

# PURGATORIO

## CANTO I

To run its course through smoother water  
the small bark of my wit now hoists its sail,  
leaving that cruel sea behind. 3

Now I shall sing the second kingdom,  
there where the soul of man is cleansed,  
made worthy to ascend to Heaven. 6

Here from the dead let poetry rise up,  
O sacred Muses, since I am yours.  
Here let Calliope arise 9

to accompany my song with those same chords  
whose force so struck the miserable magpies  
that, hearing it, they lost all hope of pardon. 12

Sweet color of oriental sapphire,  
hovering in the calm and peaceful aspect  
of intervening air, pure to the horizon, 15

pleased my eyes once more  
as soon as I had left the morbid air  
that had afflicted both my chest and eyes. 18

The fair planet that emboldens love,  
smiling, lit up the east,  
veiling the Fishes in her train. 21

I turned to the right and, fixing my attention  
on the other pole, I saw four stars  
not seen but by those first on earth. 24

The very sky seemed to rejoice  
in their bright glittering. O widowed  
region of the north, denied that sight! 27

Once I had drawn my gaze from them,  
barely turning toward the other pole  
where the constellation of the Wain had set, 30

I saw beside me an old man, alone,  
who by his looks was so deserving of respect  
that no son owes his father more. 33

His beard was long and streaked with white,  
as was his hair, which fell  
in double strands down to his chest. 36

The rays of those four holy stars  
adorned his face with so much light  
he seemed to shine with brightness of the sun. 39

'What souls are you to have fled the eternal prison,  
climbing against the dark and hidden stream?'  
he asked, shaking those venerable locks. 42

'Who was your guide or who your lantern  
to lead you forth from that deep night  
which steeps the vale of Hell in darkness? 45

'Are the laws of the abyss thus broken,  
or has a new decree been made in Heaven,  
that, damned, you stand before my cliffs?' 48

My leader then reached out to me  
and by his words and signs and with his hands  
made me show reverence with knee and brow, 51

then answered him: 'I came not on my own.  
A lady descended from Heaven and at her request  
I lent this man companionship and aid. 54

'But since it is your will that I make plain  
the true condition of our presence here,  
it cannot be that I deny your wish. 57

'This man has not yet seen his final sunset,  
but through his folly was so close to it  
his time was almost at an end. 60

'I was sent to him, as I have said,  
for his deliverance. No other way  
but this could he be saved. 63

'I have shown him all the guilty race  
and now intend to let him see those spirits  
who cleanse themselves within your charge. 66

'How I have led him would take long to tell.  
Descending from on high a power aids me  
to bring him here that he may see and hear you. 69

'May it please you to welcome his arrival,  
since he's in search of liberty, which is so dear,  
as he well knows who gives his life for it. 72

'You know this well, since death in Utica  
did not seem bitter, there where you left  
the garment that will shine on that great day. 75

'Not by us are the eternal edicts broken,  
for this man lives and Minos does not bind me,  
but I am of the circle where your Marcia 78

'implores with her chaste eyes, O holy breast,  
that you still think of her as yours.  
For love of her, then, I beseech you, 81

'allow us passage through your seven kingdoms.  
I will report to her your kindness--  
if you deign to be mentioned there below.' 84

'Marcia so pleased my eyes while I still lived,'  
he said, 'that whatever favor  
she sought of me, I granted. 87

'Now that she dwells beyond the evil stream  
she cannot move me any longer,  
according to the law made at my deliverance. 90

'But if, as you say, a lady from Heaven  
moves and directs you, there is no need of flattery.  
It is enough you ask it in her name. 93

'Go then, make sure you gird him  
with a straight reed and bathe his face,  
to wipe all traces of defilement from it, 96

'for it would not be fitting to appear,  
his eyes still dimmed by any mist,  
before the minister, the first from Paradise. 99

'This little island, at its lowest point,  
there where the waves beat down on it,  
grows reeds in the soft and pliant mud. 102

'There no other plant can leaf,  
or harden to endure,  
without succumbing to the battering waves. 105

'After you are done, do not come back this way.  
The sun, now rising, will disclose  
an easier ascent to gain the peak.' 108

With that he vanished, and I stood up,  
speechless. Coming closer to my leader,  
I turned my eyes to him. 111

He began: 'My son, follow my steps.  
Let us turn around, for this plain slopes  
from here, down to its lowest edge.' 114

Dawn was overtaking the darkness of the hour,  
which fled before it, and I saw and knew  
the distant trembling of the sea. 117

We went along the lonely plain,  
like someone who has lost the way  
and thinks he strays until he finds the road. 120

When we came to a place where the dew  
can hold its own against the sun  
because it is protected by a breeze, 123

my master spread his hands  
gently upon the grass.  
And I, who understood what he intended, 126

raised my tear-stained cheeks  
and he restored the color  
Hell had obscured in me. 129

Now we came to the empty shore.  
Upon those waters no man ever sailed  
who then experienced his return. 132

There he girded me as pleased Another.  
What a wonder it was that the humble plant  
he chose to pick sprang up at once 135

in the very place where he had plucked it. 136