Some critics have lamented that the doctrines presented and explained in Paradiso are by and large orthodox, pretty much what was taught in the schools, even if presented in often surprising and spectacular ways. We might observe that the goal of the Paradiso is not to innovate on doctrine, but to teach and to explain what is known, like any good vernacular exposition; and, moreover, to make its readers enamored of it, which is in the power of poetry. In the end, the daring of Paradiso is less in its absolute originality of thought than in its feats of poetic expression, stunning imagery, and integration of threads of divergent traditions. It remains daring perhaps, most of all, in its "pails of milk," that is, in its choice of humble linguistic container: the vernacular. Despite protests of unsayability in the journey "beyond the human," Dante clearly thought big ideas were worth explaining in a language even those unschooled in learned Latin culture could understand. His choice for the idiom of his own time and place, rather than the cosmopolitan one, meant that his poem would eventually have to be translated and explained for new readers in different times and places, especially for those who call his time ancient.

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Translator's Preface

My approach to translating Paradiso has been substantially the same as that outlined in the Translator's Preface to my translation of Inferno: a close, nearly line-for-line rendering in an American poetic vernacular. I have relied upon Charles Singleton's comprehensive commentary to the Commedia as my main guide to the Italian text, especially in resolving the meaning of the many disputed passages. Meaning of course is paramount in translation, but it is matters of style, insofar as style is distinguishable from meaning, that confront the translator with the critical choices that will define his translation as art.

The main stylistic choices I have made in recreating Dante's poem in English may be separated into matters of diction, tone, and verse form. Dante's range of diction and tone in Inferno, rising to outraged and sometimes austere dignity at times but equally at home with hellish obscenities, maps well onto the vernacular of contemporay American speech and poetry. (One reviewer has compared the language of my translation of Inferno to the edgy dialogue in a typical Martin Scorsese film). Dante's range of diction and rhetorical tone in Purgatorio, while still vernacular, is largely contained in a higher register than in Inferno—we no longer have the colorful speech of the damned, but diatribes of various sorts continue, and Beatrice's memorable tongue-lashing of Dante on the summit of Mount Purgatory is in a register of its own.

In Paradiso the diatribes, perhaps surprisingly, continue, though they are somewhat rarer. Beatrice has replaced Virgil as a meticulous expositor of the poem's philosophical and increasingly theological background, and she is joined in this role by a wide range of other blessed souls (as Alison Cornish points out in her Introduction, everybody in Paradise is a professor). These passages place demands on the translator for accuracy wedded to eloquence. But nothing in the Commedia tests the translator's sensitivity to poetic tone as those passages in Paradiso where Dante manages to express in his vernacular an experience of ineffable beauty that culminate in his vision of God at the end of the poem. Throughout the range of his registers Dante
himself is a sure guide to the translator who pays close attention to
his author's shifts in tone and subtle modulations of style.

The choice of verse form presents its own problems. Dante's sig-
nature interlocking triple rhyme scheme throughout the Comme-
dia—ABA BCBC CDC etc.—can and has been replicated in English
with some success, but at the cost of frequent unnatural inversions,
archaisms, and loose or padded translation. Rhymed translation is
always a difficult fit in translation into English; triple rhyme sus-
tained over thousands of lines (the Commedia is 14,233 lines long)
is extremely compromising. Another consideration is that English
rhyme tends to be on the final syllable, calling attention to itself
in a way that rhyme in Italian, which tends to be over the last two
syllables and as a natural by-product of grammatical inflection and
word suffixes, does not. Hearing Dante recited in Italian one is aware
of but not overpowered by the rhymes. At the same time it would be
a mistake to ignore rhyme entirely in a translation that aims to give
some sense of the poetics of the original text. I have opted to use
rhyme where I think it counts the most: to provide closure to each
of the Commedia's one hundred cantos, segueing into rhyme towards
the end of each canto and concluding with interlocked final rhymes.

Just as important as rhyme in the dynamics of Dante's verse is
the tercet structure and the rhythmic integrity of each line, both
of which I work to preserve in translation. Dante's eleven-syllable
line tends to have three accentual beats with several relatively un-
stressed syllables between each beat and one or more word-ending
vowels elided—features that I have incorporated into my verse line,
although I have allowed the lines to vary in length from nine to
twelve syllables. This is very nearly a line-for-line translation, cer-
tainly tercet-for-tercet, matching up as closely as possible with the
facing Italian text and its rhetorical and verse structure.

In spite of the fact that in the text of his poem he occasionally ad-
dresses the reader, Dante's intended audience included listeners. The
poem was composed to be heard as well as read. A tradition of solo
performers arose and has continued to this day (Roberto Benigni
being the latest and perhaps the most famous). I have followed suit,
composing my translations of all three canticles of Dante's Commedia
for performance and, as far as I have been able, revising the transla-
tion in the light of live readings for audiences, with attention at this
stage especially to sentence and verse rhythm (a major determinant
of tone) and overall poetic force. The translation is addressed to a
number of audiences: undergraduate students and their instructors,
Dante scholars, the general reader, and the community of American
poets. I have tried to take into account the interests of all of these
constituents.

I owe a large debt of gratitude to Alison Cornish for the splendid
Introduction she has provided to the poem, as well as for the head-
notes and illuminating endnotes to each canto. My deep thanks also
to Professor Cornish for reading the translation in draft and mak-
ing numerous corrections and suggestions to improve it. My thanks
also to Rebekah Curry for her work in compiling the Index of the
Blessed. And my warmest gratitude to Anne Shaw and Dee Johnson
for our weekly meetings to read aloud and discuss the Italian text of
Paradiso, as we had done with Purgatorio. Finally, as ever, I am grateful
to Brian Rak and the staff at Hackett for seeing this project through.

Note on the Text

The Italian text of Paradiso substantially accords with Giorgio Pet-
rocchi's critical edition (La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata, Milan,
Mondadori, 1966). New conventions for line indentation and verse
paragraphing have been adopted.
CANTO I

Dante's Paradise begins with glory, a term used for fame, especially literary fame, elsewhere in the poem, and alluded to in this canto by Dante's prayer to "good Apollo" to make him worthy of the laurel crown. In the first lines of the canticle glory is seen from its point of origin, in "Him who moves all things," as it penetrates and is reflected back by the universe. The third line establishes an important, and somewhat surprising, principle in the Paradiso: that of inequality or diversity—the more and less—of goodness. This hierarchical understanding of goodness applies even to the always changing position of the sun, where the first point of Aries is described as "a better course and in conjunction / with better stars" (37–42). Ordered diversity, or hierarchy, as Beatrice explains in this inaugural canto, is what "makes the universe an image of God" (103–3), who Himself admits of no such differences, no "less" or "more." Diversity in the universe is thus a solution to a problem of representation: how God makes an image of Himself in what is not Himself—a problem that is foregrounded in the Paradiso because it is the essential problem also of the poet. Dante claims to have had an experience of Paradise, of the ultimate metaphysical heaven that later he will describe as the "mind of God," but he does not claim that he will be able to communicate it to his audience, especially since even his own memory—a storehouse of images—was not able to retain what was an imageless, face-to-face experience of divinity. All he can offer will be whatever trace he "could store as treasure in [his] mind" (11), a "shadow / of the blessed realm that is stamped on [his] brain" (23–24), an "example" that must "suffice / for those granted the experience by grace" (71–72). Dante leaves it somewhat ambiguous whether he ascended through all the planetary spheres and even into the metaphysical realm in the flesh or in some sort of out-of-body experience (73–75), although he claims that one is already more physically capable of vision in the garden of Eden where, copying Beatrice, he is able to stare directly at the sun for longer "than men ever can" (54). He also imagines a quasi-physical mechanism of reflected light and of love's "gravity" in order to account for his swift ascent through the spheres. His unacustomed ability to stare at the sun emerges from his seeing Beatrice do the same, "as a second ray of light, reflected / from the first, will shoot back up again" (49–50). So too, because of his renewed state after climbing Purgatory, his "rising above these light bodies" (99) is analogous to the physical movement of sublunar elements to their natural place, no more to be wondered at than "a stream descending / down to the plain from a mountain height" (137–38). At the same time, the transgressive risks of this journey are apparent from the start. St Paul had said that he knew a man, "whether in the body or out of the body I know not," who had been rapt to the third heaven, but he also said that he had seen hidden things that were not lawful to be told. Outdoing even Paul, Dante claims to have visited all of the heavens, including the one "that most receives / His light" (4–5), and will attempt to retell all he can remember. Underlining the transgressiveness of such an enterprise is the invocation to Apollo that he might be inspired as was the satyr-musician Marsyas, who was flayed "out of the scabbard of his body" (21) in punishment for competing with the gods.

La gloria di colui che tutto move
per l'universo penetra, e risplende
in una parte più e meno altrove.
Nel ciel che più de la sua luce prende
fù' io, e vidi cose che ridire
né sa né può chi di là sù discende;

The glory of Him who moves all things
penetrates the universe, and its splendor
reflects more in one part and in another less.
I was in the heaven that most receives
His light, and I saw things that no one who
comes down from there can know how to tell;
Paradiso

perché appressando sé al suo desir,
nostro intelletto si profonda tanto,
che dietro la memoria non può ire.
Veramente quant'io del regno santo
ne la mia mente potei far tesoro,
sarà ora materia del mio canto.

O buono Apollo, a l’ultimo lavoro
fammi del tuo valor sì fatto vaso,
come dimandi a dar l’amato alloro.
Infino a qui l’un giogo di Parnaso
assi mi fu; ma or con amende
m’è uopo intrar ne l’aringo rimaso.
Entra nel petto mio, e spira tue
si come quando Marsia traesti
de la vagina de le membra sue.
O divina virtù, se mi ti presti
tanto che l’ombra del beato regno
segnata nel mio capo io manifesti,
vedrai m’al piè del tuo dilettol legno
venire, e coronarmi de le foglie
che la materia e tu mi farai degno.
Si rade volte, padre, se ne coglie
per trionfare o cesare o poeta,
colpa e vergogna de l’umane voglie,
che partirir letizia in su la lieta
defica deittà dovría la fronda
peneia, quando alcun di sé asseta.
Poca favilla gran fiamma seconda:
forse di retro a me con miglior voci
si pregherà perché Cirra risponda.

Surge ai mortali per diverse foci
la lucerna del mondo; ma da quella
che quattro cerchi giunge con tre croci,
con miglior corso e con migliore stella
esce congiunta, e la mondana cera
più a suo modo tempera e suggella.

Canto I

For our intellect, as it draws itself close
to its desire, goes so deep that memory
is not able to follow it there.
As much, however, of the holy kingdom
as I could store as treasure in my mind,
I will now make the matter of my song.

O good Apollo, for this final labor
make me as much a vessel of your power
as you require to bestow your beloved laurel.
Up until now one peak of Parnassus
has been enough, but now I need both
as I enter into the last arena.

Come into my breast, and breathe there
as you did when you drew Marsyas
out of the scabbard of his body.
If you inspire me, O power divine,
 to show even as much as the shadow
of the blessed realm that is stamped on my brain,
You will see me come to your cherished tree
and crown myself with those leaves, of which
my theme and your godhead will make me worthy.
So seldom, Father, does Caesar or poet
gather those leaves for triumph—and this
is the fault and shame of human wills—
That the Penetean bough ought to beget
gladness in the glad Delphic deity
whenever it makes anyone long for it.
A great flame follows a little spark.
Perhaps after me some more eloquent prayer
will be answered by Cyrrha, your sacred peak.

The lamp of the world rises on mortals
from different points; but from the point that joins
four celestial circles, making three crosses,
The sun takes a better course and in conjunction
with better stars, tempering and stamping
the wax of the world more in its own fashion.
Paradiso

Fatto avea di là mane e di qua sera
tal foce, e quasi tutto era là bianco
quello emisperio, e l'altra parte nera,
quando Beatrice in sul sinistro fianco
vidi rivolta e riguardar nel sole:
aguglia si non li s'affisse unquanco.
E si come secondo raggio suole uscir del primo e risalire in suso,
pur come pelegrin che tornar vuole,
cosi de l'atto suo, per li occhi infuso
ne l'immagine mia, il mio si fece,
e fessi li occhi al sole oltre nostro' uso.
Molto è licio là, che qui non lece
a le nostre virtù, mercè del loco
fatto per proprio de l'umana spece.

Io nol soffersi molto, nè si poco,
ch'io nol vedessi stavellar dintorno,
com'ferro che bolgiente esce del foco;
e di subito parve giorno a giorno
esser aggiunto, come quei che puote
avesse il ciel d'un altro sole addorno.
Beatrice tutta ne l'etere rote
fissa con li occhi stava; e io in lei
le luci fissi, di là si rimote.
Nel suo aspetto tal dentro mi fei,
qual si ò Glauco nel gustar de l'erba
che 'l ò consorto in mar de li altri dèi.
Trasumant ar significar per verba
non si poria; però l'esempio basti
a cui esperienza grazia serba.
S'ì era sol di me quel che creasti
novellamente, amor che 'l ciel governi,
tu 'l sai, che col tuo lume mi levasti.
Quando la rota che tu sempiterni
desiderato, a sé mi fece atteso
con l'armonia che temperi e discerni,
parve mi tanto allor del cielo acceso
de la fiamma del sol, che pioggia o fiume
lago non fece a cun tanto disteso.
La novità del suono è 'l grande lume
di lor cagion m'acceresero un disio
mai non sentii di cotanto acume.
Ond' ella, che vedea me si com'io,
a quietarmi l'animo commosso,
pria ch'io a dimandar, la bocca aprio
e cominciò: "Tu stesso ti fai grosso
col falso imaginari, si che non vedi
 ciò che vedresti se l'avessi scosso.
Tu non se' in terra, sì come tu credi;
ma folgore, fuggendo il proprio sito,
non corse come tu ch'ad esso riedi."

S'o fui del primo dubbio disvestito
per le sorrisi parollette brevi,
dentro ad un nuovo più fu' inretito
e dissi: "Gia contento requievi
di grande ammirazione; ma ora ammiro
com'io trascenda questi corpi levi."
Ond' ella, appresso d'un pio sospiri,
l'occhi drizzò ver' me con quel sembiante
che madre fa sovra figlio deliro,
e cominciò: "Le cose tutte quante
hanno ordine tra loro, e questo è forma
che l'universo a Dio fa simigliante.
Qui veggion l'alte creature l'orma
de l'eterno valore, il qual è fine
al quale è fatta la toccata norma.
Ne l'ordine ch'io dico sono acclive
tutte nature, per diverse sorti,
piu' al principio loro e men vicine;
onde si muovono a diversi porti
per lo gran mar de l'essere, e ciascuna
con istinto a lei dato che la porti.

So much of the sky then seemed on fire
with the sun's flame that neither rain nor river
ever made a lake spread out so broad.
The newness of the sound and of the great light
kindled a desire in me to know their cause.
I had never felt desire so keen,
And she who saw me as I saw myself,
opened her lips to calm my troubled mind
before I could open my own to ask.
She said, "You are making yourself dull
with false imaginings, and so cannot see
as you would if you had just cast them aside;
You are not on earth, as you believe you are.
Lightning flying from its own place in the sky
does not run as fast as you return to yours."

If I was freed from my first perplexity
by the few smiling words she spoke to me,
I was more entangled in a new one now
And said, "I was already content, resting
from a great wonder, but now I wonder
how I can be rising above these light bodies."
Then Beatrice, with a sigh of pity,
turned her eyes on me with the sort of look
a mother gives her delirious child,
And began, "All things whatsoever possess
order among themselves, and this is the form
that makes the universe an image of God.
Here the higher creatures see the impress
of eternal excellence, the end and goal
of the order that we have touched upon,
And in this order all beings have
their own natural bent, according with their lots,
some nearer and some farther to their Source.
They move, therefore, to different ports
over the great sea of being, each of them
endowed with an instinct that bears it along.
Paradiso

Questi ne porta il foco iner’ la luna;
questi ne’ cor mortali è permotore;
questi la terra in sé stringe e aduna;
né pur le creature che son fere
d’intelligenza quest’ arco saetta,
ma quelle c’hanno intelletto e amore.
La provvenienza, che cotanto assetta,
del suo lume fa ’l ciel sempre quieto
nel qual si volge quel c’ha maggior fretta;
e ora li, come a sito decreto,
cen porta la virtù di quella corda
che ciò che scocca dirizza in segno lieto.
Vero è che, come forma non s’accorda
molte fiate a l’intenzion de l’arte,
perch’ a risponder la materia è sorda,
co’ da questo corso si diparte
talor la creatura, c’ha podere
di piegar, così pinta, in altra parte;
e si come veder si può cadere
foco di nube, si l’impeto primo
l’aterra torto da falso piacere.
Non dei più ammirar, se bene stimo,
lo tuo salir, se non come d’un rivo
se d’alto monte scende giuso ad imo.
Maraviglia sarebbe in te se, privo
d’impedimento, giù ti fossi assiso,
com’ a terra quieta in foco vivo.”
Quinci rivolse iner’ lo cielo il viso.

Canto I

This instinct bears fire up to the moon;
this is the moving force in mortal hearts;
this holds the earth together and makes it one.
And this bow shoots not only creatures
without intelligence, but also those
who are endowed with intellect and love.
The Providence that keeps all this in place
quiets with its light the sphere of Heaven
within which turns the one with greatest speed,
And that is where, as to an appointed place,
we are being borne by the power of that bow
that takes aim straight at a joyous mark.
It is true that, just as a shape often
fails to match the artist’s intention
because the material is not responsive,
So too a creature will sometimes diverge
from its natural course, if it has the power
and is impelled to turn in another direction;
And as fire can be seen to fall from a cloud,
so too the primal impulse, diverted
by false pleasure, may turn down to the earth.
So you should no more wonder, if I am right,
at your ascent than at a stream descending
down to the plain from a mountain height.
If, once your hindrances had come to an end,
you stayed below, it would cause as much surprise
as a living flame that failed to ascend.”
And then back to the heavens she turned her eyes.
Canto II

IN THE OPENING ADDRESS TO the reader, Dante is like Ulysses, leading the small group that remains in their “little bark” on a course that “has never been sailed before.” Unlike Ulysses, however, the poet warns his followers to look back at the shore and “not put out on the deep.” Only a few, those “who have reached out early / for the bread of angels” (10–11), are advised to come along in Dante’s wake. The bread of angels is knowledge, an expressed goal of Ulysses’ journey, naturally desired but not actively sought by all men. Paradise, or the “realm / that is the form of God” can be defined, precisely, as the only knowledge that can ultimately satisfy this “innate and perpetual thirst” (19–20). Dante compares himself not to his own Ulysses, who did not make it home again, but to Jason, who made the first seafaring journey and brought back the golden fleece, which is the poem we are reading. Dante, perhaps in his own body, is received into the shining body of the moon, like a ray of light penetrating water. Yet the pilgrim’s first doubt is about the dark spots visible on this “eternal pearl.” Beatrice’s lengthy lecture on the moonspots, requiring a review of the whole celestial system that brings forth natural processes on the earth, and even suggesting an experiment to try at home, establishes an important principle for these early cantos. The apparent blemishes on this nearest of quintessential bodies are not due to “aridity and density” in the matter of the moon, as if it were lumpy or full of holes; rather they are formal variations as essential to the design of the cosmos as the myriad of different stars turned by the angels, whose diverse “virtues” are constantly bringing forth variety and change in terrestrial things. In this perfect realm of the stars, difference is not a defect, it is by design.

O voi che siete in piccole barca, desiderosi d’ascoltare, seguiti dietro al mio legno che cantando varca, tornate a riveder li vostri siti: non vi mettete in pelago, ché forse, perdendo me, rimarreste smarriti. L’acqua ch’io prendo già mai non si corse: Minerva spirà, e conduce mi Appollo, e nove Muse mi dimostran l’Orse.

Voi altri pochi che drizzaste il collo per tempo al pan de li angeli, del quale vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo, metter poteste ben per l’alto sale vostro navigio, servendo mio solco dinanzi a l’acqua che ritorna equale.

O you, who in your desire to listen, have followed in your little bark my vessel as it sails away in song, Turn around to catch sight of your shores again. Do not put out on the deep, for should you lose sight of me you might well become lost. The course I set has never been sailed before. Minerva’s my wind, Apollo my pilot, the nine Muses show me the stars of the Bears.

You few others who have reacted out early for the bread of angels, by which men here live but never come from wholly satisfied, You may indeed put forth your vessel on the salt sea and sail in my wake before the water becomes smooth again.
Paradiso

Que' gloriosi che passaro al Colco
non s'ammiraron come voi farete,
quando Isaón vider fatto bifolco.

La concreta et perpetua sete
del deiforme regno cen portava
veloci quasi com'l ciel vedete.
Beatrice in suos, e io in lei guardava;
e forse in tanto in quanto un quadrel posa
e vela e da la noce si dischiava,
giunto mi vide ove mirabil cosa
mi torse il viso a sé; e per quelli
cui non potea mai cura essere ascosa,
volta ver' me, si lieta come bella,
"Drizza la mente in Dio grata," mi disse,
"che n'ha congiunti con la prima stella."

Parev'a me che nube ne coprisse
lucida, spessa, solida e pulita,
quasi adamante che lo sol ferisse.
Per entro sé l'eterna margarita
ne ricevette, com' acqua recepe
raggio di luce permanendo unita.
S'io era corpo, e qui non si concepe
com' una dimensione altra patio,
ch'esser convien se corpo in corpo repe,
accender ne dovría il disio
di veder quella essenza in che si vede
come nostra natura e Dio s'unio.
Lì si vedrà ciò che tenem per fede,
non dimostrato, ma fia per sé noto
a guisa del ver primo che l'uom crede.

Io risposi: "Madonna, si devoto
com' esser posso più, ringrazio lui
lo qual dal mortal mondo m'ha remoto.
Ma ditemi: che son li segni bui
di questo corpo, che là giuso in terra
fan di Cain favoleggiare altrui?"

Canto II

The glorious heroes who sailed to Colchis
were not as amazed as you shall be
when they saw Isao plowing the furrowed earth.

The innate and perpetual thirst for the realm
that is the form of God bore us away
as swiftly as the heavens that you see move.
Beatrice was looking up, and I at her,
and in the time, perhaps, that it takes a bolt
to hit its mark, fly, and be shot from a crossbow.
I saw that I had come to a place where
a marvelous thing attracted my gaze.
So she, from whom my thought could not be hidden,
Turned to me, as happy as she was beautiful,
and said, "Direct your grateful mind to God,
who has brought us to the first of the stars."

It seemed to me that a cloud covered us,
as shining, intense, solid, and polished
as a diamond that has been struck by the sun,
An eternal pearl that took us into itself
the way water receives a ray of light
and yet remains whole and inviolate.
If I was a body—and here we cannot conceive
how one volume admits another,
which must be if a body enters a body—
It should kindle more our desire to see
that essential being in which it is perceived
how our nature is unified with God.
There will be seen what we now hold as faith,
not demonstrated but known in itself,
the way we believe self-evident truth.

I replied, "Lady, with all the devotion
of my heart I give thanks to Him
who has taken me from the mortal world.
But tell me, what are the dark spots
on this body that make men on earth
tell the story of Cain and his thorns?"
Ella sorrise alquanto, e poi “S’elli erra l’opinioni,” mi disse, “d’i mortali
dove chiave di senso non diserra,
certo non ti dovri penner li strali
d’ammirazione omai, poi dietro ai sensi
vedi che la ragione ha corte l’ali.
Ma dimmi quel che tu da te ne pensi.”
E io: “Ciò che n’appar qua sì diverso
credo che fanno i corpi rari e densi.”

Ed ella: “Certo assai vedrai sommerso
nel falso il creder tuo, se bene ascolti
l’argomentar ch’io li farò avverso.
La spera ottava vi dimostra molti
lumi, li quali e nel quale e nel quanto
notar si posson di diversi volti.
Se raro e denso ciò facesser tanto,
una sola virtù sarebbe in tutti,
più e men distributa e altrettanto.
Virtù diverse esser convegnion frutti
di principi formali, e quei, for ch’uno,
seguieteri a tua ragion distrutt.
Ancor, se raro fosse di quel bruno
cagion che tu dimandi, o d’oltre in parte
fora di sua materia si digiuno
esto pianeto, o, si come comparte
lo grasso e ’l magro un corpo, così questo
nel suo volume cangerebbe carte.
Se ’l primo fosse, fora manifesto
ne l’eclissi del sol, per trasparere
lo lume come in altro raro ingesto.
Questo non è; però è da vedere
de l’altro; e s’elli avvien ch’io l’altro cassi,
falsifico sia lo tuo parere.
S’elli è che questo raro non trapasi,
esser conviene un termine da onde
lo suo contrario più passar non lassi;

Paradiso

Canto II

She smiled a little and then said to me,
“If the opinion of mortals goes astray
where the key of the senses fails to unlock,
Surely the shafts of wonder should no longer
prick you, since you see that reason
has a short flight when it chases the senses.
But tell me what you yourself think of this.”
I said, “The diversity we see is caused,
I suppose, by bodies that are thick and thin.”

And she: “You will surely see that your belief
is submerged in error if you listen well
to the arguments that I make against it.
The eighth sphere shows you many stars
that can be observed to have different aspects
both in their qualities and magnitudes.
If difference in density alone caused this,
one single virtue would be in all of them,
distributed more and less and equally.
But different virtues must be the result
of formal principles, and by your reasoning
all but one would be eliminated.
Further, if thinness were the cause
of the dark spots you ask about, either
this planet would lack material
Here and there, or else, just as fat and lean
are layered in a body, so too here
the pages in its volume would alternate.
If the former were true it would be evident
in eclipses of the sun, with light shining through
just as through any thinner material.
This is not so, and therefore we must look
at the alternative, and if I destroy that too
your view on this will be proven false.
If this thinning goes only part way through,
there must be some limit beyond which
its dense opposite is not allowed to pass,
e indi l’altrui raggio si rifonde
cosi come color torna per vetro
lo qual di retro a sè piombo nasconde.
Or dirai tu ch’èl si dimostra tetro
ivi lo raggio più che in altre parti,
per esser lì refratto più a retro.
Da questa instanza può deliberarti
esperienza, se già mai la provi,
ch’esser suol fonte ai rivi di vostre arti.
Tre specchi prenderai; e i due rimovi
da te d’un modo, e l’altro, più rimosso,
tr’amo li primi li occhi tuoi ritrovi.
Rivolto ad essi, fà che dopo il dosso
ti stia un lume che i tre specchi accenda
e torni a te da tutti ripercosso.
Ben che nel quanto tanto non si stenda
la vista più lontana, li vedrai
come convien ch’ialguamente risplenda.
Or, come ai colpi de li caldi rai
de la neve riman nudo il suggetto
dal colore e dal freddo primai,
cosi rimaso te ne l’intelletto
voglio informar di luce si vivace,
che ti tremolerà nel suo aspetto.
Dentro dal ciel de la divina pace
si gira un corpo ne la cui virtute
l’esser di tutto suo contento giace.
Lo ciel seguente, ch’ha tante vedute,
quell’esser parte per diverse essenze,
da lui distratte e di lui contenute.
Li altri giron per varie differenze
le distinzion che dentro da sè hanno
dispongono a lor fini e lor semenze.
Questi organi del mondo così vanno,
come tu vedi omai, di grado in grado,
di sì prendono e di sotto fanno.
Riguarda bene omai si com’io vado
per questo loco al vero che disiri,
si che poi sappi sol tener lo guado.

And from that limit a ray of light
will be reflected back, just as color
returns through glass that is backed with lead.
You will now say that the ray looks dimmer
where it is reflected from farther back
than it is reflected in other parts.
You can be disabused of this objection
by, if you will try it, an experiment,
the spring that feeds all the streams of your art.
Take three mirrors; place two of them
equidistant from yourself, and the third
between the other two but farther removed;
Then face them with a lamp behind your back
that illuminates all three in such a way
that the light returns from them to your eyes.
Although the light seen from farther off
will not be as big as the others, you will see
that it does in fact shine with equal brightness.
And now, as the ground beneath snow, when struck
by the sun’s warm rays, is left bare
of both its former color and its cold,
So would I instill in your mind, left bare
in much the same way, a light so living
that it will shimmer as you gaze upon it.
Within the heaven of the divine peace
revolves a body in whose virtue lies
the being of all that it in turn contains.
The next heaven, which has so much to see,
parcels that being among different essences,
distinct from it but contained within it.
The other spheres, differing variously,
dispose the distinctive qualities they have
to achieve their ends and seed further goals.
These organs of the universe work like this,
as you now see, grade by grade; each of them
receives from above and operates below.
Observe well now how I move along
from here to the truth that you desire,
so that you learn how to take the ford alone.
Lo moto e la virtù d’i santi giri,
come dal fabbro l'arte del martello,
da’ beati motor convien che spiri;
e ’l ciel cui tanti lumi fanno bello,
de la mente profonda che lui volve
prende l’image e fassene suggello.
E come l’alma dentro a vostra polve
per differenti membra e conformate
a diverse potenze si risolve,
cosi l’intelligenza sua bontate
multiplicata per le stelle spiega,
girando sè sovra sua unitate.
Virtù diversa fa diversa lega
col prezioso corpo ch’ella avviva,
nel qual, sì come vita in voi, sì lega.
Per la natura lieta onde deriva,
la virtù mista per lo corpo luce
come letizia per pupilla viva.
Da essa vien ciò che da luce a luce
par differente, non da denso e raro;
essa è formal principio che produce,
conforme a sua bontà, lo turbo e ’l chiaro.”

The motion and virtue of the sacred spheres
must derive from the blessed, spiritual movers,
as the craft of the hammer comes from the smith;
And the heaven that so many stars make beautiful
takes its stamp from the profound mind that turns it,
and becomes itself the seal of that stamp.
And as the soul within your body’s dust
is diffused through different organic members
that are adapted to various faculties,
So the Intelligence unfolds its goodness
that is multiplied then through all its stars
while it wheels itself on its unity.
Different virtues make different alloys
with the precious bodies that they enliven,
and with which, just as in your life, they are bound.
By the joyous nature that is its source
the mingled virtue shines through the body
as through the living pupil happiness pours.
It is this, and not thinness or thickness,
that produces the differences in light;
this is, in proportion to its goodness,
The formal principle that causes dark and bright.”
THE SOULS IN PARADISE do not have "virtual bodies" as did shades in Hell and Purgatory. Here in the heaven of the Moon they still have a vague human physiognomy, though indistinct, like watery reflections. Whereas in Purgatory the danger was to mistake images for solid things, here the pilgrim mistakes real beings for mere reflected images. The faces ready to speak to Dante appear only as faintly as "a pearl on a white brow" (14). White on white is difficult to discern, precisely because of lack of difference. We remember from the first canto that the diversity among things is what makes God's image visible in His creation. Diversity among happy souls—who are not all alike—is the theme of this canto. These souls are said to be "relegated" to this lowest sphere because of a failure to keep their vows. Piccarda Donati, sister of Forese, whom we met among the gluttons in Purgatory, and of Corso, a damnable leader of the Black Guelphs, tells Dante how she joined the order of the Poor Clares as a young girl in order to flee from the world, but that "men more used to evil than to good"—led presumably by her vicious brother—then "snatched [her] away from that sweet cloister" (106-7). Only God knows, she says, what her life then became. Piccarda and Constance, mother of Emperor Frederick II whom Piccarda goes on to introduce, are women who were forced into marriages—marriages which violated their monastic vows—against their will. To be rewarded with an inferior lot in Heaven seems a harsh justice and a defective happiness. Just as the spotty moon seemed defective, so too these saints seem second class. Transferring the astronomical lesson to people: difference does not mean defect. Dante's first question is thus whether their ostensibly low status in Heaven is also against their will, against their deepest desires for a higher place. Piccarda's answer, which has left many a reader unsatisfied, actually exemplifies the principle of ordered difference as an essential good, rather than as something defective. To desire exactly what one has is not so much required by an authoritarian God as it is necessitated by the definition of what it is to be blessed. It is the form, or essence, of that supreme happiness to desire exactly what God desires—"In His will is our peace" (85); in other words, to desire what is. Desires are movements that are quieted by being satisfied. When threatened with violence in life, these women acquiesced to evil. What makes them happy now is that they have acquiesced to the good—"charity / quiets our will" (70-71, my emphasis). In other words, they are completely satisfied with what they are. Exemplifying the "physics" of desire, Piccarda sinks upward, "like a weight through deep water plummeting" (123), just as Dante's own eyes follow her until they revert to Beatrice, "the vision that they desired most" (126).

Quel sol che pria d'amor mi scaldò 'l petto,
  di bella verità m'avea sovvenuto,
  provando e riprovando, il dolce aspetto;
1  e io, per confessar corretto e certo
  me stesso, tanto quanto mi convenne
  leva' il capo a proferir più erto;
  ma visione apparve che riennne
  a sè me tanto stretto, per vedersi,
  che di mia confession non mi sovvenne.

The sun that first warmed my heart with love
3  had uncovered for me, by proof and rebuttal,
  the sweet beauty of the face of truth;
And I raised my head, although no higher
6  than was necessary for me to confess
  that I stood corrected and was assured;
But as I did so a sight appeared to me
9  that so strongly compelled my attention then
  that I do not remember if I said anything.
Quali per vetri trasparenti e tersi,
o ver per acque nitide e tranquille,
non si profonde che i fondi sien persi,
tornan dí nostri visi le postille
debili si, che perla in bianca fronte
non vien men forte a le nostre pupille;
tali vid’io più face a parlar pronte;
per ch’io dentro a l’error contrario corsi
a quel ch’accece amor tra l’omo e l’onte.
Subito si com’io di lor m’accorsi,
quello stimando specchiati sembianti,
per veder di cui fosser, li occhi torsi;
e nulla vidi, e ritorsi avanti
dritti nel lume de la dolce guida,
che, sorridendo, ardea ne li occhi santi.

"Non ti maravigliar perch’io sorrida,”
mi disse, "appresso il tuo püeril coto,
poi sopra l’vero ancor lo pië non fida,
ma te rivolve, come suole, a voto:
vere sustanze sò ciò che tu vedi,
qui rilegate per manco di voto.
Però parla con esse e odi e credi;
ché la verace luce che le appaga
da sé non lascia lor torcer li piedi.”

E io a l’ombra che parea più vaga
di ragionar, diriza’mi, e cominciai,
quasi com’om cui troppa voglia smaga:
"O ben creato spirito, che a’ rai
di vita eterna la dolcezza senti
che, non gustata, non s’intende mai,
grazioso mi fia se mi contenti
del nome tuo e de la vostra sorte.”
Ond’ ella, pronta e con occhi ridenti:
"La nostra carità non serra porte
a giusta voglia, se non come quella
che vuol simile a sé tutta sua corte.

Just as through smooth, transparent glass,
or through a pool of still, limpid water
not so deep that the bottom is lost,
The outlines of our faces return to us
so faint that a pearl on a white brow
does not come less quickly to our eyes.
I saw many such faces, eager to speak,
and I ran into the opposite error
then the one Narcissus made with the spring.
As soon as I saw them, taking them to be
reflected semblances, I turned my eyes
to see whose images they were.
Seeing nothing there, I turned my eyes back
straight into the light of my sweet guide,
whose holy eyes glowed as she smiled.

"Do not wonder,” she said to me, "that I smile
at your childish mind, for it does not yet
trust its footing on the truth, but instead
Turns you back, as usual, into a void.
These are real beings that you see,
relegated here for a broken vow.
Speak with them therefore, and hear and believe,
for the true light that gives them peace
does not let them turn their feet away from itself.”

So I addressed myself to the shade that seemed
most eager to talk, and, like a man confused
by excessive desire, I began,
"O spirit created for happiness, who
in the beams of eternal life feel the sweetness
that if not tasted is never understood,
It would be a kindness if you satisfied me
by telling me both your name and your lot.”
Then she, ready and with smiling eyes, said,
"Our charity does not shut doors in the face
of just desire, any more than does His
who wants all His court to be like Himself.
I' fui nel mondo vergine sorella;
e se la mente tua ben sé riguarda,
non mi ti celerà l'esser più bella,
ma riconoscerai ch'i' son Piccarda,
che, posta qui con questi altri beati,
beata sono in la spera più tarda.
Li nostri affetti, che solo infiammati
son nel piacer de lo Spirito Santo,
letizian del suo ordine formati.
E questa sorte che par più cotanto,
però nè data, perché fuor negletti
li nostri voti, e vòti in alcun canto.”

Ond’io a lei: “Ne’ mirabili aspetti
vostri risplende non so che divino
che vi trasmuta da’ primi concetti:
però non fu a rimembrar festino;
ma or m’aiuta ciò che tu mi dici,
sì che raffigurar m’è più latino.
Ma dimmi: voi che siete qui felici,
disiderate voi più alto loco
per più vedere e per più farvi amici?”

Con quelle altr’ ombre pria sorrisse un poco;
da indi mi rispose tanto lieta,
ch’arder parea d’amor nel primo foco:
“Frato, la nostra volontà quieta
virtù di carità, che fa volere
sol quel ch’avemo, e d’altro non ci asseta.
Se disassimo esser più superne,
foran discordi li nostri disiri
dal voler di colui che qui ne cerne;
che vedrai non capere in questi giri,
s’essere in carità è qui necese,
e se la sua natura ben rimiri.
Anzi è formale ad esto beato esse
tenersi dentro a la divina voglia,
per ch’una fansi nostre voglie stesse;

Canto III

In the world I was a virgin sister,
and if you search your memory well
my being more beautiful will not conceal me,
But you will recognize that I am Piccarda,
pot here with these other blessed ones,
and blessed am I in the lowest of the spheres.
Our affections, which are set alight only
in the pleasure of the Holy Spirit,
rejoice in being conformed to His order,
And this lot of ours, which seems so low,
has been given to us because our vows
were neglected and in some manner void.”

Then I said to her, “There shines forth from you
in your marvelous appearance something divine
that is different from my memory of you,
And that is why I was slow to remember.
But what you are saying now assists me
to recall more clearly the lines of your face.
But tell me, do you who are happy here
desire a higher place, in order that
you may see more and be more beloved?”

Along with the other shades she first smiled a little,
and then she responded to me so gladly
she seemed to be in the first fire of love.
“Brother,” she said, “the virtue of charity
quiets our will and causes us to wish for
only what we have and thirst for nothing more.
If we desired to be more exalted,
our desire would be discordant with the will
of the One who assigns us to this place,
And you will see that this cannot hold
in these circles, since love here is guaranteed,
if you consider well the nature of these spheres.
It is the essence of the blessed state
that we keep ourselves within the divine desire
so that our desires themselves may be unified.
si che, come noi sem di soglia in soglia
per questo regno, a tutto il regno piace
com’a lo re che ’n suo voler ne’ nvoglia.
E ’n la sua volontade è nostra pace:
ell’ è quel mare al qual tutto si move
ciò ch’e’lla crà o che natura face.”

Chiaro mi fu allor come ogne dove
in cielo è paradiso, etsi la grazia
del sommo ben d’un modo non vi prove.
Ma si com’ eli avvién, s’vn cibo sizia
e d’un altro rimane ancor la gola,
che quel si chere e di quel si ringrazia,
coi fec’io con atto e con parola,
per apprender da lei qual fu la tela
onde non trasse infino a co la spuola.

“Perfetta vita e alto merto inciel
folla più sù,” mi disse, “a la cui norma
nel vostro mondo giù si veste e vela,
perché fino al morir si vegghi e dorma
con quello sposo ch’ogni voto accetta
che caritate a suo piacer conforma.
Dal mondo, per seguirla, giovinetta
fuggì mi, e nel suo abito mi chiusi
e promissi la via de la sua setta.
Uomini poi, a mal più ch’a bene usi,
fuor mi rapiron de la dolce chiesa:
Iddio sì sa qual poi mia vita fusi.
E quest’altro splendor che ti si mostra
da la mia destra parte e che s'accende
di tutto il lume de la spera nostra,
cioè ch’io dico mi de, di sé intende;
sorella fu, e così le fu tolta
di capo l’ombra de le sacre bendes.
Ma poi che pur al mondo fu rivolti
contra suo grado e contra buona usanza,
non fu dal vel del cor già mai disciolta.
It is the light of the great Constance,
who bore to Swabia's second storm
the third and the last true emperor.”

She said this to me and then began to sing
Ave Maria, and as she sang she vanished
like a weight through deep water plummeting.

My eyes followed her until she was lost
to my sight, and then they reverted
to the vision that they desired most,
Turning themselves upon Beatrice alone;
but she flashed on my gaze in such a manner
that my eyes at first could not bear how she shone,
And this made me slower to question her.