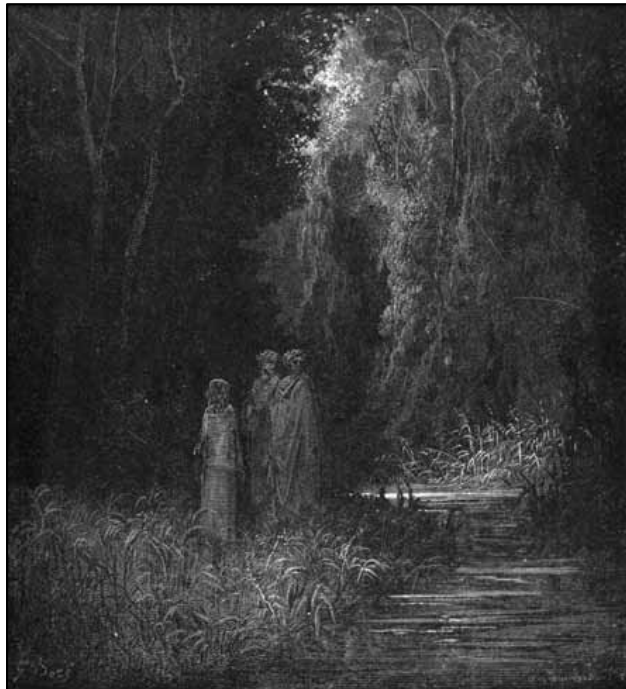


Purgatorio Canto XXVIII:1-51 Matilda gathering flowers

Now, eager to explore, within and round, the dense green of the divine wood, that moderated new daylight to my eyes, I left the mountainside without delay, crossing the plain, slowly, slowly, over the ground, perfumed on every side. A sweet breath of continuous air, struck my forehead, with no more force than a gentle wind, before which the branches, immediately shaking, were all leaning towards that western quarter where the sacred Mount casts its first shadow, not bent so far from their vertical that the little birds, in the treetops, left off practising their art: but singing, in true delight, they welcomed the first breezes among the leaves, that murmured a refrain to their songs: such as gathers, from bough to bough, through the pine-woods on Chiassi's shore, when *Aeolus* [p. 407] frees the Sirocco.

Already my slow steps had taken me into the ancient wood, so far that I could not see where I had entered: and, see, a stream prevented my going further, that, with its little waves, bent the grass that issued from its shore, towards the left. All the waters that seem purest, here, would appear tainted, compared to that, which conceals nothing: though it flows dark, dark in perpetual shade, that never allows the sun or moonlight there.



The Purgatorio

I rested my feet, and, with my eyes I passed beyond the stream, to stare at the vast multitude of fresh flowers of May, and, just as something suddenly appears, that sets all other thoughts aside, through wonderment, *a lady* [p. 517], all alone, appeared to me, going along singing, gathering flowers on flowers, with which all her path was painted. I said to her: 'I beg you, lovely lady, who warm yourself at Love's rays, if I can believe appearances, so often witness to the heart, may it please you to come nearer to the stream, so that I can know what you sing. You make me think of where, and how, *Proserpine* [p. 542] seemed, when *Ceres* [p. 542], her mother, lost her, and she, the Spring.

Purgatorio Canto XXVIII:52-138 The Garden's winds, plants and waters

As a lady, who is dancing, turns, with feet close to each other, and to the ground, and barely placing foot in front of foot, she turned to me, among the red and yellow flowers, as a virgin who looks downwards, modestly: and satisfied my prayer, drawing so near, that the sweet sound, and its meaning, reached me.

As soon as she was there, where the grass is already bathed by the waves of the lovely stream, she granted me the gift of raising her eyes. I do not think as bright a light shone, beneath *Venus's* [p. 571] eyelids, when she was, accidentally, wounded by her son, *Cupid* [p. 571], against his wish. *Matilda* [p. 517] smiled, from the right bank, opposite, gathering more flowers in her hands, which the high ground bears without seeds. The river kept us three steps apart, but the Hellespont, that *Xerxes* [p. 575] crossed, a check to human pride to this day, was not hated more by *Leander* [p. 505], because of its turbulent wash, between Sestos and Abydos, than this stream was by me, because it did not open then, for me.

She began: 'You are new, and perhaps because I am smiling here, in this place chosen as a nest for the human race, wonderingly, you have some doubts: but the psalm "*Delectasti* [p. 596]: you have made me glad" sheds light that might un-fog your intellect. And you, who are in front, and entreated me, say if you want to hear anything more, since I came ready to answer your questions, until you are sated.'

The Divine Comedy

'The water,' I said, 'and the sound of the forest, are struggling in me with a new belief, in something, I have heard, contrary to this.' At which she said: 'I will tell you the cause of what you wonder at, and I will clear away the fog that annoys you.

The highest Good, who is his own sole joy, created Man good, and for goodness, and gave him this place as a pledge of eternal peace. Through Man's fault, he did not stay here long: through Man's fault, he exchanged honest laughter, and sweet play, for tears and sweat. So that the storms, caused below this Mount, by the exhalations of water and earth, following the heat as far as they can, should not hurt Man, it rose this far towards Heaven, free of them, from beyond where it is closed off.

Now, since the whole of the air turns in a circle with the primal circling, unless its motion is blocked in some direction, that motion strikes this summit, which is wholly free in the clear air, and makes the woods resound because they are so solid: and a plant that is struck has such power, that it impregnates the air with its virtue, and the air, in its circling, scatters it round: and the other soil, depending on its quality and its situation, conceives, and produces various plants, with various virtues.

If this were understood, over there, it would not seem strange when some plant takes root without obvious seed. And you must know that the sacred plain, where you are, is full of every kind of seed, and bears fruit in it that is not gathered over there.

The water you see does not rise from a spring, fed by the moisture that the cold condenses, as a river does that gains and loses volume, but issues from a constant, unfailing fountain, that, by God's will, recovers as much as it pours out freely, on every side.

On this side it falls with a power that takes away the memory of sin: on the other, with one that restores the memory of every good action. On this side it is called Lethe, on that side Eunoë, and does not act completely unless it is tasted first on this side, and then on that. It surpasses all other savours, and though your thirst to know may be fully sated, even though I say no more to you, I will give you this corollary, out of grace, and I do not think my words will be less precious to you, because they go beyond my promise to you.

Purgatorio Canto XXVIII:139-148 The Golden Age

Perhaps, in ancient times, those who sang of the Golden Age, and its happy state, dreamed of this place, on Parnassus. Here the root of Humanity was innocent: here is everlasting Spring, and every fruit: this is the nectar of which they all speak.'

Then I turned straight back towards the poets, and saw that, with smiles, they had heard the last elucidation. Then I turned my face to the lovely lady.

Purgatorio Canto XXIX:1-36 The Divine Pageant

She continued, from the end of her words, singing, like a lady in love: '*Beati, quorum tecta sunt peccata* [p. 596]: Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.' And, like the nymphs who used, alone, to wander through the woodland shadows, one wishing to see the sun, another to flee it, she moved then, walking along the bank, against the stream, and I across from her, one small step answering the other.

Her steps, with mine, were not a hundred, when both banks curved alike, so that I turned eastwards. And our journey was not far yet, when the lady turned completely to me, saying: 'My brother, look and listen.' And see a sudden brightness flooded, through the great forest, on every side, so that I was unsure if it was lightning. But since lightning vanishes, as it comes, and that shone brighter and brighter, lasting, I said, in my mind: 'What is this thing?'

And a sweet melody ran through the glowing air, at which righteous zeal made me condemn *Eve's* [p. 472] boldness, who a woman, alone, and newly created, there, where Heaven and Earth were obedient, could not bear to be under any veil, which if she had borne, devoutly, I would have known these ineffable delights earlier, and for longer.

While I was moving among such first fruits of the eternal bliss, enraptured and still longing for greater joys, the air turned to blazing fire, under the green branches in front of us, and the sweet sound was distinguished as a song.