

PURGATORIO

CANTO VII

Once the courteous and joyful greetings
had been repeated a third time and a fourth,
Sordello drew back and asked: 'Who then are You?' 3

'Before souls worthy of ascent to God
could be directed to this mountain,
Octavian interred my bones. 6

'I am Virgil, and for no other failing
did I lose Heaven but my lack of faith.'
That was the answer that my leader gave. 9

Like one who of a sudden sees a thing before him
at which he wonders, who both believes and doesn't,
saying to himself: 'It is--but no, it cannot be,' 12

such seemed the other. He bowed his head,
humbly drew near again and, opening his arms,
bent down to clasp him deferentially. 15

'O glory of the Latins,' he exclaimed,
'through whom our language showed what it could do,
O eternal honor of the town where I was born, 18

'what merit or what grace brings you to me?
If I am worthy of your words, tell me
if you come from hell, and from what cloister.' 21

'Through all the circles of the woeful kingdom
I have made my way,' he answered. 'Power
from Heaven moved me and with that power I come. 24

'Not for what I did but what I did not do
I lost the vision of the lofty Sun you long for
and which I came to know too late. 27

'There is a place down there, not sad with torments
but only darkness, where lamentations sound,
not loud as wailing but soft as sighs. 30

'There I abide with the innocent little ones
seized in the fangs of death
before they could be cleansed of mortal guilt. 33

'There I abide with those who were not clothed
 in the three holy virtues, yet, blameless,
 knew the others and followed every one. 36

'But if you know the way and are permitted,
 show us how to go, so that we may come sooner
 where purgatory has its true beginning.' 39

He answered: 'We are set in no fixed place.
 I may ascend and move about, and I will walk
 with you and be your guide as far as I'm allowed. 42

'But see, already day is waning
 and we may not ascend by night.
 Now is the time to choose a resting place. 45

'There, to the right, are spirits set apart.
 I will lead you to them, if you wish.
 And not without pleasure shall you know them.' 48

'How is that?' was the reply. 'If a man should wish
 to climb by night, would he be hindered,
 or would he not ascend because he lacked the power?' 51

Good Sordello drew his finger through the dust
 and said: 'See, you would not cross
 even this line once the sun goes down, 54

'for nothing hinders the ascent
 except the darkness of the night,
 which binds the will with helplessness. 57

'After nightfall one might head back down
 and wander lost around the hill
 as long as the horizon hides the day.' 60

At that my lord, as in amazement, said:
 'Lead us, then, to where you say
 we may take pleasure in our rest.' 63

We had gone but a little way from there
 when I observed the hill was hollowed out,
 as valleys carve out hollows in our mountains. 66

'Let us go there,' said the shade,
 'to where the slope sinks to a bowl,
 and there await the coming of the day.' 69

A slanting path, connecting steep and flat,
 brought us to the border of the glade
 just where the rim around it falls away. 72

Gold and fine silver, carmine and leaded white,
 indigo, lignite bright and clear,
 an emerald after it has just been split, 75
 placed in that dell would see their brightness fade
 against the colors of the grass and flowers,
 as less is overcome by more. 78
 Nature had not only painted there in all her hues
 but there the sweetness of a thousand scents
 was blended in one fragrance strange and new. 81
 Seated in the grass and flowers, I saw
 souls not visible from beyond the sunken valley.
 'Salve Regina' was the song they sang. 84
 'Before the sun's rim sinks into its nest,'
 began the Mantuan soul who'd brought us there,
 'do not ask me to take you down among them. 87
 'From this bank you will more easily discern
 their gestures and their features
 than if you went among them down below. 90
 'He who sits the highest--the one with the look
 of a man who shirked his duty--not moving his lips
 to match the singing of the rest, 93
 'was Emperor Rudolph. He might have healed
 the wounds that have brought Italy to death,
 so that, for another to restore her, it is late. 96
 'The next, who looks as if he gave him comfort,
 ruled the land where the waters from the Moldau
 flow into the Elbe, and from the Elbe to the sea. 99
 'His name was Ottocar, and in his swaddling clothes
 he was of greater worth than Wenceslaus,
 his bearded son, who feasts on lust and idleness. 102
 'And the one with the small nose, who seems in council
 with the one who is so gracious in his looks,
 died in flight, deflowering the lily. 105
 'Look how he beats upon his breast!
 And see the other, who rests his cheek
 upon his palm and sighs: 108
 'father and the father-in-law of the plague of France,
 they know his foul and vicious life--
 thus comes the grief that pierces them. 111

'He who looks so tall and sturdy and who sings in time with him who bears a manly nose was girt with the cord of every virtue.	114
'And if the youth who sits behind him had come to power on his throne, then indeed his virtue would have passed from vessel to vessel,	117
'which none can say of the other heirs. James and Frederick hold their kingdoms, but neither has the better heritage.	120
'Rarely does human worth rise through the branches. And this He wills who gives it, so that it shall be sought from Him.	123
'My words concern the large-nosed one no less than Peter, who is singing with him, so that Apulia and Provence are now in grief.	126
'As much is the plant poorer than its seed that Constance may yet praise her husband more than Beatrice and Margaret boast of theirs.	129
'See the king who led a simple life sitting there alone, Henry of England. His branches bloom with better issue.	132
'Lowest among them, sitting on the ground and looking up, is William the marquis, because of whom Alessandria and its war	135
make Monferrato and Canavese weep.'	136