

PARADISO

CANTO XIV

From center to rim, as from rim to center,
the water in a rounded vessel moves
as it is struck from outside or within. 3

This thought, just as I phrase it,
dropped into my mind the very instant
the glorious living soul of Thomas fell silent, 6
because of the like effects that sprang
from his speech and from the words of Beatrice,
who, responding, graciously began: 9

'This man has need, but does not tell of it
either by word or yet in thought,
because he seeks the root of still another truth. 12

'Tell him if the light that blooms
and makes your substance radiant shall remain
with you eternally the way it shines today, 15
'and, if it remains, tell him how,
when all of you are visible once more,
this would not prove distressing to your sight.' 18

As, impelled and drawn by heightened joy,
dancers in a round may raise their voices,
their pleasure showing in their movements, 21
so, at that eager and devout appeal,
the holy circles showed new joy in wheeling
as well as in their wondrous song. 24

Whoever here on earth laments that we must die
to find our life above knows not the fresh relief
found there in these eternal showers. 27

That ever-living One and Two and Three
who reigns forever in Three and Two and One,
uncircumscribed and circumscribing all, 30
was sung three times by each and every one
of these spirits, and with such melody
as would be fit reward for any merit. 33

And I heard in the most resplendent light
 of the lesser circle a modest voice,
 such perhaps as the angel's was to Mary, 36
 reply: 'Just as long as the festival of Paradise
 shall last, that is how long our love
 shall dress us in this radiance. 39
 'Its brightness answers to our ardor,
 the ardor to our vision, and that is given
 in greater measure of grace than we deserve. 42
 'When we put on again our flesh,
 glorified and holy, then our persons
 will be more pleasing for being all complete, 45
 'so that the light, granted to us freely
 by the Highest Good, shall increase,
 the light that makes us fit to see Him. 48
 'From that light, vision must increase,
 and love increase what vision kindles,
 and radiance increase, which comes from love. 51
 'But like a coal that shoots out flame
 and in its glowing center still outshines it
 so that it does not lose its own appearance, 54
 'just so this splendor that enfolds us now
 will be surpassed in brightness by the flesh
 that earth as yet still covers. 57
 'Nor will such shining have the power to harm us,
 for our body's organs shall be strengthened
 to deal with all that can delight us.' 60
 So quick and eager seemed to me both choirs
 to say their *Amen* that they clearly showed
 their desire for their dead bodies, 63
 not perhaps for themselves alone, but for their mothers,
 for their fathers, and for others whom they loved
 before they all became eternal flames. 66
 And lo, all around and all of equal brightness,
 rose a splendor, surpassing what had been,
 as the horizon, at the rising sun, grows brighter. 69
 And just as, at the approach of evening,
 new lights begin to show throughout the sky,
 so faint they seem both real and yet unreal, 72

it seemed to me that I began to see
 new subsistences there that formed a ring
 beyond the other two circumferences. 75

Ah, true incandescence of the Holy Breath!
 How suddenly its glowing shone before me,
 so bright my eyes could not endure it! 78

But Beatrice showed herself to me so fair
 and smiling, this vision of her must remain
 among those sights that have escaped my memory. 81

At this my eyes regained their sight and, raising them,
 I saw myself translated, alone now with my lady,
 to a more exalted state of bliss. 84

I was assured that I had risen higher
 by the planet's fiery smile. It seemed to me
 to glow more red than usual. 87

With all my heart and in that tongue
 which is the same for all, I made
 burnt-offering to God befitting the new grace. 90

And the burning of the sacrifice
 had not yet finished in my breast before I knew
 my offering was propitious and accepted, 93

for splendors of such brightness, glowing red,
 appeared to me within two beams that I cried out:
 'O Helios, who so adorn them!' 96

As the Milky Way, arrayed with greater and lesser lights,
 glows white between the universal poles,
 making even sages wonder how and why, 99

these rays, thus constellated, made, deep within Mars,
 the venerable sign that the crossing
 of its quadrants fixes in a circle. 102

Here my memory outstrips my skill,
 for that cross so flamed forth Christ
 that I can find no fit comparison. 105

But he who takes his cross and follows Christ
 shall yet forgive me what I leave untold,
 for shining in that dawn I did see Christ. 108

From arm to arm, and between the head
 and foot, moved brilliant lights
 that scintillated as they met and passed. 111

Just so we see on earth, straight and slanting,
swift and slow, changing in appearance,
tiny motes of matter, long and short, 114
move through the beam of light that sometimes streaks
the shades that men devise for their protection
both with cunning and with skill. 117
And as viol and harp strung with many strings
in their harmony will sound sweet
even to one who fails to catch their tune, 120
so from the lights that there appeared to me
a melody gathered and came from the cross,
enchancing me, though I could not make out the hymn. 123
I could tell that it contained high praise,
for the words 'Arise' and 'Conquer' came to me
as to one who hears but does not understand. 126
I was moved to such great love by this
that up until that moment I had not been bound
by chains so sweet and gentle. 129
My words, perhaps, may seem too bold,
slighting the beauty of those lovely eyes --
gazing into them my longing finds repose. 132
But one who understands that the living seals
of all that's beautiful gain potency with each ascent
and that I had not turned to her eyes there 135
may excuse me for that of which, accusing myself,
I make my excuse and see that I speak the truth:
for holy beauty may not be excluded here 138
because, as it ascends, it gains in purity. 139