

PARADISO

CANTO XXXIII

'Virgin Mother, daughter of your Son, more humble and exalted than any other creature, fixed goal of the eternal plan,	3
'you are the one who so ennobled human nature that He, who made it first, did not disdain to make Himself of its own making.	6
'Your womb relit the flame of love -- its heat has made this blossom seed and flower in eternal peace.	9
'To us you are a noonday torch of charity, while down below, among those still in flesh, you are the living fountainhead of hope.	12
'Lady, you are so great and so prevail above, should he who longs for grace not turn to you, his longing would be doomed to wingless flight.	15
'Your loving kindness does not only aid whoever seeks it, but many times gives freely what has yet to be implored.	18
'In you clemency, in you compassion, in you munificence, in you are joined all virtues found in any creature.	21
'This man who, from within the deepest pit the universe contains up to these heights has seen the disembodied spirits, one by one,	24
'now begs you, by your grace, to grant such power that, by lifting up his eyes, he may rise higher toward his ultimate salvation.	27
'And I, who never burned for my own seeing more than now I burn for his, offer all my prayers, and pray that they may not fall short,	30
'so that your prayers disperse on his behalf all clouds of his mortality and let the highest beauty be displayed to him.	33

'This too, my Queen, I ask of you, who can achieve whatever you desire, that you help him preserve, after such vision, the purity of his affections.	36
'Let your protection rule his mortal passions. See Beatrice, with so many of the blessed, palms pressed together, joining me in prayer.'	39
Those eyes beloved and revered by God, fixed on him who prayed, made clear to us how dear to her all true devotion is.	42
Then she turned her gaze to the eternal Light. It is incorrect to think that any living being can penetrate that brightness with such unblinking eyes.	45
And, as I neared the end of all desire, I extended to its limit, as was right, the ardor of the longing in my soul.	48
With his smile, Bernard signaled that I look upward, but of my own accord I was already doing what he wished,	51
for my sight, becoming pure, rose higher and higher through the ray of the exalted light that in itself is true.	54
From that time on my power of sight exceeded that of speech, which fails at such a vision, as memory fails at such abundance.	57
Just as the dreamer, after he awakens, still stirred by feelings that the dream evoked, cannot bring the rest of it to mind,	60
such am I, my vision almost faded from my mind, while in my heart there still endures the sweetness that was born of it.	63
Thus the sun unseals an imprint in the snow. Thus the Sibyl's oracles, on weightless leaves, lifted by the wind, were swept away.	66
O Light exalted beyond mortal thought, grant that in memory I see again but one small part of how you then appeared	69
and grant my tongue sufficient power that it may leave behind a single spark of glory for the people yet to come,	72

since, if you return but briefly to my mind and then resound but softly in these lines, the better will your victory be conceived.	75
I believe, from the keenness of the living ray that I endured, I would have been undone had I withdrawn my eyes from it.	78
And I remember that, on this account, I grew more bold and thus sustained my gaze until I reached the Goodness that is infinite.	81
O plenitude of grace, by which I could presume to fix my eyes upon eternal Light until my sight was spent on it!	84
In its depth I saw contained, by love into a single volume bound, the pages scattered through the universe:	87
substances, accidents, and the interplay between them, as though they were conflated in such ways that what I tell is but a simple light.	90
I believe I understood the universal form of this dense knot because I feel my joy expand, rejoicing as I speak of it.	93
My memory of that moment is more lost than five and twenty centuries make dim that enterprise when, in wonder, Neptune at the Argo's shadow stared.	96
Thus all my mind, absorbed, was gazing, fixed, unmoving and intent, becoming more enraptured in its gazing.	99
He who beholds that Light is so enthralled that he would never willingly consent to turn away from it for any other sight,	102
because the good that is the object of the will is held and gathered in perfection there that elsewhere would imperfect show.	105
Now my words will come far short of what I still remember, like a babe's who at his mother's breast still wets his tongue.	108
Not that the living Light at which I gazed took on other than a single aspect -- for It is always what It was before --	111

but that my sight was gaining strength, even as I gazed
 at that sole semblance and, as I changed,
 it too was being, in my eyes, transformed. 114

In the deep, transparent essence of the lofty Light
 there appeared to me three circles
 having three colors but the same extent, 117
 and each one seemed reflected by the other
 as rainbow is by rainbow, while the third one seemed fire,
 equally breathed forth by one and by the other. 120

O how scant is speech, too weak to frame my thoughts.
 Compared to what I still recall my words are faint --
 to call them little is to praise them much. 123

O eternal Light, abiding in yourself alone,
 knowing yourself alone, and, known to yourself
 and knowing, loving and smiling on yourself! 126

That circling which, thus conceived,
 appeared in you as light's reflection,
 once my eyes had gazed on it a while, seemed, 129
 within itself and in its very color,
 to be painted with our likeness,
 so that my sight was all absorbed in it. 132

Like the geometer who fully applies himself
 to square the circle and, for all his thought,
 cannot discover the principle he lacks, 135
 such was I at that strange new sight.

I tried to see how the image fit the circle
 and how it found its where in it. 138

But my wings had not sufficed for that
 had not my mind been struck by a bolt
 of lightning that granted what I asked. 141

Here my exalted vision lost its power.
 But now my will and my desire, like wheels revolving
 with an even motion, were turning with 144

the Love that moves the sun and all the other stars. 145