

PURGATORIO

CANTO XXXII

My eyes were fixed and so intent
to satisfy ten years of thirst
that all my other senses were undone, 3
walled off from anything around them, enclosed
in their indifference, so did the holy smile
ensnare them in its old, familiar net, 6
when by the power of those goddesses
my gaze was forced to travel left
as they cried out: 'Too fixed!' 9
And then I shared the temporary blindness
of those whose eyes have just been smitten by the sun,
leaving me sightless for a time. 12
But after my eyes again became accustomed
to lesser sights--lesser, I mean, when compared
to the greater from which they'd been forced to turn-- 15
I noted that the glorious army had wheeled around
on its right flank and now was facing east,
with the seven candles and the sun before it. 18
As under cover of its shields a squadron
turns to save itself, following the colors,
before the entire force can rearrange its ranks, 21
the soldiers of the heavenly kingdom
who were marching in the front passed by
before the chariot turned upon its yoke. 24
Then the ladies went back to their wheels
and the griffin moved its blessed load,
but so that not a feather on it shook. 27
The fair lady who had pulled me through the stream
and Statius and I were following the wheel
that in a smaller arc had made its turn. 30
Then, passing on beneath a vaulting forest,
emptied through fault of her who trusted in the snake,
we measured our steps to an angelic song. 33

We had proceeded perhaps as far as an arrow,
 loosed three times from the string, would carry,
 when Beatrice descended from the car. 36

I heard all of them murmuring 'Adam.'
 Then they circled a tree stripped of its leaves
 and any other flowering on its branches. 39

The higher its branches grew, the wider was their spread.
 Its height would cause even the Indian,
 in his towering forest, to gaze in wonder. 42

'Blessed are you, griffin, for not plundering
 with your beak this tree's sweet-tasting fruit
 that later wrenches bellies with its pain.' 45

Thus did those around the mighty tree cry out,
 and the double-natured animal replied:
 'This is how the seed of justice is preserved.' 48

Turning to the shaft that he had pulled,
 he drew it to the foot of the widowed trunk
 and left it bound to the tree from which it came. 51

As our plants, when the great light falls on them,
 mingled with the light that shines
 in the rays that follow the celestial carp, 54

begin to swell their buds and are renewed,
 each in its proper color, before the sun
 hitches his steeds to other stars, 57

so, taking on a hue less red than roses
 yet deeper than violets, the tree renewed itself
 where its branches just before had been so bare. 60

The hymn that company then chanted
 is not sung on earth nor could I make it out,
 nor bear to hear that music to its end. 63

Could I describe how those pitiless eyes,
 hearing of Syrinx, were lulled to sleep,
 the eyes whose lengthy vigil cost so dear, 66

I would fashion, as a painter does
 when painting from a model, how I fell asleep.
 But let him, who can do it, portray his nodding off. 69

I move along, therefore, to when I came awake
 and say a brightness broke my veil of sleep,
 as did the call: 'Arise, what are you doing?' 72

As, when brought to see the blossoms on the apple-tree
 that makes the angels hungry for its fruit
 and celebrates perpetual marriage-feasts in Heaven, 75
 Peter and John and James were overcome,
 called back into themselves at the word
 by which still deeper sleep was broken, 78
 and saw their company diminished
 both by Moses and Elijah
 and their teacher's raiment changed, 81
 such did I become. I saw, standing above me,
 the same compassionate lady
 who had guided my steps along the river. 84
 All in doubt I asked: 'Where is Beatrice?'
 And she: 'Look there beneath the new-sprung blossoms
 of the tree where she is seated on the root. 87
 'See the company encircling her.
 The others all ascend behind the griffin
 with a song more sweet and more profound.' 90
 I do not know if she had more to say,
 for now, before my eyes, appeared the one
 who had closed me off from any other thought. 93
 On the bare ground she sat alone,
 as if left behind to guard the chariot
 I had seen the twofold beast make fast. 96
 The seven nymphs encircled her as a cloister,
 holding up lights that would not waver
 should winds blow even from the north or south. 99
 'Here for a time you shall be a woodsman
 and then forever a citizen with me
 of that Rome where Christ Himself is Roman. 102
 'Therefore, to serve the world that lives so ill,
 keep your eyes upon the chariot and write down
 what now you see here once you have gone back.' 105
 Thus Beatrice. And I, overwhelmed,
 prostrate at the feet of her commands,
 gave my mind and eyes to what she wished. 108
 Never did fire descend with such swift motion
 out of thickened banks of clouds,
 plunging from the farthest zone of air, 111

as I saw the bird of Jove swoop down and plummet
 through the tree, ripping the bark,
 shredding flowers and fresh leaves. 114

It struck the chariot with its full force
 so that it reeled like a ship tossed in a tempest,
 now leeward, now windward, driven by the waves. 117

Then I saw, flinging itself into the very cradle
 of the triumphal car, a fox so wasted
 it seemed deprived of any nourishment. 120

But my lady, railing at its foul offenses,
 drove it back in such retreat
 as its fleshless bones allowed. 123

Then, from where it had swept down before,
 I saw the eagle plummet to the chariot's floor
 and leave it feathered with its plumage. 126

Such a voice as issues from a grieving heart
 I heard break forth from Heaven, saying:
 'O my little bark, how badly are you laden!' 129

Then it seemed to me the earth was cleft
 between the wheels, and I saw a dragon issue,
 thrust its tail up through the car, 132

and as a wasp withdraws its sting, so it drew back
 its venomous tail, ripping out part of the floor,
 and then slithered off on its own errant way. 135

What was left was once more covered,
 as is fertile soil with weeds, by plumage,
 offered perhaps with kind and innocent intent, 138

and both the wheels and shaft
 were completely covered over
 in less time than a sigh may part the lips. 141

Thus transformed, the holy edifice
 put forth heads on all its parts,
 three on the shaft and one at every corner-- 144

the first three bore horns like oxen, the others
 had a single horn upon their foreheads--
 such a monster as never seen before. 147

Secure, like a fortress on a towering mountain,
 I saw a disheveled harlot sitting there,
 casting provocative glances this way and that. 150

I saw a giant who stood beside her,
perhaps to prevent her being taken from him.
They kissed each other again and again. 153

But because she turned on me
her lustful, roving eye, that savage lover
thrashed her body from head to foot. 156

Then, full of suspicion and cruel in his rage,
he unhitched the monster and dragged it through the wood
so far that the wood itself now screened 159
the harlot and the strange brute from my sight. 160