

TO GEORGE AND GEORGINA KEATS

Wentworth Place, Hampstead, April 18th, 1819

[...]

The fifth canto of Dante pleases me more and more – It is that one in which he meets with Paulo and Francesca – I had passed many days in rather a low state of mind, and in the midst of them I dreamt of being in that region of Hell. The dream was one of the most delightful enjoyments I ever had in my life I floated about the whirling atmosphere as it is described with a beautiful figure, to whose lips mine were joined, as it seemed for an age – and in the midst of all this cold and darkness I was warm – even flowery tree-tops sprung up, and we rested on them, sometimes with the lightness of a cloud, till the wind blew us away again. I tried a sonnet upon it – there are fourteen lines but nothing of what I felt in it – O that I could dream it every night.

As Hermes once took to his feathers light,
When lulled Argus, baffled, swoon'd and slept,
So on a Delphic reed, my idle spright
So play'd, so charm'd, so conquer'd, so bereft
The dragon-world of all its hundred eyes;
And seeing it asleep, so fled away,
Not to pure Ida with its snow-cold skies,
Nor unto Tempe where Jove griev'd that day;
But to that second circle of sad Hell,
Where in the gust, the whirlwind, and the flaw
Of rain and hail-stones, lovers need not tell
Their sorrows—pale were the sweet lips I saw,
Pale were the lips I kiss'd, and fair the form
I floated with, about that melancholy storm.