

# Purgatory Canto 26

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Canto XXVI

Argument

The spirits wonder at seeing the shadow cast by the body of Dante on the flame as he passes it. This moves one of them to address him. It proves to be Guido Guinicelli, the Italian poet, who points out to him the spirit of Arnault Daniel, the Provençal, with whom he also speaks.

While singly thus along the rim we walk'd,  
Oft the good master warn'd me: "Look thou  
Avail it that I caution thee." The sun [well,  
Now all the western clime irradiate changed  
From azure tinct to white; and, as I pass'd,  
My passing shadow made the umber'd flame  
Burn ruddier. At so strange a sight I mark'd  
That many a spirit marvel'd on his way.

This bred occasion first to speak of me.  
"He seems," said they, "no insubstantial frame:"  
Then, to obtain what certainty they might,  
Stretch'd tow'rd me, careful not to overpass  
The burning pale. "O thou, who followest  
The others, haply not more slow than they,  
But moved by reverence; answer me, who burn  
In thirst and fire: nor I alone, but these  
All for thine answer do more thirst, than doth  
Indian or Aethiop for the cooling stream.  
Tell us, how is it that thou makest thyself  
A wall against the sun, as thou not yet  
Into the inextricable toils of death  
Hadst enter'd?" Thus spake one; and I had straight  
Declared me, if attention had not turn'd  
To new appearance. Meeting these, there came,  
Midway the burning path, a crowd, on whom  
Earnestly gazing, from each part I view  
The shadows all press forward, severally  
Each snatch a hasty kiss, and then away.  
E'en so the emmets, 'mid their dusky troops,  
Peer closely one at other, to spy out  
Their mutual road perchance, and how they thrive.  
That friendly greeting parted, ere despatch

Of the first onward step, from either tribe  
Loud clamour rises: those, who newly come,  
Shout "Sodom and Gomorrah!" these, "The cow  
Pasiphae enter'd, that the beast she woo'd  
Might rush unto her luxury." Then as cranes,  
That part toward the Rhiphaean mountains fly,  
Part toward the Lybic sands, these to avoid  
The ice, and those the sun; so hasteth off  
One crowd, advances the other; and resume  
Their first song, weeping, and their several shout.

Again drew near my side the very same,  
Who had erewhile besought me; and their looks  
Mark'd eagerness to listen. I, who twice  
Their will had noted, spake: "O spirits! secure,  
Whene'er the time may be, of peaceful end;  
My limbs, nor crude, nor in mature old age,  
Have I left yonder: here they bear me, fed  
With blood, and sinew - strung. That I no more  
May live in blindness, hence I tend aloft.  
There is a Dame on high, who wins for us  
This grace, by which my mortal through your realm  
I bear. But may your utmost wish soon meet  
Such full fruition, that the orb of heaven,  
Fullest of love, and of most ample space,  
Receive you; as ye tell (upon my page  
Henceforth to stand recorded) who ye are;  
And what this multitude, that at your backs  
Have pass'd behind us." As one, mountain - bred,  
Rugged and clownish, if some city's walls  
He chance to enter, round him stares agape,  
Confounded and struck dumb; e'en such appear'd  
Each spirit. But when rid of that amaze,  
(Not long the inmate of a noble heart,)  
He, who before had question'd thus resumed:  
"O blessed! who, for death preparing, takest  
Experience of our limits, in thy bark;  
Their crime, who not with us proceed, was that  
For which, as he did triumph, Caesar heard  
The shout of 'queen,' to taunt him. Hence their cry  
Of 'Sodom,' as they parted; to rebuke  
Themselves, and aid the burning by their shame.  
Our sinning was hermaphrodite: but we,  
Because the law of human kind we broke,  
Following like beasts our vile concupiscence,  
Hence parting from them, to our own disgrace  
Record the name of her, by whom the beast

In bestial tire was acted. Now our deeds  
Thou know'st, and how we sinn'd. If thou by name  
Wouldst haply know us, time permits not now  
To tell so much, nor can I. Of myself  
Learn what thou wishest. Guinicelli I;  
Who having truly sorrow'd ere my last,  
Already cleanse me." With such pious joy,  
As the two sons upon their mother gazed  
From sad Lycurgus[1] rescued; such my joy  
(Save that I more repress'd it) when I heard  
From his own lips the name of him pronounced,  
Who was a father to me, and to those  
My betters, who have ever used the sweet  
And pleasant rhymes of love. So naught I heard,  
Nor spake; but long time thoughtfully I went,  
Gazing on him; and, only for the fire,  
Approached not nearer. When my eyes were fed  
By looking on him; with such solemn pledge,  
As forces credence, I devoted me  
Unto his service wholly. In reply  
He thus bespake me: "What from thee I hear  
Is graved so deeply on my mind, the waves  
Of Lethe shall not wash it off, nor make  
A whit less lively. But as now thy oath  
Has seal'd the truth, declare what cause impels

[1: Hypsipile had left her infant charge, the son of Lycurgus, on a bank, where it was destroyed by a serpent, when she went to show the Argive army the river of Langia; and on her escaping the effects of Lycurgus' resentment, the joy her own children felt at the sight of her was such as our Poet felt on beholding his predecessor Guinicelli.]

That love, which both thy looks and speech bewray."

"Those dulcet lays," I answer'd; "which, as long  
As of our tongue the beauty does not fade,  
Shall make us love the very ink that traced them."

"Brother!" he cried, and pointed at the shade  
Before him, "there is one, whose mother speech  
Doth owe to him a fairer ornament.  
He[2] in love ditties, and the tales of prose,  
Without a rival stands; and lets the fools  
Talk on, who think the songster of Limoges[3]  
O'ertops him. Rumour and the popular voice  
They look to, more than truth; and so confirm  
Opinion, ere by art or reason taught.  
Thus many of the elder time cried up  
Guittone, giving him the prize, till truth

By strength of numbers vanquish'd. If thou own  
So ample privilege, as to have gain'd  
Free entrance to the cloister, whereof Christ  
Is Abbot of the college; say to him  
One paternoster for me, far as needs  
For dwellers in this world, where power to sin  
No longer tempts us." Haply to make way  
For one that follow'd next, when that was said,  
He vanish'd through the fire, as through the wave  
A fish, that glances diving to the deep.

[2: Dante and Petrarch place Arnaut Daniel first among Provençal poets.]

[3: Giraud de Bornet, of Sideuil, a castle in Limoges. He was a Troubadour, much admired and caressed in his day, and appears to have been in favor with the monarchs of Castile, Leon, Navarre, and Arragon.]

I, to the spirit he had shown me, drew  
A little onward, and besought his name,  
For which my heart, I said, kept gracious room.  
He frankly thus began: "Thy courtesy[4]  
So wins on me, I have nor power nor will  
To hide me. I am Arnaut; and with songs,  
Sorely waymenting for my folly past,  
Thorough this ford of fire I wade, and see  
The day, I hope for, smiling in my view.  
I pray ye by the worth that guides ye up

[4: Arnaut is here made to speak in his own tongue, the Provençal.]

Unto the summit of the scale, in time  
Remember ye my sufferings." With such words  
He disappear'd in the refining flame.