

PARADISO

CANTO I

The glory of Him who moves all things
pervades the universe and shines
in one part more and in another less. 3

I was in that heaven which receives
more of His light. He who comes down from there
can neither know nor tell what he has seen, 6
for, drawing near to its desire,
so deeply is our intellect immersed
that memory cannot follow after it. 9

Nevertheless, as much of the holy kingdom
as I could store as treasure in my mind
shall now become the subject of my song. 12

O good Apollo, for this last labor
make me a vessel worthy
of the gift of your beloved laurel. 15

Up to this point, one peak of Mount Parnassus
has been enough, but now I need them both
in order to confront the struggle that awaits. 18

Enter my breast and breathe in me
as when you drew out Marsyas,
out from the sheathing of his limbs. 21

O holy Power, if you but lend me of yourself
enough that I may show the merest shadow
of the blessed kingdom stamped within my mind, 24
you shall find me at the foot of your beloved tree,
crowning myself with the very leaves
of which my theme and you will make me worthy. 27

So rarely, father, are they gathered
to mark the triumph of a Caesar or a poet --
fault and shame of human wishes -- 30
that anyone's even longing for them,
those leaves on the Peneian bough, should make
the joyous Delphic god give birth to joy. 33

Great fire leaps from the smallest spark.
Perhaps, in my wake, prayer will be shaped
with better words that Cyrrha may respond. 36

The lamp of the world rises on us mortals
at different points. But, by the one that joins
four circles with three crossings, it comes forth 39
on a better course and in conjunction
with a better sign. Then it tempers and imprints
the wax of the world more to its own fashion. 42

Its rising near that point had brought out morning there
and evening here, and that hemisphere
was arrayed in light, this one in darkness, 45
when I saw that Beatrice had turned toward her left
and now was staring at the sun --
never had eagle so fixed his gaze on it. 48

And, as a second ray will issue from the first
and rise again up to its source,
even as a pilgrim longs to go back home, 51
so her gaze, pouring through my eyes
on my imagination, made itself my own, and I,
against our practice, set my eyes upon the sun. 54

Much that our powers here cannot sustain is there
allowed by virtue of the nature of the place
created as the dwelling fit for man. 57

I could not bear it long, yet not so brief a time
as not to see it sparking everywhere,
like liquid iron flowing from the fire. 60

Suddenly it seemed a day was added to that day,
as if the One who has the power
had adorned the heavens with a second sun. 63

Beatrice had fixed her eyes
upon the eternal wheels and I now fixed
my sight on her, withdrawing it from above. 66

As I gazed on her, I was changed within,
as Glaucus was on tasting of the grass
that made him consort of the gods in the sea. 69

To soar beyond the human cannot be described
in words. Let the example be enough to one
for whom grace holds this experience in store. 72

Whether I was there in that part only which you
 created last is known to you alone, O Love who rule
 the heavens and drew me up there with your light. 75

When the heavens you made eternal,
 wheeling in desire, caught my attention
 with the harmony you temper and attune, 78
 then so much of the sky seemed set on fire
 by the flaming sun that neither rain nor river
 ever fed a lake so vast. 81

The newness of the sound and the bright light
 lit in me such keen desire to know their cause
 as I had never with such sharpness felt before. 84

And she, who knew me as I knew myself,
 to calm my agitated mind
 before I even had begun to speak, parted her lips 87
 and said: 'You make yourself dull-witted
 with false notions, so that you cannot see
 what you would understand, had you but cast them off. 90

'You are not still on earth, as you believe.
 Indeed, lightning darting from its source
 never sped as fast as you return to yours.' 93

If I was stripped of my earlier confusion
 by her brief and smiling words,
 I was the more entangled in new doubt 96
 and said: 'I was content to be released
 from my amazement, but now I am amazed
 that I can glide through these light bodies.' 99

Then she, having sighed with pity,
 bent her eyes on me with just that look
 a mother casts on her delirious child, 102
 and said: 'All things created have an order
 in themselves, and this begets the form
 that lets the universe resemble God. 105

'Here the higher creatures see the imprint
 of the eternal Worth, the end
 for which that pattern was itself set forth. 108

'In that order, all natures have their bent
 according to their different destinies,
 whether nearer to their source or farther from it. 111

'They move, therefore, toward different harbors
upon the vastness of the sea of being,
each imbued with instinct that impels it on its course. 114

'This instinct carries fire toward the moon,
this is the moving force in mortal hearts,
this binds the earth to earth and makes it one. 117

'This bow impels not just created things
that lack intelligence, but also those
that have both intellect and love. 120

'Providence, which regulates all this,
makes with its light forever calm the heaven
that contains the one that whirls with greatest speed, 123

'and there now, as to a place appointed,
the power of that bowstring bears us,
aimed, as is all it shoots, at a joyful target. 126

'It is true that as a work will often fail
to correspond to its intended form, its matter
deaf and unresponsive to the craftsman's plan, 129

'so sometimes a creature, having the capacity
to swerve, will, thus impelled, head off another way,
in deviation from the better course 132

'and, just as sometimes we see fire
falling from a cloud, just so the primal impulse,
diverted by false pleasure, turns it toward earth. 135

'If I am correct, you should no more wonder
at your rising than at a stream's descent
from a mountain's peak down to its foot. 138

'It would be as astounding if you, set free
from every hindrance, had remained below,
as if on earth a living flame held still.' 141

Then she turned her face up to the heavens. 142