

The Paradiso

draws its life and power from them. And as a hillside reflects itself in the water at its foot, as if to view its own beauty, rich in grass and flowers, so, rising above the light, around, around, I saw all of us who have won their way back up there, casting their reflection in more than a thousand ranks.

And if the lowest level attracts so great a light inside it, what of the intensity of the rose's outer petals? My sight was not lost itself in the height and breadth, but grasped the quality and quantity of joy. Near and far do not add or subtract there, since where God rules without mediation the laws of nature have no relevance.

Beatrice drew me, a man silent, who would speak, into the yellow glow of the eternal Rose, that rises layer on layer, and exudes the perfume of praise, towards the Sun, that makes eternal Spring, saying: 'Marvel at the vastness of the white-robed gathering! Our City, see how wide its circle! See our thrones, filled, so that few spirits are still awaited there.'

The soul, an imperial one on earth, of *Henry the Seventh* [p. 487], shall sit on that high seat, that you fix your eyes on because of the crown you already see placed over it, before you yourself dine at this wedding feast: he, who will come to set Italy straight before she is ready for it. Blind greed that mazes you has made you like a little child that chases away its nurse while dying of hunger: and he, *Clement* [p. 453], who will be Pope then in the court of divine things, will be such as will not tread the same path as him, openly or in secret. But God will not suffer him long in that sacred office, since he will be forced down where *Simon Magus* [p. 557] is, for his reward, and push *Boniface* [p. 431], him of Anagna lower still.'

Paradiso Canto XXXI:1-27 The Rose

That sacred army, that Christ espoused with his blood, displayed itself in the form of a white rose, but the Angel other, that sees and sings the glory, of him who inspires it with love, as it flies, and sings the excellence that has made it as it is, descended continually into the great flower, lovely with so many petals, and climbed again to where its love lives ever, like a swarm of bees, that now plunges into the flowers, and now returns, to where their labour is turned to sweetness.

The Divine Comedy



Their faces were all of living flame, their wings of gold, and the rest of them so white that snow never reached that limit. When they dropped into the flower, they offered, tier on tier, the peace and ardour that they acquired with beating wings: and the presence of such a vast flying swarm between the flower and what was beyond it, did not dilute the vision or the splendour: because the Divine Light so penetrates the Universe, to the measure of its Value, that nothing has the power to prevent it. This kingdom, safe and happy, crowded with ancient peoples and the new, had sight and Love all turned towards one point.

Paradiso Canto XXXI:28-63 Saint Bernard

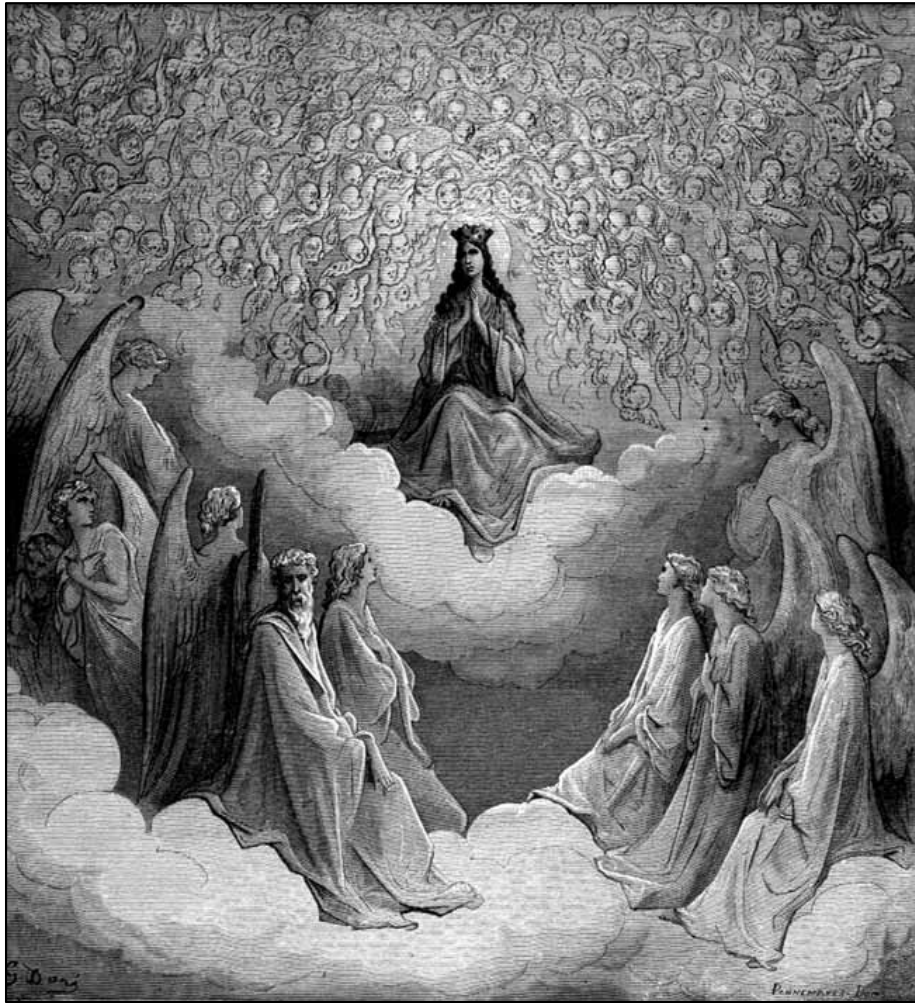
O triple Light that glitters in their sight, a single star, and so contents them: look down on our tempest! If the Barbarians, coming from those countries that *Callisto* [p. 439], the Bear, spans every day, orbiting with her son, *Arcas* [p. 418], the little Bear, whom she longs for, if they were stupefied on seeing Rome and her great works, at the time when her palaces exceeded mortal things, what then of me, who had gone to the divine, from the human, to the eternal, from time, and from Florence to a true and just people? With what stupor must I be filled! Truly, what with it, and with my joy, my wish was to hear nothing, and be dumb.

Like a pilgrim who renews himself, by gazing, in the Temple of his vows, and already hopes to retell how it looks, so I led my eyes, crossing the living light, along the levels, up and down, and then around them, circling. I saw faces persuasive of Love, graced by another's light and their own smile, and with gestures adorned with all honour. My gaze had already taken in the general form of Paradise in its completeness, and my sight had not rested on any one part, and I turned, with re-illuminated will, to ask my Lady about things with which my mind was concerned. I intended that, but another sight answered mine: I thought that I would see Beatrice, but I saw an old man dressed like the glorious folk. His eyes and cheeks were full of gentle joy, with kindly gestures as fits a tender father.

Paradiso Canto XXXI:64-93 Beatrice crowned in Heaven

And I suddenly said: 'Where is She?' at which he replied: '*Beatrice* [p. 426] brought me from my place to lead your desire to its goal: and if you look up at the third circle from the highest level, you will see her again, on that throne her merit has marked out for her.' I raised my eyes without answering, and saw her, making a crown for herself, by reflecting the eternal light from her person.

The Divine Comedy



No human eye is further from the highest vaults of the thunder, though plunged to the sea's depths, as my sight was from Beatrice, but that did not affect me, since her image came to me undiluted by any medium.

'O Lady, in whom my hope has life, and who, for my salvation, suffered to leave your footprints in Hell, I recognise the grace and virtue of all I have seen, through your power and your goodness. You have brought me from slavery to freedom, by all those paths, by all those ways that you had power over. Guard your grace, in me, so that my spirit, which you have made whole, may be acceptable to you when it leaves my body.' So I prayed: and she, far off though she appeared, smiled, and gazed at me, then turned towards the Eternal Fountain.

Paradiso Canto XXXI:94-142 The Virgin

And the holy man said: 'Let your eyes fly around this Garden, so as to consummate your journey perfectly, the mission for which prayer and sacred love sent me: since gazing at it will better fit your sight to climb through the divine light. And the Queen of Heaven, for whom I burn wholly with love, will grant us all grace, because I am her loyal *Bernard* [p. 429].'

Like one who comes from Croatia perhaps to see our cloth of *Veronica* [p. 572], and is not sated with looking because of its ancient fame, but, as long as it is visible, says, in thought: 'Lord Jesus Christ, true God, was this then your face?' such was I gazing at the living love of him, who in this world tasted of that peace in contemplation.

He began: 'Son of grace, this joyful being will not become known to you, merely by keeping your gaze down here at the foot, but look at the circles, to the very farthest, until you see the enthroned *Queen of Heaven* [p. 516], to whom this kingdom is subject, and devoted.'

I lifted my eyes, and as, at dawn, the eastern space of the horizon conquers that space where the sun declines, so, as if raising my eyes, from a valley to the mountain, I saw a space, at the edge, exceed all the rest of the ridge in light. And as down here that place where we expect the chariot, that *Phaethon* [p. 536] failed to guide, is most glowing, and the light is cut away on either side, so was She, *that flame* [p. 614] of peace, quickened in the centre, tempering the blaze on all sides. And at the mid-point I saw more than a thousand Angels, joying, with outstretched wings, each Angel distinct, in glow and function.

I saw there, a Beauty that was delight, in the eyes of all the other saints, smiling at their dances and their songs. And if I had words as rich as my imagination, I would still not dare to attempt the smallest part of her delightfulness.

Bernard turned his eyes to her, with so much love, when he saw my eyes fixed and attentive gazing towards the source of his own light, that he made mine more eager to gaze again.