



P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

DANTE

THE DIVINE COMEDY
VOLUME 2: PURGATORY

TRANSLATED BY MARK MUSA

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Introduction to the PURGATORY

The great English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry* says that "Homer was the first and Dante the second epic poet: that is, the second poet, the series of whose creations bore a defined and intelligible relation to the knowledge and sentiment and religion of the age in which he lived." It is in this sense that we may speak of *The Divine Comedy* as an epic, as a poem that captures an entire civilization (just as Homer in his *Iliad* captures the whole of an ancient culture), for in it is mirrored a rather complete picture of the medieval European world. When Dante began writing his masterpiece, Duccio and Giotto's paintings were on the walls of churches and homes, Gothic architecture was at its peak, the troubadours had left a hefty canon of lyric poetry behind them, the *Romance of the Rose* had been written, and scholastic philosophy was at its high point, while the conflict between church and temporal power was nearing its final stages. All this and much more is reflected in the verses of Dante's masterpiece.

The subject matter of *The Divine Comedy*, however, was not new: We find some of the same ideas and philosophies, the concern with religion, virtue, and the demonic, in many of the writers of the times. Nor was this the first time that the three realms of *The Divine Comedy* made an appearance in literature, nor would it be fair to say that Dante's landscapes and punishments were altogether original ones. What was original, however, is the fact that Dante put himself, as a character, into his own poem, and in so doing, he gave it the important dramatic ingredient that gave the poem eternal life.

Holding Dante's artistic world together is his special use of allegory, concerning which in his famous letter to Can Grande della

Earth to its center, it is quite high—perhaps over 3000 miles high. We are told as early as Canto IX of *Purgatory*, when the Pilgrim reaches the gate to Purgatory proper, he has already reached the limit of the Earth's atmosphere from which point forward all natural phenomena such as rain, snow, and wind are absent. We are also told that the mountain slopes at an angle of more than 45 degrees and that the seven rather narrow terraces have no railings on their outer edges to prevent one from falling to the bottom.

This mountain, whose creation was the miraculous result of Lucifer's fall, serves as a passageway not only for those assigned to Purgatory but also for those destined for immediate passage to Heaven. In *Purgatory* II, 104-105, Casella tells the Pilgrim that after death all the souls that do not "sink to Acheron's shore" gather at the river Tiber to be transported to the shores of Purgatory. At the very beginning of *Purgatory*, Dante allows the Pilgrim to witness, immediately after he has seen all the damned in Hell, the mysterious arrival of those souls on the boat from the Tiber. Those destined for Heaven are also included among the passengers and must make their way to Heaven by first climbing to the mountain's summit, the Earthly Paradise. Aboard the boat, then, we must think of there being three different categories of the Saved: those destined immediately for Heaven (if only one or two), those free to proceed directly to their purgation (the great majority), and those few who must wait behind in the Antepurgatory. Since only six cantos of the *Purgatory* are devoted to those who must wait behind, it is reasonable to assume they represent a minority of souls. At the very edge of Antepurgatory, there is already an anticipation of Purgatory proper and even of Heaven beyond—a glorious hopeful beginning, a note Dante will sound again and again in this poem.

Just as Virgil suddenly appeared out of nowhere upon the vague landscape of the opening canto of the *Inferno*, so, too, at the foot of the true mountain appears another figure. It is Cato, the guardian of Mount Purgatory. Virgil explains to Cato in the opening canto of *Purgatory* why and how he and his ward are there, and in doing so defines in a tercet (70-72) the moral purpose of the Pilgrim's journey:

May it please you to welcome him—he goes
in search of freedom, and how dear that is,
the man who gives up life for it well knows.

It is "freedom" from the shackles of original and actual sin that the Pilgrim seeks and eventually succeeds in finding. Virgil tells him at the close of Canto XXVII (139-142) before entering the Earthly Paradise:

Expect no longer words or signs from me.

Now is your will upright, wholesome and free,
and not to heed its pleasure would be wrong:

I crown and miter you lord of yourself!

These words bring to a close the central portion of the *Purgatory*. The Pilgrim, having climbed the seven terraces and participated in the purgation of the seven Deadly Sins, is ready at this point to leave Virgil behind forever and enter the Earthly Paradise. He is now in a state of innocence, the state of Adam before the Fall, when mankind had no need for the authority of the emperor or the pope.

When the Pilgrim and Virgil arrive on the shores of the mountain of Purgatory, they are both as new to these shores as the boatload of souls who disembark just afterwards in Canto II and who, seeing the two men already on the shore, ask for directions up the mountain. The souls from the boat are amazed to see that the Pilgrim is alive and gather around him with great interest. The Pilgrim, recognizing an old friend in this group, a musician called Casella, begs his friend to stop and ease his weariness by singing a song for him. Casella does so by singing the words of one of Dante's own poems. It is important to note that the souls who are gathered around the singer Casella are the same ones who a few verses earlier in the canto (II, 46-48) arrived on the shores of Purgatory singing a different song:

In exitu Israël de Aegypto,

they all were singing with a single voice,
chanting it verse by verse until the end.

In his letter to Can Grande, which serves as an introduction to the entire *Divina Comedy*, Dante gives us the song's significance, the meaning of the Exodus event. Exodus can be seen as the pattern of all three canticles of *The Divina Comedy*, but especially for the *Purgatory*, which deals with the difficult process by which the Pilgrim moves from the ignorance and slavery of sin to the freedom of grace

and knowledge. The triviality of Casella's song, then, is in direct contrast to the importance of the first song.

The Pilgrim, Virgil, and all the souls gathered around them are so totally absorbed by Casella's soothing music that they are oblivious to everything else going on. Cato, the venerable guardian of Purgatory, suddenly appears again. This time he comes to break up the worldly concert on the open slopes of the mountain. Virgil is most embarrassed by the incident, and all the souls run off in search of the path upwards. In this scene we are being taught a lesson about life on earth: souls in the Antepurgatory, a place that so resembles the world of the living, should not be concerned with such trivialities. Man should not be so absorbed in worldly pursuits.

In this particular case man is so concerned about poetry and song that he forgets his ultimate goal, which, as we know by this time, is to reach God. It is important for the meaning of the *Purgatory* that Dante the Poet establish this point in the middle section of his tripartite poem as early as possible since the theme of poetry, its purpose and goal, becomes increasingly more significant the higher the mountain is climbed.

In the first eight cantos, which are devoted to the Pilgrim's progress in the Antepurgatory (and its fringes), the Pilgrim meets five different groups of souls (and one solitary individual, Sordello, who will serve to introduce the fifth group). These groups are the souls that surround (1) Casella; (2) Manfred; (3) Belacqua; (4) Jacopo del Cassero, Buonconte da Montefeltro, and la Pia, and (5) Nino Visconti and Conrad Malaspina (the Princes). The sequence of groups two through five clearly suggests a hierarchical order from the most sinful to the least sinful. Like the others, the members of Manfred's group were late in repenting, but they had also incurred excommunication and had made no attempt to make peace with the Church. Belacqua's group, which immediately follows Manfred's, has no distinguishing features. Their attitudes of indifference, which have earned for them the label "the Indolent," are meant to symbolize their lack of spiritual zeal. They are "the Late Repentant" pure and simple, preceded by a group more sinful and followed by two groups less sinful. The distinguishing feature of the last two groups can be considered as an attenuation of guilt. Their delay in repentance is partly excused by (early) violent death or by preoccupation with affairs of state.

The hierarchical distinction of these groups is borne out by the fact that while the second group sings no hymns, those souls with Buonconte sing the *Miserere*, and those of the last group in the Valley of the Princes sing two Compline hymns. Because of Manfred's alienation from the Church, he was perhaps not fit to sing the hymns, whereas the failure of the third group to do so is easily explained by their general apathy (Belacqua is the epitome of laziness, so much so that the Pilgrim asks him if he is up to his old ways again). The piety of the fourth group is presented as rather perfunctory: they break off singing the *Miserere* to utter cries of amazement as they see the Pilgrim's shadow on the ground before them. There is no indication that they make a practice of singing hymns. But the fervor and concentration of the fifth group as they sing their prayers, especially the *Te lucis ante*, is dramatic: the Pilgrim all but swoons in ecstasy. And it is made clear that their orisons take place every evening. In the practice of singing hymns, then, the last two groups are distinguished from each other.

The extent of homogeneity of each group of souls in the Antepurgatory is problematic. It does not automatically follow that because the individually famous Manfred speaks of his excommunication and contumacy toward the Church that all the souls with him share his fate and attitudes. Dante, however, suggests their homogeneity by presenting them as a flock of sheep, each doing what the other does. The fourth group's similarities are most clearly characterized. Before the Pilgrim begins his conversation with Jacopo, he is told by a nameless member of the group (*Purgatory* V, 52-3) that each has died a violent death and waited until the last hour to repent. As for the inhabitants of the valley, we come to learn from Sordello's words that all are of princely rank.

Just how long the Late Repentant must wait before they may pass through the gate into Purgatory proper to begin their purgation is also problematic. The period imposed on the Excommunicated, as Manfred tells (*Purgatory* III, 135-40), is exactly thirty times as long as their excommunication lasted. Belacqua states (*Purgatory* IV, 130-32) that he must wait the length of his lifetime on earth. Nothing whatsoever is said on this subject in the treatment of the two groups that follow. It is not until canto XI that we learn their fate. The Pilgrim, surprised that Provenzan Salvani was allowed to begin his purgation so soon, inquires:

And I: "If it is true that any soul
who has delayed repentance till the last
must wait down there before he can ascend,

the same amount of time he lived on earth
(unless he's helped by efficacious prayer)—
then how has he arrived so fast up here?"

(127-132)

From what the Pilgrim here takes for granted, we can only assume that Belacqua's words, instead of being limited to the "Late Repentant pure and simple" were meant (by Dante if not by Belacqua) to apply also to the last two groups. Thus there are two terms: the Excommunicated will be there thirty times the duration of their excommunication; all the rest will be there for the length of their natural lives. One is tempted to ask why Dante refrained from giving the reader this information at the proper time—and how could the Pilgrim know, concerning the last groups, facts that he was never told? These two problems do not seem to concern critics, but this does not necessarily mean that they are unimportant.

The Antepurgatory leaves us with other questions. For instance, what exactly is Cato's role? In discussing Dante's choice of Cato scholars allude to the passage in the *Aeneid* (VIII, 670) where Cato is represented as lawgiver. His function in the *Purgatory*, however, is rather like that of a policeman on his beat. But what is his beat? Does he restrict his activities to the shore, never appearing on the mountain slope? Does he greet every incoming boatload of souls—or only those whom we see singing, who, like Casella's group, need to be stirred into action? Does he ever give directions to the newly arrived souls as to the best path to take for the ascent? He was not present before the music began, when the bewildered souls were forced to ask directions from Virgil and the Pilgrim, who were unable to help them. Surely the brief scene in which we see Cato performing his appointed duties leaves much to be desired in the way of clarification, and may even suggest some confusion in the "organization" of the Antepurgatory.

The allocation of the Late Repentant souls, who have no overseer, seems also somewhat disorganized—or at least, highly flexible. Unlike the damned in Hell and those expiating their sins in Purgatory proper, the Late Repentant are assigned no fixed abode, and appear to

have nothing to do but wander. We see two groups in movement up the mountain: the Excommunicated and those who died a violent death, the first proceeding very slowly, the second more rapidly. The other two groups are seated on the ground: Belacqua's in postures of indolence, the Princes concentrating on their worship. One is tempted to guess that Belacqua's group has chosen a temporary resting place behind the great boulder and will soon be on its way again, whereas the Princes in the Valley seem to live there. It is, of course, possible that they come there only at nightfall to sing their evening hymns and await the arrival of the angels to protect them from the serpent. Perhaps it is because Dante intended the Antepurgatory to be so close a reflection of our life on earth that at times it appears to be so unstructured and puzzling.

This is not the case with Purgatory proper. When we leave the Antepurgatory, we leave behind all signs of nature as we know it on our earth. Once past the gate, the colors and atmosphere, the nonchalance and motion of the Antepurgatory (and our world) disappear, replaced by the endless steep and naked stone of the mountain that the Pilgrim must climb. And once the Pilgrim has had his first dream in the Valley of the Princes at the end of his first day on the mountain and has passed with his guide, Virgil, through the gates into Purgatory proper, all becomes highly structured, ritualistic, and thoroughly organized. Seven *P's* (the *Peccata*, Latin for "sins") are inscribed upon the Pilgrim's forehead by the first angel he meets (IX,112). Each of the following angels he encounters will remove one of the *P's*, lightening his conscience, as he passes from one terrace to the next. Blending with the highly structured nature of the mount is an atmosphere of tranquillity and serenity, solitude and silence, in which color and sound seem to be muted. From time to time there is the quiet sound of music and voices singing. Here souls address the Pilgrim as "brother."

The middle portion of the mountain is surrounded by seven concentric ledges, each separated from the other by a steep cliff. On each ledge, or terrace, one of the seven Capital Sins is purged: Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Avarice (and Prodigality), Gluttony, Lust. The plan of the first terrace (cantos X through XII), where souls are punished for the sin of Pride, the root of all sin, and where every soul entering Purgatory proper is required to spend a certain amount of time, is paradigmatic and establishes the pattern of purgation that is followed throughout Purgatory proper. Each group of souls on its particular

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terrace is assigned a prayer. When a soul has finished purging his sin on one level, he climbs to the next one via a stairway where an angel-sentry performs a final cleansing gesture. A beatitude appropriate to the sin that has been cleansed is assigned to each ledge. In addition, on each terrace of Purgatory, representations of the sin being purged as well as examples of the virtue opposed to that sin are found. These representations take on various forms; for example, on the first terrace they appear as carvings in the stone of the mountain. They are intended to incite disdain for that particular sin, while the representations of virtue are designed to inspire souls to emulate virtuous behavior. The examples that comprise both of these are drawn from Christian and pagan lore.

As Virgil in Canto XI of the *Inferno* explained the moral structure of Hell, so here in Canto XVII of *Purgatory* he describes the moral structure of this realm which, unlike Hell with its eternal pain, is temporary. The Pilgrim learns that there are two kinds of love that God places in man's heart before he is born. The first is instinctive, the natural desire to return to God, and because it leads man back to the Creator, it can never in itself be wrong. The second kind of love involves our free will, and given human error, can mislead us into choosing evil. Virgil goes on to explain that love that is wrongly directed always aims at harm for one's neighbor. He defines this through the first three of the seven Deadly Sins: Pride, Envy, and Wrath. Sloth, the insufficiency of love for true good or God, is the sin being purged on the central terrace of the mountain, the place where Virgil explains the purgatorial structure to his ward. Finally, excessive love for secondary goods, that which is not the true good, is defined in terms of the last three of the seven Deadly Sins: Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust.

Because of its place and power within the human soul, Love is the source of all actions, the good as well as those that merit punishment. This idea is at the heart of our understanding of *The Divine Comedy*, and if we keep in mind the main action of the Pilgrim in Purgatory, the reason why he is making this climb, which is to free his judgment and will and reach a state of innocence (much like Adam before the Fall), then we may better understand why there are so many discussions of Free Will in the course of the ascent of Purgatory. In fact, cantos XVI, XVII, and XVIII, which are at the center of *The Divine Comedy*, deal primarily with Love and Free Will.

In the introduction to the *Inferno* (Vol. I, p. 45), I discussed the

Pilgrim's participation in the different sins he encounters on his journey to Lucifer at the center of the Earth. His participation was at times obvious and at other times subtle. Here in Purgatory the technique of participation is again at work. The Pilgrim's participation in the purging of Pride, for example, is obvious: as the penitents of Pride make their way along the terrace under heavy weights that bend their bodies and force their eyes to examine the carvings of defeated Pride on the terrace floor, the Pilgrim also bends down, as if he were examining his own conscience. In order to speak to the suffering souls on this terrace (cantos X-XII), he imitates their posture. Later (cantos XV-XVI), on the Terrace of the Wrathful, the penitent he is with speaks to the Pilgrim as they walk blindly along through thick, dark smoke. The final terrace of the Purgatory is where Lust is purged. How accurate and real that participation is for the Pilgrim—the reality of actually having to pass through those burning flames of lust that separate him from his beloved Beatrice who waits on the other side, at the top of the mountain.

The Pilgrim's participation in the sin of Gluttony, which occurs on the terrace immediately preceding that of Lust, is more symbolic and has more to do with poetry than with the literal sin of gluttony. Gluttony is the act of filling oneself, of taking into oneself, for a glorification of oneself. For the poets purging themselves on this terrace, poetry was gluttony while they were alive on earth. Now in Purgatory and on their way to Paradise they are learning the true meaning of their poetic art. All we need do is remember the rest of the words of the psalm sung by all of the Gluttonous at the beginning of Canto XXIII: "Labia mea, Domine, aperies, et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam" ("Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim your praises.") The lips those penitents had used for glorification of self, they now use to send forth praise to God.

Before talking about the third and final section of Purgatory, some mention should be made of the Pilgrim's three dreams, because they are part of the mechanism connecting each of the three parts of the *Purgatory* to one another. All three dreams mark a new and important stage in his journey. They are prophetic, involve female figures, and are to some degree erotic. The Pilgrim and his guide arrive on the shores of the mountain at dawn of Easter Sunday and spend four days and three nights climbing. During each of the three nights the Pilgrim has a dream and each dream takes place in a canto connected to the number nine: cantos IX, XIX, and XXVII.

The Pilgrim, overcome by the fatigue of his day's journey, falls asleep in the Valley of the Princes (Canto IX) and has his first dream close to dawn the following morning. This dream marks the Pilgrim's passage to Purgatory proper from the Antepurgatory. It takes shape within a framework of allusions to classical mythology, is the most erotic of all (this aspect will be brought out in the notes discussing each dream), and prophesies the Pilgrim's ascent of the mountain. The imaginary blaze with which the dream ends may, in fact, foreshadow the fire of the Empyrean as well as the wall of fire that the Pilgrim must pass through on the Terrace of the Lustful. The second night on the mountain follows a day of much discussion between Marco Lombardo and Virgil on Love as well as moral and political philosophy. The dream the Pilgrim has this time is clearer in its eroticism than the first. The hideous-looking female, who is transformed before the Pilgrim's eyes into a lovely woman, represents the sins of incontinence, the vices of Avarice, Gluttony, and (especially) Lust. The third dream is the clearest of all. It is Leah and Rachel in the Pilgrim's final dream who are like Matilda and Beatrice whom the Pilgrim will meet the next day on entering the Terrestrial Paradise. This dream in all of its aspects points straight ahead to the Garden of Eden, while the first and second dreams take part of their meaning from the preceding action and part from future events in the canticle. It seems that as the Pilgrim grows in understanding with each day that he climbs higher on the mountain, the dreams become easier to interpret.

By the time we reach the final and third part of the *Purgatory* and are into the Earthly Paradise, it becomes clear that the climb of Mount Purgatory has all been in preparation for Christian Revelation. What happens here in the last six cantos of the *Purgatory* points beyond, to the ultimate goal, to the Paradise where man is fulfilled in the supernatural vision of God. If Adam, our first father, had not committed Original Sin, then mankind would have passed directly from the Garden of Eden, where the Pilgrim now finds himself alone, into a life of perfection in this world and the next. Because Adam sinned, mankind must start his journey from earth, from Jerusalem, which is the place of the Redemption, and then must make his way up to regain his lost innocence. By reaching the Garden of Eden at the top of Mount Purgatory, the Pilgrim has reached the first of his two goals, "the happiness of this life" (*beatitudinem huius vite*). Man's second goal, "happiness in the eternal life" (*beatitu-*

diuam uitae eterne) is, of course, the subject of the final part of *The Divine Comedy*, the *Paradise*.

In Canto XXVII of the *Purgatory* Virgil brings his role in the Pilgrim's journey to an end when he announces to his ward that he no longer needs to guide him. Virgil, in his role of natural reason, can lead the Pilgrim to Eden, to his original state of innocence, but he cannot himself understand Eden. If he could, he would be there right next to the Pilgrim standing in this enchanted wood. The climb is over and the journey that began in a wood, the "dark wood" of *Inferno* I, comes to an end at the entrance to another wood, but a wood of a different texture. This is the Terrestrial Paradise, the Garden of Eden, the antechamber to Paradise itself. Things seen here are nothing like those of the real world of the Antepurgatory or of the stark and structured world of Purgatory proper. The souls the Pilgrim meets here as well as the elaborate pageant where the Christian and pagan worlds join to reenact the fall of man, his redemption, and the changing history of the church, belong more to the world of Paradise than the purgatorial world. The last six cantos of the *Purgatory* are essentially the introduction and opening to the *Paradise*.

Before leaving the Pilgrim, Virgil tells him, as I mentioned earlier, that he can do as he pleases once he enters this wood. The Pilgrim enters cautiously, slowly, and as he does he feels a constant breeze caressing his brow. The wood is thick with trees and color that shines clear and bright. In the Terrestrial Paradise all is in perfect harmony and Dante begins to fulfill the promise he made concerning Beatrice at the close of the *Vita nuova*; that is, to treat her in a way that is worthy of her significance. In these cantos the poet's entire life under the influence of Beatrice is reenvoked, from the time he first met her at the age of nine until the present time of the poem. She appears here in different and changing roles: for a time, dressed in her special colors, she is the lady of the *Vita nuova*; then she is a stern judge; and finally she is a wise teacher. Never, however, does she appear as a tender, loving lady. Never does she speak to her lover's heart. She speaks always to the Pilgrim's mind and conscience.

Both *The Divine Comedy* and the *Vita nuova* are to a certain degree autobiographical and confessional. We have seen this aspect of the poem on occasions in the *Inferno*; for instance, when the Pilgrim admits to having broken a baptismal font in the baptistry of San Giovanni in Florence (*Inferno* XIX). But confessional allegory is even more evident here in the closing six cantos of *Purgatory*. The

Vita nuova makes it clear that the nature of Beatrice was destined to inspire the stern resolution to strive for spiritual growth, not tender sentiments, and certainly not the weak tears that fill the pages of that little book. The divine Beatrice would approve of tears, but only tears of deep contrition, as she herself tells the Pilgrim at the top of the mountain. Although the lover of the *Vita nuova* failed to understand the significance of Beatrice, and the Pilgrim, as we saw in Canto V of the *Inferno*, failed to understand the significance of Francesca, here at the summit of Purgatory and entrance to Paradise, the Pilgrim will see and finally fully comprehend Beatrice. The Pilgrim, overcome by her sudden appearance, turns to Virgil for comfort. Finding him gone, he begins to weep. In Canto XXX (55-57) Beatrice, knowing the bitter tears of contrition that he must shed (after confessing his failure to learn the meaning of her death and before being washed in the waters of Lethe), addresses her lover here for the first time in the poem as "Dante," and rebukes him sternly for his tears:

"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."

This is no place for tenderness. In fact, in the tercet that immediately follows (58-60), Beatrice is compared to a stern, masculine, and even military figure: "Just as an admiral from bow or stern . . ."

As she was in the *Vita nuova*, Beatrice here, too, is a Christ figure. Earlier in this same canto (XXX, 19) she is heralded onto the stage of the Earthly Paradise in the masculine terms of Christ: "Benedictus qui venis!" She has come to judge her lover as Christ on the Final Day will come to judge all mankind. This judgment of one man, Dante the Pilgrim, the Poet, the Lover—for he is all of these at this point on the mount—stands for the judgment all men will come to on that Final Day.

Here, then, in Canto XXX of the *Purgatory*, in the coming of Beatrice, we have the Final Advent of Christ. The pattern of the three Comings of Christ—the three symbolic events that encompass all of Christian time—find their completion in *The Divine Comedy* here at the top of the mountain of Purgatory. Much like the three dreams the Pilgrim has during his stay in Purgatory, the three Ad-

vents that occur in the Poem become increasingly easier to understand. Dante prepares us for the Final Advent in a different way. Preceding the Third Advent there is no address to the reader. The first address to the reader, asking him to study carefully the account of the opening of the gate of Dis (*Inferno* IX, 61-63), stressed the difficulty of the proper interpretation; the one contained in *Purgatory* VIII (19-21), before the coming of the angels in the Valley of the Princes, encouraged us to believe that what will follow will be easier to interpret: "the truth, *this time*,/is covered by a thinner veil . . ." (italics mine). If there is no appeal to the reader in the canto describing the Third Advent, it must mean that the event described is easy to interpret. It certainly must have been difficult for the poet to suggest the First Advent, to suggest somehow Christ's thirty-three years on earth by narrating a single happening; nor was it all that simple to present on stage an act that is invisible, that takes place in the hearts of men every day: the Second Advent (see *Purgatory* VIII, note 19). But how else should the poet enact for the Pilgrim the Final Coming of Christ, the Third Advent, except to present the coming of Beatrice to judge her lover (the event described in Canto XXX after the account in XXXIX of the apocalyptic procession intended to announce her Coming)? Like the three dreams, the three Advents take place at crucial points in the action of the poem: the First Advent at the entrance to the City of Dis, the Second at the entrance to Purgatory proper, and the Third on the threshold of Paradise.

The *Purgatory*, like the *Inferno* (and the *Paradise* to come), ends with the word "stars." It is the poet's way of making three circles into one in imitation of the Trinity (we will discover this when we have read the final canto of the *Paradise*, the hundredth canto of the poem itself). The circular ending to the *Purgatory* is brilliantly reflected by the poet in his triple use of words having to do with rebirth, purity, and freedom:

I returned
to her reborn, a tree renewed, in bloom
with newborn foliage, immaculate,
eager to rise, now ready for the stars.

These are the motivating forces of the central portion of *The Divine Comedy*. These are the notes that sounded so strongly in the opening

cantos at the foot of the mountain. And these are those same "stars" the Pilgrim caught sight of as he came out of Hell and onto the shores of Purgatory. Then he could only see them; now he is ready to climb toward them; in the *Paradise* he will have joined them.

M.M.

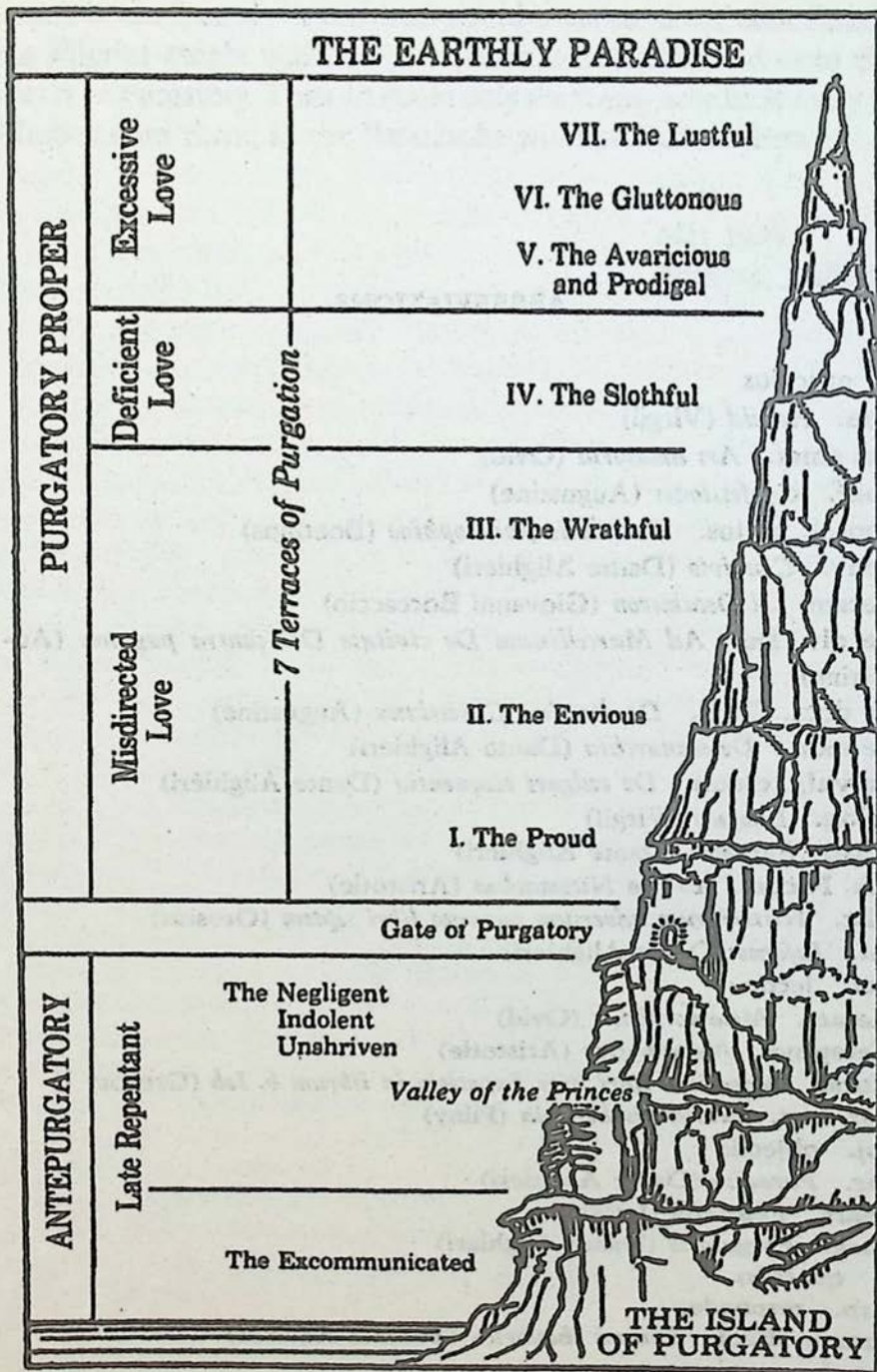
May 1984

Pollensa, Mallorca

ABBREVIATIONS

- a. articulus
- Aen.** *Aeneid* (Virgil)
- Ars amat.** *Ars amatoria* (Ovid)
- Conf.** *Confessiones* (Augustine)
- Consol. philos.** *Consolatio philosophiae* (Boethius)
- Conv.** *Convivio* (Dante Alighieri)
- Decam.** *Il Decameron* (Giovanni Boccaccio)
- De civ. Dei** *Ad Marcellinum De civitate Dei contra paganos* (Augustine)
- De doct. Chris.** *De doctrina Christiana* (Augustine)
- De mon.** *De monarchia* (Dante Alighieri)
- De vulg. eloqu.** *De vulgari eloquentia* (Dante Alighieri)
- Eclog.** *Eclogues* (Virgil)
- Epist.** *Epistolae* (Dante Alighieri)
- Eth. Nicom.** *Ethica Nicomachea* (Aristotle)
- Hist.** *Historiarum adversum paganos libri septem* (Orosius)
- Inf.** *Inferno* (Dante Alighieri)
- lect.** lectio
- Metam.** *Metamorphoses* (Ovid)
- Metaphys.** *Metaphysica* (Aristotle)
- Moral.** *Moralium libri, sive Expositio in librum b. Iob* (Gregory I)
- Nat. hist.** *Naturalis historia* (Pliny)
- obj.** objectio
- Par.** *Paradiso* (Dante Alighieri)
- Phars.** *Pharsalia* (Lucan)
- Purg.** *Purgatorio* (Dante Alighieri)
- q.** quaestio
- resp.** respondeo
- Summa theol.** *Summa theologica* (Thomas Aquinas)
- suppl.** supplementum
- Theb.** *Thebaid* (Statius)

THE EARTHLY PARADISE



Dante's
PURGATORY

CANTO I

HAVING LEFT THE Inferno behind, Dante announces his intention to sing of the second kingdom, Purgatory, and calls upon the Muses, in particular Calliope, to accompany his song. As the dawn approaches, he feels a sense of renewal, and, looking up into the heavens, he sees four stars. Turning his gaze earthward again, he discovers standing near him a dignified old man: Cato of Utica. Cato thinks Dante and Virgil are refugees from Hell, and he questions them as to how they managed to escape. Virgil explains that Dante is still a living man, and that, at the command of a lady from Heaven, he, Virgil, has been sent to guide this man on a journey for the purpose of his salvation. Already this journey has taken them through Hell, and now it is their intention to see the souls of Purgatory. Cato assents to their passage. He then instructs Virgil to bind a reed around the Pilgrim's waist and to be sure to cleanse him of every trace of stain from the infernal regions. The two poets descend to the shore, where they proceed to carry out Cato's instructions. The purgation is marked by a miracle: when Virgil pulls a reed from the ground, another springs up immediately to take its place.

For better waters, now, the little bark
of my poetic powers hoists its sails,
and leaves behind that cruelest of the seas. 3

And I shall sing about that second realm
where man's soul goes to purify itself
and become worthy to ascend to Heaven. 6

Here let death's poetry arise to life,
O Muses sacrosanct whose liege I am!
And let Calliope rise up and play 9

her sweet accompaniment in the same strain
that pierced the wretched magpies with the truth
of unforgivable presumptuousness. 12

The tender tint of orient sapphire,
suffusing the still reaches of the sky,
as far as the horizon deeply clear, 15

- renewed my eyes' delight, now that I found
 myself free of the deathly atmosphere
 that had weighed heavy on my eyes and heart. 18
- The lovely planet kindling love in man
 made all the eastern sky smile with her light,
 veiling the Fish that shimmered in her train. 21
- Then to my right I turned to contemplate
 the other pole and there saw those four stars
 the first man saw, and no man after him. 24
- The heavens seemed to revel in their flames.
 O widowed Northern Hemisphere, deprived
 forever of the vision of their light! 27
- And when I looked away from those four stars,
 turning a little toward the other pole,
 where no sign of the Wain was visible, 30
- I saw near me an ancient man, alone,
 whose face commanded all the reverence
 that any son could offer to his sire. 33
- Long-flowing was his beard and streaked with white,
 as was his hair, which in two tresses fell
 to rest upon his chest on either side. 36
- The rays of light from those four sacred stars
 struck with such radiance upon his face,
 it was as if the sun were shining there. 39
- "Who are you two who challenged the blind stream
 and have escaped from the eternal prison?"
 he said, moving his venerable locks. 42
- "Who guided you? What served you as a lamp
 to light your way out of the heavy night
 that keeps the pit of Hell forever black? 45
- Are all the laws of God's Abyss destroyed?
 Have new decisions now been made in Heaven
 so that, though damned, you come up to my cliff?" 48
- My leader quickly seized me by the arm;
 his words, his touch, the way he looked at me,
 compelled my knees and brow to reverence. 51

- Then he addressed him: "Not on my behalf
 have I come here; a lady sent from Heaven
 asked me to guide this man along his way. 54
- But since it is your will that we reveal
 the circumstances of our presence here,
 how can my will deny yours what it asks? 57
- This man has not yet seen his final hour,
 although so close to it his folly brought him
 that little time was left to change his ways. 60
- So I was sent to help him, as I said;
 there was no other way to save his soul
 than by my guiding him along this road. 63
- Already I have shown him all the Damned;
 I want to show him now the souls of those
 who purge themselves of guilt in your domain. 66
- How we came here would take too long to tell;
 from Heaven comes the power that has served
 to lead him here to see and hear you now. 69
- May it please you to welcome him—he goes
 in search of freedom, and how dear that is,
 the man who gives up life for it well knows. 72
- You know, you found death sweet in Utica
 for freedom's sake; there you put off that robe
 which will be radiant on the Great Day. 75
- We have not broken Heaven's timeless laws.
 This man still lives; Minòs does not bind *me*;
 I come from that same Round where the chaste eyes 78
- of your dear Marcia still plead with your soul,
 O blessed heart, to hold her as your own;
 for love of her, then, bend your will to ours, 81
- allow us to go through your seven realms,
 and I shall tell her how you have been kind—
 if you will let me speak your name below." 84
- "Marcia was so enchanting to my eyes,"
 he answered then, "that while I was alive,
 there was no wish of hers I would not grant. 87

- She dwells beyond the evil river now,
and can no longer move me by that law
decreed upon the day I issued forth. 90
- But if a heavenly lady, as you say,
moves and directs you, why your flattery?
Ask in her name, there is no need for more. 93
- Go with this man, see that you gird his waist
with a smooth reed; take care to bathe his face
till every trace of filth has disappeared, 96
- for it would not be fitting that he go
with vision clouded by the mists of Hell,
to face the first of Heaven's ministers. 99
- Around this little island at its base,
down there, just where the waves break on the shore,
you will find rushes growing in soft sand. 102
- No other plant producing leaves or stalk
that hardens could survive in such a place—
only the reeds that yield to buffeting. 105
- When you are ready to begin to scale
the mountainside, do not come back this way;
the rising sun will show you where to climb." 108
- With that he vanished. From my knees I rose,
and silent, drawing closer to my guide,
I looked into his eyes. He said to me: 111
- "Follow my footsteps; now we must turn back,
for over there the plain begins to slope,
descending gently to the shore below." 114
- The dawn was gaining ground, putting to flight
the last hour of the night; I recognized,
far off, the rippling waters of the sea. 117
- We made our way along that lonely plain
like men who seek the right path they have lost,
counting each step a loss till it is found. 120
- When we had reached a place where the cool shade
allowed the dew to linger on the slope,
resisting a while longer the sun's rays, 123

my master placed both of his widespread hands
 gently upon the tender grass, and I,
 who understood what his intention was, 126
 offered my tear-stained face to him, and he
 made my face clean, restoring its true color,
 once buried underneath the dirt of Hell. 129
 At last we touched upon the lonely shore
 that never yet has seen its waters sailed
 by one who then returned to tell the tale. 132
 There, as another willed, he girded me.
 Oh, miracle! When he pulled out the reed,
 immediately a second humble plant 135
 sprang up from where the first one had been picked.

NOTES

1-6. *For better waters*: The first tercet introduces the theme of the sea voyage, a metaphor both for the journey undertaken by Dante the Pilgrim and for the process of composition in which the genius of Dante the Poet is involved. The same image with the same twofold implication is found in the *Paradise* at the beginning of Canto II, and here the "little bark" has become a mighty ship, the metaphor being considerably developed to include Dante's readers in their boats. The presence of this image already in the *Inferno* would seem to be guaranteed in lines 1 and 3 of this canto: the words *For better waters, now . . . , and leave behind that cruelest of the seas* are surely reminders of the Pilgrim's earlier travels through Hell. Yet no reference to "Dante's ship" is to be found in the first canticle. For an explanation of this inconsistency, see notes to *Purg.* I, 7-12 and 115-36.

7-12

The Invocation to the Muses points both backward to the beginning of the *Inferno* and forward to the beginning of the *Paradise*. The Invocation in the *Inferno* is contained in one tercet; actually, it consists of one line: "O Muses, O lofty intellect, help me now"; in the other two lines of the tercet Dante calls upon his own memory to record faithfully what he has seen (*Inf.* II, 7-9).

In our passage the Invocation, expanded to two tercets, singles out Calliope, leader of the Muses. The appeal is made more elaborate by the allusion to the arrogant daughters of King Pierus: the Poet asks of Calliope that she do him the favor of accompanying his poetry with the same strain, the same exalted music that had served to bring low the presumptuous princesses. By contrasting himself with the "magpies," the Poet stresses his modesty: unlike them, he has not challenged; he simply seeks for help. (The need for humility is constantly stressed in the *Purgatory*; there will be other allusions to it in this canto.) At the same time, however, it seems clear that Dante the Poet has been cautiously gaining confidence in his own poetic powers.

And the difference between the Invocation here and that of the *Inferno* may explain the absence, there, of the image of the Poet's ship. At the beginning of his poem, when he must humbly beg the Muses, simply: "Help me now," how could he posit the "ship of his talent"?

7. *Here let death's poetry arise to life:* The *morta poesia*, "dead poetry," of the original must refer to the poetry of the *Inferno*, "dead" in that it treated of souls dead to God and to His grace. But note also the suggestion of resurrection contained in this line.

9. *Calliope:* The greatest of the Muses, who, in Greek mythology, presides over heroic or epic poetry.

11-12. *that pierced the wretched magpies:* Pierus, king of Emathia in Macedonia, had nine daughters, to whom he unwisely gave the names of the nine Muses. In their presumption they challenged the Muses to a contest in song, in which they sang the praises of the Titans who waged war against Jupiter (cf. *Inf.* XXXI). Defeated by Calliope, who was chosen to represent all the Muses, they were punished by being transformed into magpies (cf. Ovid, *Metam.* V, 294-678).

13-30

These six tercets are devoted to a description of the sky: the passage is important if only because it invites us to imagine the experience of the Pilgrim, who, having emerged from the darkness of Hell, is allowed for the first time to see the heavens above him. And this description of the heavens with which the

Purgatory begins is, in fact, the beginning of the end of the *Divine Comedy*, for the *Paradise* concludes with the Beatific Vision of God in the Empyrean. From this moment on we will never be able to forget the heavens above the Pilgrim, the heavens toward which he will be climbing throughout his journey in *Purgatory* and into which he will enter, still continuing to ascend, at the beginning of the *Paradise*.

As for the graphic details of the description, it is indeed a clear and delicate glow of color that strikes our eyes after the grim reds and dead blacks of the skylless Hell. The atmosphere of *Purgatory* contrasts strongly with that of the *Inferno*, sensuously as well as spiritually. A new vocabulary is in evidence: the gentle glow (13), the spreading color (15), the smiling eastern sky (20), the heavens lit with joy (25) (there is a similar delicate treatment of the details of the landscape at the end of the canto). And opposed to the heavy, sullen despair and excruciating torment of Hell, *Purgatory* holds out the prospect of new hope. Though there will be much stress in this canticle on the arduous, painful purgation of the soul, we are constantly made aware of the increasing capacity of the soul for love, knowledge and self-perfection: the note of hope was already sounded within the first two tercets treating of the "sea voyage": *For better waters, now . . .*

Already the Invocation to the Muses had contained the suggestion of the resurrection motif in line 7; now, in the description of the heavens, we learn that the time is just before dawn, the hour of rebirth and new beginnings. Moreover, because of the position of the stars that are described here, it has been determined by scholars that the date is supposed to be April 10, 1300, Easter Sunday. The Pilgrim descended into Hell on Good Friday, and now he rises from the "dead atmosphere." The main events in Dante's poem—the descent of the Pilgrim into Hell, his emergence into *Purgatory*, and his final ascent into *Paradise*—are an imitation of the central events of divine history: the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

The eastern origin of the sapphire directs our gaze to that point on the horizon where the sun, symbol for Christ, is just about to rise. At this same point the planet of love, Venus, has risen with the constellation of Pisces, which it outshines, lighting up the whole eastern sky. Pisces is the last of the twelve signs of the Zodiac. The sun, when it rises, will be in the first sign, Aries, or the Ram.

23. *those four stars*: No living man since the time of Adam and Eve has seen the four stars that the Pilgrim now sees. These stars would have been visible to Adam and Eve because the Garden of Eden, in which they were placed after their creation, was located at the top of the mountain of Purgatory (the Pilgrim is now at the bottom of this same mountain). After the Fall, Adam and Eve were driven from the garden, and they and their offspring—the whole human race—were consigned to inhabit the lands opposite the Earthly Paradise, that is, according to Dante's geography, the Northern Hemisphere. Hence, the stars of the southern sky would be invisible in the inhabited northern part of the globe.

Allegorically, the four stars represent the four cardinal virtues: Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude. A problem arises when, in lines 26 and 27, Dante laments the fact that the inhabited world is widowed, deprived forever of the sight of these stars (or virtues). But it is not likely that the poet is saying that after the Fall the world was deprived and will continue to be deprived of the virtues of Prudence, Temperance, Justice, and Fortitude! Surely Virgil and the other noble shades of antiquity now in Limbo possess these four virtues; in fact, it was the pagan philosophers who were the first to describe them. And every Christian, if he is prepared to receive sanctifying grace, will be endowed with these virtues (as well as with the three theological virtues). In the case of the Christian, the four virtues in question are referred to as the "infused" cardinal virtues; the pagans may possess only the "acquired" cardinal virtues.

But, though these virtues can be possessed in individual cases by pagans and Christians alike, they no longer form an inevitable part of human nature as they did before the Fall. When God endowed Adam with a combination of these virtues and an immortal body, He created a perfect man. This perfection was to pass to Adam's progeny, but when Adam sinned and lost Eden, mankind lost Eden and human nature was defiled. This Edenic state of existence was never to be recovered. Even with the Redemption, when Christ opened up the way for man to Salvation, we were not restored to the perfect Edenic existence of our first parents, with the natural infusion of virtue and the immortality of the body.

Thus, the first reference to the four stars leads to a lament, actually, over the loss of Eden; and this lament anticipates the

great joy the Pilgrim will experience when, at the end of Canto XXVII, he is led by Virgil to the entrance of the preternaturally beautiful Earthly Paradise and encouraged to "let pleasure be your guide."

See Singleton (1958), pp. 159-83, for the allegorical significance of the four stars as it is revealed in the course of the journey up the mountain of Purgatory.

30. *no sign of the Wain*: The constellation of the Wain (or Big Bear, *Ursa Major*), since it is near the North Pole, is not visible in the Southern Hemisphere.

31-75

Here we are introduced to Cato of Utica, the guardian of the Antepurgatory. Cato (Marcus Porsius Cato Uticensis, 95-46 B.C.) was a devout Stoic who became famous for his stern moral principles. Although he opposed the ambitions of both Caesar and Pompey, when the civil war broke out in 49 B.C., he sided with the latter against Caesar. After Caesar's victory at Pharsalia, Cato continued his resistance in Northern Africa, where he joined forces with Metellus Scipio, but they were defeated at the battle of Thapsus, and all of Africa, with the exception of Utica, fell into Caesar's hands. Rather than submit to Caesar, Cato resolved to take his own life. He reportedly spent the night before his suicide reading Plato's *Phaedo*, which deals with the immortality of the soul.

Dante's profound admiration for the character of Cato is expressed in earlier writings. In *Monarchy* (II, v, 15) he calls Cato "that most severe author of true liberty," and in the *Convivio* (IV, xxviii, 121-213) he makes the startling analogy: "And what earthly man is more worthy to represent God himself than Cato? Certainly none." Dante's appreciation of Cato belongs to a tradition that our poet inherited from antiquity: in particular, he must have known Lucan (*Phars.* II, 380-90), who praises Cato's integrity, and Cicero, who in the *De Officiis* justifies and idealizes Cato's suicide.

How can one justify the appropriateness of Cato's presence on the shores of Purgatory and of his role as guardian of the repentant souls newly arrived to begin, in time, the process of purification? As for the fact of Cato's suicide, it will become clear from Virgil's words to him later (73-75) that Dante, like Cicero, viewed this idealistically, not as an act meriting punish-

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