

PURGATORIO

CANTO XIII

We were at the summit of the stair
where the mountain that unsins us as we climb
is for the second time cut back. 3

There another terrace carves the hill,
just like the first, except its arc
is shorter and it makes a tighter curve. 6

There are no shades nor any carvings--
only the bank and the bare road
with the livid color of the stone. 9

'If we linger here to ask directions,'
the poet reasoned, 'before we choose our way,
I fear we may be long delayed.' 12

Then he fixed his eyes upon the sun
and made a pivot of the right side of his body
on which he swung his left side forward. 15

'O sweet light, in whose help I trust
as I set out upon this unknown road,' he said,
'give us whatever guidance here is needed. 18

'You shed your light upon the world and warm it.
Unless we find good reason to do other,
your rays must always be our guide.' 21

We had already gone as far
as here on earth would count a mile--
but quickly, for our will was eager-- 24

when, flying toward us, spirits could be heard,
not seen, sounding courteous invitation
to the table readied for the feast of love. 27

The first voice, flying by,
called loudly: '*Vinum non habent*'
and, having passed, called out the same again. 30

Before it was quite out of hearing
in the distance, there came another, crying:
'I am Orestes,' and it also did not stay. 33

'O father,' I said, 'what voices are these?'
And as I asked there came a third voice, saying:
'Love him who has done you wrong.' 36
And the good master said: 'This circle
scourges the sin of envy, and thus
the cords of the scourge are drawn from love. 39
'To rein in envy requires opposing notes.
Such other voices you will hear, I think,
before you reach the pass of pardon. 42
'Now fix your sight more steady through the air
and you will make out figures seated
in front of us along the rock.' 45
Then, opening my eyes still wider,
I looked ahead and now could see
shades wearing cloaks the color of the stone. 48
We had gone a little farther on,
when I heard voices crying: 'Mary, pray for us,'
then 'Michael,' 'Peter,' and 'All saints.' 51
I do not think there walks on earth today
a man so hard that he would not have been
transfixed by pity at what I saw next, 54
for when I had drawn close enough
so that their state grew clear to me
my eyes were overwhelmed by grief. 57
They appeared covered with coarse haircloth.
Each propped up another with his shoulder,
and all of them were propped against the rock. 60
Just so the blind who lack for daily bread
at pardons take their place to beg for what they need,
one letting his head fall on another's shoulder 63
so that he may more quickly prompt to pity,
not only with the words that he is saying
but with his looks, which plead no less. 66
And as the sun is of no profit to the blind,
so Heaven's light denies its bounty
to the shades in the place of which I speak, 69
for iron wire pierces all their eyelids,
stitching them together, as is done
to the untrained falcon because it won't be calmed. 72

As I went on, it seemed to me that seeing others,
 without my being seen, offended them,
 so that I turned to my wise counsel. 75

Well he knew what my silence meant to say
 and did not wait to hear me ask, but said:
 'Speak, yet be brief and to the point.' 78

Virgil, moving along beside me on the terrace,
 was at the edge, where one might fall
 because no parapet encircled it. 81

At my other side were the shades in prayer
 who, through those dreadful seams,
 were wringing tears that bathed their cheeks. 84

I turned to them and I began:
 'O people assured of seeing light on high--
 sole object stirring your desire-- 87

'so grace may soon dissolve the scum
 that fouls your conscience, and the stream
 of memory flow through it pure, 90

'tell me, for I shall hold it courteous and dear,
 if any soul among you is Italian.
 Perhaps for me to know might profit such a one.' 93

'O my brother, all of us are citizens
 of the one true city. What you mean to say is,
 "who, while still a pilgrim, lived in Italy." 96

This it seemed to me I heard in answer
 farther along from where I stood,
 and I made myself heard by moving closer. 99

Among the rest I saw a shade that looked expectant,
 and if any should ask 'how?', it was raising
 its chin the way a blind man does. 102

'Spirit,' I said, 'who abase yourself to climb,
 if you were the one who answered me,
 make yourself known by your city or your name.' 105

'I was of Siena,' replied the shade,
 'and with these others here I mend my sinful life,
 weeping to Him that He may lend Himself to us. 108

'Sapìa was my name, though I was far from wise,
 for I rejoiced much more at harm done others
 than at my own good fortune. 111

'And, so that you know I do not lie,
 hear me out when I tell how mad I was,
 with the arc of my years already in decline. 114

'My townsmen were near Colle,
 engaged in battle with their enemies, and I prayed
 that God let happen what in fact He willed. 117

'When they were routed and turned back
 in bitter steps of flight, I watched the chase,
 my heart filled with such boundless joy 120

'that recklessly I turned my face to God,
 crying: "Now I do not fear you any more,"
 as the blackbird said after a glint of sunshine. 123

'I sought my peace with God
 at the very last, and penitence
 would not have yet reduced the debt 126

'had it not been for Peter the comb-seller
 who in his charity was grieved for me
 and remembered me in his devout petitions. 129

'But who are you who walk about inquiring
 of our condition, with your eyes not sewn,
 as I suspect, and speak with breath?' 132

'My eyes,' I said, 'will yet be taken
 from me here, but for a short while only,
 for small is their offense in looks of envy. 135

'Greater is the fear, which fills my soul with dread,
 of torments lower down, those heavy loads--
 I can almost feel their weight upon me now.' 138

And she: 'Who has led you here among us,
 if you think that you'll return below?' And I:
 'He that is with me here and does not speak. 141

'I am alive, and therefore ask of me,
 you chosen spirit, if you would have me move
 my mortal feet for your sake back on earth.' 144

'Oh,' she replied, 'how wonderful it is to hear
 of this great token of God's love for you.
 Since it is so, aid me sometime with a prayer. 147

'And I entreat you by what you most desire,
 if ever you tread the soil of Tuscany,
 to restore my name among my kinfolk. 150

'You will find them part of that vain people
who pinned their hopes on Talamone and will lose
more hope thereby than in their search for the Diana-- 153
but it is their admirals who shall lose still more.' 154