

## CANTO XXX

AS THE PROCESSION comes to a halt, the twenty-four elders turn to face the chariot. One of them sings, "Come, O bride, from Lebanon." One hundred singing angels appear in the sky overhead; they fill the air with a rain of flowers. Through the flowers, Beatrice appears. The Pilgrim turns to Virgil to confess his overpowering emotions, only to find that Virgil has disappeared! Beatrice speaks sternly to Dante, calling him by name and reprimanding him for having wasted his God-given talents, wandering from the path that leads to Truth. So hopeless, in fact, was his case, to such depths did he sink, that the journey to see the souls of the Damned in Hell was the only way left of setting him back on the road to salvation.

When the Septentrion of the First Heaven  
 (which never sets nor rises nor has known  
 any cloud other than the veil of sin), 3

which showed to everyone his duty there  
 (just as our lower constellation guides  
 the helmsman on his way to port on earth), 6

stopped short, that group of prophets of the truth  
 who were between the griffin and those lights  
 turned to the car as to their source of peace; 9

then, one of them, as sent from Heaven, sang  
*Veni, sponsa, de Libano*, three times,  
 and all the other voices followed his. 12

As at the Final Summons all the blest  
 will rise out of their graves, ready to raise  
 new-bodied voices singing 'Hallelujah!' 15

just so rose up above the heavenly cart  
 a hundred spirits *ad vocem tanti senis*,  
 eternal heralds, ministers of God, 18

all shouting: *Benedictus qui venis!* then,  
 tossing a rain of flowers in the air,  
*Manibus. O, date lilia plenis!* 21

Sometimes, as day approaches, I have seen  
all of the eastern sky a glow of rose,  
the rest of heaven beautifully clear, 24

the sun's face rising in a misty veil  
of tempering vapors that allow the eye  
to look straight at it for a longer time: 27

even so, within a nebula of flowers  
that flowed upward from angels' hands and then  
poured down, covering all the chariot, 30

appeared a lady—over her white veil  
an olive crown and, under her green cloak,  
her gown, the color of eternal flame. 33

And instantly—though many years had passed  
since last I stood trembling before her eyes,  
captured by adoration, stunned by awe— 36

my soul, that could not see her perfectly,  
still felt, succumbing to her mystery  
and power, the strength of its enduring love. 39

No sooner were my eyes struck by the force  
of the high, piercing virtue I had known  
before I quit my boyhood years, than I 42

turned to the left—with all the confidence  
that makes a child run to its mother's arms,  
when he is frightened or needs comforting— 45

to say to Virgil: "Not one drop of blood  
is left inside my veins that does not throb:  
I recognize signs of the ancient flame." 48

But Virgil was not there. We found ourselves  
without Virgil, sweet father, Virgil to whom  
for my salvation I gave up my soul. 51

All the delights around me, which were lost  
by our first mother, could not keep my cheeks,  
once washed with dew, from being stained with tears. 54

"Dante, though Virgil leaves you, do not weep,  
not yet, that is, for you shall have to weep  
from yet another wound. Do not weep yet." 57

- Just as an admiral, from bow or stern,  
watches his men at work on other ships,  
encouraging their earnest labors—so, 60
- rising above the chariot's left rail  
(when I turned round, hearing my name called out,  
which of necessity I here record), 63
- I saw the lady who had first appeared  
beneath the angelic festival of flowers  
gazing upon me from beyond the stream. 66
- Although the veil that flowed down from her head,  
fixed by the crown made of Minerva's leaves,  
still kept me from a perfect view of her, 69
- I sensed the regal sternness of her face,  
as she continued in the tone of one  
who saves the sharpest words until the end: 72
- "Yes, look at me! Yes, I am Beatrice!  
So, you at last have deigned to climb the mount?  
You learned at last that here lies human bliss?" 75
- I lowered my head and looked down at the stream,  
but, filled with shame at my reflection there,  
I quickly fixed my eyes upon the grass. 78
- I was the guilty child facing his mother,  
abject before her harshness: harsh, indeed,  
is unripe pity not yet merciful. 81
- As she stopped speaking, all the angels rushed  
into the psalm *In te, Domine, speravi*,  
but did not sing beyond *pedes meos*. 84
- As snow upon the spine of Italy,  
frozen among the living rafters there,  
blown and packed hard by wintry northeast winds, 87
- will then dissolve, dripping into itself,  
when, from the land that knows no noonday shade,  
there comes a wind like flame melting down wax; 90
- so tears and sighs were frozen hard in me,  
until I heard the song of those attuned  
forever to the music of the spheres; 93

but when I sensed in their sweet notes the pity  
 they felt for me (it was as if they said:  
 "Lady, why do you shame him so?"), the bonds 96  
 of ice packed tight around my heart dissolved,  
 becoming breath and water: from my breast,  
 through mouth and eyes, anguish came pouring forth. 99  
 Still on the same side of the chariot  
 she stood immobile; then she turned her words  
 to that compassionate array of beings: 102  
 "With your eyes fixed on the eternal day,  
 darkness of night or sleep cannot conceal  
 from you a single act performed on earth; 105  
 and though I speak to you, my purpose is  
 to make the one who weeps on that far bank  
 perceive the truth and match his guilt with grief. 108  
 Not only through the working of the spheres,  
 which brings each seed to its appropriate end  
 according as the stars keep company, 111  
 but also through the bounty of God's grace,  
 raining from vapors born so high above  
 they cannot be discerned by human sight, 114  
 was this man so endowed, potentially,  
 in early youth—had he allowed his gifts  
 to bloom, he would have reaped abundantly. 117  
 But the more vigorous and rich the soil,  
 the wilder and the weedier it grows  
 when left untilled, its bad seeds flourishing. 120  
 There was a time my countenance sufficed,  
 as I let him look into my young eyes  
 for guidance on the straight path to his goal; 123  
 but when I passed into my second age  
 and changed my life for Life, that man you see  
 strayed after others and abandoned me; 126  
 when I had risen from the flesh to spirit,  
 become more beautiful, more virtuous,  
 he found less pleasure in me, loved me less, 129

and wandered from the path that leads to truth,  
 pursuing simulacra of the good,  
 which promise more than they can ever give. 132

I prayed that inspiration come to him  
 through dreams and other means: in vain I tried  
 to call him back, so little did he care. 135

To such depths did he sink that, finally,  
 there was no other way to save his soul  
 except to have him see the Damned in Hell. 138

That this might be, I visited the Dead,  
 and offered my petition and my tears  
 to him who until now has been his guide. 141

The highest laws of God would be annulled  
 if he crossed Lethe, drinking its sweet flow,  
 without having to pay at least some scot 144

of penitence poured forth in guilty tears."

## NOTES

1. *When the Septentrion of the First Heaven*: The constellation sometimes called Septentrion is probably the Little Dipper (Ursa Minor), which contains seven stars, including the North Star. Thus, the "Septentrion of the First Heaven" (the Empyrean) must be the seven blazing candlesticks that direct the procession.

11. *Veni, sponsa, de Libano*: "Come, bride, from Lebanon" is taken from the Song of Songs (Cant. 4:8), where the bride is interpreted as the soul wedded to Christ. Here the song has to do with the advent of Beatrice, one of whose allegorical meanings is Sapientia, or the wisdom of God.

17. *ad vocem tanti senis*: "At the voice of so great an elder."

19. *Benedictus qui venis*: "Blessed are Thou that comest" is a slightly modified version of Matt. 21:9, *Benedictus qui venit*, "Blessed is He who cometh." Note that while Dante felt free to shift from the third to the second person in quoting this line, he left intact *Benedictus*, with its masculine form. In this way the word, though applied to Beatrice, who is about to appear, retains its original reference to Christ.

21. *Manibus. O, date lilia plenis*: "O give us lilies with full hands." This quotation from the *Aeneid*: (VI, 883) is surely intended as high tribute to Virgil, the Pilgrim's guide, since his words are placed on the same level as verses from the Bible. If Virgil has not yet disappeared from the scene, as he will have done by verse 49, this passage may be taken as a most gracious farewell to the great Roman poet.

31-33. *appeared a lady*: The lady is Beatrice, and the colors she wears are those of the three theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity.

35. *since last I stood trembling before her eyes*: A number of times we are told in the *Vita nuova* of the spell that Beatrice would cast on the young, enamored Dante, who was always unnerved by her presence and would often faint.

48. *I recognize signs of the ancient flame*: As we come closer to the final disappearance of Virgil from the poem, Dante, as a farewell gesture to his mentor, again reminds his reader of a verse of Virgil's: *Adgnosco veteris vestigia flammae* (*Aen.* IV, 23). The words are spoken by Dido of her passion for Aeneas, which she had thought no longer existed. And with this verse Virgil is gone from the poem.

54. *once washed with dew*: In the opening canto of the *Purgatory*, Virgil, at the suggestion of Cato, had washed his ward's cheeks with dew to cleanse them from any traces of the mists of Hell. This was an act symbolizing purgation (see *Purg.* I, 124-29).

55. *Dante, though Virgil leaves you*: This is the first time that the Pilgrim hears his own name during his journey. Most critics believe that Beatrice is naming him to his shame. It has been suggested, however, that the naming of the Pilgrim has a lofty, solemn significance suggesting a second baptism. Given the context that follows, such an interpretation does not seem likely.

57. *from yet another wound*: The "wound" will be that caused by the harsh words of Beatrice.

58. *Just as an admiral*: Earlier the masculine form *Benedictus* had been applied to Beatrice; here she is compared to a male figure. Porena points out that in the simile "Beatrice—admiral"

there is only one detail in common: a person whose upper body is seen rising above some kind of railing.

61. *above the chariot's left rail*: Beatrice is not in the center of the chariot but on the side nearest the Pilgrim.

63. *which of necessity I here record*: At first glance these words would merely seem to be Dante's apology for recording his own name in what he has written: it was made necessary by his concern for truth, accuracy, and precision in his narrative. But he means more than this. When the poet records his own name in verse 55 by having Beatrice call him in stern fashion—"Dante"—he is telling his reader at this point to shift his perspective: Dante the Pilgrim, until now Everyman, must here be seen as the individual who represents only himself at this point, as he is about to answer to a number of personal charges and make a very personal and painful confession to his lover.

73. *Yes, look at me! Yes, I am Beatrice!*: After having named the young Dante, Beatrice names herself, and surely in the same cutting tone. She is saying, as it were, "Yes, I am that Beatrice that you abandoned; you have still to know what I, Beatrice, represent!"

What I have translated as "look at me!" is in the original *guardaci ben*, in which I have taken the *ci* to mean "here." It could, of course, represent the first person plural, being the plural of majesty. In that case, the rest of the line, *ben son . . . Beatrice*, must be changed to *ben sem*. To me the mixture of sarcasm with the plural of majesty is hardly appropriate.

74. *So, you at last have deigned to climb the mount?*: These sarcastic words of Beatrice are not meant to be taken literally. She is reproaching the Pilgrim for his slowness in learning what constitutes true human bliss.

83-84. *In te, Domine, speravi*: The angels are singing the first part of the thirty-first psalm, which begins, "In Thee, O lord, have I put my trust." They continue through verse 8 (*pedes meos*), "Thou hast set my feet in a spacious place"—which is precisely the place where the Pilgrim is standing at this moment.

## 85-99

In this canto the range and intensity of the Pilgrim's emotions are put into relief to a degree unparalleled in the *Divine Comedy*. The most poignant stage is surely that when the Pil-

grim bursts into tears. To describe this occasion, the poet devotes five tercets to a simile that likens the contrast between his feelings at that moment and those just preceding to the contrast between the climates of northern Europe and Africa.

85–86. *As snow upon the spine of Italy*: This is a reference to the Appenines. The "living rafters" are the pine trees.

89. *the land that knows no noonday shade*: Equatorial Africa, where the sun is often directly overhead, sending its rays straight down so that objects cast no shadow.

106. *and though I speak to you*: The reader may wonder why Beatrice expresses her grievances to the angels instead of addressing the Pilgrim directly. Perhaps her doing so would more effectively check their over-ready pity. Then, too, the distraught state of the Pilgrim would make such a direct address inappropriate.

126. *strayed after others and abandoned me*: So far Beatrice has spoken only of the excellence of the Pilgrim's natural gifts, suggesting simply that he had not put them to the best use. Now she becomes slightly more specific: after her death he became unfaithful to her. The only example recorded in the *Vita nuova* of unfaithfulness on Dante's part is his brief infatuation with the Lady at the Window, by whose compassion he allowed himself to be too easily consoled (*Vita nuova*, XXXV), but having had a vision of the child Beatrice when he first saw her (XXXIX), he repents deeply and vows to write a book in which he will speak of Beatrice as no other woman had been spoken of before (XLII). It is hardly conceivable that Beatrice is here reproaching the Pilgrim for an action for which the Pilgrim has sincerely repented. Rather, she is attacking him for the weaknesses of which he has not yet fully repented. Perhaps the pronoun *altrui* (which I translate as "others") should be taken not as a reference to a human individual (or individuals) but as a personification of the deceptive images of good that he was tempted to follow. After all, the individual Beatrice is presenting herself here to the Pilgrim primarily as a symbol of certain virtues and forces; particularly, perhaps, she represents Revelation.

136. *To such depths did he sink*: As she approaches the end of her address, Beatrice makes it clear that she believes that the

young Dante had reached a stage of utter degeneration. But she still refuses to state explicitly the nature of his sin. She accuses her lover of none of the Seven Deadly Sins; she mentions only his confusion after her death, which induced him to lower his standards. Beatrice's words are a demonstration of a general truth, of which her lover offers the perfect exemplum. "Imagine," she is saying, "a young man endowed by God with unique gifts and privileged to have as guide one who represents the goal of the Supreme Good. But he loses this guidance and abandons this goal. His must become not only a worthless life but a destructive one: destructive of the gifts with which he had been endowed." This abuse of his talent can lead only to degradation.

We have seen the range of emotions experienced by the Pilgrim in this canto: his grief over the loss of Virgil, his fascination by the beauty and power of Beatrice once she reveals herself, the bittersweet surge of adoration for a beloved being he has lost, his shame and timidity, the writhings of an inarticulate contrition, and, finally, the relief, induced by the angels' pity, which takes the form of a torrent of anguished tears. It is this individual—whose feelings, caused by the exceptional circumstances in which he finds himself, have been presented so vividly—that Beatrice addresses in such impersonal terms. Beatrice can be stern in her judgment because she is engaged in a demonstration of a supreme truth; she is interested in Dante not as a suffering individual but as a means to an end: his past conduct is evidence that proves the truth of her words. Or if, at the very end, she reveals her awareness of the Pilgrim's suffering, she also reveals her satisfaction over his punishment, which means that he has not been allowed to break "the highest laws of God." There is no room for a note of pity in her peroration.