

PURGATORIO

CANTO XVII

Remember, reader, if ever in the mountains you were trapped in fog and could not see except as moles do, through their eyelids,	3
how, when the strands of mist, humid and dense, began dispersing, the sun's disk dimly glimmered through,	6
then you can readily imagine how, on my seeing it again, the sun appeared, now on the verge of setting.	9
Measuring my steps to the trusted steps of my master, I came out of that haze to beams already vanished from the shores below.	12
O imagination, which at times so rob us of outward things we pay no heed, though a thousand trumpets sound around us,	15
who sets you into motion if the senses offer nothing? A light, formed in the heavens, moves you either of itself or by a will that sends it down.	18
Of the impious deed of her whose shape was changed into the bird that most delights to sing a picture formed in my imagination.	21
At this my mind had so withdrawn into itself there was no impulse from outside that could impinge upon my senses.	24
Then there rained down into my lofty phantasy one fastened to a cross, scornful and fierce in looks, and in his death.	27
With him were Ahasuerus, the great king, Esther, his wife, and Mordecai the just, so upright in his words and deeds.	30
And as this image broke up of itself, just as a bubble does when it floats up above the water from which it takes its form,	33

in my vision there arose a girl.
 She was weeping bitterly, crying: 'O Queen,
 why, in your anger, have you chosen not to be? 36
 'Not to lose Lavinia have you killed yourself.
 Now you have lost me and I am left to mourn
 your death, mother, before the death of yet another.' 39
 As sleep is broken when a sudden light
 strikes on closed eyes and, broken,
 flickers before it dies, 42
 so my imaginings grew faint within me
 as soon as a light, far brighter
 than the light we know, struck my face. 45
 I was turning to discover where I was
 when a voice said: 'Here is your ascent,'
 and drew me away from any other thought. 48
 It raised in me the overwhelming wish--
 a wish that cannot rest short of its goal--
 to behold the one who spoke. 51
 But as before the sun, which weighs upon our eyes,
 veiling its form in an excess of light,
 so, before him, my power of sight fell short. 54
 'This divine spirit is directing us
 toward the ascent without our even asking,
 concealed in his own shining. 57
 'He cares for us as we do for ourselves,
 since one who, seeing another's need, awaits the asking
 maliciously has set his mind upon refusal. 60
 'We should accept so kind an invitation with our feet,
 attempting the ascent before it darkens,
 for then we cannot, until day returns.' 63
 These were my leader's words, and we together
 turned our footsteps toward a stairway.
 As soon as I had reached the lowest step 66
 I sensed beside me something like the motion
 of a wing that fanned my face. I heard the words:
 '*Beati pacifici*, those untouched by sinful wrath.' 69
 Already the sun's last rays before the night
 were slanting up so high above us
 that stars were showing here and there. 72

'O my strength, why do you drain away?'
I said, but only to myself,
because I felt my legs had lost their power. 75
We had reached a point at which the stair
ceased rising higher and we stopped,
as does a ship that comes to shore. 78
For a little while I waited to discover
if my ears could make out sounds in this new circle.
Then I turned to my master and I said: 81
'Sweet father, tell me, what is the offense
made clean here in this circle that we've reached?
If our feet must rest, do not arrest your words.' 84
And he: 'A love of good that falls short
of its duty is restored here in this place.
Here the slackened oar is pulled with greater force. 87
'That you may understand more clearly,
pay close attention. Then you shall pluck
some good fruit from our stay.' 90
'Neither Creator nor His creature, my dear son,
was ever without love, whether natural
or of the mind,' he began, 'and this you know. 93
'The natural is always without error,
but the other may err in its chosen goal
or through excessive or deficient vigor. 96
'While it is directed to the primal good,
knowing moderation in its lesser goals,
it cannot be the cause of wrongful pleasure. 99
'But when it bends to evil, or pursues the good
with more or less concern than needed,
then the creature works against his Maker. 102
'From this you surely understand that love
must be the seed in you of every virtue
as well as of each deed that merits punishment. 105
'Now, since love cannot avert its face
from the welfare of its subject,
all creatures are secure against self-hatred, 108
'and since no being can conceive itself
as severed, self-existing, from its Author,
each creature is cut off from hating Him. 111

'It follows, if I'm right in these distinctions,
 that the evil that is loved must be a neighbor's.

Three ways this love takes form within your clay. 114

'There is the one, hoping to excel by bringing down
 his neighbor, who, for that sole reason, longs
 that from his greatness his neighbor be brought low. 117

'There is the one who fears the loss of power, favor,
 honor, fame--should he be bettered by another.
 This so aggrieves him that he wants to see him fall. 120

'And there is the one who thinks himself offended
 and hungers after vengeance,
 and he must then contrive another's harm. 123

'All these three forms of love cause weeping down below.
 Now I would have you consider yet another,
 which pursues the good in faulty measure. 126

'Everyone can vaguely apprehend some good
 in which the mind may find its peace.
 With desire, each one strives to reach it. 129

'If the love that draws you on is laggard
 to know or have that peace, this terrace,
 after just remorse, torments you for it. 132

'There is another good that fails to make men happy,
 for it is not the essence or true source,
 the root of happiness or its proper fruit. 135

'The excessive love which gives itself to that
 is mourned above us in three circles.
 Exactly how its parts are three I do not say, 138

so that you may consider for yourself.' 139