

PURGATORIO

CANTO III

Their sudden flight had scattered them
along the plain, toward the mountain
where Justice tries our souls, 3
and I drew closer to my true companion.
How would I have come this far without him?
Who would have led me up the mountain? 6
He seemed beside himself with self-reproach.
O pure and noble conscience,
how bitter is the sting of your least fault! 9
When he had slowed the hectic pace
that mars the dignity of any action,
my mind, at first withdrawn into itself, 12
now eagerly took in the wider landscape.
I fixed my gaze upon the highest hill
rising from the sea into the sky. 15
The sun, its rays like red flames at my back,
was cut off by my body
and threw the shadow of my shape before me. 18
Quickly I turned to look beside me,
afraid that I had been abandoned,
since the ground was dark in front of me alone. 21
And my comfort, turning, then began to speak:
'Why are you still distrustful?
Do you not believe I am with you and guide you? 24
'Evening has fallen there, where the body
that cast my shadow while I lived is buried.
Taken from Brindisi, Naples holds it now. 27
'Do not wonder if I cast no shadow,
no more than that the heavenly spheres
do not cut off their rays from one another. 30
'The Power that fits bodies like ours
to suffer torments, heat, and cold
does not reveal the secret of its working. 33

'Foolish is he who hopes that with our reason
 we can trace the infinite path
 taken by one Substance in three Persons. 36

'Be content, then, all you mortals, with the *quia*,
 for could you, on your own, have understood,
 there was no need for Mary to give birth, 39

'and you have seen the fruitless hope of some,
 whose very longing, unfulfilled,
 now serves them with eternal grief-- 42

'I speak of Aristotle and of Plato
 and of many others.' And here he lowered his brow,
 said nothing more, and seemed perturbed. 45

We now had come to the mountain's base.
 There we found the cliff so steep
 that nimble legs could not have climbed it. 48

The roughest, most deserted landslide
 between Lèrici and Turbìa, compared with it,
 seems a wide and easy stairway. 51

'Who would know where the hill slopes gently,'
 mused my master, coming to a halt,
 'where someone without wings might climb?' 54

And while, his eyes cast down,
 he was searching in his mind to find the way,
 and I was looking up among the rocks, 57

there to the left I saw a company of souls
 moving their steps in our direction,
 not seeming to approach, they came so slow. 60

'Raise your eyes, master,' I said, 'look,
 there are some who can offer us advice
 if you can't puzzle out the way yourself.' 63

He looked up then and, reassured, replied:
 'Let us go toward them, for they come slowly,
 and you, dear son, hold to that hope.' 66

Even after we had walked a thousand steps
 these souls were still quite far away--
 about the distance a strong arm could throw-- 69

when they all pressed against the solid wall
 of the high bank, standing still and close together,
 as men stop, taking stock, when they are puzzled. 72

'O you who have come to a happy end,
spirits already chosen,' Virgil began,
'by that peace which, I think, awaits you all, 75
'tell us where the mountain rises gently
so that we may begin the long ascent.
The more we know, the more we hate time's waste.' 78
As sheep come from the fold, first one,
then two, then three, and the rest stand timid,
bending eyes and muzzle to the ground, 81
and what the first one does the others copy,
pressing up behind it if it stops,
simple and quiet, not knowing why, 84
so, of that fortunate flock, I saw
the ones in front move shyly forward,
with solemn bearing and with modest looks. 87
As soon as those in front could see the light
upon the ground was broken to my right, so that
my shadow stretched up to the cliff, 90
they stopped, drew back a little,
and all the rest that came behind,
not knowing why, did just the same. 93
'Without your asking I declare to you
this is a human body that you see,
which now divides the sun's light on the ground. 96
'Do not be amazed, but think
that not without a power sent from Heaven
does he attempt to scale this rocky wall.' 99
Thus the master. And those worthy souls replied:
'Turn, then, and go on before us,'
showing the way with the backs of their hands. 102
And one of them began: 'Whoever you are,
as you continue walking, turn to look at me,
and think if ever you have seen me in the world.' 105
I turned and fixed my gaze on him.
He was blond, handsome, and of noble aspect,
but a blow had cleft one of his eyebrows. 108
When I had courteously disclaimed
ever to have seen him, 'Look here!' he said,
and showed me a wound high on his breast, 111

then, smiling: 'I am Manfred,
 grandson of the Empress Constance.
 Therefore I beg of you, when you return, 114
 'make your way to my fair daughter,
 mother of the pride of Sicily and Aragon,
 and tell the truth if another tale is told. 117
 'After my body was riven
 by two mortal blows, I turned
 in tears to Him who freely pardons. 120
 'Horrible were my sins,
 but Infinite Goodness with wide-open arms
 receives whoever turns to it. 123
 'If the pastor of Cosenza, sent by Clement
 on the hunt to take me down,
 had read that page in God with greater care, 126
 'my body's bones would still be sheltered
 at the head of the bridge near Benevento
 under the cairn of heavy stones. 129
 'Now the rain washes and the wind stirs them,
 beyond the Kingdom, near the Verde's banks, there
 where he brought them with his torches quenched. 132
 'By such a curse as theirs none is so lost
 that the eternal Love cannot return
 as long as hope maintains a thread of green. 135
 'It is true that one who dies in contumacy
 of Holy Church, even though repentant at the end,
 must still endure outside this wall-- 138
 'for every year he spent in his presumption--
 thirty, unless that sentence
 is reduced by holy prayers. 141
 'Now you know how you can make me happy:
 reveal to my good Constance where you've seen me
 and how long I am excluded-- 144
 for here much can be gained from those on earth.' 145