

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXIV

Walking did not slow our talk, nor did the talking
slow our motion, as conversing we moved swiftly,
like ships that are driven by favoring winds. 3

And the shades, that seemed things dead twice over,
stared at me, amazed, from the sockets of their eyes,
once they saw I was alive. 6

And I, continuing, remarked:
'Perhaps he climbs more slowly than he'd like
because someone else is with him. 9

'But tell me, if you know, where Piccarda is.
And tell me if I am seeing anyone of note
among these people who are staring at me so.' 12

'I cannot say whether my sister was more virtuous
than she was beautiful. On high Olympus
she already triumphs, rejoicing in her crown.' 15

This he said first and then:
'Here it's not forbidden to call us by our names,
since our features are sucked dry by fasting. 18

'He there'--and he pointed with his finger--'is
Bonagiunta, Bonagiunta of Lucca, and that one
just beyond him, the face more cracked and scaly 21

'than the rest, held Holy Church within his arms.
He was from Tours and now by fasting purges
eels from Lake Bolsena served *alla vernaccia*.' 24

He named many another, one by one,
and each seemed happy to be named--
I did not see a scowl on any face. 27

I saw, gnashing his teeth on nothing in his hunger,
Ubaldo dalla Pila, and Bonifazio,
who with his crozier led and fed a multitude. 30

I saw Messer Marchese, who once took his leisure,
drinking in Forlì with less cause for thirst
and still could not be satisfied. 33

But as a man might look around and take more note
 of one than of another, so I did with him from Lucca,
 who clearly seemed to know me. 36

He was muttering and all I could make out
 was a word like 'Gentucca' coming from his mouth,
 where he felt most the justice that so wastes them. 39

'O soul,' I said, 'who seem so keen to speak with me,
 speak in a manner I can understand
 and with your speech thus satisfy us both.' 42

'A woman is born and wears not yet the wimple,'
 he said. 'She shall make my city please you,
 however men revile it. 45

'Take your way with this prophecy in mind
 and, if you have mistook my muttering,
 events themselves will make it plain to you. 48

'But tell me if I see before me
 the one who brought forth those new rhymes
 begun with *Ladies that have intelligence of love.*' 51

And I to him: 'I am one who, when Love
 inspires me, take note and, as he dictates
 deep within me, so I set it forth.' 54

'O my brother,' he said, 'now I understand the knot
 that kept the Notary, Guittone, and me
 on this side of the sweet new style I hear. 57

'I clearly understand that your pens follow
 faithfully whatever Love may dictate,
 which, to be sure, was not the case with ours. 60

'And he who takes the next step sees in this
 what separates the one style from the other.'
 Then, as though with satisfaction, he was silent. 63

As birds that spend the wintertime along the Nile
 sometimes gather in a flock high in the air,
 then, flying faster, form a line, 66

so all the people gathered there
 turned from us, hurrying away,
 light as they were through leanness and desire. 69

And, as one exhausted by his run
 lets his companions race ahead while he but walks
 until the heaving of his chest is eased, 72

so Forese let the holy flock pass by and came along with me behind them. He asked: 'How long until I see you here again?'	75
'I do not know,' I said, 'how long I'll live. But my return could not occur so soon that I will not in thought return before,	78
'since the place where I was put to live day by day strips itself of every good and seems disposed to certain ruin.'	81
'How true,' he said, 'and I see him who bears the greatest blame dragged behind a beast toward the valley where there is no absolution.	84
'The beast goes faster with each step, and faster, until it hurls him to the ground and leaves his body horribly disfigured.	87
'Those wheels do not have long to turn'-- and he looked skyward--'until that which my speech has left obscure shall be made plain to you.	90
'Now I must leave you here, for time is so precious in this realm that I lose too much by moving at your pace, slow step by step.'	93
As sometimes a horseman dashes at a gallop from a troop of riders to attain the honor of the first encounter,	96
he went away from us with longer strides, and I continued on with those two souls who were such noble leaders of the world.	99
And when he became a distant sight, my eyes kept following him, just as my mind hung on his words.	102
Suddenly a second tree, its branches green and weighted down with fruit, caught my eye as we came nearer.	105
I saw a crowd beneath it raising up their hands and calling--I don't know what--up at the foliage, like headlong, foolish children	108
who beg, but he from whom they beg does not reply and, to make their longing even stronger, holds the thing they want aloft and does not hide it.	111

Then they went away as if enlightened,
 and it was our turn to approach the lofty tree
 that turns away so many prayers and tears. 114

'Pass on, do not come any closer.
 This is the offshoot of that tree above
 from which Eve plucked and ate the fruit.' 117

I do not know whose voice spoke out among the leaves.
 Virgil, Statius, and I drew close to one another,
 moving on beside the rising cliff. 120

'Remember,' the voice went on, 'those accursèd creatures,
 formed in the clouds, their chests both beast and man,
 who, drunk with wine, made war on Theseus, 123

'and those Hebrews whose thirst revealed them slack,
 so that Gideon would not take them with him
 when he charged from the hills on Midian.' 126

Thus, staying close to one edge of the path,
 we passed on, hearing sins of gluttony
 that long ago received their wretched wages. 129

Then, farther apart along the road now empty,
 we moved ahead at least a thousand paces,
 each of us silent, deep in his thoughts. 132

'What are you thinking as you walk along,
 you three there by yourselves?' a sudden voice inquired,
 at which I started, as do timid, drowsy beasts. 135

I raised my head to make out who it was,
 and never was glass or metal in a furnace
 ever seen so glowing and so red 138

as the one I saw who said: 'If you wish
 to mount above, here is where you turn.
 This is the road for those who would find peace.' 141

His shining face had blinded me,
 so that I turned and walked behind my teachers
 like someone led by only what he hears. 144

And as, announcing dawn, the breeze of May
 stirs and exudes a fragrance
 filled with the scent of grass and flowers, 147

just such a wind I felt striking my brow
 and I could feel the moving of his feathers,
 my senses steeped in odor of ambrosia. 150

I heard the words: 'Blessèd are they	
whom grace so much enlightens that appetite	
fills not their breasts with gross desires,	153
but leaves them hungering for what is just.'	154