

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXX

When the seven-starred Wain of highest Heaven--
which never sets and never rises
and never wore a veil of fog except for sin-- 3
had made all in the procession mindful of their duty
(as lower down those seven stars direct
the helmsman making for his port)-- 6
came to a stop, the chosen people
that first appeared between it and the griffin
turned toward the chariot as to their peace. 9
One of them, who seemed dispatched from Heaven,
sang out aloud three times: '*Veni, sponsa,*
de Libano,' and all the others echoed him. 12
As quickly as from their graves at the last trumpet
the blessed shall arise, their voices
rejoined to flesh in joyous Hallelujahs, 15
there, on the sacred chariot, rose up
ad vocem tanti senis, one hundred
ministers and messengers of life eternal. 18
All were chanting: '*Benedictus qui venis*' and,
tossing flowers up into the air and all around them,
'*Manibus, oh, date lilia plenis!*' 21
At break of day, I have seen the sky,
its eastern parts all rosy
and the rest serene and clear 24
even as the sun's face rose obscured
so that through tempering mist
the eye could bear it longer, 27
thus, within that cloud of blossoms
rising from angelic hands and fluttering
back down into the chariot and around it, 30
olive-crowned above a veil of white
appeared to me a lady, beneath a green mantle,
dressed in the color of living flame. 33

And in my spirit, which for so long a time
 had not been overcome with awe
 that used to make me tremble in her presence-- 36
 even though I could not see her with my eyes--
 through the hidden force that came from her I felt
 the overwhelming power of that ancient love. 39
 As soon as that majestic force,
 which had already pierced me once
 before I had outgrown my childhood, struck my eyes, 42
 I turned to my left with the confidence
 a child has running to his *mamma*
 when he is afraid or in distress 45
 to say to Virgil: 'Not a single drop of blood
 remains in me that does not tremble--
 I know the signs of the ancient flame.' 48
 But Virgil had departed, leaving us bereft:
 Virgil, sweetest of fathers,
 Virgil, to whom I gave myself for my salvation. 51
 And not all our ancient mother lost
 could save my cheeks, washed in the dew,
 from being stained again with tears. 54
 'Dante, because Virgil has departed,
 do not weep, do not weep yet--
 there is another sword to make you weep.' 57
 Just like an admiral who moves from stern to prow
 to see the men that serve the other ships
 and urge them on to better work, 60
 so on the left side of the chariot--
 as I turned when I heard her call my name,
 which of necessity is here recorded-- 63
 I saw the lady, who had just appeared
 veiled beneath the angels' celebration,
 fix her eyes on me from across the stream. 66
 Although the veil, encircled with Minerva's leaves
 and descending from her head,
 did not allow me unrestricted sight, 69
 regally, with scorn still in her bearing,
 she continued like one who, even as he speaks,
 holds back his hottest words: 72

'Look over here! I am, I truly am Beatrice.
 How did you dare approach the mountain?
 Do you not know that here man lives in joy?' 75
 I lowered my eyes to the clear water.
 But when I saw myself reflected, I drew them back
 toward the grass, such shame weighed on my brow. 78
 As a mother may seem overbearing to her child,
 so she seemed to me, for the taste
 of such stern pity is a bitter taste. 81
 Then she fell silent and at once
 the angels sang: '*In te, Domine, speravi,*'
 but did not sing past '*pedes meos.*' 84
 Even as the snow among those living beams
 that grow along the spine of Italy is frozen
 when blown and packed by the Slavonian winds 87
 but then, dissolving, melts into itself
 if the land that casts no shadow merely breathes,
 acting like a flame that makes a candle melt, 90
 just so was I with neither tears nor sighs
 before they sang who always are in tune
 with notes set down in the eternal spheres, 93
 but, when their lovely harmonies revealed
 their sympathy for me, more than if they'd said:
 'Lady, why do you torment him so?' 96
 the ice that had confined my heart
 was turned to breath and water and in anguish
 flowed from my breast through eyes and mouth. 99
 As yet she stood, motionless,
 on the same side of the chariot,
 then turned her words to the pitying angels: 102
 'You keep your watch in the eternal day
 so neither night nor sleep deprives you
 of a single step that time takes in its course. 105
 'Therefore my response is made with greater care
 that he who is weeping over there should listen,
 so that his sin and sorrow be of equal measure. 108
 'Not only by the working of the wheels above
 that urge each seed to a certain end
 according to the stars that cluster with them, 111

'but by grace, abundant and divine,
 which rains from clouds so high above
 our sight cannot come near them, 114

'this man in his new life potentially was such
 that each good disposition in him
 would have come to marvelous conclusion, 117

'but the richer and more vigorous the soil,
 when planted ill and left to go to seed,
 the wilder and more noxious it becomes. 120

'For a time I let my countenance sustain him.
 Guiding him with my youthful eyes,
 I drew him with me in the right direction. 123

'Once I had reached the threshold of my second age,
 when I changed lives, he took himself from me
 and gave himself to others. 126

'When I had risen to spirit from my flesh,
 as beauty and virtue in me became more rich,
 to him I was less dear and less than pleasing. 129

'He set his steps upon an untrue way,
 pursuing those false images of good
 that bring no promise to fulfillment-- 132

'useless the inspiration I sought and won for him,
 as both with dreams and other means
 I called him back, so little did he heed them. 135

'He sank so low that every instrument
 for his salvation now fell short
 except to make him see souls in perdition. 138

'And so I visited the threshold of the dead
 and, weeping, offered up my prayers
 to the one who has conducted him this far. 141

'Broken would be the high decree of God
 should Lethe be crossed and its sustenance
 be tasted without payment of some fee: 144

his penitence that shows itself in tears.' 145