

PURGATORIO

CANTO XX

The will strives ill against a worthier will.
Therefore, against my wish but granting his,
I drew the sponge, not full yet, from the water. 3

I moved on and my leader picked his way,
keeping to the clear path near the rock
as one must walk on ramparts, tight against the wall, 6
for the people from whose eyes dissolves,
drop by drop, the evil filling all the world
were crowded near the rim of the outer edge. 9

May you be cursed, you age-old wolf,
who take more prey than any other beast
to feed your bottomless appetite! 12

O heavens, whose wheels transmute
the state of those on earth, as some believe,
when will he come from whom the wolf shall flee? 15

We made our way with scant, slow steps,
my attention fixed upon those weeping shades
as I listened to their piteous lamentations, 18
when by chance I heard one up ahead call out
'Sweet Mary!' through his tears,
even as a woman does in labor, 21
and I heard the voice go on:
'How poor you were is witnessed by the inn
where you set down your holy burden.' 24

After that I heard: 'O good Fabricius,
you chose poverty with virtue
rather than possess great wealth in wickedness.' 27

These words gave me such pleasure
that I pressed forward to encounter
the spirit who I thought had spoken 30
and he went on to tell the generous gifts
that Nicholas conferred upon the maidens
to guide their youthful innocence to honor. 33

'O soul that speak of so much goodness, tell me who you were,' I said, 'and why you alone rehearse these deeds so fit for praise.	36
'Your words shall not go unrewarded if I return to finish my brief journey in that life which rushes to its ending.'	39
And he: 'I will tell you, not for any comfort I await from there, but for the grace that shines in you, reflected even short of death.	42
'I was the root of the evil tree that casts its shadow over all the Christian lands so that good fruit is rarely gathered there.	45
'If Douai, Lille, Ghent, and Bruges but had the power, there would soon be vengeance-- and this I beg of Him who judges all.	48
'On earth I was known as Hugh Capet. Of me were born the Philips and the Louis who lately have been rulers over France.	51
'I was the son of a butcher of Paris. When the ancient line of kings had all died out, except for one, a gray-robed monk,	54
'I found the reins to govern all the kingdom firm in my hands, and soon had in possession such power and so very many friends	57
'that to the widowed crown my son's head was put forward. His issue is entombed as consecrated bones.	60
'As long as the great dowry of Provence had not yet stripped my house of feeling shame, it counted little, but at least it did no harm.	63
'Then, with fraud and pillage, the rape began and afterwards, to make amends, my heirs took Ponthieu, Normandy, and Gascony.	66
'Charles came into Italy and, to make amends, made Conradin a victim and then, to make amends, drove Thomas back to Heaven.	69
'I see a time, not very long from now, that brings another Charles away from France to make himself and then his kin more known.	72

'He comes alone, armed only with the lance that Judas used to joust. And with one thrust he bursts the swollen paunch of Florence.	75
'From this he shall acquire, not land, but sin and shame, so much the heavier for him the lighter he considers such disgrace.	78
'Still another Charles: once led, a prisoner, from his own ship, I see him sell his daughter after haggling, as pirates do for female slaves.	81
'O avarice, what more harm can you do us, since our blood is so attached to you it has no care for its own flesh?	84
'That past and future evil may seem less, I see the fleur-de-lis proceed into Anagni and, in His vicar, make a prisoner of Christ.	87
'I see Him mocked a second time. I see renewed the vinegar and gall-- between two living thieves I see Him slain.	90
'I see that this new Pilate is so brutal this does not sate him, and, unsanctioned, I see him spread his greedy sails against the Temple.	93
'O my Lord, when shall I be gladdened at the sight of vengeance that, as yet concealed, hidden in your mind, makes sweet your wrath?	96
'What I have said of the one and only bride of the Holy Spirit, which made you turn to me for a gloss,	99
'is the response, as long as it is day, in all our prayers, but when night falls we then intone an opposite refrain.	102
'Then we recall Pygmalion, whose all-devouring lust for gold made him a traitor, thief, and parricide,	105
'and the misery of avaricious Midas that came on him for his intemperate demand and must always be a cause for laughter.	108
'Each then remembers reckless Achan and how he stole the spoils, so that the wrath of Joshua seems here to strike at him again.	111

'Then we accuse Sapphira with her husband.
 We celebrate the hoof-blows that Heliodorus bore.
 In disgrace the name of Polymnestor, 114
 'for slaying Polydorus, circles all the mountain.
 Last, the cry is: "Tell us, Crassus,
 since you know, what is the taste of gold?" 117
 'Sometimes one speaks loud, another low,
 according to the zeal that spurs our speech,
 at times with greater, at times with lesser force. 120
 'Therefore, in giving voice to goodness,
 as here we do by day, I was not alone just now,
 even though no other raised his voice nearby.' 123
 We had already left him there behind us
 and strove to pick our way
 as nimbly as the narrow path allowed, 126
 when I felt the mountain tremble
 as though it might collapse, and a chill,
 like the chill of death, subdued me. 129
 Surely Delos was not so shaken
 before Latona built her nest
 and there gave birth to the twofold eyes of heaven. 132
 Then there rose up a great cry all around us
 so that my master drew up closer to me,
 saying: 'Have no fear while I'm your guide.' 135
 '*Gloria in excelsis Deo*' all were shouting
 from what I understood from those nearby,
 where their outcry could be better heard. 138
 We stood stock still and in suspense,
 like the shepherds who first heard that song,
 until the trembling ceased and the song was done. 141
 Then we continued on our holy path,
 our eyes cast down to see the shades along the ground,
 who had returned to their accustomed weeping. 144
 Never did ignorance attack me with such fury
 against so great a need to know--
 if in this my memory does not err-- 147
 as I felt then deep in my thoughts.
 But, since we had to hurry, I dared not ask,
 nor could I of myself find answers there. 150

I went on, afraid to ask and full of thought.

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