

PURGATORIO

CANTO IV

When one of our faculties is given over
to pleasure or to pain,
our soul will focus on that one alone 3
and seem to pay no mind to any of its other powers--
revealing the error in the doctrine that maintains
among the souls within us one is more aflame. 6
And therefore when we see or hear a thing
that concentrates the soul,
time passes and we're not aware of it, 9
for the faculty that hears the passing time
is not the one that holds the soul intent:
the one that hears is bound, the other free. 12
This I truly understood,
listening to that spirit in amazement,
for the sun had climbed a good fifty degrees 15
and I had failed to notice, when we came
to where these souls cried out as one:
'Here is the place you asked for.' 18
Often, at the time the grapes are darkening,
a peasant, with a pitchfork full of thorns,
will plug a larger opening 21
than the gap through which my leader
and I behind him climbed alone,
after the troop went on without us. 24
One may go up to San Leo or descend to Noli
or mount to the summits of Bismantova or Cacùme
on foot, but here one had to fly-- 27
I mean with the swift wings and plumage
of great desire, following that guidance
which gave me hope and showed me light. 30
We climbed into a fissure in the rock.
The stony walls pressed close on either side.
We had to use our hands to keep our footing. 33

When we had reached the crag's high upper ledge,
 out on the open hillside, 'Master,' I said,
 'which path shall we take?' 36

And he to me: 'Do not fall back a single step.
 Just keep climbing up behind me
 until some guide who knows the way appears.' 39

The summit was so high that it was out of sight,
 the slope far steeper than the line
 drawn from midquadrant to the center. 42

Exhausted, I complained:
 'Belovèd father, turn around and see
 how I'll be left alone unless you pause.' 45

'My son,' he said, 'drag yourself up there,'
 pointing to a ledge a little higher,
 which from that place encircles all the hill. 48

His words so spurred me on
 I forced myself to clamber up
 until I stood upon the ledge. 51

There we settled down to rest, facing
 the east, where we had begun our climb,
 for often it pleases us to see how far we've come. 54

First I gazed upon the shore below,
 then raised my eyes up to the sun and was amazed
 to see its rays were striking from the left. 57

The poet understood I was astounded
 to see the road that chariot of light
 was taking in its path between the north and us. 60

And so he said: 'If the mirror that moves its light
 to either side of the Equator
 were in the company of Castor and of Pollux, 63

'the red part of the zodiac would show
 still closer to the Bears
 unless it were to leave its ancient track. 66

'If you would understand how this may be,
 with your mind focused, picture Zion
 and this mountain positioned so on earth 69

'they share the same horizon
 but are in different hemispheres.
 Then you shall see how, to his misfortune, 72

'the highway Phaeton failed to drive
 must pass this mountain on the one side,
 Zion on the other, if you consider it with care.' 75

'Indeed, my master,' I said,
 'I did not understand what now is clear,
 the point for which my wit was lacking: 78

'the mid-circle of that celestial motion,
 which a certain science calls "Equator,"
 and which lies always between the sun and winter, 81

'for the very reason you have given
 is as far to the north from here
 as the Hebrews saw it toward the torrid parts. 84

'But, please, tell me just how far
 we have to go, for the hill rises
 farther than my eyes can climb.' 87

And he to me: 'This mountain is so fashioned
 that the climb is harder at the outset
 and, as one ascends, becomes less toilsome. 90

'When climbing uphill will seem pleasing--
 as easy as the passage of a boat
 that lets the current float it down the stream-- 93

'at that point will this trail be done.
 There look to rest your weariness.
 This I know for truth. I say no more.' 96

As soon as he had said these words
 a voice close by called out: 'Perhaps
 you'll feel the need to sit before then.' 99

Hearing this, both of us turned around,
 and saw to our left an enormous rock
 that neither he nor I at first had noticed. 102

When we approached, we saw some people
 resting in the shade behind the boulder
 as men will settle down in indolence to rest, 105

and one of them, who seemed so very weary,
 was sitting with his arms around his knees,
 his face pressed down between them. 108

'O my dear lord,' I said, 'just look at him.
 He shows himself more indolent
 than if sloth had been his very sister.' 111

Then he turned and fixed his eyes on us,
 barely lifting his face above his haunch,
 and said: 'Go on up then, you who are so spry.' 114

At that I realized who he was,
 and the exertion that still kept me short of breath
 now did not keep me from his side. 117

When I reached him he barely raised his head
 to say: 'Have you marked how the sun
 drives his car past your left shoulder?' 120

His lazy movements and curt speech
 slowly shaped my lips into a smile, and I began:
 'Belacqua, no longer need I grieve for you. 123

'But tell me, what keeps you sitting here?
 Are you waiting for an escort,
 or have you gone back to your old lazy ways?' 126

And he: 'Brother, what's the good of going up?
 The angel of God who sits in the gateway
 would not let me pass into the torments. 129

'I must wait outside as long as in my lifetime
 the heavens wheeled around me
 while I put off my sighs of penance to the end, 132

'unless I'm helped by prayers that rise
 from a heart that lives in grace.
 What good are those that go unheard in Heaven?' 135

And now, not waiting for me, the poet began
 to climb the path, saying: 'Come along.
 Look, now the sun is touching the meridian, 138

and on Morocco's shore night sets her foot.' 139