

PURGATORIO

CANTO XV

As much as between the end of the third hour
and the first of day is seen of the sphere
that like a child is always darting here and there, 3
so much appeared now to remain
of the sun's course toward nightfall:
it was vespers there and midnight here on earth. 6
The rays were striking full into our faces,
for we had circled so much of the mountain
that we were heading straight into the west, 9
when such great splendor overwhelmed my sight,
greater than any I had seen before,
that I was dazed by its unfamiliar brightness. 12
I raised one hand above my brow
and gave my eyes sufficient shade
to temper this excess of light. 15
As, when from water or a mirror, a reflected beam
leaps back the other way, rising
at the angle it took in its descent, 18
and from the plumb line of a stone
will deviate an equal distance,
as shown by science and experiment, 21
it seemed to me that I was struck
by such bright light reflected there before me
that my eyes were quick to turn away. 24
'What is that, gentle father,' I asked,
'from which I cannot even screen my eyes?
It seems to be moving toward us.' 27
'Don't be surprised,' he answered me,
'if those who live in Heaven still can blind you:
this messenger invites us to ascend. 30
'Soon the sight of beings such as these
will not be burdensome, will give as much delight
as nature made you fit to feel.' 33

When we had reached the blessed angel
 he called out in a joyful voice: 'Now enter here
 on a stairway far less steep than were the others.' 36

As we ascended, moving on from there,
 we heard '*Beati misericordes*' sung behind us
 and 'Rejoice, you who conquer.' 39

My master and I, alone again,
 were climbing, and as we went along,
 hoping to take some profit from his words, 42

I turned to him and asked:
 'What did the spirit from Romagna mean
 when he spoke of things that can't be shared?' 45

He replied: 'Of his worst fault he knows the cost.
 Thus it is no wonder he condemns it, in the hope
 that fewer souls will have a reason to lament. 48

'Because your appetites are fixed on things
 that, divided, lessen each one's share,
 envy's bellows pushes breath into your sighs. 51

'But if love for the highest sphere
 could turn your longings toward heavenly things,
 then fear of sharing would pass from your hearts. 54

'For there above, when more souls speak of *ours*,
 the more of goodness each one owns,
 the more of love burning in that cloister.' 57

'I am more starved for answers,' I said,
 'than if before I had kept silent,
 since now my mind is filled with greater doubt. 60

'How can it be that a good, distributed,
 can enrich a greater number of possessors
 than if it were possessed by few?' 63

And he to me: 'Because you still
 have your mind fixed on earthly things,
 you harvest darkness from the light itself. 66

'That infinite and ineffable Good,
 which dwells on high, speeds toward love
 as a ray of sunlight to a shining body. 69

'It returns the love it finds in equal measure,
 so that, if more of ardor is extended,
 eternal Goodness will augment its own. 72

'And the more souls there are who love on high,
 the more there is to love, the more of loving,
 for like a mirror each returns it to the other. 75

'And if my words do not requite your hunger,
 you shall see Beatrice. She will deliver you
 entirely from this and every other craving. 78

'Seek only that the five wounds healed
 by being painful soon may be closed up,
 as the other two already are.' 81

I was about to say: 'You give me satisfaction,'
 when I saw that I had reached another terrace,
 and my eager eyes made me keep silent. 84

There it seemed to me I was caught up
 in an ecstatic, sudden vision
 in which I saw a temple full of people 87

and, at the door, about to enter, a woman,
 with the sweet demeanor of a mother, who said:
 'My son, why have you dealt with us like this? 90

'Behold, your father and I have searched
 for you in sorrow.' Just as she now was silent,
 so did that which brought her leave my sight. 93

Then there appeared to me another woman,
 tears of grief still running down her cheeks
 from anger at the one whom she disdained. 96

She said: 'If you are indeed lord of this city,
 whose naming caused such strife among the gods
 and from which so much knowledge lights the world, 99

'avenge yourself on those bold arms
 that dared embrace our daughter, Pisistratus.'
 And it seemed to me that lord gave gracious answer, 102

offered gently and with tranquil look:
 'What shall we do to one who seeks our harm
 if we condemn the one who loves us?' 105

Then I saw people, aflame with burning wrath,
 stoning a youth to death,
 and each was screaming to himself, "Kill, kill." 108

And I saw him sinking to the ground--
 for death was heavy on him now--
 but keeping his eyes open to Heaven, 111

as he begged the Lord on high to pardon
 his persecutors, from the depth of his agony,
 with a look that unlocks compassion. 114

When my soul made its way back
 to the things that are real outside it,
 I came to know my errors were not false. 117

My leader, who could see that I was acting
 like one who shakes himself from sleep, said:
 'What's wrong with you that you can't walk straight 120
 'but have come now more than half a league
 with your eyes veiled and your legs entangled,
 like a man overcome by wine or sleep?' 123

'O my dear father,' I said, 'if you'll but listen,
 I will tell you exactly what I saw
 when my legs were taken from me.' 126

And he: 'If over your face you wore
 a hundred masks, even your faintest thoughts
 would not be hidden from my sight. 129

'These things were shown so you would not refuse
 to open your heart to the waters of peace
 that pour from the eternal fountain. 132

'I did not ask "What's wrong?" for your resemblance
 to a man who stares with but unseeing eyes
 when his body lies insensate, 135

'but asked to put fresh vigor in your step.
 So must the sluggard, slow to use his waking hours
 even once these come, be spurred to act.' 138

We went along through the evening hour,
 forcing our eyes to seek the farthest point ahead
 against the bright late beams, 141

when, little by little, a smoke moved toward us,
 black as night, and there was nowhere
 we could escape from it. And first it took away 144
 the pureness of the air and then our sight. 145