



A LONGING FOR PARADISE

Let's talk Paradise(ReImagined, if you will). Our word for Paradise derives from the Old Iranian/Persian 'Pairi-daeza,' meaning an 'enclosed/walled garden,' 'Paradeisos' in the Greek. In the biblical Edenic version this archetypal concept came to denote harmony amongst nature, man & beast, from which pre-extraction condition we would appear to be a ways downstream, if you'll allow me to extend this meta-metaphor. All of this would-be preamble is but another way to convey that the really big event on the world stage this month is the 700th anniversary of that consummate artist Dante Alighieri's death on SeptEmber 13th, 1321.

To evoke Dante's imagery in the book of his "Commedia" that immediately precedes his 'Paradiso,' from where I sit in a garden with its flowers & flowing streams & a view atop Mount Purgatory, feel free to consider me a devotee of the bee. For as Ms. Emily Dickinson expresses it so well, "To make a prairie it takes a clover & a bee, & reverie. The reverie alone will do, if bees are few." There is also comfort to be had in Jalaluddin Rumi's aptly titled 'A Garden Beyond Paradise' :: "Everything you see has its roots / in the Unseen . . . / The forms may change, / yet the essence remains the same . . . / Every wondrous sight will vanish . . . / but do not be disheARTened -- / The Source they come from is eternal, / Growing, branching out, giving new life & new joy." (as trans. by Jonathan Star & Shahram Shiva; Bantam Bks., NYC, 1992 -- Rumi having died 8 years after Dante was born).

As you might surmise, to write from 'within the eye of God' is not exactly a walk in the {primal} park. Light is absolutely central to Dante's Vision. "O luce, o gloria de la gente umana/O Light, O glory of the human race" is among the myriad ways our Pilgrim/Poet emphasizes the subtly intertwined centrality of Light & Love. He also characterizes Beatrice as the "O isplendor di viva luca eterna/Splendor of living eternal light." As Jeffrey Burton Russell phrases this in his "A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence" (Princeton, 1997), "As light is to the eye, so is harmony to the ear." Among Dante's numerous coinages in his 'Paradiso' is 'trasumanar,' which means 'to go beyond the human,' which Russell 'translates' as that state where "The Creator & the Cosmos move in a contrapuntal dance whose consummation is Union" (= Dante's 'Paradiso' in a nutshell). So how do we contrive to get ourselves back to the Garden? In lieu of Dante's late-13th/early-14th-century cosmology, allow me to proffer the 7-year-young Karen's InSight :: "When you love somebody, your eyelashes go up & down & little stars come out of you." How can one better that devoutly to be wished state in which -- to echo J. B. Russell again -- Heaven is an Eternal Now, at once both Silence & Song, both in Time & in Eternity, both, like Light, Wave & pARTicle . . . a Tapestry of Infinite Riches & Subtlety, without Boundaries & with its Centre Every-Here{?}" "Oh ineffabile allegrezza/O joy beyond words!"