

PURGATORIO

CANTO XVIII

My lofty teacher had brought his discourse
to its end and was studying my face
to see if I seemed satisfied, 3
while I, spurred on by yet another thirst,
kept silent, rehearsing in my mind the thought:
'Perhaps I trouble him with all these questions.' 6
But that true father, mindful
of the timid wish that I did not declare,
spoke and gave me courage to speak out. 9
Therefore I said: 'Master, your light so quickens
my mental sight that I discern in full
your argument's distinctions and its thesis. 12
'And thus I pray, dear, gentle father,
that you expound this love, from which you say
each good deed and its opposite derive.' 15
'Direct on me your intellect's keen eyes,'
he said, 'and the error of the blind
who set themselves as guides will be revealed. 18
'The mind, disposed to love at its creation,
is readily moved toward anything that pleases
as soon as by that pleasure it is roused to act. 21
'From real forms your perception draws
an image it unfolds within you
so that the mind considers it, 24
'and if the mind, so turned, inclines to it,
that inclination is a natural love,
which beauty binds in you at once. 27
'Then, as fire, born to rise,
moves upward in its essence,
to where its matter lives the longest, 30
'just so the mind, thus seized, achieves desire,
a movement of the spirit never resting
as long as it enjoys the thing it loves. 33

'Now you see how hidden is the truth from those who hold that every love is in itself deserving praise,	36
'perhaps because such love seems always good. But every seal is not a good one, even if imprinted in good wax.'	39
'Your words and my answering wit,' I said, 'have made love's nature clear to me, but that has left me even more perplexed.	42
'For if love is offered from outside us and if the soul moves on no other foot, it has no merit in going straight or crooked.'	45
And he to me: 'As far as reason may see in this, I can tell you. To go farther you must look to Beatrice, for it depends on faith alone.	48
'Every substantial form that is at once distinct from matter and is, as well, united with it, contains its own defining disposition.	51
'This is not perceived except in operation, nor ever demonstrated except by its effect, as, in a plant, the force of life by its green leaves.	54
'In consequence, where we derive our knowledge of first principles and the inclination to universal objects of desire, no one knows.	57
'These are innate in you just like the zeal in bees for making honey, and this primal inclination admits no positing of praise or blame.	60
'So that to this will all others may conform there is innate in you the faculty that counsels and ought to guard the threshold of assent.	63
'This is the principle in which is found the measure of your merit, as it welcomes and then winnows good from guilty loves.	66
'Those who in their reasoning reached the root recognized this innate freedom and thus bequeathed their ethics to the world.	69
'Let us posit as a given: every love that's kindled in you arises necessarily. Still, the power to constrain it lies with you.	72

'That noble power is called free will by Beatrice,
 and so make sure that you remember this
 if she should ever speak of it to you.' 75

Still brilliant after midnight, the moon,
 like a fiery bucket, was shining,
 making the stars seem fewer than they were, 78
 as in its course against the sky it followed
 the tracks the sun inflames when seen from Rome,
 setting between Sardegna and the Corsicans. 81

That noble shade through whom Pietola
 is more renowned than any Mantuan town
 had doffed the weight with which I'd burdened him, 84
 so that I, having harvested his clear
 and forthright answers to my questions,
 remained like one who rambles in his drowsy mind. 87

But suddenly this drowsiness was snatched away
 by a crowd who were approaching,
 having already rounded the terrace from behind us. 90

As once the rivers Ismenus and Asopus
 saw a furious throng of revelers crowd their banks
 on any night the Thebans felt the need for Bacchus, 93
 such a throng cut their way, as does a sickle,
 around that circle, and I could tell
 that right will and just love drove them on. 96

Soon they were upon us,
 for the whole turbulent mob was running,
 while two in front, weeping, cried out: 99

'Mary ran with haste into the mountains,'
 and 'Caesar, to subdue Lèrida, thrust at Marseilles
 and then raced on to Spain.' 102

'Quickly, quickly, lest time be lost for lack of love,'
 the others cried behind them. 'Let our zeal
 for doing good make grace grow green again.' 105

'O you who with keen fervor make amends,
 perhaps for your past negligence and sloth
 in being lukewarm to do good, 108

'this man, who is alive--indeed I do not lie--
 is eager to ascend at day's first light.
 Tell us, then, where the nearest opening is.' 111

These were my leader's words,	
and one of those spirits answered:	
'Follow us and you shall find the gap.	114
'We are so filled with our desire to keep moving	
we cannot rest. Pardon us, then,	
if our just penance seems discourteous.	117
'I was Abbot of San Zeno at Verona	
under the rule of worthy Barbarossa,	
of whom Milan still speaks with sorrow.	120
'And one there, with a foot already in the grave,	
will soon bemoan that monastery	
and regret his power over it,	123
'because he put his son, lame in body,	
deformed in mind, and base of birth,	
in the place of its true shepherd.'	126
I know not if he said more or was still,	
he had already raced so far beyond us,	
but this I heard and chose to keep in mind.	129
And he who was my help in every need said:	
'Turn around and see these two	
who now come nipping at the heels of sloth.'	132
Coming behind the rest they chanted:	
'The people for whom the Red Sea opened	
were dead before the Jordan saw their heirs'	135
and 'Those who chose not to endure the toil	
to its conclusion with Anchises' son	
gave themselves to a life without renown.'	138
Then, when these shades were so far parted	
from us we could no longer see them,	
a new thought rose within me,	141
from which others, many and diverse, were born.	
And I rambled so from one thought to another	
that my eyes closed in drowsy wandering	144
and I transformed my musings into dream.	145