

PARADISO

CANTO XXVIII

When she who does imparadise my mind
had revealed the truth against
the present life of wretched mortals, 3
then, as one whose way is lit by a double-candled lamp
held at his back, who suddenly in a mirror sees
the flame before he has seen or even thought of it 6
and turns to see if the glass is telling him the truth,
and then sees that it reflects things as they are --
as notes reflect the score when they are sung -- 9
just so do I remember having done,
gazing into the beautiful eyes
which Love had made into the snare that caught me. 12
When I turned back and my eyes were struck
by what appears on that revolving sphere --
if one but contemplates its circling -- 15
I saw a point that flashed a beam of light
so sharp the eye on which it burns
must close against its piercing brightness. 18
The star that, seen from here below, seems smallest
would seem a moon if put beside it,
as when one star is set beside another. 21
As near, perhaps, as a halo seems to be
when it encircles the light that colors it,
where the vapor that forms it is most dense, 24
there whirled about that point a ring of fire
so quick it would have easily outsped
the swiftest sphere circling the universe. 27
This point was encircled by another ring,
and that by the third, the third by the fourth,
the fourth by the fifth, and the fifth by the sixth. 30
Higher there followed the seventh, now spread so wide
that the messenger of Juno, in full circle,
would be unable to contain its size. 33

And so, too, the eighth and ninth,
 each one revolving with diminished speed
 the farther it was wheeling from the first. 36

And that one least removed from the blazing point of light
 possessed the clearest flame, because, I think,
 it was the one that is the most intruded by it. 39

My lady, who saw me in grave doubt
 yet eager to know and comprehend, said:
 'From that point depend the heavens and all nature. 42
 'Observe that circle nearest it,
 and understand its motion is so swift
 because it is spurred on by flaming love.' 45

And I to her: 'If the universe were arranged
 in the order I see here among these wheels
 I would be content with what you've set before me. 48
 'However, in the world of sense we see
 the farther from the center they revolve
 the more divinity is in their orbits. 51

'And so, if my desire to know shall gain its end
 in this rare temple of the angels,
 which has but light and love for boundaries, 54
 'then I still need to learn exactly why
 model and copy fail to follow the same plan,
 for, using my own powers, I reflect on this in vain.' 57

'That your fingers are not fit to undo this knot
 is not surprising, so entangled
 has it become from never being tried.' 60

My lady said this, then went on: 'Take
 what I shall tell you if you would be fed,
 and see you sharpen your wits on it. 63

'The material heavens are wide or narrow
 according as power, greater or less,
 is diffused through all their parts. 66

'Greater goodness makes for greater blessedness,
 and greater bliss takes on a greater body
 when all its parts are equal in perfection. 69

'This sphere, therefore, which sweeps into its motion
 the rest of the universe, must correspond
 to the ring that loves and knows the most, 72

'so that, if you apply your measure,
 not to their appearances but to the powers themselves
 of the angels that appear to you as circles, 75
 'you will see a marvelous congruence,
 larger with more, smaller with less, in each sphere
 according to its celestial Intelligence. 78
 As the vault of our air is left
 serene and shining when Boreas
 blows from his gentler cheek 81
 and the dark refuse of the sky is cleared
 and purged away so that the heavens smile
 as all their quarters fill with loveliness, 84
 just so did I feel when my lady
 bestowed on me her lucid answer,
 and, like a star in heaven, the truth shone clear. 87
 And, when she paused in her speech,
 as boiling iron shoots out sparks
 so did these circles sparkle, 90
 each spark keeping to its flaming ring. They were
 so many that their number ran to thousands more
 than the successive doubling of a chessboard's squares. 93
 From choir to choir I heard *Hosanna* sung
 to the fixed point, which holds them -- and forever shall --
 in those *ubi* that have always been theirs. 96
 And she, who understood the puzzled thoughts
 now present in my mind, said: 'The closer rings
 reveal to you both Seraphim and Cherubim. 99
 'They pursue their bonds so swiftly, hoping they may gain
 as much as they can hold of likeness to the point,
 and this they can attain, the loftier their vision. 102
 'These other loving spirits circling them
 are called the Thrones of God,
 and with them the first triad was complete. 105
 'And you should know that all of them delight
 in measure of the depth to which their sight
 can penetrate the truth, where every intellect finds rest. 108
 'From this, it may be seen, beatitude itself
 is based upon the act of seeing,
 not on that of love, which follows after, 111

'and the measure of their sight reveals their worth, which grace and proper will beget in them. Such, then, is the process, step by step.	114
'The second triad thus blossoming in this eternity of spring which no nocturnal Ram cuts short	117
'ever sings hosannas, the threefold strain resounding in the threefold ranks of bliss by which they are intrined.	120
'In this hierarchy are found the next divinities -- Dominions first, then Virtues, and the third are Powers.	123
'The penultimate two of these festive throngs are whirling Principalities and Archangels, while the last one is all Angels at their play.	126
'All these orders gaze in ecstasy above. The highest so prevail on those below, that the rest are drawn, and also draw, to God.	129
'Dionysius with such passion set his mind to contemplate these orders that he named them and arranged them as do I.	132
'But later Gregory took a different view, so that, opening his eyes here in this heaven, he saw his errors, laughing at himself.	135
'And if a mortal man on earth set forth such hidden truth, you need not wonder: for he who saw it here above revealed it then to him,	138
along with many other truths about these circlings.'	139