

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXXI

'O you on the far side of the sacred stream,'
turning the point of her words on me
that had seemed sharp enough with their edge, 3
she then went on without a pause: 'Say it,
say if this is true. To such an accusation
your confession must be joined.' 6
My faculties were so confounded
that my voice struggled up but spent itself
before it made its way out of my mouth. 9
For a moment she held back, then asked:
'What are you thinking? Speak, for your memories
of sin have not been washed away by water yet.' 12
Confusion and fear, mixed together,
drove from my mouth a yes--
but one had need of eyes to hear it. 15
As a crossbow breaks with too much tension
from the pulling taut of cord and bow
so that the arrow strikes the target with less force, 18
thus I collapsed beneath that heavy load
and, with a flood of tears and sighs,
my voice came strangled from my throat. 21
At that she said to me: 'In your desire for me
that guided you to love that good
beyond which there is nothing left to long for, 24
'what ditches or what chains did you encounter
across your path to make you cast aside
all hope of going forward? 27
'And what profit or advantage showed
in the face of other things so that you felt
you must parade yourself before them?' 30
After heaving a bitter sigh
I hardly had the voice to give the answer
my lips were laboring to shape. 33

In tears, I said: 'Things set in front of me, with their false delights, turned back my steps the moment that Your countenance was hidden.'	36
'Had you stayed silent or denied what you confess,' she said, 'your fault could not be any less apparent since it is known to such a Judge.	39
'But when a man's own blushing cheek reveals the condemnation of his sin, in our high court the grindstone dulls the sharp edge of the sword.	42
'Nonetheless, so that you now may bear the shame of your straying and, the next time that you hear the Sirens' call, be stronger,	45
'stop sowing tears and listen. Then you shall hear just how my buried flesh should have directed you to quite a different place.	48
'Never did art or nature set before you beauty as great as in the lovely members that enclosed me, now scattered and reduced to dust.	51
'And if the highest beauty failed you in my death, what mortal thing should then have drawn you to desire it?	54
'Indeed, at the very first arrow of deceitful things, you should have risen up and followed me who was no longer of them.	57
'You should not have allowed your wings to droop, leaving you to other darts from some young girl or other novelty of such brief use.	60
'The fledgling may allow even a third attempt, but all in vain is the net flung or arrow shot in sight of a full-fledged bird.'	63
As children in their shame stand mute, their eyes upon the ground, listening, acknowledging their fault, repentant,	66
just so I stood. And then she said: 'Now that you are grieved by what you hear, lift up your beard and you shall have more grief from what you see.'	69
With less resistance is the sturdy oak torn from the earth, whether by our northern wind or by the one that blows from Iarbas' lands,	72

than was my chin nudged up by her command.
 When by my beard she sought my face
 I recognized the venom in her words. 75
 And when I had raised my head
 my eyes saw that those first-created beings
 had paused in scattering their flowers 78
 and, my vision blurred and still uncertain,
 saw Beatrice turning toward the beast
 that is one person in two natures. 81
 Even beneath her veil, even beyond the stream,
 she seemed to surpass her former self in beauty
 more than she had on earth surpassed all others. 84
 The nettle of remorse so stung me then
 that whatever else had lured me most to loving
 had now become for me most hateful. 87
 Such knowledge of my fault was gnawing at my heart
 that I was overcome, and what I then became
 she knows who was the reason for my state. 90
 Then, when my heart restored my vital signs,
 I saw the lady I first found alone above me,
 saying: 'Hold on to me and hold me fast!' 93
 She drew me into the river up to my throat
 and, pulling me along behind her, moved
 upon the water as lightly as a skiff. 96
 When I had come close to the blessed shore
 I heard '*Asperges me*' so sweetly sung
 that I cannot recall nor write it down. 99
 The lovely lady spread her arms,
 then clasped my head, and plunged me under,
 where I was forced to swallow water. 102
 Then she drew me out and led me, bathed,
 into the dance of the four lovely ladies
 as each one raised an arm above my head. 105
 'Here we are nymphs and in heaven we are stars.
 Before Beatrice descended to the world
 we were ordained to serve her as her handmaids. 108
 'We will bring you to her eyes. But to receive
 the joyous light they hold, the other three,
 who look much deeper into things, shall sharpen yours.' 111

Thus they began their song and then
 they took me to the griffin's breast,
 where Beatrice stood and faced us. 114

They said: 'Do not withhold your gaze.
 We have placed you here before the emeralds
 from which, some time ago, Love shot his darts.' 117

A thousand desires hotter than any flame
 bound my eyes to those shining eyes,
 which still remained fixed on the griffin. 120

Even as the sun in a mirror, not otherwise
 the twofold beast shone forth in them,
 now with the one, now with its other nature. 123

Consider, reader, whether I was struck by wonder
 when I saw the thing itself remain as one
 but in its image ever changing. 126

While my soul, filled with wonder and with joy,
 tasted the food that, satisfying in itself,
 yet for itself creates a greater craving, 129

the other three, who by their bearing
 showed themselves of a higher order, moved forward,
 dancing to their angelic roundelay. 132

'Turn, Beatrice, turn your holy eyes
 upon your faithful one'--thus ran their song--
 'who, to see you, now has come so far. 135

'Of your grace do us a grace: unveil
 your mouth to him so that he may observe
 the second beauty that you still conceal.' 138

O splendor of eternal living light--
 even he who has grown pale in the shadow of Parnassus
 or has drunk deeply from its well, 141

would not even he appear to have his mind confounded,
 attempting to describe you as you looked,
 Heaven with its harmonies reflected in you, 144

when in the wide air you unveiled yourself? 145