

PARADISO

CANTO IV

Between two foods, equally near at hand and tempting,
left free to choose, a man would die of hunger
before he could bring either to his teeth -- 3
so would a lamb stand still, caught between the cravings
of two ferocious wolves, in equal fear of both,
so would a hound, stock-still between two does: 6
just so, if I kept silent, urged in equal measure
by my doubts, I merit neither praise nor blame,
since my silence was forced, not freely chosen. 9
I kept silent, but my longing
and my questions all were painted on my face
more ardently than words could have expressed. 12
Beatrice did what Daniel did
when he freed Nebuchadnezzar from his wrath,
which had made him cruel unjustly, 15
by her words: 'It is clear to me you feel the pull
of two desires, so that your divided craving
binds itself so tight it can't breathe out. 18
'You reason: "If the will does not even waver
in devotion to the good, how can the violence
of another reduce my measure of reward?" 21
'Still another cause for your perplexity
is that you think, in accord with Plato's teaching,
the souls return to their own stars. 24
'These are the questions that weigh equally
upon your will. First I shall deal
with the one that has more venom in it. 27
'Not the Seraph that most ingods himself,
not Moses, Samuel, or whichever John you please --
none of these, I say, not even Mary, 30
'have their seats in another heaven
than do these spirits you have just now seen,
nor does their bliss last fewer years or more. 33

'No, all adorn the highest circle --
but they enjoy sweet life in differing measure
as they feel less or more of God's eternal breath. 36

'Those souls put themselves on view here
not because they are allotted to this sphere
but as sign of less exalted rank in Heaven. 39

'It is necessary thus to address your faculties,
since only in perceiving through the senses can they grasp
that which they then make fit for intellect. 42

'For this reason Scripture condescends
to your capacity when it attributes hands and feet
to God, but has another meaning, 45

'and for your sake Holy Church portrays
Gabriel and Michael with the faces of men
and that other angel who made Tobit well again. 48

'What Timaeus has to say about the souls
does not resemble what one here observes
because he seems to take his words for facts. 51

'He claims the soul returns to its own star,
from which he thinks that it was drawn
when nature gave it bodily form. 54

'But perhaps his meaning differs
from what his words seem to express
and may have an intention not lightly mocked. 57

'If he intends to assign to these wheels
the honor of their influence and the blame,
then his shaft may strike a certain truth. 60

'This principle, wrongly understood, once misled
nearly all the world so that it went astray
and named stars Jupiter, Mercury, and Mars. 63

'The other doubt that troubles you
contains less venom because its harm
could not lead you away from me. 66

'For divine justice to appear unjust
in mortal eyes is evidence of faith,
not of heretical iniquity. 69

'Since your human understanding is quite able
to penetrate this truth,
I shall content you as you wish. 72

'Even if violence is done when the one who bears it
in no way consents to the one who deals it out,
these souls were not excused on that account. 75

'For the will, except by its own willing, is not spent,
but does as by its nature fire does in flame,
though violence may force it down one thousand times. 78

'Thus, if it stays bent, whether much or little,
it then accepts that force, as indeed did these,
since they could have retreated to their holy place. 81

'Had their will remained unbroken,
as did the will that fastened Lawrence to the grate
and which made Mucius harsh to his own hand, 84

'then, once freed, it would have drawn them back
along the path from which they had been dragged.
But will so firm is all too rare. 87

'And these words, if you have correctly understood them,
have destroyed an argument
that would have often troubled you again. 90

'But now before your eyes you find
another obstacle, so vast that your attempt
to overcome it on your own would leave you spent. 93

'Assuredly I have set it firmly in your mind
that a soul in bliss could never tell a lie,
since it is always near the primal Truth. 96

'But then you may have heard Piccarda say
that Constance kept her true love for the veil,
so that in this she seems to contradict me. 99

'Many times, brother, has it occurred
that, if unwillingly, to escape from harm,
one does a thing that had better not been done, 102

'as Alcmaeon, exhorted by his father,
slew his own mother: so as not to fail
in piety, he steeled himself to pity. 105

'At this point, I would ask you to reflect,
the threat of violence so mingles with the will
that these offenses cannot be excused. 108

'An absolute will consents not to the wrong,
but the will *does* consent to the extent it fears,
if it draws back, to fall into still greater harm. 111

'Piccarda, thus, in that which she affirms, speaks of the absolute will, while I refer to the other, so that we both maintain a truth.'	114
Such was the rippling of the holy stream, issuing from the source from which all truth derives, that put each one of my desires at peace.	117
'O belovèd of the first Lover,' I said then, 'divine creature whose speech so floods and scalds me that I am more and more alive,	120
'not all the depth of my affection is enough to requite You grace for grace. But may He who sees, and has the power, reward You.	123
'I now see clearly that our intellect cannot be satisfied until that truth enlighten it beyond whose boundary no further truth extends.	126
'In that truth, like a wild beast in its den, it rests once it has made its way there -- and it can do that, or else its every wish would be in vain.	129
'Like a shoot, doubt springs from the root of truth, and its nature urges us toward the summit, from ridge to ridge.	132
'It is this, lady, that invites and assures me to ask You, with reverence, about another truth that still remains obscure to me.	135
'I would like to know if one can satisfy your court with such other works for vows left unfulfilled that in your scale their weight would not be scant.'	138
Beatrice looked at me with eyes so full of the radiance of love and so divine that, overcome, my power of sight faded and fled,	141
and, eyes cast down, I almost lost my senses.	142