

Torquato Tasso

[from] **POEMS FOR LUCRETIA AND LAURA**

*(Le Rime, Books I-II)*



*Translated from the Italian by*

Max Wickert



This translation in progress was begun in 2008. The two long poems in this selection (nos. 31 and 113) are noteworthy as Tasso's first truly ambitious efforts. (He was still in his teens when he wrote them.) In time, I hope to complete translations of and notes to all the five-hundred-odd love poems in Tasso's *Rime d'Amore*.

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1<sup>1</sup>

*This first sonnet offers, as it were, the premise of the work:  
in it the poet lays claim to praise for soon repenting his madness  
and exhorts lovers by his example to take back from Love the mastery of themselves.<sup>2</sup>*

Truly those joys, those ardors, and those sighs,  
the varied subject my woeful song,  
gave me the power<sup>3</sup> to make the notes of strong  
Mars, joined with chaste, heroic Love, arise.

And if my heart was not quite dull, my cries  
not quite inept, I should not deem it wrong  
if penance now win better praise among  
those<sup>4</sup> who to modest virtue yield the prize.

Warned by my fate, let other lovers now,  
reading how my desires and joys proved vain,  
seize back from Love the bridle of the soul.

If I can quench one tear, or cool one brow,  
or guide some heart on Reason's path again,  
my will shall gladly bow to Love's control.

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<sup>1</sup> Ever since Tasso's lifetime, this little palinode has been printed as a preface to the complete *Rime d'Amore*, of which the poems to Lucrezia form Book One.

<sup>2</sup> The captions of individual poems (some of them less appropriate than others) appear in some of the earliest editions and seem to have been sanctioned by Tasso himself. Those supplied by later editors are enclosed in square brackets.

<sup>3</sup> As Tasso himself noted in *Esposizioni*, the idea that apprenticeship in lyric enables the poet's mastery of epic is at least as old as Quintilian (*Rhetorica* X.1.62)

<sup>4</sup> The nobles "in the courts of the best princes" [T]

*He describes his mistress's beauty and the onset of his love,  
which occurred in his early youth*

My age was in glad April's prime, and still,  
in youthful quest of beauty and delight,  
my soul sought out joy after joy that might  
find lodging in a gentle spirit, till  
a lady appeared and called out to my will,  
much like a guileless cherub in my sight.  
She showed no plumes as yet, but (blessed sprite!)  
seemed to engraft them on my graceful quill.  
Strange marvel! She unto my verse, and I  
unto her name, lent wings<sup>5</sup> of glorious fame;  
each by the other's means ventured to soar.  
She was the one whose bright, enticing flame  
I'm pleased to sing and all alone deplore,  
and my first sparks in sweet oblivion die.

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<sup>5</sup> "To be read as a miraculous exchange of the wings of Fame and of Love." [T]

*There follows a description of the same*

From her broad brow the waves of shining gold  
rippled, and from her lovely stars the light  
brought blossoming May to earth and burned like bright  
July in men's hearts with a joy untold.  
In her white bosom sportive Cupid lolled,  
but dared not give offense however slight,  
while Courtesy and Wisdom winged their flight  
on soft breaths from her roses' blushing fold.  
Seeing on earth a goddess from the skies  
I shut my eyes, thinking: "Ah fool! you place  
your life at risk, to gaze upon these spheres!"  
But from high peril I escaped nowise,  
for my poor heart was wounded through my ears  
her speech pierced me more deeply than her face.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Near the end of his life, Tasso makes the title character in his dialogue "Minturno, or On Beauty" quote the conclusion of this sonnet and comment: "The young man's insight . . . is certainly fine, but he is not about to flee himself, being caught in the toils of love." (see Carnes Lord and Dain A. Trafton, *Tasso's Dialogues*, Berkeley: 1982, pp.240-41)

*He shows how love ignited by the appearance of his mistress was increased by her song.*

Already her softening mien and gracious sight  
had cracked the ice of scorn that armed my heart.  
Once more my breast felt itself change and start  
at signs of ancient ardor<sup>7</sup> and delight.  
I fondly nursed the sparks till they grew bright,  
feeding my fever to increase my smart:  
so Love compelled me by his flattering art,  
who in her eyes enthroned displays his might;  
when (hark!) a strange song<sup>8</sup> pierced my heart and fanned  
the flames with ever-quickening breath until  
its calm and steady fire flared up anew.  
No wind-blown torches saw I ever spill  
more dazzling flashes than the firebrand  
that was enkindled there and blazed and grew.

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<sup>7</sup> The image is a commonplace, harkening back to Dido's "*adgnosco veteris vestigial flammae*" in Virgil (*Aeneid* iv.23), famously re-used by Dante (*Purgatorio* xxx.48).

<sup>8</sup> Love roused by song is more spiritual "because the sense of hearing is more spiritual than that of touch." [T]

*He tells of having seen his mistress on the banks of the Brenta  
and describes poetically the miracles wrought by her beauty.*

I saw my most prized, best loved lady pass  
    gathering flowers on this river's strands;  
    and every time she plucked one with her hands,  
her white foot made more spring up in the grass.  
Loosed to the breeze fluttered the lovely mass  
    of her gold curls, Love's subtly fettering bands,  
    and her sweet song enkindled in her glance  
fires that all her earlier fires surpass.  
    Stopped in its course, the wandering stream nearby,  
    as if to form a mirror of its flow  
for her eyes and hair, lay still beneath the sky,  
    and seemed to say: "With your fair image, though  
it well might grace the king of rivers<sup>9</sup>, I  
    brighten my placid waves and make them glow."

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<sup>9</sup> The Po, as opposed to the Brenta, which flows near Abano. See also poem 83 below.



*He proceeds to demonstrate by another metaphor how,  
seeing his mistress defenseless, he was himself defeated and overcome by her.*

A tender maid beneath a fine veil I  
once seemed to find, all helpless, young and frail,  
in braids and frock still, yielding without fail,  
like ice to sunlight blazing from on high.  
But seeing the fire that I can ill deny  
or hide and my great yearning, she grew pale  
and hard, a tower too lofty to assail,  
or a flinty crag<sup>10</sup> fronting a storm-tossed sky.  
I looked and she, in jasper<sup>11</sup> helmeted,  
turned weapons of Medusa upon me.  
I froze and instantly grew mute and lame.  
I wished to say, finding no will to flee,  
all rock without and inwardly all flame:  
“Lady, first melt this stone, then strike me dead.”

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<sup>10</sup> “This portion imitates Lord Della Casa . . . ‘like an alpine cliff / That rises high over wind and rain.’” [T] The reference is to Giovanni Della Casa’s *Rime* xli.13-14.

<sup>11</sup> Jasper, in medieval lapidaries, betokens chastity.

*He describes how in his early youth, through his lack of experience,  
he was overcome by pleasure in a very gentle and noble young girl.*

A heedless youth, too green to understand,  
amazed to feel such sweetness in my heart,  
I feared no injury from that precious dart<sup>12</sup>  
Love hones and hardens in his cruel hand,  
nor dreamt a mere spark could so strongly and  
so swiftly make immortal fires start,  
but fondly deemed I had the fowler's art  
to trap the fledgling in desire's band.  
But secret nets, spread among flowers, became  
trammels to cause me grievous woe, while she  
sped away, light and free. Thus it was I,  
snared in a soft noose<sup>13</sup>, who was left to cry,  
her every glance an arrow aimed at me  
and her regard an all-consuming flame.

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<sup>12</sup> "Love's arrows are two, as one finds in the first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: one is of gold, which engenders love, the other of lead, which has the opposite effect." [T]

<sup>13</sup> "In imitation of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, but with more marvelous effect; for the pursuer here is caught and becomes . . . the quarry." [T]

*He playfully reflects upon his mistress's name.*

Lady, your name of all names is most apt.  
It sounds like *luce, reti*<sup>14</sup>—nets and light.<sup>15</sup>  
Yes, dazzled by your splendid face, I land,  
reeling, in your enchanting net. I'm trapped  
in strands of gold, deprived of sense and flight,  
snared in your hair and captured by your hand--  
so soft, so bare, yet of its conquest sure,  
more cruel and fierce as it is chaste and pure.

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<sup>14</sup> "This shows the grounds of propriety for the verse, the name *Lucrezia* being split into two parts, omitting but a single letter; the first intends its derivation from *luce*, the other from *reti*, which among the Latins signifies 'nets'." [T]

<sup>15</sup> The final words of this line have (for obvious reasons) been supplied by the translator.

*He shows what sweetness there is in love's torments.*

If Love contrived these nets and feathers, oh!  
how sweet is amorous trouble! If my will  
be hooked and baited by the fowler's skill,  
is not the bait sweet, sweet the hooks? Even so.  
With what sweet poison the limed branches glow!  
How sweet the warmth it lends, how sweet the chill!  
How sweet to know I suffer and keep still!  
That I can love none else, how sweet my woe!  
How sweet to writhe with inward pangs, to call  
for ruth, tears in my guilty gaze,  
and to sue for justice as the death-blows fall!  
If this be life, let a thousand such affrays  
assault me daily--I delight in all;  
if death, to death I consecrate my days.

*To Master Fulvio Viani*<sup>16</sup>

See, Fulvio, see that sun new-risen flare  
and plunge the land in her immortal day!  
See what bright light, what heat her splendid ray  
diffuses and engenders everywhere!  
Kneel to that goddess, since too scant and bare  
is mortal homage men to her might pay.  
For me, Love's altar waits: I long to lay  
My heart, her sacrificial victim, there.  
I build her temple in my mind even now,  
where Thought erects her image and with fit  
characters carves Lucretia's name and state;  
and as picked guardian of that shrine, I vow,  
my frank and spotless Faith, shall sit  
to chase all other longings from the gate.

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<sup>16</sup> The identity of Tasso's friend is unknown.

*To the same.*

Here, Fulvio, now my fair sun goes to rest,  
while the other sun takes lodging in the sea.  
Here too, when Phoebus greets the day, she'll be--  
Phoebus who is her dawn and herald blest.  
Before she comes, I'll see him step forth, dressed  
in scarlet robes and glowing splendidly;  
and if the Hours attend his progress, she  
has Love and all the Graces at her hest.  
How is it then that, sensing his return,  
so many flowers open wide and rise,  
not fearing in his blaze to meet their doom?  
Alas, he nurtures and renews their bloom  
with virtue raining from her dewy eyes,  
and only hearts will at her coming burn!

*He shows why his mistress, though dressed in the exquisite garments of a young maiden,  
should not be numbered among the nymphs, but rather is worthy of celestial honor.*

While she enriched with splendors of her own  
the flower-strewn lawn<sup>17</sup>, each tranquil fountain sighed,  
seeming to murmur: "All my crystal tide  
is fed and sweetened by that face alone.

Let the proud nymph not scorn a secret throne  
that sunrise gleams or sunset shadows hide,  
while the green woods and steep hills far and wide  
her welcome to their verdant climes<sup>18</sup> intone."

But then a whisper passed from bough to bough:

"The mistress of such dear and gentle scorn  
could not have sprung from woods or springs or earth;  
but to enamor all the world, she now  
has come from heaven; her celestial worth  
is only fitly prized where she was born."

---

<sup>17</sup> "By her effects, he likens her to the goddess Flora, or rather, to the sun." [T]

<sup>18</sup> Verdant climes: *stagione acerba*, literally "bitter [?] season." The adjective, hallowed by its use in Dante and Petrarch, with its rich range of meanings ("unripe," "immature", "green", "bitter"), defies exact rendering.

*In this dialogue<sup>19</sup> of the poet with Love, it is shown  
how the reward for his service is contained in his mistress's eyes.*

“For all my vassalage<sup>20</sup>, Love, where is my hire?”

“There, when at last they tremble, in those eyes.”

“And who will make my anxious Heart aspire?”

“I will, if Thought on faithful pinions rise.”

“But if that cloudless sky should blaze with fire?”

“Sweet teardrops cool it, and despairing cries.”

“Ah woe! he<sup>21</sup> flies, he burns, his hopes all fade.”

“Let him have pain. With pain he's nobly paid.”

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<sup>19</sup> The form of the poem is, in fact, a *stichomythia*.

<sup>20</sup> Tasso notes the medieval sense of 'vassalage' (*servaggio*), "an ancient word, elegantly revived by Lord Della Casa." [T] He has in mind Giovanni Della Casa's *Rime* xx.13-14.

<sup>21</sup> The jolting shift to the third person pronoun is deliberate. The Icarus-figure is the personified Thought of line 4.



*He maintains that, in the absence of his mistress,  
he can take no pleasure except in his feeling of suffering for her sake.*

No joy has any might  
far from you, who alone can please my sight;  
and yet my mind will cheat,  
and past plains, mountains, seas, and rivers flies  
whither you are, to meet,  
in thought the blazing fire of your eyes.  
Then seems my plight so sweet,  
I find in torment infinite delight.

*On the same subject.*

All my joys pall and tire  
while I stray far from you, and my desire  
    sweetly torments my brain;  
    yet when my mind at thoughts of you makes stay,  
I see, hear you again,  
    ever more near, the farther I'm away.  
I love, I burn in pain,  
and feel more bliss the more I feel the fire.

*He complains unto Love that his mistress has taken a husband,  
and entreats her not to scorn his love and praise.<sup>22</sup>*

Love, you betray no pain, no scorn, yet see  
my lady's neck under the yoke bent low,  
while she with all your precepts is at war.  
Another man has stolen from me (ah woe!)  
my dearest treasure; now what hard-earned fee  
can recompense my constant faith? What more  
can hope expect therefore  
from your harsh hand, since all your store is spent  
and squandered in an instant, and you place  
your whole worth in one space,  
making one man supremely opulent.  
Only a fool would face  
long service to you now: you've no more wealth  
to feed your servitors except by stealth.

Look! I've already turned to flee your power--  
your tyrant power; look! I've left behind  
my scattered ashes and my smothered fire.  
But you give chase and all too quickly find  
Me while I wail my wrongs in vain and cower,  
for your winged speed makes swiftest runners tire.  
Ah! all too soon my breast feels heat more dire;  
too soon my feet feel clogged with chain and cord.  
Soon like a slave and thankless runaway,  
my heart deep in my left side feels straightway  
that name, its brand in scalding letters scored,  
whose love holds me in sway;  
and, to augment my boundless woe, my brain  
shapes images that bring yet sharper pain

For I see Joy and Peace on Po's banks ply  
their sports with Hymen, whose refrain invites  
the crowds to join in revel at his feast;  
see jocund dances that to me are rites  
of burial, one self-same torch raised by  
the bridal altar's and my pyre's priest.  
See, like Aurora rising in the East,  
a maid appearing, chaste of mien and meek,  
her lashes closed upon her eyes' clear blaze  
if with a kiss another gently pays

---

<sup>22</sup> Lucrezia married Paolo Machiavelli in the summer of 1562, less than a year after her first meeting with Tasso. Her wedding occasioned this curious epithalamion.

his pledge of fealty to her spotless cheek,  
and gathering the fresh sprays  
that now, engirt with thorns in amorous ranks,  
sprinkle their crimson through soft, snowy banks.

You, Love, who flutter round these blooms at pleasure,  
most like a bee<sup>23</sup>, eager to graze and feed,  
so diligent and frugal in your art,  
what! would you let another sip that mead,  
that sweetest juice, and rob your honeyed treasure?  
Have you no bow to make a wound, no dart?  
You were quick enough to aim at my poor heart  
when I, by heedless fancy led, strolled through  
soft beds of roses, crimson hued, that were  
with amorous breath a-stir.  
Wounds grave enough I suffered then from you,  
and straight showed them to her,  
gaping and bloody, to be stanchèd and closed,  
but found harsh honor cruelly opposed.

Back, thought! back to my soul! Alas, be gone,  
offensive and displeasing, and consort  
with those sharp inward pangs that crease my brow.  
Look, that fair maid who only can support  
my poor heart, like a vine that stands alone  
and by its own weight falls, leans elsewhere now.  
Then let my hope, like ivy, bough by bough  
droop and collapse, since it would never dare  
to twine with limbs which that high trunk entwine.  
But you, whom that fair vine  
embraces, happy tree, sustain her there,  
uphold her, nor repine  
if a song-bird in your branches flits and turns,  
basks in mere shade, and no more hopes and yearns.

Nor let my lady, though a new love now  
warms her fair breast, disdain the ancient knot,  
but still be pleased to see it in my heart;  
else cleanly through its windings let her cut--  
no power else its fixed toils will allow  
(no, not the hand that knit them up) to part.  
Yet if once, by her will, throughout my art  
there dimly echoed her beloved name,  
like a fine tree in a fertile plain, why then  
she'll hearken now again

---

<sup>23</sup> "This compares Love to a bee, as the Greek poets first did" [T]. The allusion is to several poems by Anacreon.

nor scorn the songs of her undying fame  
traced by my humble pen;  
and may Apollo's gifts shower the place  
that Cupid scanted with such meager grace.

My song, thus does my poor soul grow inured  
to pain, and (is it possible?) somehow  
hopes to find recompense in dust and ash.  
But if someone should dash  
that hope by cutting its weak strand, even now,  
with one blow, let him slash  
(I wish it, I demand it) both the skein  
of life itself and love's relentless chain.

*On the same subject*<sup>24</sup>

Though harsh Fate spread my sails and hurl me through  
the vexed Aegean or Tyrrhenian sea  
from deep to deep, yet shall I never be  
less yours, nor my devoted heart less true--  
nay, though she, cruel in her grace like you,  
gave my horse rein and lashed it till I be  
lost in the Alps or by far Rhine, or flee  
till some dark wood or vale hides me from view.  
Yet from a gentle lady pity's prize  
is torment next to the delights that burn  
in those sweet fires of scorn that arm your eyes.  
Divine lights, my dear bane, when I return  
to die, drive me not off, but hear my cries:  
Such death is glory; for that death I yearn.

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<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding the caption, the connection of this poem with the preceding is something of a stretch. The sonnet seems to be out of sequence and more properly belongs with the group concerning the lover's absence (LVI-LXI).

*[At Fairview Villa<sup>25</sup>, while his mistress was at Comacchio]*

Fairview I am no more,  
for she who made me so, the only fair,  
took every beauty with her elsewhere.  
Grim, sad, and bare I now appear to sight;  
all my unhappy boughs are stripped of green;  
all my cool shadows fly;  
and a most cruel chance, as if to spite  
my need to find an outlet for my spleen,  
has made my springs run dry.  
I cannot weep or sigh.  
Who now, for eyes hollow with want and care,  
shall give me tears to water my despair?

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<sup>25</sup> Fairview Villa: Villa Belvedere, the Este summer estate near Padua. Tasso's wordplay has forced me to Anglicize the name. For Comacchio, see poem 83 above.

*He presents Scorn in debate with Love at the court of Reason*<sup>26</sup>.

That generous fighter<sup>27</sup> of my secret will,  
 who like an armed guard in my heart resides,  
 chief of a chosen troop of warlike might,  
 before her<sup>28</sup> who, throned on the highest hill  
 of Nature, with her potent scepter guides  
 all of our strivings, good or ill, to right,  
 accuses him<sup>29</sup> who to his sweet delight  
 with pleasing flatteries inclines the soul:  
 “Lady, that just control,  
 which Heaven granted by creating you  
 in Virtue’s mold, who bars  
 from lawless paths even its wandering stars,  
 I never gainsaid nor was rebel to,  
 nor could I ever, unless  
 unbridled by your will, your rule transgress.

“Indeed I’ve often waged war for your sake  
 against Desire, when, heedless to your call,  
 divorced from you, he lifts his crest  
 and like a vicious, many-headed snake,<sup>30</sup>  
 splits into countless other longings, all  
 swift, lustful and insatiate, without rest  
 shrieking and hissing to a soul obsessed  
 to make it wail in torment and in fear  
 that death itself is near.  
 And many have I pierced and overcome,  
 or quite cut off, although  
 I cannot kill all that I overthrow;  
 for somehow he instills new life in some  
 more suddenly  
 than a bird’s new plumes or fresh growth on a tree.

“You well know how upon our blinded sense  
 light from its high seat is reflected back

<sup>26</sup> “In this canzone . . . the poet imitates Petrarch’s indictment of Love at the tribunal of Reason, and Love’s defense against him.” [T]  
 Tasso is thinking of *Canzoniere* 360, one of the last poems in Petrarch’s work. Tasso’s tellingly departs from his model is by  
 making the personification of Scorn rather than the suffering lover the accuser. At the conclusion of Tasso’s poem, as in  
 Petrarch’s, Reason’s verdict is withheld.

<sup>27</sup> Scorn. “He calls Anger or Disdain a fighter because it fights on the side of Reason against Lust.” [T]

<sup>28</sup> Reason

<sup>29</sup> Love

<sup>30</sup> “Plato imagines within the soul the form of the Hydra . . . who has an infinite number of heads, because the desires that spring up  
 one after another are infinite in number.” [T]



even as from Ganges wheels the morning sun;  
and know how then Desire with intense  
delight places the soul upon the rack  
till old wounds or till new wounds burn and stun,  
and how he coils, how his quick changes run  
from will to will, if a fair face should smile,  
by sudden gladness cheered, or while  
a ray of pity soothes its angry flame,  
or when it lets appear  
faintly the purple lineaments of fear,  
or blushes crimson with enchanting shame,  
and know how, sweet and coy,  
it glows at the mere sound of words with joy.

“You know that she, so charming and so proud,  
appears in various forms and never tires,  
a new and gentle portent, passing strange,  
with Nature’s power or magic art endowed,  
to shift herself and all our souls’ desires  
to ever new shapes in perpetual change.  
Alas! what snow on sunlit mountain range  
so quickly melts, what ice in a warm breeze!  
Her lovely glances seize  
even me at moments and her sweet words pierce  
my armor and so loose  
my rigor till I sue for peace or truce  
with my great foe; as he becomes less fierce,  
I feel him growing stronger,  
and to my own cost fight his force no longer.

“I’ll grant him Hope, from whom by nature I  
seek peace and free myself and force my way  
forward, by danger and by doubt oppressed;  
let Hope from his high aims turn him awry  
for golden braids, or cheat him with a play  
of rose and ivory on a face or breast,  
or at an eyebrow’s flicker make him rest,  
as if she were a handmaid of his laws  
and rebel to my cause;  
but never shall the traitor gain his prize,  
though he may open wide  
the heart’s gates, lodging strange allies inside,  
or from it send his sly and secret spies;  
seeking, if truth be known,  
to chain me down and to drive you from your throne.”

Thus spoke he, turning where her high seat rose,  
to her whose hands the palm and laurel<sup>31</sup> hold;  
and thus the sweet-tongued flatterer replies:  
“None of my minions ever dared oppose  
your law through cursèd hunger for bright gold,<sup>32</sup>  
which where it most abounds least satisfies;  
nor through his thirst for honor ever tries  
to twist your rule. I only chase the fair  
for being fine and rare:  
if so, you know that to Desire’s gaze  
once rose a gentle maid  
so brightly in my April’s prime displayed,  
she in an instant made the young heart blaze;  
my pleasures only she  
quickenèd and from your bridle set me free.

“I grant I acted with imprudent speed  
to wound the soul: if my wounds made it grieve,  
it knows--so much did suffering please its will,  
that it would rather for its mistress bleed  
whose medicine<sup>33</sup> can every pang relieve,  
than all joys else, and sighs about it still.  
But this proud foe of mine, intent on ill,  
who for slight cause, when she shows some delight,  
lashes himself for spite  
seeing that heavenly countenance so serene,  
untroubled by a cloud  
of pride made wrathful or of wrath made proud,  
with scarce a shadow of distaste or spleen,  
and, being rebuffed, has learned  
to spurn simply because he has been spurned.

“How then he vaunted and with ceaseless strife  
lorded it over me, already bowed  
and spent by travel, baffled by disdain,  
let him who crushed me say and left me life,<sup>34</sup>  
if he can glory in glory by me allowed.  
I will say this: he<sup>35</sup>, faint-heart and insane,  
against that Will who ever must upward strain,

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<sup>31</sup> Palm and laurel are emblems of peace and concord. In Petrarch’s *Canzonere* 359, Laura’s spirit appears in a dream, bearing boughs of these two trees.

<sup>32</sup> A *topos* derived from Virgil’s “*auri sacra fames*” (*Aeneid* III.57); see also Dante, *Purgatorio* xxii.40-41.

<sup>33</sup> “His lady’s lies, when she tells him that she loves him.” [T]

<sup>34</sup> See the conclusion of stanza two, above.

<sup>35</sup> The third-person-singular pronoun in this passage has two distinct antecedents: Scorn (lines 1-6 and 14) and the Will (lines 7-13, and the following stanzas). See next note

led, joined with you, by a clear, inward light  
as I by my own eye-sight,  
no less than on my own made war, and saw  
how that Will too  
as eagerly did beauty's heavenly form pursue  
as if he<sup>36</sup> were myself, nor could distinctions draw<sup>37</sup>;  
and he is deaf when told  
we are brothers, even as Leda's sons of old.

“Not twins<sup>38</sup>, however: of heavenly birth was he,  
I later of an earthly mother born;  
but the same sire begot us, I dare say;  
on both of us from heaven equally  
that glorious radiance shines whose hues adorn  
and clothe in splendor all terrestrial clay.  
He soars up oftentimes, and finds his way  
to the eternal sea of beauty whence  
all beauty else descends;  
I plunge<sup>39</sup> into the human world below.  
Indeed in tuneful rhyme,  
at times, and in the quickening clime  
of calm eyes I refine myself and grow,  
and yield him without strife  
the keys to the heart that glories in your life.

“With him, your votary, who by high light attended  
is moved, I too dwell, and send forth from me  
glances and sighs, my heralds fair and kind.  
Sometimes upon their pinions strong and splendid  
even he departs and soars so loftily  
that he leaves your wisest judgment far behind,  
since other, fairer forms beguile his mind,  
by another sun's more brilliant rays made bright.  
I, too, would with delight  
united with him, as he bids me, rise;  
but when it thus aspires  
and wings its way, my mortal nature tires

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<sup>36</sup> “He” in this clause is the Will, but the subject of “draw” in the next clause is Scorn (as is the antecedent of “he” in the line that follows). See note 35 above. The “brothers” in the final line are Love and the Will. The syntax in the Italian original is, if anything, more convoluted than in the translation.

<sup>37</sup> That is, Scorn could not distinguish between Love and the immortal Will. “Scorn, taking up arms against Love and against the whole appetite of Lust, has overstepped . . . the limit, not realizing that it was fighting the Will; since Scorn is mortal and the Will immortal, it was waging a war like that of the Giants [against the Gods].” [T]

<sup>38</sup> “The two appetites, of sense and intellect, are the two kinds of love born of two Venuses, that is the heavenly and the earthly. One is immortal and the other mortal, and in that respect similar to Castor and Pollux, but different, since the latter had an earthly mother in common, but the former a heavenly father. As the mother of one of them the rational soul or mind may also be understood, and as the mother of the other, the sensual soul, which is born and dies with the body.” [T]

<sup>39</sup> “I plunge [caggio]”: “*confessio criminis*” [T]

and rarely lifts me beyond lovely eyes.  
Let not your power condemn  
your follower for bandying sleights with them.

But if it not displease you, sovereign queen,  
may he unto your common fountainhead  
make swift return and win fair passage through  
the spheres toward forms not understood or seen,  
not guided thither, but by rapture sped;  
myself, born on this earth, charmed by the view  
of another kind of beauty (I hide it not from you),  
pardon while I myself too closely bind  
to what deludes the mind.

In time by slow degrees I also may  
my urge toward it unlearn  
and willingly unite with him to burn  
in the pure flame of that celestial ray,  
as Castor, joined on high  
with his immortal Pollux<sup>40</sup>, lights the sky.”

My song, thus our two promptings at her court  
make dispute, both of whom  
bow to her rule, and wait to hear her doom.

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<sup>40</sup> For Castor and Pollux, see note 38 38 above.