

## *Purgatory XIX*

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321)  
*Purgatory XIX, Divine Comedy*

The dream which occurs at the beginning of Canto XIX suggests a poetic analogy between sleep and poetry. For Dante, dreams conjure up the mysterious shapes and appearances of life and compel the mind to interpret them either as mere fantasies or enigmatic signs to be deciphered. In other words, dreams are allegories of our existence, which always veil a deep, elusive truth.

### **Purgatorio XIX**

Ne l'ora che non può 'l calor d'iurno  
intepidar più 'l freddo de la luna,  
vinto da terra, e talor da Saturno

óquando i geomanti lor Maggior Fortuna  
veggiono in oriente, innanzi a l'alba,  
surger per via che poco le sta brunaó,

mi venne in sogno una femmina balba,  
ne li occhi guercia, e sovra i piè distorta,  
con le man monche, e di colore scialba.

lo la mirava; e come 'l sol conforta<sup>10</sup>  
le fredde membra che la notte aggrava,  
così lo sguardo mio le facea scorta

la lingua, e poscia tutta la drizzava  
in poco d'ora, e lo smarrito volto,  
com' amor vuol, così le colorava.

Poi ch'ell' avea 'l parlar così disciolto,  
cominciava a cantar sì, che con pena  
da lei avrei mio intento rivolto.

«lo son», cantava, «io son dolce serena,  
che ' marinari in mezzo mar dismago;<sup>20</sup>  
tanto son di piacere a sentir piena!

Io volsi Ulisse del suo cammin vago  
al canto mio; e qual meco s'ausa,  
rado sen parte; sì tutto l'appago!».

Ancor non era sua bocca richiusa,  
quand' una donna apparve santa e presta  
lunghesso me per far colei confusa.

«O Virgilio, Virgilio, chi è questa?»,  
fieramente dicea; ed el venìa  
con li occhi fitti pur in quella onesta.<sup>30</sup>

L'altra predea, e dinanzi l'apria  
fendendo i drappi, e mostravami 'l ventre;  
quel mi svegliò col puzzo che n'uscia.

Io mossi li occhi, e 'l buon maestro: «Almen tre  
voci t'ho messe!», dicea, «Surgi e vieni;  
troviam l'aperta per la qual tu entre».

### **Translation** **Purgatory XIX**

It was the hour when the diurnal heat  
No more can warm the coldness of the moon,  
Vanquished by earth, or peradventure Saturn,

When geomancers their Fortuna Major  
See in the orient before the dawn  
Rise by a path that long remains not dim,

There came to me in dreams a stammering woman,  
Squint in her eyes, and in her feet distorted,  
With hands dissevered and of sallow hue.

I looked at her; and as the sun restores  
The frigid members which the night benumbs,  
Even thus my gaze did render voluble

Her tongue, and made her all erect thereafter  
In little while, and the lost countenance  
As love desires it so in her did colour.

When in this wise she had her speech unloosed,  
She 'gan to sing so, that with difficulty  
Could I have turned my thoughts away from her.

"I am," she sang, "I am the Siren sweet  
Who mariners amid the main unman,  
So full am I of pleasantness to hear.

I drew Ulysses from his wandering way  
Unto my song, and he who dwells with me  
Seldom departs so wholly I content him."

Her mouth was not yet closed again, before  
Appeared a Lady saintly and alert  
Close at my side to put her to confusion.

"Virgilius, O Virgilius! who is this?"  
Sternly she said; and he was drawing near  
With eyes still fixed upon that modest one.

She seized the other and in front laid open,  
Rending her garments, and her belly showed me;  
This waked me with the stench that issued from it.

I turned mine eyes, and good Virgilius said:  
"At least thrice have I called thee; rise and come;  
Find we the opening by which thou mayst enter."

(Translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

## Purgatory XIX

Macrobius (395–423)

### *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*

In his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, the Neoplatonist philosopher Macrobius classifies dreams into five general categories: the enigmatic dream (Gk *oneiros*); the prophetic vision (Gk *horama*); the oracular dream (Gk *chrematiamos*); apparition (Gk *phantasma*). For Macrobius, the apparitions produced by love passions and drowsiness are simulacra, insubstantial specters of our diseased vision. On the other hand, oracular or prophetic dreams require a skilled hermeneutics in order to be deciphered. In Dante, however, the pilgrim's dream of the Siren eludes Macrobius' taxonomy insofar as it is both mere phantasm and enigmatic vision.

### *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*

"All dreams may be classified under five main types: there is the enigmatic dream, as in Greek *oneiros*, in Latin *somnium*; second, there is the prophetic vision, in Greek *horama*, in Latin *visio*; third, there is the oracular dream, in Greek *chrematismos*, in Latin *oraculum*; fourth, there is the nightmare, in Greek *eypnion*, in Latin *insomnium*; and last, the apparition, in Greek, *phantasma*, which Cicero, when he has occasion to use the word, calls *visum*.

The last two, the nightmare and the apparition are not worth interpreting since they have no prophetic significance. Nightmares may be caused by mental or physical distress, or anxiety about the future: the patient experiences in dreams vexations similar to those that disturb him during the day. As examples of the mental variety, we might mention the lover who dreams of possessing his sweetheart or of losing her, or the man who fears the plots or might of an enemy and is confronted with him in his dream or seems to be fleeing him. The physical variety might be illustrated by one who has overindulged in eating or drinking and dreams that he is either choking with food or unburdening himself, or by one who has been suffering from hunger or thirst and dreams that he is craving and searching for food and drink or has found it. Anxiety about the future would cause a man to dream that he is gaining a prominent position or office as he hoped or that he is being deprived of it as he feared...

The apparition (*phantasma* or *visum*) comes upon one in the moment between wakefulness and slumber, in the so-called "first cloud of sleep." In this drowsy condition he thinks he is still fully awake and imagines he sees specters rushing at him or wandering vaguely about, differing from natural creatures in size and shape, and hosts of diverse things, either delightful or disturbing. To this class belongs the incubus, which, according to popular belief, rushes upon people in sleep and pressed them with a weight which they can feel...

We call a dream oracular (oraculum) in which a parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god clearly reveals what will or will not transpire, and what action to take or to avoid. We call a dream a prophetic vision (visio) if it actually comes true... By an enigmatic dream (somnia) we mean one that conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the true meaning of the information being offered, and requires an interpretation for its understanding....There are five varieties of it: personal, alien, social, public, and universal. It is personal when one dreams that he himself is doing or experiencing something; alien, when he dreams this about someone else; social, when his dream involves others asnd himself; public, when he dreams that some misfortune or benefit has befallen the city, forum, theater, public walls, or other public enterprise; universal, when he dreams that some change has taken place in the sun, moon, planets, sky, or regions of the earth."

## Purgatory XXII

Statius (45-96)  
Book I, *Thebaid*

As the last verse of the poem suggests, Statius wrote his epic poem *Thebaid* during the reign of Emperor Domitian. The poem describes the fratricidal struggle between Oedipus' two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, who fight for control over Thebes.

### Book I, *Thebaid*

Arcados atque alio Capaneus horrore canendus. impia iam merita scrutatus lumina dextra merserat aeterna damnatum nocte pudorem Oedipodes longaue animam sub morte trahebat. illum indulgentem tenebris imaeque recessu	45
sedis inaspectos caelo radiisque penates seruantem tamen adsiduis circumuolat alis saeua dies animi, scelerumque in pectore Dirae. tunc uacuos orbes, crudum ac miserabile uitae supplicium, ostentat caelo manibusque cruentis pulsat inane solum saeuaque ita uoce precatur:	50
'di, sontes animas angustaque Tartara poenis qui regitis, tuque umbrifero Styx liuida fundo, quam uideo, multumque mihi consueta uocari adnue, Tisiphone, peruersaque uota secunda: si bene quid merui, si me de matre cadentem fouisti gremio et traiectione uulnere plantas	55
firmasti, si stagna peti Cirrhaea bicorni interfusa iugo, possem cum degere falso contentus Polybo, trifidaeque in Phocidos arto longaeuum implicui regem secuique trementis ora senis, dum quaero patrem, si Sphingos iniquae callidus ambages te praemonstrante resolui,	60
si dulces furias et lamentabile matris conubium gauisus ini noctemque nefandam saepe tuli natosque tibi, scis ipsa, parauit, mox audus poenae digitis caedentibus ultro incubui miserae oculos in matre reliqui: exaudi, si digna precor quaeque ipsa furenti subiceres. orbem uisu regnisque carentem	65
non regere aut dictis maerentem flectere adorti, quos genui quocumque toro; quin ecce superbi —pro dolor!—et nostro iam dudum funere reges insultant tenebris gemitusque odere paternos. hisne etiam funestus ego? et uidet ista deorum ignauus genitor? tu saltem debita uindex	70
huc ades et totos in poenam ordire nepotes. indue quod madidum tabo diadema cruentis	75
	80

unguibus abripui, uotisque instincta paternis  
i media in fratres, generis consortia ferro  
dissiliant. da, Tartarei regina barathri,  
quod cupiam uidisse nefas, nec tarda sequetur  
mens iuuenum: modo digna ueni, mea pignora nosces.'

85

**Translation**  
**Book I, *Thebaid***

[46] Already had Oedipus with avenging hand probed deep his sinning eyes and sunk his guilty shame in eternal night, abiding in a long and living death. But while he hugs his darkness and the uttermost seclusion of his dwelling, and keeps his secret chamber which the sun's rays and heaven behold not, yet with unwearied wings the fierce daylight of the mind hovers around him, and the Avenging Furies of his crimes assail his heart. Then he displays to heaven those empty orbs, the cruel, pitiful punishment of his life, and with blood-stained hands beats upon the hollow earth, and in dire accents utters this prayer: "Gods who hold sway over guilty souls and over Tartarus crowded with the damned, and thou O Styx, whom I behold, ghastly in thy shadowy depths, and thou Tisiphone, so oft the object of my prayer, be favourable now, and further my unnatural wish: if in aught I have found favour; if thou didst cherish me in thy bosom when I fell from my mother's womb, and didst heal the wounds of my pierced feet; if I sought the lake of Cirrha where it winds between the two summits of the range, when I could have lived contented with the false Polybus, and in the Phocian strait where three ways meet grappled with the aged king and cleft the visage of the trembling dotard, searching for my true sire; if by wit of the foreshowing I solved the riddles of the cruel Sphinx; if I knew exulting the sweet ecstasy and fatal union of my mother's bed, and passed many an unhallowed night, and begot sons for thee, as well thou knowest, yet soon, greedy for punishment, did violence to myself with tearing fingers and left my eyes upon my wretched mother – hear me to the end, if my prayer be worthy and such as thou wouldest inspire my ranging heart withal. Sightless though I was and driven from my throne, my sons, on whatever couch begotten, attempted not to give me guidance or consolation in my grief; nay, haughtily (ah! the maddening sting!) an raised to royalty with me long dead, they mock my blindness and abhor their father's groans. Do these too hold me accursed? and the father of gods beholds it, and does naught? Do thou at least, my due defender, come hither, and begin a work of vengeance that will blast their seed for ever! Set on thy head the gore-drenched circlet that my bloody nails tore of, and inspired by their father's curses go thou between the brethren, and with the sword sunder the binding ties of kinship. Grant me, thou queen of Tartarus' abyss, grant me to see the evil that my soul desires, nor will the spirit of the youths be slow to follow; come thou but worthy of thyself, thou shalt know them to be true sons of mine."

(Translated by J H. Mozley)

## *Purgatory XXII*

Virgil (70 BC - 19 BC)  
Book III, *Aeneid*

Dante is translating here from *Aeneid* III (56-7). Moving toward the Sixth Ring inhabited by the Gluttonous, Virgil and Statius discuss the *Aeneid*. Statius admits that he was so moved by this passage in Virgil's epic poem that he became prodigal: "Why cannot you, o holy hunger for gold, restrain the appetite of mortals?" Opposite sins, prodigality and avarice, are punished in the same circle of both Hell and Purgatory.

### **Liber Tertius, *Aeneid*, 55-7**

Hunc Polydorum auri quondam cum pondere magno infelix Priamus furtim mandarat alendum Threicio regi, cum iam diffideret armis Dardaniae cingique urbem obsidione uideret. ille, ut opes fractae Teucrum et Fortuna recessit, res Agamemnonias uictriciaque arma secutus fas omne abruptit: Polydorum obtruncat, et auro ui potitur. quid non mortalia pectora cogis, auri sacra fames! postquam pauor ossa reliquit, delectos populi ad proceres primumque parentem monstra deum refero, et quae sit sententia posco. omnibus idem animus, scelerata excedere terra, linqui pollutum hospitium et dare classibus Austros.	50       55    60
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### **Translation Book III, *Aeneid*, 55-7**

O sacred hunger of pernicious gold!  
What bands of faith can impious lucre hold?

(Translated by John Dryden)



## *Purgatory XXII*

Virgil (70 BC - 19 BC)

### *Eclogue IV*

Dante translates here from Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* (5-7), which is based on the Sibylline oracle. It prophesizes a new Age of Gold and its visionary tone alludes to the birth of Christ.

### ***Ecloga quarta***

Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas; magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo.	5
iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna, iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto. tu modo nascenti puero, quo ferrea primum desinet ac toto surget gens aurea mundo, casta fave Lucina; tuus iam regnat Apollo.	10

### **Translation**

#### ***Eclogue IV***

[5] Now is come the last age of Cumaean song; the great line of the centuries begins anew. Now the Virgin returns, the reign of Saturn returns; now a new generation descends from heaven on high. Only do you, pure Lucina, smile on the birth of the child, under whom the iron brood shall at last cease and a golden race spring up throughout the world! Your own Apollo now is king!

(Translated by H. R. Fairclough)