

# PARADISO

## CANTO VIII

To its own cost, there was a time the world believed  
that the fair Cyprian beamed rays of maddened love,  
revolving in the wheel of the third epicycle, 3  
so that the ancient peoples in their ancient error  
not only did her honor  
with sacrifice and votive cr 6  
but honored Dione, and Cupid too,  
one as her mother, the other as her son,  
and told how once he sat in Dido's lap. 9  
And from her with whom I here begin they took  
the name of the star that is wooed by the sun,  
now at her nape, now at her brow. 12  
I had not been aware of rising to that star,  
but was assured of being in it  
when I observed my lady turn more beautiful. 15  
And, as one sees a spark within a flame  
or hears, within a song, a second voice,  
holding its note while the other comes and goes, 18  
so I saw within that light still other lights,  
swifter and slower in their circling motions,  
it seemed in measure to their inner sight. 21  
Winds racing down from a cold cloud,  
in their swift motion, whether visible or not,  
would seem impeded, slow, 24  
to one who had seen these heavenly lights  
come toward us, pausing in the dance  
begun among the lofty Seraphim. 27  
And from among the closest that appeared  
rang out *Hosanna* so that ever since  
I have not been without the wish to hear it. 30  
Then one, alone, drew nearer and began:  
'All of us desire to bring you pleasure  
so that you may in turn delight in us. 33

'In one orbit we revolve with these celestial princes --  
in one circle, with one circling, and with a single thirst --  
to whom, from the world, you addressed these words: 36

"You who, by understanding, move the third heaven."  
We are filled with love but, to give you pleasure,  
a little respite will be no less sweet to us.' 39

After I had raised my reverent eyes  
to my lady and she had made them glad  
and made them sure of her consent, 42

I turned them back to the light that had made  
such a promise, and 'Oh, who are you?'  
I asked, my voice expressing great affection. 45

I watched the light grow larger  
and more luminescent as I spoke  
with new joy added to its joys! 48

Thus changed, it said to me: 'The world kept me  
but a little while below, and, had that time been longer,  
much evil that shall be would not have been. 51

'It is my happiness that hides me from you,  
as it enfolds and hides me in its shining rays,  
like the creature that is sheathed in its own silk. 54

'You loved me well, and with good reason.  
Had I remained below, to you I would have shown  
much more than the first leaves of my affection. 57

'The left bank that is moistened by the Rhone  
once it mingles waters with the Sorgue  
awaited me as sovereign at a time to come, 60

'as did Ausonia's horn, from where it borders Bari,  
Gaeta, and Catona, to the place  
where the Tronto and the Verde flow into the sea. 63

'On my brow already shone the crown  
of the country furrowed by the Danube  
once it leaves behind its German banks. 66

'And fair Trinacria, overcast and murky  
between Pachynus and Pelorus,  
above the bay most vexed by the Sirocco, 69

'darkened not by Typhon but by rising sulphur --  
would still have waited for its kings,  
born through me of Charles and Rudolph, 72

'had not bad governance, which ever grieves the hearts  
of subject peoples, impelled Palermo  
to cry out, "Kill them, kill!" 75

'And if my brother but foresaw this  
he would shun the greedy poverty of Catalonia  
so that it not afflict him. 78

'For truly there is need that he or someone else  
should look to it, lest on his overloaded bark  
be laid a load of even greater weight. 81

'His stingy nature, though he came from worthy stock,  
would require officials who do not set their hearts  
on filling up their coffers.' 84

'Since I sense that the deep joy  
your words have filled me with, my lord,  
is seen by you as clearly as it's seen by me 87

'there where every good begins and ends,  
my joy is greater. And I also hold it dear  
that you discern this as you gaze on God. 90

'You have made me glad, now bring me light,  
for, listening to your words, I am confused:  
How from sweet seed may come a bitter fruit?' 93

Thus I to him, and he: 'If I can prove a truth to you,  
then you will have before your eyes  
an answer to the question on which you turn your back. 96

'The Good, which revolves and gladdens  
all the realm you now are climbing,  
puts its plan to work through these great bodies. 99

'Not only are the natures of the souls foreseen  
within the Mind that in Itself is perfect,  
but, along with their natures, their well-being, 102

'and thus whatsoever this bow shoots  
falls predisposed to a determined end,  
as a shaft directed to its target. 105

'Were this not so, the heavens you traverse  
would engender such effects  
as would not seem crafted but chaotic, 108

'and such cannot be, unless the intellects that impel  
the spheres here were defective and defective, too,  
the primal Intellect, for failing to perfect them. 111

'Would you like to have this truth made clearer?'  
And I: 'No, for I understand it cannot be  
that nature should weary in her necessary chores.' 114

And he continued: 'Now tell me, would it be worse  
for man on earth if he were not a social being?'  
'Yes,' I agreed, 'and here I ask no proof.' 117

'And can he be such if men down there on earth  
live not in different ways for different tasks?  
Not if your master is correct in this.' 120

Thus he brought his thesis to its point  
and then concluded, 'The roots of your activities,  
therefore, are necessarily diverse: 123

'Thus one is born Solon and another Xerxes,  
one Melchizedek, another one the man  
who flew up through the air and lost his son.' 126

'Circling nature, which sets its seal  
on mortal wax, plies its craft with skill,  
but does not distinguish one house from another. 129

'Thus it happens that Esau differs even in the seed  
from Jacob, and Quirinus is born  
of so rude a father he is ascribed to Mars. 132

'Nature, once begotten, would always follow  
a course like that of its begetters  
if Divine Providence did not intervene. 135

'Now what was behind you is before you.  
But that you may know how much it is you please me,  
I want you to wear this corollary as your cloak. 138

'Always, if nature meets a fate  
unsuited to it, like any kind of seed  
out of its native soil, it comes to a bad end, 141

'and if the world below paid more attention  
to the foundation nature lays  
and built on that, it would be peopled well. 144

'But no, you force into religion one born  
to wear the sword, and make a king  
of one more fit for sermons, 147

so that your path departs from the true way.' 148