

PURGATORIO

CANTO XIX

In the hour when the heat of day,
cooled by earth and at times by Saturn,
can no longer temper the cold of the moon, 3
when geomancers see their *Fortuna Major*
rise in the east before the dawn,
which does not long stay dark for it, 6
there came to me a woman, in a dream,
stammering, cross-eyed, splayfooted,
with crippled hands and sickly pale complexion. 9
I looked at her, and as the sun revives
cold limbs benumbed by night,
so my gaze gave her a ready tongue 12
and then in very little time
straightened her crooked limbs
and tinged her sallow face as love desires. 15
And with her speech set free
she started singing in a way that would
have made it hard for me to turn aside. 18
'I am,' she sang, 'I am the sweet siren
who beguile mariners on distant seas,
so great is their delight in hearing me. 21
I drew Ulysses, eager for the journey,
with my song. And those who dwell with me
rarely depart, so much do I content them.' 24
Her lips had not yet closed
when there appeared a lady at my side,
holy and alert, to confound her. 27
'O Virgil, Virgil, who is this?'
she asked, indignant. And he came forward
with his eyes fixed on that virtuous one. 30
The other he seized and, ripping her garments,
laid her front bare and exposed her belly.
The stench that came from there awoke me. 33

I was looking around, and the good master said:
 'Three times at least I've called you. Arise and come.
 Let us find the opening through which you enter.' 36
 I stood up. All the circles of the holy mountain
 were already filled with the advancing day
 and we went on with the new sun at our backs. 39
 With furrowed brow I followed him,
 as though burdened with a thought that bent
 my body like the half-arch of a bridge, 42
 until I heard: 'Come, here is the passage,'
 spoken in such gentle, gracious tones
 as are not heard within these earthly confines. 45
 With open wings that seemed a swan's
 he that had spoken showed the way on up
 between two walls of flinty stone 48
 and, stirring his feathers, gently fanned us,
 declaring those *qui lugent* to be blessed,
 for their souls shall be comforted. 51
 'What's wrong, that you keep staring at the ground?'
 my guide began, once we were on our way,
 leaving the angel just below. 54
 'I am so distracted going on,' I said,
 because this strange new dream so weighs on me
 I cannot keep it from my mind.' 57
 'You saw,' he said, 'that ancient witch
 who alone is purged with tears above us here.
 And you saw how man is freed from her. 60
 'Let that be enough. Press your heels
 into the ground. Raise your eyes to the lure
 the Eternal King spins with His majestic spheres.' 63
 Like the falcon that at first looks at its feet,
 and only then turns to the call and stretches up
 in its desire for the food that draws it, 66
 such I became and, so impelled, I went
 as far as the cleft rock allowed for the ascent
 to where the circling starts again. 69
 When I came out onto the ledge
 of the fifth round, I saw people on it
 lying face down on the ground and weeping. 72

' <i>Adhaesit pavimento anima mea</i> '	
I heard them say with such deep sighs	
the words could hardly be distinguished.	75
'O chosen ones of God, whose sufferings	
both hope and justice make less hard,	
direct us to the steps that lead us up.'	78
'If you are here exempt from lying prostrate	
and wish to find the quickest way,	
keep to the right along the outer rim.'	81
Thus the poet asked and thus came the response	
from a little way ahead, and I could tell who spoke	
although his face was hidden.	84
I turned my eyes to the eyes of my lord.	
With a pleased sign he consented	
to what my pleading look had asked.	87
When I was free to do what I desired	
I drew away and stood above that soul	
whose words had made me first aware of him,	90
saying: 'Spirit in whom weeping ripens	
that without which there is no return to God,	
for my sake just a while neglect your greater care.	93
'Tell me who you were and why you lie face down	
and whether there is something I might do	
for you back there, where I set out alive.'	96
And he to me: 'Why Heaven turns our backs	
against Itself, that you shall know, but first	
<i>scias quod ego fui successor Petri.</i>	99
'Between Sestri and Chiàvari there runs down	
a lovely stream and with its name	
the title of my line has marked its shield.	102
'In a month and little more I learned how heavy	
the mantle weighs on one who keeps it from the mud,	
making any other burden seem a feather.	105
'My conversion, alas, came late--	
when I was made the Roman shepherd,	
I discovered a life of lies.	108
'I saw that there the heart was not at peace,	
nor was preferment possible in that life,	
and for this higher state my love was kindled.	111

'Until that moment I was a wretched soul,
 cut off from God, and filled with avarice.
 Now, as you see, I am punished for that here. 114

'The work of avarice is here proclaimed
 in the purging of the down-turned souls,
 and the mountain gives no punishment more bitter. 117

'Just as we failed to lift our eyes on high
 because they were fixed on earthly things,
 so justice here has turned them to the earth. 120

'As avarice quenched our love of worthy things,
 wasting our chance to do good works,
 so justice here has bound us fast. 123

'Securely tied are our hands and feet.
 As long as it shall please the righteous Lord
 so long shall we, unmoving, lie here prone.' 126

I had kneeled and was about to speak,
 but as soon as I began and he perceived,
 only by listening, that I did him reverence, 129

'Why,' he asked, 'did you bend down that way?'
 And I: 'Because the dignity of Your high office
 stung my conscience as I stood erect.' 132

'Straighten your legs, stand up, brother,'
 he replied, 'make no mistake. I am a fellow-servant
 with you, and with the others, of a single Power. 135

'If ever you did understand the holy passage
 in the Gospel where it says "*Neque nubent*,"
 you may well perceive just why I say this. 138

'Now go your way. I would not keep you longer,
 for your being here impedes the tears
 with which I ripen that of which you spoke. 141

'On earth I have a niece who is called Alàgia--
 she is still virtuous, if indeed our house
 has not by its example made her wicked, 144

and she alone is left to me back there.' 145