

PARADISO

CANTO III

That sun which first made warm my breast with love
had now disclosed, by proof and refutation,
the sweet and lovely features of the truth. 3

To confess myself corrected and convinced
I raised my head no higher
than saying so required, 6

but then appeared a sight
which so drew my attention
that my confession quickly slipped from mind. 9

As through clear, transparent glass
or through still and limpid water,
not so deep that its bed is lost from view, 12

the outlines of our faces are returned
so faint a pearl on a pallid forehead
comes no less clearly to our eyes, 15

I saw many such faces eager to speak,
at which I fell into the error opposite to that
which inflamed a man to love a fountain. 18

As soon as I became aware of them,
believing them to be reflections,
I turned around to see from whom they came 21

and, seeing nothing, I returned my gaze
to the light of my sweet guide,
whose holy eyes were glowing as she smiled. 24

'Be not surprised,' she said, 'if I am smiling
at your childish thoughts, since they as yet trust not
their steps to truth but turn you back, 27

'as is their custom, toward emptiness.
These are real beings that you see,
assigned this place for failing in their vows. 30

'Therefore speak with them, listen, and believe,
for the true light that brings them peace
does not allow their steps to stray.' 33

And, addressing myself to the shade
that seemed most keen to speak, I began,
like a man muddled by excessive zeal: 36

'O spirit made for bliss, who in the beams
of life eternal savor the sweetness
that, untasted, cannot be understood, 39

'I shall take it as a kindness if you share with me
your name and lot, and the lot of others here.'
Then she, eager and with smiling eyes: 42

'Our love shuts not its doors against just will,
any more than does the love of God, who wills
that all His court be like Himself. 45

'In the world I was a virgin sister.
If you search your memory,
my having grown more fair will not conceal my name 48

'and you will recognize me as Piccarda,
placed here among these other blessed souls,
and blessed am I in the slowest of these spheres. 51

'Our affections, which are inflamed
only when they please the Holy Spirit,
take joy in their adherence to His plan, 54

'and this our lot, which seems so very low,
is given us because of vows neglected
and, in part, no longer valid.' 57

Then I said to her: 'From your transfigured faces
shines forth a divinity I do not know,
and it transforms the images I can recall. 60

'That is why my memory worked so slowly,
but now what you have said has helped me
and I more readily recall your features. 63

'But tell me, do you, who are here content,
desire to achieve a higher place, where you
might see still more and make yourselves more dear?' 66

Along with the other shades, she smiled,
then answered me with so much gladness
she seemed alight with love's first fire: 69

'Brother, the power of love subdues our will
so that we long for only what we have
and thirst for nothing else. 72

'If we desired to be more exalted,
 our desires would be discordant
 with His will, which assigns us to this place. 75

'That, as you will see, would not befit these circles
 if to be ruled by love is here required
 and if you consider well the nature of that love. 78

'No, it is the very essence of this blessed state
 that we remain within the will of God,
 so that our wills combine in unity. 81

'Therefore our rank, from height to height,
 throughout this kingdom pleases all the kingdom,
 as it delights the King who wills us to His will. 84

'And in His will is our peace.
 It is to that sea all things move,
 both what His will creates and that which nature makes.' 87

Then it was clear to me that everywhere in heaven
 is Paradise, even if the grace of the highest Good
 does not rain down in equal measure. 90

But, as happens, when one food may satisfy
 while still we crave another, we give thanks
 for the one we have, while asking for the other, 93

so did I with both word and gesture,
 to learn from her about the web through which
 she had not drawn her shuttle to completion. 96

'Perfect life and high desert,' she said to me,
 'set in a higher sphere a lady by whose rule
 down in your world they take the robe and veil 99

'so that till death they wake and sleep
 in union with that Bridegroom who accepts each vow
 that love makes fitting for His pleasure. 102

'To follow her, still young, I fled the world
 and, cloaking myself in her habit,
 I promised to follow the rule of her order. 105

'Then men more used to evil than to good
 carried me off, away from the sweet cloister.
 God knows what after that my life became. 108

'And this other splendor who appears to you
 upon my right, who blazes up
 with all the brightness of this sphere: 111

'What I told of myself applies to her as well.
She was a sister and, like me, she had the shadow
of the holy veil torn from her head. 114

'But, even after she was cast into the world
against her will and against all proper custom,
the veil was never loosened from her heart. 117

'This is the light of the great Constance,
who bore to the second blast of Swabia
the third and final emperor.' 120

Thus she spoke to me, and then began to sing
Ave Maria, and, still singing, vanished,
like something heavy through deep water. 123

My eyes, which watched her as long as they could,
turned, once she was lost to view,
to the goal of their greater desire 126
and were wholly bent on Beatrice.

But she so blazed upon my sight
at first my gaze could not sustain her light 129
and that delayed my plying her with questions. 130