

PARADISO

CANTO XI

O foolish cares of mortals, how flawed
are all the arguments that make you flap
your wings in downward flight_ 3

One pursued the law, one the Hippocratic
Aphorisms, while yet another sought
the priesthood, and another, rule by force or fraud, 6

one was set on plunder, one on the public weal,
one wearied himself in the toils of flesh
and its delights, another gave himself to idleness, 9

while I, set free from all these things,
was, high in heaven with Beatrice,
thus gloriously received. 12

When each flame had returned to the same point
on the circle where it had stood before,
it stopped, like a candle on its scone, 15

and now the light that had already spoken
from deep within began again to speak,
smiling and shining still more bright: 18

'Even as I reflect its radiant beams, so,
gazing into the Eternal Light, I grasp
your thoughts and the source of their beginnings. 21

'You are in doubt and would have me restate
my words, to make them clear and plain,
matching the level of your understanding, 24

'as when I said, "Where sheep are fattened,"
as well as, "Nor was there ever born another."
And here one needs to make a clear distinction. 27

'The providence that rules the world
with such deep wisdom that any God-created eye
must fail before it reaches to the very depth -- 30

'so that the bride of Him who, crying out
in a loud voice, espoused her with His sacred blood,
should go in joy to her beloved 33

'sure of herself and now to Him more faithful --
ordained in her behalf two princes,
one on this side, one on that, to serve as guides. 36

'One was all seraphic in his ardor,
the other, by his wisdom, was on earth
resplendent with cherubic light. 39

'I shall speak of one, since praising one,
whichever one we choose, is to speak of both,
for they labored to a single end. 42

'Between the Topino and the waters that descend
down from the hilltop chosen by the blessèd Ubaldo
there hangs a fertile slope from one high peak 45

'that makes Perugia feel both heat and cold
at Porta Sole, while behind its other flank
Gualdo and Nocera mourn their heavy yoke. 48

'From this slope, where it interrupts
its steep descent, a sun rose on the world,
as from the Ganges our sun sometimes does. 51

'Therefore, let anyone who would speak of this place
not say *Ascesi*, which would convey too little,
but call it *Orient*, to sound its proper worth. 54

'Not much time as yet had passed
when he first lent his comfort to the earth
by the greatness of his virtuous power. 57

'For, still a youth, he fought against his father's wish
for the favor of a lady to whom, as to death,
no one unlocks the door with gladness, 60

'and before his spiritual court *et coram patre*
he joined himself to her and, from then on,
each passing day, he loved her more. 63

'She, bereft of her first husband, scorned and unknown
one thousand and one hundred years and more,
remained without a suitor till he came. 66

'Nor did it profit her when men heard that she stood
unmoved, with Amyclas, despite the voice
of him who put the whole wide world in fear. 69

'Nor did it profit her when, being fiercely loyal
and undaunted, while Mary stayed below,
she wept with Christ upon the cross. 72

'But, lest I make my meaning dark,
let it be understood, in all that I have said,
that these two lovers are Francis and Poverty. 75

'Their happy countenances and their harmony,
their love and wonder and sweet contemplation
made them a cause for holy thoughts, 78

'so that the venerable Bernard was the first
to shed his shoes and run, pursuing such great peace,
and, running, thought himself too slow. 81

'O unknown riches and prolific good_ Barefoot goes Giles,
barefoot goes Sylvester, following the groom,
so greatly pleasing is the bride. 84

'Then that father and teacher went his way
in company of his lady and that family,
each one girt with the same humble cord. 87

'Nor did an unworthy shame weigh on his brow
for being Pietro Bernardone's son,
nor for being an object of amazed contempt, 90

'but he regally laid bare his stern resolve
to Innocent and, from him, he received
the first seal of his order. 93

'When his followers, sworn to poverty,
increased their number, he, whose admirable life
were better sung in the glorious realm of Heaven, 96

'was affirmed with a second crown
by the eternal Breath, through Honorius,
in his holy purpose as shepherd of this flock. 99

'And when, in his thirst for martyrdom,
he preached Christ and the Apostles who came after
in the proud presence of the Sultan, 102

'finding the people unripe for conversion
and unwilling to remain to no good purpose,
he returned to reap the harvest of Italian fields. 105

'On the harsh rock between the Tiber and the Arno
from Christ he had the final seal, then for two years
he bore His wounds upon his limbs. 108

'When He who had chosen him for so much good
was pleased to take him to the high reward
that he had won with his devoted meekness, 111

'he recommended his most cherished lady
to his brothers, as to his rightful heirs,
commanding them to love her faithfully. 114

'From his lady's bosom the illustrious soul
chose to set forth, returning to its kingdom,
and for its corpse would have no other bier. 117

'Now think what kind of man it took
to be a fit companion to maintain
the steadfast course of Peter's bark upon the sea, 120

'and just such was our patriarch. From this
you may perceive that he who follows him
as he commands is freighted with good cargo. 123

'But his flock has grown so greedy
for new sustenance that it is forced
to scatter through remote and distant pastures, 126

'and the farther his sheep go wandering off
from him, the emptier of milk
do they at last come back into the fold. 129

'There are some, indeed, who, fearing harm,
huddle near the shepherd, but these are so few
that a tiny piece of cloth can furnish all their cowns. 132

'And so, if my words are not too dark,
and if your ears have been intent,
and if you can recall exactly what was said, 135

'then shall your wish be in part fulfilled
and you shall see the reason why the plant is cleft
and what is meant by the rebuke 138

where sheep are fattened if they do not stray.' 139