

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXVII

As when it strikes with its first rays
there where its Maker shed His blood,
while the Ebro lies beneath the lofty Scales 3
and noon burns down on the waters of the Ganges,
so stood the sun. And thus day was departing
when the blissful angel of the Lord appeared. 6
He stood beyond the flames there on the terrace
and sang '*Beati mundo corde!*
with a voice more radiant than ours. 9
'There is no going on, you blessed souls,
without the fire's stinging bite. Enter,
and do not stop your ears against the distant song,' 12
he said to us once we were near,
so that, hearing him, I felt
like a man who has been put into his grave. 15
I bent forward over my outstretched hands
and stared into the fire, my mind fixed on the image
of human bodies I once saw being burned. 18
Then my kindly escorts turned to me
and Virgil said: 'My son,
here you may find torment, but not death. 21
'Remember, remember--
if even on Geryon I conveyed you safely,
what shall I do now we are nearer God? 24
'You must believe that if you were confined
in the very belly of this flame a thousand years
it would not singe a single hair upon your head. 27
'And if you think, perhaps, that I deceive you,
go close to it and test it, holding out
the hem of your garment in your hands. 30
'From now on put away, put away all fear.
Turn in this direction, come, and boldly enter.'
But, against my will, I stood stock still. 33

When he saw me stay, unmoved and obstinate,
 he said, somewhat disturbed: 'Now look, my son,
 this wall stands between Beatrice and you.' 36

As at the name of Thisbe, though on the point of death,
 Pyramus raised his lids and gazed at her,
 that time the mulberry turned red, 39

just so, my stubbornness made pliant, I turned
 to my wise leader when I heard the name
 that ever blossoms in my mind, 42

at which he shook his head and said: 'Well,
 are we going to stay on this side?' then smiled
 as one smiles at a child won over with a fruit. 45

Then, ahead of me, he was immersed in the fire,
 asking Statius, who for a long way now
 had walked between us, to come through last. 48

As soon as I was in I would have thrown myself
 straight into molten glass to cool myself,
 so beyond measure was the burning there, 51

and my sweet father, to comfort me,
 kept speaking of Beatrice as he went,
 saying: 'Even now I can almost see her eyes.' 54

Guiding us was a voice that sang beyond the flame.
 We gave it our rapt attention,
 and came forth from the fire where the ascent began. 57

'*Venite, benedicti Patris mei*' resounded
 from a dazzling light that blinded me
 so that I could not bear to look. 60

'The sun departs and evening comes,'
 it continued, 'do not stop, but hurry on
 before the west grows dark.' 63

The way went straight up through the rock
 so that my body blocked the last rays of the sun,
 now low in the sky, from my path. 66

We had tried only a few of the steps when we,
 I and my sages, understood, as my shadow faded,
 that the sun had set behind us. 69

And before the horizon, in all its vast expanse,
 had taken on a single hue
 and night had claimed all parts of her domain, 72

each of us made, of a step, a bed, for the nature of the mountain took from us the power and the urge for climbing higher.	75
As goats that have been quick and reckless on the heights before they grazed now peacefully chew their cud,	78
silent in the shade while the sun is burning, guarded by the shepherd, leaning on his staff, who lets them take their rest,	81
and as the herdsman who lives out in the open passes the night beside his quiet flock, watching lest a beast should scatter them,	84
such were the three of us, I like a goat and they like shepherds, shut in on all sides by walls of rock.	87
Only a small space could be seen beyond them, but in that space I saw the stars bigger and brighter than usually they are.	90
Amidst such sights and thoughts I was seized by sleep, which often knows what is to be before it happens.	93
In the hour, I think, when Cytherea, who always seems aflame with fire of love, first shone on the mountain from the east,	96
in a dream it seemed to me I saw a lady, young and lovely, passing through a meadow as she gathered flowers, singing:	99
'Let anyone who asks my name know I am Leah, and here I move about, using my fair hands to weave myself a garland.	102
'To be pleased at my reflection I adorn myself, but my sister Rachel never leaves her mirror, sitting before it all day long.	105
'She is as eager to gaze into her own fair eyes as I to adorn myself with my own hands. She in seeing, I in doing, find our satisfaction.'	108
And now, along with the pre-dawn splendors that, rising, become more welcome to the traveler, as, returning, he lodges a little nearer home,	111

the shadows all around were being put to flight and my sleep with them. And I rose up, seeing the great masters already risen.	114
'That sweet fruit which mortals seek and strive to find on many boughs today shall satisfy your cravings.'	117
Such were Virgil's words to me, and never was there promise of a gift that might yield equal pleasure.	120
Desire upon desire so seized me to ascend that with every stride I felt that I was growing wings for flight.	123
When the stairs had all run past beneath us and we were on the topmost step, Virgil fixed his eyes on me	126
and said: 'The temporal fire and the eternal you have seen, my son, and now have come to a place in which, unaided, I can see no farther.	129
'I have brought you here with intellect and skill. From now on take your pleasure as your guide. You are free of the steep way, free of the narrow.	132
'Look at the sun shining before you, look at the fresh grasses, flowers, and trees which here the earth produces of itself.	135
'You may sit down or move among these until the fair eyes come, rejoicing, which weeping bid me come to you.	138
'No longer wait for word or sign from me. Your will is free, upright, and sound. Not to act as it chooses is unworthy:	141
over yourself I crown and miter you.'	142