

PARADISO

CANTO VI

'Once Constantine reversed the eagle's flight,
counter to the course of heaven it had followed
behind that ancient who took Lavinia to wife, 3
'for two hundred years and more the bird of God
remained at Europe's borders,
near the mountains from which it first came forth. 6
'There it ruled the world beneath the shadow
of its sacred wings, passing from hand to hand
and, changing in this way, at last came into mine. 9
'Caesar I was and am Justinian,
who, by will of the Primal Love I feel,
pruned from the laws what was superfluous and vain. 12
'Before I had set my mind to that hard task
I believed Christ had but a single nature,
and not a second, and was content in that belief. 15
'But the blessèd Agapetus,
the most exalted of our shepherds,
brought me to the true faith with his words. 18
'I believed him. What he held by faith
I now see just as clearly as you understand
that any contradiction is both false and true. 21
'As soon as my footsteps moved at the Church's side,
it pleased God, in His grace, to grant me inspiration
in the noble task to which I wholly gave myself, 24
'entrusting my weapons to Belisarius,
with whom Heaven's right hand was so conjoined
it was a sign for me to give them up. 27
'Here, then, ends my reply to your first question,
but its nature still constrains me
to follow up with something further 30
'so that you may consider if with reason some rebel
against that sacred standard, both those opposed
and those who take it as their own. 33

'Consider how much valor has made it worthy
of reverence, beginning with the hour
when Pallas gave his life to give it sway. 36

'You know it made its home in Alba
for three hundred years and more until, at last,
again for its sake, three made war on three. 39

'And you know what it accomplished under seven kings,
from the wrongs done Sabine women to Lucretia's woes,
conquering the nearby people all around. 42

'You know what it accomplished when it was held aloft
by the noble Romans against Brennus, against Pyrrhus,
against the other kingdoms and republics, 45

'so that Torquatus, Quintius -- named
for his unkempt locks -- the Decii, the Fabii:
all achieved the fame that I am glad to keep. 48

'It brought the pride of Arabs low
when they followed Hannibal along the Alpine crags
from which, O river Po, you fall. 51

'Under it triumphed youthful Scipio and Pompey,
and to that hill beneath which you were born
it seemed indeed a bitter sight. 54

'Then, as the time approached when Heaven willed
to bring the world to its own state of peace,
Caesar, by the will of Rome, laid hold on it. 57

'And what it accomplished, from the Var to the Rhine,
the Isère and the Loire and the Seine beheld,
as did all the valleys that supply the Rhone. 60

'What it accomplished when it issued from Ravenna
and leapt the Rubicon was such a flight
that neither tongue nor pen could follow it. 63

'Toward Spain it wheeled in arms,
then toward Durazzo, and smote Pharsalia,
thus bringing grief to the tepid waters of the Nile. 66

'Antandros and the Simois, where it had set out,
it saw again, and the place where Hector lies.
Then it roused itself -- at Ptolemy's expense. 69

'From there, like lightning, it fell on Juba,
then turned toward the region to your west,
where it heard the sound of Pompey's trumpet. 72

'For what it wrought with the one who bore it next Brutus and Cassius bark in Hell, and both Modena and Perugia were aggrieved.	75
'Wretched Cleopatra still weeps because of it. She, fleeing before its advancing front, took from the asp her quick and baleful death.	78
'With him it raced to the shore of the Red Sea. With him it brought the world such peace that the doors of Janus's shrine were locked.	81
'But what the standard that promotes my speech had done before and had yet to do in the mortal realm where it holds sway	84
'comes to seem both small and dim if we observe it, with clear eyes and pure affection, when it was held in the third Caesar's hand.	87
'For the living justice that inspires me allowed it, in the hand of him of whom I speak, the glory of the vengeance for His wrath.	90
'Now must you marvel at what I unfold: Afterwards it raced with Titus, doing vengeance upon the vengeance for the ancient sin.	93
'Then, beneath its wings, when Lombard tooth bit Holy Church, Charlemagne, in victory, gave her comfort.	96
'Now you may judge such men as I accused before and consider their offenses, the very cause of all your ills.	99
'One sets against the universal standard yellow lilies, while the other claims it for a party, so that it's hard to see which one offends the more.	102
'Let the Ghibellines ply them, ply their tricks beneath another standard, for he follows this one poorly who severs it from justice.	105
'And let not this new Charles strive to fell it with his Guelphs, but let him fear its claws, which have ripped the hides from greater lions.	108
'Many a time have children wept for the father's sin, and let him not think that God will change His ensign for those lilies.	111

'This little star is ornamented with righteous spirits, those whose deeds were done for the honor and the glory that would follow.	114
'When such errant desires arise down there, then the rays of the one true love must rise with less intensity.	117
'But noting how our merit equals our reward is part of our happiness, because we see them being neither less nor more.	120
'So much does living justice sweeten our affection we cannot ever then take on the warp of wickedness.	123
'Differing voices make sweet music. Just so our differing ranks in this our life create sweet harmony among these wheels.	126
'Within this very pearl shines the shining light of Romeo, whose great and noble work was poorly paid.	129
'But those of Provence who schemed against him have not had the last laugh -- he takes an evil road to whom another's good deed seems a wrong.	132
'Raymond Berenger had four daughters, each of them a queen, and Romeo, a man of little standing and a stranger, made that happen.	135
'And when malicious tongues moved Raymond to go over accounts with this just man, who had rendered him seven plus five for ten,	138
'Romeo left there, poor in his old age. And, if the world knew the heart he had within when, crust by crust, he begged his bread,	141
much as it praises him, it would praise him more.'	142