

l. 118: *Currado Malaspina*: Conrad Malaspina I (“the old man”, l. 119) was grandfather to three cousins: Conrad II (now addressing Dante), who died about 1294; Moroello (see *Inf.* xxiv. 142 and note); and Franceschino (d. between 1313 and 1321) whose hospitality Dante enjoyed in Lunigiana in the autumn of 1306 — i.e. less than seven years (l. 133) from the time of this encounter in Purgatory.

l. 120: *that love which here we purify*: Conrad implies that it was absorption in family pride and family affection which placed him among the Preoccupied.

l. 122: *through your domain*: the “your” is here singular and honorific.

ll. 130-1: *the great Lord of Misrule*: (lit. “the evil head”): probably Satan: but possibly either Pope Boniface VIII or the Emperor.

l. 134-5: *that bright bed the Ram’s four feet arch over*: i.e. the sign of Aries, in which the sun now is.

l. 136-8: *events ... other men have said*: Dante has said that he has never visited Conrad’s domain (Lunigiana) but knows the generosity of the Malaspina family by repute. Conrad replies that he will before long know it by experience (thus prophesying Dante’s coming exile and dependence on the hospitality of his patrons).

## Canto IX



THE STORY. *DANTE*, waking from a dream in which he is snatched away by an Eagle, finds that he has actually been carried up, in his sleep, by St Lucy to the Gate of Purgatory itself Here Virgil and he are challenged by the Porter, who, hearing that Lucy has sent them, invites Dante to climb the three steps that lead to the Gate, marks the sign of the Seven Capital Sins upon his forehead, and opens the Gate with the Keys of Peter. On entering Purgatory the Poets are greeted by the strains of the Te Deum.

Now, glimmering on her eastward balcony, 1  
Came the white leman of Tithonus old  
Forth of her lover’s arms reluctantly;

Her brow was starred with jewels manifold, 4  
Set in the likeness of the beast whose tail  
Smites on the people, and whose blood is cold.

Already, on the stair night has to scale, 7  
Two paces, in that sky of ours, were stept,  
And now the third flagged on the wing as well,

When I — in whom old Adam’s nature kept 10  
Its share — began to nod, and on the lawn  
Where all we five now sat, I sank and slept

About the hour when the sad swallow, drawn 13  
In memory back, maybe, to her old woes,  
Pipes out her mournful lay to greet the dawn,

And when the pilgrim soul a-roving goes 16  
So far from flesh and thought's entangling snare  
That half-divine her dreaming vision grows,

I dreamt I saw an eagle in mid-air, 19  
Plumed all in gold, hovering on wings outspread,  
As though to make his swoop he poised him there.

Meseemed me in the place whence Ganymede 22  
Up to the high gods' halls was snatched one day,  
Leaving his comrades all discomfited.

I thought: Perhaps this eagle strikes his prey 25  
Always just here; his proud feet would think shame  
Elsewhere to seize and carry it away.

Then, in my dream, he wheeled awhile and came 28  
Down like the lightning, terrible and fast,  
And caught me up into the sphere of flame,

Where he and I burned in one furnace-blast; 31  
The visionary fire so seared me through,  
It broke my sleep perforce, and the dream passed.

Not otherwise, I think, Achilles threw 34  
Wild eyes about him, waking with a start,  
Wondering what place he had awakened to,

When his fond mother, cradled on her heart, 37  
Brought him from Chiron unto Scyros' coast,  
Whence the Greeks caused him later to depart,

Than I so stared and started and felt lost 40  
When the dream fled and left the face of me  
Pale, as of one whom fear congeals like frost.

Beside me sat my Comfort — only he; 43  
And lo! the sun was now two hours and more  
Risen; and my eyes were turned toward the sea.

"Fear nothing," said my lord, "sit thou secure 46  
At heart; we've come into a good estate,  
Faint not, but be the more alert therefore.

Thou hast reached Purgatory; see, the great 49  
Rampart of rock that compasses it round;  
And where the cleft shows yonder, there's the gate.

In the white daybreak hour just now, when sound 52  
Thy soul slept in thee down below, thy head  
Lodged on the flowers which there adorn the ground,

A lady came: 'I am Lucy' — thus she said; 55  
'Come, let me take this sleeper; I've a mind  
To help him on the road he has to tread.'

Sordel and all those shades of princely kind 58  
Were left; but thee she took and bore thee hither  
Up with the daylight, and I came behind.

She set thee down; then turned her fair eyes thither 61  
Towards the rock, to show me where the fissure  
Opened; she went then, and thy sleep went with her."

Like one consoled, released from the dull pressure 64  
Of doubt, who changes all his former fright,  
When the glad truth is told him, into pleasure,

So my face changed; and when he saw me quite 67  
Carefree, my leader moved; and so did I,  
Up by the rampart, onward toward the height,

Look, Reader, how my theme would scale the sky! 70  
Marvel not, therefore, if with greater art  
I seek to buttress what I build so high.

So we drew near and came unto a part 73  
Whence, in what first had seemed a simple breach  
Or fissure such as rives a wall apart,

I saw a gate; three steps beneath it, each 76  
Of different hue, led upward; and thereat  
A porter, who as yet vouchsafed no speech.

Widening my eyes, I saw him, how he sat 79  
Over the topmost step, in countenance  
Such as would not abide the looking-at.

A naked sword was in his hand, whose dance 82  
Of mirrored rays so binding blazed and shot,  
I tried and tried, but could not fix my glance.

Then he began: "Make answer from that spot; 85  
What would you? Where's the escort? Take good heed  
That your ascending hither harm you not."

"A lady out of Heaven, well skilled indeed 88  
In matters such as this," my lord replied,  
"Told us: 'There stands the gate; go there with speed.'"

To whom, immediately: "And may she guide 91  
Your journey on to a good end and fair!  
Approach our steps," the courteous porter cried.

And when we reached the first step of the stair 94  
It was white marble, polished to such gloss  
That, even as I am, I saw me there;

And dyed more dark than perse the second was — 97  
A calcined stone, rugged and rough in grain,  
And it was cracked both lengthways and across;

The third step, piled above the other twain, 100  
Seemed all or porphyry that flamed and shone  
Redder than bright blood spurting from a vein,

And this, God's Angel held both feet upon, 103  
And on the threshold of the door he sate,  
And that seemed made of adamantine stone.

With great goodwill my master led me straight 106  
Up those three steps: "And now," said he, "entreat  
Most humbly of him to unlock the gate."

Devoutly falling at the holy feet 109  
I prayed him let me in for mercy's sake,  
But first upon my breast three times I beat.

Then did he write with his sword's point, and make 112  
Upon my brow the mark of seven P's;  
"Wash thou these wounds within there"; thus he spake.

Colour of ash, or earth dug dry, agrees 115  
Well with the sober vesture on him clad,  
And from beneath it he brought out two keys;

One golden and one silver key he had; 118  
With the white first, the yellow afterward,  
He wrought so with the gate that I was glad.

"Should one or other of the keys stick hard, 121  
Turning askew so that the tumblers block,"  
He said, "this wicket cannot be unbarred.

One's costlier; the other needs good stock 124  
Of wit and skill to get the bolt to stir,  
For that one grips the wards and frees the lock.

From Peter hold I these, who bade me err 127  
In opening rather than in keeping fast,  
So men but kneeled to me without demur."

That blest gate's door he pushed then, saying at last: 130  
"Enter; but I must warn you: back outside  
He goes, who looks behind him once he's passed."

When in their sockets now began to gride 133  
The turning pivots of the sacred door,  
Which are of strong and ringing bronze, they cried

Aloud — so loud Tarpeia did not roar, 136  
Nor with such dreadful discord, when she found  
The good Metellus gone, her wealth made poor.

Then, as I leaned, hearkening to that first sound, 139  
Methought a voice sang, like some chorister's,  
*Te Deum laudamus*, sweetly interwound

With music; and its image in my ears 142  
Left such impression as one often catches  
From songs sung to an organ, when one hears

The words sometimes and sometimes not, by snatches. 145

#### *The Images.*

*Dante's Dream of the Eagle:* This is the first of the three dreams which Dante has, on the three nights he spends in Purgatory. All three symbolize and interpret something which is occurring or about to occur. On this occasion he dreams that he is walking, like Ganymede, upon Mount Ida, and, like Ganymede, is caught up to heaven by an eagle. The dream is induced by a reality (Dante's dream-psychology is always plausible): he has actually been carried up the face of the Mountain by St Lucy, and this movement both induces and fulfils the dream which symbolizes it.

*Ganymede* was the son of Tros, ancestor of Aeneas and mythical founder of Troy. Enamoured of his beauty, Jove sent the divine eagle to fetch him one day as he was hunting with his friends upon Mount Ida, overlooking Troy, and Ganymede was carried away to Olympus to become cupbearer to the gods. The legend thus provides two threads of symbolism. (1) Primarily, it is a story in which God takes the initiative, moved by love for a human being, and carries the beloved away to be with Himself. (We need not let any prejudices about Olympian morality interfere with our, or Dante's,

allegorizing of the myths.) (2) Secondly, throughout the *Comedy*, the Eagle always symbolizes the true Empire and, in particular, the Justice of the Empire — a concept which we shall see fully elaborated in the *Paradiso*, in the Heaven of Jupiter (*Para.* xviii, xix, xx). To this true Empire (“The Rome where Christ Himself is a Roman”, *Para.* xxxii. 102) the souls of men are brought by the purgatorial path, which is the fulfilling of Justice. (See Introduction, p *sqq.*) Ganymede the Trojan, of the line that founded Rome, is thus the type of human society, taken up into the City of God, here and hereafter.

*Lucy*: St Lucy, it will be remembered, was the second of the “Three Blessed Ladies” who interested themselves in Dante’s welfare. It was she who was sent by the Blessed Virgin to call Beatrice’s attention to Dante’s peril in the Dark Wood (*Inf.* ii. 97 *sqq.*). As the saint who looks after people’s eyesight, she figures as a symbol of illuminating grace, and is thus fitly typified in the dream by the eagle which can, traditionally, bear to look on the sun with naked eyes.

In the *allegory*, the intervention of Lucy means, I think, that in entering actively upon the way of Penitence and Purgation the soul is dependent upon God’s grace. It is too great a leap for it to make by its natural light and natural powers, though these will, of course, accompany and assist it. Thus Lucy is sent from Heaven to carry Dante up, and Virgil only “comes behind”.

*The Three Steps*: These are the three parts of Penitence: (1) Confession, (2) Contrition, and (3) Satisfaction. (See Introduction, .) The first is of polished white marble: the penitent looks into his heart, sees himself as he is, recognizes his sinfulness, and so admits and confesses it. The second is black, the colour of mourning, and cracked in the figure of the cross: “A broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise” (*Ps.* li. 17, *Vulg.* l. 19). The third is of porphyry redder than blood: the colour symbolizes not only the penitent’s pouring out his own life and love in restitution for sin, but

also the Blood of Christ’s “oblation of Himself once offered, to be a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world” (*Book of Common Prayer*), with which the penitent’s satisfaction must unite itself in order to be complete.

*The Threshold* of adamant is the foundation on which the Church is built: in her human aspect, the Rock which is Peter; in her Divine aspect, the Cornerstone which is Christ.

*The Angel at the Gate*: He is usually taken as representing the ideal Confessor, or the ideal Priesthood, and so, in the immediate context, he is; but in a wider sense he might be called, I think, the Angel of the Church. He wears the ashen garments of penitence, not only because the good confessor must himself be a penitent, but because the Church, so long as she sojourns in Time, must sojourn in sorrow and tribulation; he bears “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God”; and he is invested with the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, which were given to Peter as the Church’s authority to bind or unloose the bonds of sin. The Gate itself is the “Peter’s Gate” mentioned in *Inf.* i. 134: and we may note that the soul which is within the Gate and set on the Way of Purgation is already within “the Kingdom of Heaven”.

*The Seven P’s*: “P” stands for *peccatum* = sin; thus the Seven P’s represent the Seven Capital Sins which must be purged successively on the Seven Cornices of Purgatory. They “are signs of the conviction of sin, the new sense that sin is a ‘wound’, which is wrought in [the penitent] by the sword of the word” (J. D. Sinclair).

*The Keys*: These are the two parts of absolution: The Golden Key is the Divine authority given to the Church to remit sin; it is “the costlier” because it was bought at the price of God’s Passion and Death. The Silver Key is the unloosening of the hard entanglement of sin in the human heart: and this needs great skill on the part of the Church and her priesthood when administering

the sacrament of Penance. Both keys must function smoothly for a valid absolution: the use of the golden key without the silver lands you exactly where it landed Guido da Montefeltro (*Inf.* xxvii. 67 *sqq.*): the silver without the golden (i.e. remorse for sin without seeking reconciliation) leads only to despair and the Gorgon at the Gates of Dis. (*Inf.* ix.)

*Notes.*

ll. 1-9: *now, glimmering ... on the wing as well*: The lunar Aurora, or Moon-Dawn — called “the leman” of old Tithonus (see Glossary) as distinguished from the solar Aurora, who is his wife — was standing in the eastern sky like a lady looking out from her balcony, wearing on her forehead stars set in the shape of the Scorpion, the cold-blooded creature which has a stinging tail. In other words, the moon was rising in Scorpio, and Night, in Purgatory (“in that sky of ours”) had completed two steps (hours) of her journey, and the third hour was drawing to a close, so that it was now between 8 and 9 p.m. (This appears to me the best interpretation of this much disputed passage: but See Appendix.)

l. 10: *old Adam's nature*: Dante was still wearing his earthly body, which needed sleep. Note that it is only in Purgatory, which is situated in *time*, that Dante sleeps at all; not in Hell or Heaven, which are *eternal* states.

l. 12: *we live*: i.e. Dante, Virgil, Sordello, Nino, and Conrad.

ll. 13-18: *about the hour*, etc.: the hour of (the solar) dawn (6 a.m.). l. 13: *the sad swallow*: Tereus, King of Thrace, the husband of Procne, violated her sister Philomena and cut out her tongue, so that she should not betray his crime. Philomena, however, by means of a piece of tapestry, denounced him to Procne who, in revenge, killed her son Itys and with Philomena's help served up his flesh to Tereus. When Tereus, discovering this, tried to kill both sisters, the gods changed all three into birds — Tereus into a hoopoe, and the two sisters into a swallow and a nightingale respectively. (Ovid,

*Metam.* vi. 424 — .) Dante follows the less usual version, which makes Procne the nightingale and Philomena the swallow (*Purg.* xvii. 19).

l. 18: *half-divine her dreaming vision grows*: it was commonly held that a dream at morning was prophetic (cf. *Inf.* xxvi. 7).

l. 30: *the sphere of flame*: this was believed to surround the earth between the sphere of air and the sphere of the moon.

ll. 34-9: *Achilles*, etc.: Achilles, the Greek warrior, hero of Homer's *Iliad*, was the son of Peleus, King of the Myrmidons, and the nymph Thetis. So that he should not take part in the war against Troy, where it had been prophesied that he would be killed, his mother took him from the Centaur Chiron (see *Inf.* xii. 65 and note) by whom he had been brought up, and carried him in his sleep to the island of Scyros, where she dressed him as a girl and hid him among the queen's maidens. His astonishment on awaking in Scyros is described by Statius (*Achill.* i. 247 *sqq.*). Eventually his whereabouts was discovered by the cunning Ulysses, who came with Diomedes and took him away to Troy.

l. 44: *two hours and more risen*: i.e. it was now past 8 a.m.

l. 86: *where's the escort?*: this informs us that, in the ordinary way, a soul whose time in Ante-Purgatory was finished would have been as it were officially released and accompanied to the Gate by a heavenly minister. Compare this with the entirely spontaneous departure of the purged souls from the Cornices (xxi. 58-66, and Introduction, ).

l. 88: *a Lady out of Heaven*: Cf. Virgil similarly presenting their “credentials” to Cato (i. 52-4).

l. 111: *upon my breast three times I beat*: in making his confession to a priest the penitent knocks three times upon his breast, saying that he has sinned in thought, word, and deed “by my fault (*knock*), by my own fault (*knock*), by my own most grievous fault (*knock*) — *med culpa, med culpa, med maxima culpa*.”

## Canto X



THE STORY. *As Peter's Gate clangs to behind them, the Poets begin climbing the steep and narrow zigzag cleft in the rock which leads to the First Cornice. This, when they get there, turns out to be a ledge some eighteen feet wide running all round the Mountain, and, at the moment of their arrival, quite empty from end to end. The face of the cliff opposite the mouth of the hollow way is adorned with sculptured examples of the Great Humilities: and while they are examining these, they see a company of the Proud approaching, each one bent double beneath the weight of an enormous stone.*

When we had crossed the threshold of that gate <sup>1</sup>  
Which the soul's evil loves put out of use,  
Because they make the crooked path seem straight,

I heard its closing clang ring clamorous, <sup>4</sup>  
And had I then turned back my eyes to it  
How could my fault have found the least excuse?

We had to climb now through a rocky slit <sup>7</sup>  
Which ran from side to side in many a swerve,  
As runs the wave in onset and retreat.

"Now here," the master said, "we must observe <sup>xo</sup> <sup>10</sup>  
Some little caution, hugging now this wall,  
Now that, upon the far side of the curve."

These labours made our steps so slow and small <sup>13</sup>  
That the diminished moon from out the sky

l. 114: *within there*: i.e. within the Gate, in Purgatory.

l. 119: *with the white first*: the penitent's disposition must be right before the authority to pardon is exercised.

ll. 127-9: *who bade me err*, etc.: we need not make heavy weather about the possibility of the Angel's "erring". The meaning is that, provided the penitent has whole-heartedly submitted to the Church's authority (l. 29), the most merciful and generous view is to be taken of his case.

l. 131-2: *back outside he goes*, etc.: in the *literal* sense it is not possible that a saved soul should "look behind him" (i.e. falter in his purpose of purification): the *allegorical* sense has here taken charge of the passage. (But see Introduction, .)

l. 135: *they cried aloud*: the pivots are rusty because so few men take the way of salvation ("strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." *Matt.* vii. 14: and cf. *Purg.* x. 2).

l. 136-8: *Tarpeia*, etc.: the Roman treasury was kept in the Temple of Saturn on the Tarpeian Hill. Lucan (see *Inf.* iv. 90 and Glossary) in his *Pharsalia* tells how the tribune Metellus was prevented by a colleague from holding it against Julius Caesar, when he entered Rome in 49 B.C. (see Glossary: Caesar, Julius): "When Metellus had been led away, forthwith the temple was flung open. Then did the Tarpeian Rock re-echo, and with a loud peal bear witness to the opening of the doors" (*Phars.* iii. 153-68).

l. 141: *Te Deum laudamus*: "We praise thee, O God": the great hymn written by St Ambrose on the occasion of St Augustine's conversion. It is usually sung on Festival, not on penitential, occasions. Here it is perhaps chosen with reference to *Luke* xv. 10; though some writers suggest that it is sung, not by any angel (cf. xxvii. 58 and note) but by the spirits in Purgatory for joy that a new soul has entered on the way of purification, just as they sing the *Gloria in excelsis* whenever a purified soul is released from his pains (*Purg.* xxi. 58-60).