

PARADISO

CANTO XXIII

As the bird among the leafy branches that she loves,
perched on the nest with her sweet brood
all through the night, which keeps things veiled from us, 3
who in her longing to look upon their eyes and beaks
and to find the food to nourish them --
a task, though difficult, that gives her joy -- 6
now, on an open bough, anticipates that time
and, in her ardent expectation of the sun,
watches intently for the dawn to break, 9
so was my lady, erect and vigilant,
seeking out the region of the sky
in which the sun reveals less haste. 12
I, therefore, seeing her suspended, wistful,
became as one who, filled with longing,
finds satisfaction in his hope. 15
But time was short between one moment and the next,
I mean between my expectation and the sight
of the sky turned more and more resplendent. 18
And Beatrice said: 'Behold the hosts
of Christ in triumph and all the fruit
gathered from the wheeling of these spheres!' 21
It seemed to me her face was all aflame,
her eyes so full of gladness
that I must leave that moment undescribed. 24
As, on clear nights when the moon is full,
Trivia smiles among the eternal nymphs
that deck the sky through all its depths, 27
I saw, above the many thousand lamps,
a Sun that kindled each and every one
as ours lights up the sights we see above us, 30
and through that living light poured down
a shining substance. It blazed so bright
into my eyes that I could not sustain it. 33

O Beatrice, my sweet beloved guide!
 To me she said: 'What overwhelms you
 is a force against which there is no defense. 36
 'Here is the Wisdom and the Power that repaired
 the roads connecting Heaven and the earth
 that had so long been yearned for and desired.' 39
 As fire breaks from a cloud,
 swelling till it finds no room there,
 and, against its nature, falls to earth, 42
 just so my mind, grown greater at that feast,
 burst forth, transported from itself,
 and now cannot recall what it became. 45
 'Open your eyes and see me as I am.
 The things that you have witnessed
 have given you the strength to bear my smile.' 48
 I was like a man who finds himself awakened
 from a dream that has faded and who strives
 in vain to bring it back to mind 51
 when I heard this invitation, deserving
 of such gratitude as can never be erased
 from the book that registers the past. 54
 If at this moment all the tongues
 that Polyhymnia and her sisters nurtured
 with their sweetest, richest milk 57
 should sound to aid me now, their song could not attain
 one thousandth of the truth in singing of that holy smile
 and how it made her holy visage radiant. 60
 And so, in representing Paradise,
 the sacred poem must make its leap across,
 as does a man who finds his path cut off. 63
 But considering the heavy theme
 and the mortal shoulder it weighs down,
 no one would cast blame if it trembled with its load. 66
 This is no easy voyage for a little bark,
 this stretch of sea the daring prow now cleaves,
 nor for a pilot who would spare himself. 69
 'Why does my face arouse you so to love
 you do not turn to see the lovely garden
 now blossoming beneath the rays of Christ? 72

'There is the rose in which the Word of God
 was turned to flesh. There are the lilies
 for whose fragrance the right way was chosen.' 75

Beatrice said these words. And I, all eager
 to follow her instruction, again resumed
 the struggle, despite my feeble power of sight. 78

As, lit by the sun's rays streaming through broken clouds,
 my eyes, sheltered by the shade,
 once saw a field of flowers, 81

so now I saw a many-splendored throng
 illuminated from above by blazing rays,
 but could not see the source of all that brightness. 84

O gracious Power, who did thus imprint them!
 You rose to more exalted heights to grant
 their sight to eyes not ready to behold you. 87

The name of the fair flower I invoke
 each morning and at evening time, enthralled my mind
 as I gazed at the brightest of the flames. 90

When the quality and magnitude of the living star,
 who surpasses up above as she surpassed below,
 were painted on my eyes, 93

there descended through the sky a torch that,
 circling, took on the likeness of a crown.
 It encircled her and wheeled around her. 96

The sweetest melody, heard here below,
 that most attracts our souls,
 would seem a burst of cloud-torn thunder 99

compared with the reverberation of that lyre
 with which the lovely sapphire that so ensapphires
 the brightest heaven was encrowned. 102

'I am angelic love and I encircle
 the exalted joy breathed from the womb
 that was the dwelling place of our desire, 105

'and I shall circle you, Lady of Heaven,
 until you follow your Son to the highest sphere,
 making it the more divine because you enter.' 108

Thus that circling music, sealing itself,
 came to its conclusion, while all the other lights
 made Mary's name resound. 111

The royal mantle of the universal turning spheres, which most burns and is most quickened in the breath of God and in His works,	114
was, at its inner boundary, so very far above us that as yet, from where I was, it was well beyond my seeing,	117
so that my eyes had not the power to fasten on the crown-tipped flame that rose along the path left by her sowing.	120
And, like a baby reaching out its arms to <i>mamma</i> after it has drunk her milk, its inner impulse kindled into outward flame,	123
all these white splendors were reaching upward with their fiery tips, so that their deep affection for Mary was made clear to me.	126
Then they remained there in my sight, singing <i>Regina celi</i> with such sweetness that my feeling of delight has never left me.	129
Oh, how great is the abundance that is stored in granaries so rich above, that down on earth were fields ripe for the sowing!	132
There they live, rejoicing in the treasure they gained with tears of exile, in Babylon, where they spurned the gold.	135
Beneath the exalted Son of God and Mary, up there he triumphs in his victory, with souls of the covenants old and new,	138
the one who holds the keys to such great glory.	139