

The Divine Comedy

among the dance of the four lovely ones, and each took my arm, and singing, they began: 'Here we are nymphs, and in heaven we are stars: before Beatrice descended to your world, we were ordained to be her helpers. We will take you to her eyes: but the three on the other side, who look more deeply, will sharpen your vision to the joyful inward light.'

Then they lead me, with them, up to the Grifon's breast, where *Beatrice* [p. 426] stood, turned towards us. They said: 'See that you do not spare your eyes: we have set you in front of the bright emeralds, from which Love once shot his arrows at you.' A thousand desires, hotter than flame, kept my eyes fixed on those shining eyes, that in turn stayed fixed on the Grifon. The dual-natured creature was reflected in them, just like the sun in a mirror, with the attributes now of the human, now of the divine. Reader, think how I marvelled, in my mind, to see the thing itself remain unmoving, and yet its image changing.

While my spirit, filled with delight and wonder, was tasting that food, that satisfies and causes hunger, the other three ladies, revealing themselves to be of highest nobility in their aspect, came forward, dancing to their angelic measure. 'Turn *Beatrice* [p. 426], turn your sacred eyes, to your faithful one,' was their song, 'he, who has trodden so many steps to see you. By your grace, grace us, by unveiling your face to him, so that he may see the second beauty that you conceal.'

O splendour of eternal living light, who of us is there, grown pale in the shadow of Parnassus, a drinker from its well, whose mind would not seem hampered, trying to render you as you appeared, there, where Heaven in harmony outlines you, when you showed yourself in the clear air?

Purgatorio Canto XXXII:1-36 The Pageant moves eastward

My eyes were so fixed on satisfying their ten-year thirst, that all my other senses were dulled, and there was a wall of disinterest either side of them, so that her holy smile drew my vision in, towards itself, into its ancient net: at which my face was turned of necessity to my left to those goddesses, because I heard them say: 'Too intensely.'

And the state of vision the eyes are in, struck, just now, by the sun, left me sightless for a while: but once my sight adjusted to lesser things (I mean

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lesser compared to the greater object of perception, that I turned away from, of necessity) I saw the glorious pageant had turned round on the right and was returning, with the sun and the seven flames in its front.

As a detachment turns to retreat, behinds its shields, and wheels, with the standard, before it can fully change fronts, that militia of the heavenly region, that led, passed us all by, before the chariot-pole had turned. Then the ladies returned near to the wheels, and the Grifon moved the holy burden forwards, without ruffling a plume.

The lovely lady who drew me across the ford, and Statius, and I, were following the right wheel that made its turn following a tighter arc. So, an angelic melody accompanied our steps, passing through the tall forest that was empty, because of her who believed the serpent. We had gone as far, perhaps, as an arrow would travel in three flights, when Beatrice descended from the chariot.

Purgatorio Canto XXXII:37-63 *The Mystic Tree*^[p. 602]

I heard them all mutter: 'Adam!' Then they surrounded *a tree* ^[p. 602], with every branch stripped of blossom, and foliage. The height of its canopy, that stretches out further the higher it reaches, would be marvelled at by the people of India, in their forests.

'Blessed, are you, Grifon, who tears nothing sweet-tasting from this tree, with your beak, because the stomach is wrenched by it.' So the others shouted, round the solid tree; and the creature of two natures said: 'So the seed of righteousness is preserved.' And turning to the pole he had dragged, he pulled it to the foot of the denuded trunk, and left, bound to it, the Cross, that came from it.

As our trees bud, when the great light falls, mixed with the light that shines from Aries, following Pisces, the heavenly Fish, and each is newly dressed with colour, before the sun yokes his horses under the light of the following constellation, opening tinted more than rose and less than violet, so that tree renewed itself, that had naked branches before.

I did not understand the hymn the people sang then, nor is it sung here, and I could not withstand its burden to the end.

Purgatorio Canto XXXII:64-99 Dante sleeps: Beatrice guards the chariot

If I could depict how *Argus's* [p. 419] pitiless eyes closed in sleep, hearing the tale of *Syrinx* [p. 561], those eyes, whose greater power to watch, cost him so dear, I would paint how I fell asleep, as an artist does from a model: but who can truly show drowsiness? So, I move on, to when I woke, and say that a bright light tore the veil of sleep, and there was a cry: 'Rise, what are you about?'

As, at the Transfiguration, *Peter* [p. 534], *John* [p. 498], and *James* [p. 494] were brought, to behold the blossom of *Christ* [p. 450], the apple-tree, that makes the Angels eager for its fruit, and makes a perpetual marriage in Heaven, and came to themselves, having been overcome, at the word by which *Lazarus's* [p. 505] deeper sleep had been broken, and saw that *Moses* [p. 523] and *Elias* [p. 467] had vanished, and their Master's white raiment changed, even so I came to myself, and saw the compassionate one, who guided my steps, before, along the stream, bending over me.

And all bemused I said: 'Where is Beatrice?' and Matilda replied: '*See her sitting* [p. 602] under the new foliage, at its root. See, the company that surround her: the rest are rising after the Grifon, with sweeter and deeper song.' And I do not know if her words went on, because now She was in front of my eyes, whose presence prevented me from attending to other things. She sat, alone, on the bare earth, left there as the guardian of the chariot, that I had seen the dual-natured creature anchor to the tree.

The seven nymphs made a ring, encircling her, carrying those lights, which are secure from the north and south winds, in their hands.

Purgatorio Canto XXXII:100-160 *The Church's Past, Present and Future* [p. 602]

Beatrice spoke: 'You will not be a forester long, here, and will be with me, a citizen, eternally, of that Rome of which Christ is a Roman. So, to help the world that lives wrongly, fix your gaze on *the chariot* [p. 602], and take care to write what you see, when you return, over there.' And I, completely obedient to her commands, set my mind and eyes where she desired.

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Fire never fell so swiftly from dense cloud, falling from that region that is most remote, as I saw *Jupiter's* [p. 501] *eagle* [p. 602] swoop down through the tree, tearing its bark, its flowers, and its new leaves, and he struck the chariot with all his power, at which it swayed like a ship in a storm, beaten by the seas, now to larboard, then to starboard.

Then I saw a *vixen* [p. 602] that seemed starved, of all decent food, leap into the body of the triumphal car. But my Lady put her to a flight as swift as fleshless bones could sustain, rebuking her for her foul sins.

Then I saw the eagle drop into the body of the chariot from the place where he had first swooped, and leave it feathered with his plumage. And a voice came from Heaven, as it comes from a sorrowing heart, and it said: O my little boat, how badly you are freighted!

Then it seemed to me that the ground opened, between the two wheels, and a *dragon* [p. 602] emerged pointing his tail upwards through the chariot, and drawing his spiteful tail towards himself, like a wasp withdrawing her sting, he wrenched away part of its base, and slid away.

What was left, covered itself, with those feathers, just as fertile land is covered with grass, offered perhaps with true and benign intent, and the chariot-pole and both wheels were covered by them, in less time than a mouth is open for a sigh. The holy structure, transformed, grew *heads* [p. 602] above its members, three above the pole and one at each corner. The first three were horned like oxen, but the other four had a single horn on the forehead: such a *Monster* [p. 602] was never seen before.

Seated on it, secure as a tower on a high hill, a *shameless Whore* [p. 602] appeared, looking eagerly round her. And I saw a *Giant* [p. 602] standing by her side, so that she could not be snatched from him, and each kissed the other, now and then: but because she turned her lustful, wandering eye on me, her fierce lover scourged her from head to foot. Then full of jealousy and vicious with anger, he loosed the Monster, and dragged it so far, through the wood, that he made a screen between me, and the Whore and Monster.