

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXVI

One before the other, we walked along the edge, and often the good master said to me: 'Be careful now, pay attention to my warnings.'	3
The sun was beating down on my right shoulder, for now its beams were changing the aspect of the west from blue to white	6
and, as my shadow made the flames appear more glowing, I saw that many of the shades, as they went past, took note of that faint sign.	9
It was this that made them speak of me, and they began by telling one another: 'This man's body does not seem made of air.'	12
Then some of them came up as near me as they could, always careful not to venture beyond the burning of the flames.	15
'O you who go along behind the others, not from sloth but perhaps with reverence, answer me, since I burn with thirst and fire.	18
'It is not I alone who crave your answer. All these others thirst for it more than the Indian or Ethiopian who craves cold water.	21
'Tell us, how can it be your body makes a wall against the sun, as if you were not yet entangled in the net of death?'	24
asked one of them. I would have then made myself known had I not been intent on another strange new sight that now appeared,	27
for in the middle of the flaming road came people moving in the opposite direction who had me staring, all absorbed.	30
There I can see that every shade of either group makes haste to kiss another, without stopping, and is content with such brief salutation,	33

just as, within their dark-hued files,
 one ant will put its face up to the other's,
 perhaps to inquire of his path and fortune. 36
 When they have ceased their friendly greeting,
 before they take a new step to continue,
 each one makes an effort to outshout the rest. 39
 The new ones cry: 'Sodom and Gomorrah!'
 and the others: 'Pasiphaë crawls into the cow
 so that the bull may hasten to her lust.' 42
 Then, as though cranes were flying, some toward
 cool Rhiphaean mountains and some toward desert sands,
 these shunning frost and those the sun, 45
 the one crowd goes, the other nears,
 and all return, weeping, to their former song
 and to the cry that most befits them. 48
 Then the same shades who had entreated me
 drew nearer, as they had before,
 and seemed all eagerness to hear me out. 51
 Having twice been made aware of their desire,
 I began: 'O souls secure of gaining,
 whenever it may be, the state of peace, 54
 'my limbs have not been left on earth,
 whether green or dried, but are here with me
 intact, in all their blood and joints. 57
 'I climb from here no longer to be blind.
 A lady is above through whom I gained the grace
 to bring my mortal parts into your world. 60
 'But, so may your greatest longing
 soon be satisfied and the heaven take you in
 that is so full of love and holds the widest space, 63
 'tell me, that I may trace it on my pages,
 who you are and who is in that throng
 which is even now receding at your backs?' 66
 Not less astounded is the mountaineer,
 struck dumb and staring all around him
 when rough and rustic he comes into a town, 69
 than each shade seemed from its expression.
 But once they had recovered from amazement,
 which is quickly overcome in noble hearts, 72

he who had questioned me began again:
 'Blessed are you, who, to die a better death,
 here take on board the knowledge that you gain. 75
 'Those, who come not with us, all offended
 the same way Caesar did, for which, in triumph,
 he once heard "queen" called out against him. 78
 'Thus they move on crying "Sodom,"
 as you heard, in self-reproach.
 And with their shame they fan the flames. 81
 'Hermaphroditic was our sin.
 Because we did not follow human law,
 but ran behind our appetites like beasts, 84
 'when, in our disgrace, we move off from the others
 we shout her name who made herself a beast
 inside the beast-shaped rough-hewn wood. 87
 'Now you know our deeds and know our guilt.
 If, perhaps, you would like to know our names,
 there is no time to tell and I would not know how. 90
 'About myself, indeed, I'll satisfy your wish.
 I am Guido Guinizzelli, come so far in my purgation
 because I felt true sorrow well before the end.' 93
 As the two sons became on seeing their mother
 caught in Lycurgus' outraged grief,
 so I became, if with less abandon, 96
 when he gave his name and I knew he had been
 father to me and to others, my betters,
 who ever used love's sweet and graceful rhymes. 99
 And for a long time, deep in thought, I went on
 without listening or speaking as I gazed at him,
 but did not, for the fire, move closer. 102
 Once my eyes were satisfied,
 I owned myself ready to do him service
 with such assurance as compels belief. 105
 He answered: 'All that I hear you tell
 leaves so deep and clear a trace in me
 that Lethe cannot wipe it out or make it dim, 108
 'but if your words just now have sworn the truth,
 tell me what has caused you to disclose
 by speech and look that you still hold me dear.' 111

And I to him: 'Your sweet verses,
 which as long as modern custom lasts,
 will make their very ink seem precious.' 114

'O brother,' he said, 'that one whom I point out
 to you'--and he pointed to a spirit just ahead--
 'was a better craftsman of the mother tongue. 117

'In verses of love and tales of romance
 he surpassed them all, and let the fools go on
 who think that fellow from Limoges was better. 120

'They favor hearsay over truth
 and thus arrive at their opinions
 without the use of skill or reason. 123

'The same was true of many long ago about Guittone,
 voice after voice shouting praise of him alone,
 until for most the truth at last prevailed. 126

'Now, if you possess such ample privilege
 that you are allowed into the cloister
 where Christ is abbot of the brothers, 129

'say a Paternoster there for me,
 as much of it as we have need in this our world,
 where we no longer have the power to sin.' 132

Then, perhaps to make room for another
 who was near him, he vanished through the fire
 as a fish glides to the bottom through the water. 135

I edged forward a little toward the other
 who had been pointed out and said that my desire
 prepared a place of welcome for his name, 138

to which he readily made answer:
 'Your courteous question pleases me so much
 I neither can nor would conceal myself from You. 141

'I am Arnaut, weeping and singing as I make my way.
 I see with grief past follies and I see,
 rejoicing, the joy I hope is coming. 144

'Now I pray You, by that power
 which guides You to the summit of the stairs,
 to remember, when the time is fit, my pain.' 147

Then he vanished in the fire that refines them. 148