific notion of the
measure of time. As the pilgrim approaches the sphere of the sun, the ancient time piece,
he hears a spiritual clockwork:

Then, like a clock that calls us at the hour when the bride of God rises to
sing matins to the Bridegroom that he may love her, when one part draws
or drives another, sounding the chime with notes so sweet that the well-
ordered spirit swells with love, so I saw the glorious wheel move and
render voice to voice with harmony and sweetness that cannot be known
but there where joy becomes eternal.

(*Par.* X. 139-148)

The magnificent clock-wheel chorus, performs at the delight of the “Bridegroom.” The
heavenly souls mark the hours with loving song, as the birds did in the earthly paradise of
Purgatorio. This notion of the “well-ordered spirit” seems familiar to the words of St.
Augustine who wrote, “Music is the science of moving well” stating further that

“whatever moves and keeps harmoniously the measuring of times and intervals can already be said to move well” (Macinnis 215). The heavens and everything therein move accordingly providing pure pleasure and gladness in the constant production of new music.

The heavenly clock renders “voice with voice” in perfect musical conversation and time. An interesting aspect to note about the *Commedia* is that over half of the lines are dialogue that manifest as Master Adam and Sinon of Troy as an argument or in the kind words of Dante’s guide, Virgil (Shaw 223). In *Paradise* exists perfection in discourse. There are no verbal altercations resounding in deceptive tones, only the pure, sweet measure of verse to voice.

Time, an abstract notion in music, is converted to measure. As Medieval polyphony revolutionized music, an increasing number of composers and theorists dedicated their study to the various rhythmical problems that still stifled progression. Finally music gave way and theorists began to “quantify silence and sound” (Crosby 2438). It measures not only the notes produced but the absences therein. As discussed in the paradoxical nature of *Purgatorio*, the time of heaven is a mystery: “time measures its contents, not contents time” (Crosby 2421).

In *Paradiso* the eternal Love *is* time and the clock of souls measures the music within its immeasurable bounds:

And as wheels in the structure of a clock revolve so that, to one watching them, the first seems at rest and the last to fly, so those choirs, dancing severally fast and slow, made me gauge their wealth... I saw one come

forth a fire so joyful that it left none there of greater brightness, and it
wheeled three times round Beatrice with so divine a song...

(*Par.* XXVI. 13-24)

The choirs sing and move as a “clock,” dancing and wheeling about in joy. The mechanical clock was a fairly new invention and by 1300, cities were investing in them. A clock was installed in the city of Caen in 1314 with this inscription: “I give the hours a voice, to make the common folk rejoice” (Crosby 1261). In our poet’s heavenly realm, the hours have a voice and sing with joy. The audience senses the distance that music has advanced from the start of the *Commedia*; the *sanza tempo* of the *Inferno* is but a faint memory.

Purgatorio allowed the penitents to learn the music fit for the heavens, but it also provided measured steps, ingraining in the minds and bodies of the students both pace and tempo. The marching on the mountain now breaks forth into dancing as the “great festival of both song and flame” (*Par.* I. 22-27). One of the fears that may arise in an audience approaching lengthy discussions of joy and bliss, is that it will be tedious or “dull” (Luke 93). However, the music of the *Paradiso*, appears more indicative of a rousing spectacle as opposed to the picture of reverence and awe. A blissful musical celebration begins to emerge:

As, impelled and drawn by increase of happiness, dancers in a round raise
their voices all together and quicken their steps, so at the eager and devout
petition the holy circles showed new joy in their wheeling and in their
wondrous song. Whoso laments that we die here to live above has not seen

there the refreshment from the eternal showers. That One and Two and Three who ever lives and ever reigns in Three and in Two and in One and uncircumscribed and circumscribes all, was sung three times by every one of these spirits in such a strain as would be fit reward for every merit.

(*Par. XIV. 19-29*)

In an act of spontaneous joy, the souls break into dance and song, “quickenning their steps.” It is quite possible that here the poet is describing the *carole*, popularized in Italy between c.1200, a group dance, in which a circle or circles of dancers move in tandem to the sound of their own singing (Mullally 2011). As music progressed, it moved into the urban settings that incorporated such dances as these, which in turn infuriated the church, provoking endless discussion on appropriate meter. It was controversial, but eventually these popular melodies and rhythms “found a way back into the upper voices of church polyphony” (Crosby 2373). These *caroles* performed by both the commonfolk and court, began contagiously influencing music and people alike, dancing in a wheeling fashion and *always* accompanied by singing. The circular, revolving dance described by our poet illustrates divine celebration.

Dante again incorporates his poetics here, in order to indicate the triune quality of the dance taking place. Of the rhythms first allowing in the church was *triple* meter, also known as perfect meter because it could be divided into three, indicating of course, the trinity (Crosby 2421).

When the audience hears this passage spoken aloud, “**One** and **Two** and **Three** who ever lives and ever reigns in **Three** and in **Two** and in **One**” (emphasis added) the

perfect meter in the dance steps of the heavenly round is unmistakable. The audience hears the heavenly souls dance and sing with reckless abandon in celestial jubilee.

Paradiso reconciles the absence of spirituality, bringing about joy in dancing, singing and also in *silence*. All is measured, as mentioned before, the eternal time measures both music and *rest*. All has purpose under the governing of a gracious Love.

As the pilgrim and Beatrice approach Saturn, the last of the seven planets before the heaven of the fixed stars, the frozen isolation and despair that prevailed in the innermost core of the *Inferno* is replaced by flame and contemplation. On Saturn, “the sweet symphony of Paradise is silent” (*Par.* XXI.58-59). This is not unintentional *void* of sound, but rather a fully realized moment of the sublime. On the seventh planet, the pilgrim witnesses those souls abiding in absolute assuredness; just as on the seventh day, the Creator basked in the afterglow of his creation. In this moment, measuring time, distance and space, our poet and pilgrim are both “inside and outside the music at the same moment” reveling in endless possibilities, capabilities and achievements (Copland 542). Music itself transforms from something that is heard, into the culmination of internal and external harmonious experience.

Silent contemplation precedes the renewal of mind, body and spirit. One must be silent and free from distraction, wholly in the moment, sparing nothing, in order to hear the heavenly music that surrounds. As the pilgrim speaks with the contemplatives, free from earthly passions, the righteous indignation of the corruption in the church invokes a tremendous within the souls:

At his voice I saw more little flames descend from step to step, wheeling,
and every turn made them more beautiful. They came about him and
stopped and raised a cry of such volume that nothing here could be likened
to it; nor did I understand it, its thunder so overcame me.

(*Par.* XXIII. 136-142)

In a growing drumroll of thunderous voices that break the silence of contemplation is
startling to the audience and pilgrim who runs to Beatrice for comfort (*Par.* XXII.1-6).

The righteous shout unveils harmonies again, as the audience hears a familiar
hymn, “*Te Deum laudamus*” resounding throughout the fixed stars (*Par.* XXIV. 113). At
the gate of *Purgatorio*, the pilgrim heard this hymn, although faintly. Now the pilgrim
experiences the exaltation, full in triumphant glory.

While still in the heaven of the fixed stars, the pilgrim endures one final
examination of his faith as he encounters a holy light of song and dance which blinds
him:

As one that strains his eyes, trying to see the sun in partial eclipse, and
become sightless such I became before that last fire, while it spoke...

At these words the flaming circle fell silent, together with the sweet
mingled sound that was made by the three-fold breath...

(*Par.* XXV. 118-132)

One final time our pilgrim cannot see and yet for the first time he must depend entirely
on his ear, testing once again the measure of his faith, how far he has come and just what
he has learned. Our pilgrim must step into the unknown with assuredness. True virtue, the

flame explains, is led by faith *unseen* and not by sight (*Zondervan NIV Bible*, 2 Cor. 5:7).

“Hope” the poet tells us, “is a sure expectation of future glory” (*Par. XXV. 67-68*).

The breathy nature of this entire canto as each flame speaks or rather, “breathes forth” is reminiscent of the ancient Latin motto: ‘*Dum Spiro spero*’ or ‘while I breathe, I hope’ indicating the very intrinsic quality of hope to humanity (*Par. XXV. 82*). The three-fold breath indicates, not only the triune Judeo-Christian God, but the cherished spiritual relationship that voices can share through song. Here, in the realm of perfect music, there is a shared breathing, a pulse, a connection. Just as in the spiritual embrace with Casella on the shore, there is a divine intimacy, intertwining sound and heart and breath, creating music beyond the capability of the individual.

Spiritual sight is learning to trust in the expectation of hope. In this moment of hopeful breathing our pilgrim’s sightless fears vanish, in him a new confidence is born. He rests in his own moment of silent contemplation:

As soon as I was silent, a strain of sweetest song resounded through the heaven, and my Lady sang with the rest, ‘*Holy, holy, holy!*’ And as sleep is broken by a piercing light...thus Beatrice chased every mote from my eyes with the radiance of her own which shone more than a thousand miles, so that I saw better than before.

(*Par. XXVI. 67-79*)

Through song the pilgrim’s eyesight is restored and he is able to see “better than before.”

Our poet’s earlier appeal to Apollo, the god of poetry, music and medicine, was granted.

In this divine moment of things invisible to the eye, song conquered fear and restored sight.

As the audience relishes the final hymns of the *Paradiso*, the pilgrim prepares to return to humanity, a new man:

Now my speech will come more short even of what I can remember that an infant's who bathes his tongue at the breast. Not that the living light at which I gazed had more than a single aspect for it is ever the same as it was before--, but by my sight gaining strength as I looked, the one sole appearance, I myself changing, was for me, transformed...

O how scant is speech and how feeble to my conception!...

Here power failed the high phantasy; but now my desire and will, like a wheel that spins with even motion, were revolved by the Love that moves the sun and other stars.

(*Par.* XXXIII. 106-145)

The imagery is of an *infant* but, unlike Nimrod, babbling into the void, our pilgrim is new, *transformed*, speechless. He is new in the same likeness of purity and innocence that was birthed in the Earthly Paradise, with its fresh, fertile ground of creative potential. Music has expressed the inexpressible through its language of the Spirit and this brief, engaging moment of sight and song brings clarity and strength. With a sweet, new voice our pilgrim and poet become one again in desire and will, ready to "arise and conquer" (*Par.* XIV. 125).

CONCLUSION

In the musical metaphor of the *Commedia*, Dante presents a mysterious and perplexing relationship at work. Nevertheless, it is a relationship in which every human takes part. The act of singing, of making music, is as ancient as the human voice itself. Song is the venerable language of the heart, older and more obscure than entertainment or industry. It is a divine relationship that strengthens the spirit, fostering human capability. Plato recognized that music was “a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul,” wielding power and influence when words fail (Frank 234). Illuminating hidden caverns of the mind and unlocking the core of our humanity, music is our memory, our hope, our joy, our desire.

In further illustration of this point, Karl Paulnack, the Director of the Music Division of the Boston Conservatory, delivers a provoking and inspiring welcome address to incoming students on the school’s webpage. He shares about performing Aaron Copland’s *Sonata*, written in 1941 in honor of a young pilot who died in the war. Despite Paulnack’s many prestigious credits, he considers this informal concert at a Midwestern nursing home his most important work. During the performance, an elderly gentleman, who had no previous knowledge of the piece, was exceedingly moved. Later, the man shared with Paulnack that he was a pilot in WWII and had witnessed a friend gunned down in aerial combat, his parachute falling into the sea, and that the music had somehow uncovered this memory. Paulnack says of this moment:

“For me to play for this old soldier and help him connect somehow, with Aaron Copland, and to connect their memories of their lost friends, to help him remember and mourn his friend, this is my work. This is why music matters...”

(*‘Karl Paulnack Welcome Address’*)

Many of us have forgotten why music matters. Perhaps we have just stopped listening. We find entertainment in music, but as Copland says, most listeners abuse the sensory plane, listening to absorb or lose themselves, but missing the true beauty that music offers (449). For most, it is no longer about insight, humility, connection or communication. It is no longer inextricably linked with the inner workings of the universe. We have forgotten its mystery. Where long ago its sweetness resonated, revealing desire, confronting fear and restoring virtue, connecting and unifying listener, interpreter and composer, it now echoes only something that was. For fear of complexity, hardship or vulnerability, both musicians and listeners have settled for sound. But many of us ache to hear true melody in a way that somehow illuminates the music of a seven hundred year old canzone.

In spite of this, Dante encourages his audience not to stop listening:

You men who cannot perceive the meaning of this canzone, do not therefore reject it; rather consider its beauty, which is great by virtue of its composition, which is the concern of grammarians, by virtue of the order of its discourse, which is the concern of the rhetoricians and by virtue of

the rhythm of its parts, which is the concern of the musicians. These things can be perceived within it as beautiful by anyone who looks closely.

(*Convivio*, Bk. 2, Ch.6)

Even if we do not understand the meaning, he urges us not to reject the song. *Anyone*, Dante tells us, can perceive the beauty of composition, discourse and rhythm if we are open and willing.

Similarly, Copland does not give up hope that we will understand our role as listeners in the relationship of music, to assume our rightful position and engage with reckless abandon:

Take seriously your responsibility as a listener. You need be no exception, no matter how modest your pretensions as a listener may be. Since it is our combined reaction as listeners that most profoundly influence both the art of the composition and interpretation, it may truthfully be said that the future of music is in our hands. Music can only really be alive when there are listeners who are really alive. To listen intently, to listen consciously, to listen with one's whole intelligence is the least we can do in the furtherance of an art that is one of the glories of mankind.

(Copland 2825)

“No matter how modest,” he requests our whole-hearted participation. As the *Commedia* illustrates, music is not an abusive entity that preys upon our weakness, but rather an open invitation to creatively collaborate soul and song. We must “listen consciously,” intelligently, not to dissect and compartmentalize, but in order to resurrect true artistry.

In our capable ears, Dante's music is as Copland's: beautiful and eternal. As British poet Stephen Spender wrote:

I think continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light, where the hours are suns,
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the Spirit, clothed from head to foot in song.

(Turkovich, '*Voices Compassion Education*')

Dante's composition tells of the Spirit, clothed in song, bridging humanity and divinity, travelling "through corridors of light, where the hours are suns, endless and singing."

Dante is as Spender describes, among "those who were truly great." However, it is imperative that we understand his humanity. In every composition we must remember that we are "listening to a man, to a particular individual, with his own special personality" (Copland 2757). Throughout the *Commedia*, in every character, not merely the pilgrim, we are hearing the voice of Dante Alighieri: who loved Beatrice, who devoted himself to Florence, who died in exile. We hear him in the lonely desperation of hell, in the hopeful transformation of the mountain and in the joyful wonder of heaven:

The wandering *cry* for mercy in the wilderness...

The agonizing *wail* of despair...

The sweet *song* of friendship...

The hopeful *hymn* of liberation...

The righteous *shout* that breaks the silence...

The joyful *dance* of delight...

The triune *breath* unifying style, content and progress...

The diverse choir of the *Commedia* is the voice of *one* composer, singing urgently and honestly, resonating deep within the human soul and awakening the kingdom of creativity within. His song enriches and uplifts the weak voice within each willing vessel and humbly requests of it, *music*.

In joining him, we honor Dante as a composer, immortalizing him, praising his ambition and accomplishment. His life's sacrifice was the salvation of the Italian people, delivered through song, which they would not then understand, but through tireless singing would become their flourishing identity. The audience was transformed then as it continues to be today by "a dangerous, passionate, unorthodox, questioning voice which compels attention through poetry" (Shaw 96-97). His voice, the holy instrument releasing the captives of blind ignorance and announcing a new way, passionately and unwaveringly beckoned all to follow. The humble craftsman is risen: blameless, enduring and *divine*.

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