

CANTO XXVI

ONE OF THE souls in the flames asks the Pilgrim, whose body has attracted a good deal of attention, to stop and speak, but as he is about to do so, they are interrupted by another group of souls rushing from the opposite direction. The members of the two groups greet each other quickly and then, before separating, shout out exempla of Lust. One group cites Sodom and Gomorrah, and the other, the shameful lust of Pasiphaë for the bull. When the commotion has died down, the Pilgrim sets forth the purpose of his journey, and the same soul who had questioned him earlier speaks again. He explains that the souls who had rushed on and off so hurriedly are the Sodomites, and thus they cry "Sodom" in self-reproach. The others are those whose sins have been heterosexual (or hermaphroditic, as Dante puts it), but since they have not acted like human beings, they cry out, to their shame, the animal lust of Pasiphaë. After these clarifications, the speaker identifies himself as Guido Guinizelli, and the Pilgrim demonstrates a profound affection for the Bolognese poet. But Guido protests that there is a far greater poet among them, and yields his place to Arnaut Daniel. Arnaut is the only (non-Italian) figure in the *Divine Comedy* to speak in his native tongue, Provençal.

While we were walking at the ledge's edge
in single file—my good guide telling me
from time to time: "I warn you now, take heed!"— 3

the sun shone on my shoulder from the right,
and now, the azure of the western sky
was slowly turning pale beneath its rays; 6

my shadow made the flames a deeper red,
and even this slight evidence, I saw,
caused many souls to wonder as they passed. 9

And this was the occasion for those souls
to speculate about me. I heard said:
"He seems to have a body of real flesh!" 12

- Then some of them toward me began to strain,
 coming as close to me as they could come,
 most careful not to step out of the fire. 15
- "O you who walk behind the other two,
 surely, as sign of your deep reverence,
 stop, speak to me whom thirst and fire burn. 18
- I'm not the only one—all of us here
 are thirsty for your words, much thirstier
 than Ethiopes or Indians for cool drink. 21
- Tell us, how is it possible for you
 to block the sun as if you were a wall,
 as if you had escaped the net of death?" 24
- So said a voice to me. I would have tried
 already to explain, if something else
 unusual had not just caught my eye: 27
- straight down the middle of the blazing road
 facing this group, another band of souls
 was on its way. I stopped to stare, amazed, 30
- for I saw shades on either side make haste
 to kiss each other without lingering,
 and each with this brief greeting satisfied. 33
- The ants in their black ranks do this: they rush
 to nose each other, as if to inquire
 which way to go or how their luck has been. 36
- As soon as friendly greetings are exchanged,
 before taking the first step to depart,
 each one tries to outshout the other's cry; 39
- the group that just arrived: "Sodom, Gomorrah!"
 The rest: "Pasiphaë enters the cow
 so that the bull may rush to mount her lust!" 42
- Imagine cranes forming two flocks: one flies
 off toward the Riphean heights, one toward the sands,
 one to escape the frost, and one the sun— 45
- so, here, two groups went their opposing ways,
 and all, in tears, took up once more their chants,
 with cries that fit each of their penances. 48

Then those same shades who had first questioned me
 drew close to me as they had done before,
 intent on listening, their faces glowed. 51

And I, who twice now knew their eager wish,
 began: "O souls assured of entering
 beatitude whenever it may be, 54

I did not leave my body, green or ripe,
 below on earth: I have it with me here;
 it is real flesh, complete with blood and bones. 57

I climb to cure my blindness, for above
 a lady has won grace for me, that I
 may bear my mortal burden through your world. 60

But please—so may what you desire most
 be quickly yours, and Heaven's greatest sphere
 shelter you in its loving spaciousness— 63

tell me, who are you? Who are those that run
 away behind us in the other group?
 I shall record your answers in my book." 66

No less dumbfounded than a mountaineer,
 who, speechless, gapes at everything he sees,
 when, rude and rustic, he comes down to town, 69

were all those shades there judging from their looks;
 but when they had recovered from surprise
 (which in a noble heart lasts but a while), 72

the same soul who had earlier questioned me
 began: "Blessed are you, who from our shores
 can ship experience back for a better death! 75

The shades that do not move with us were marked
 by that same sin for which Caesar as he
 passed in triumph heard himself called a 'Queen'; 78

and that is why you heard 'Sodom!' cried out
 in self-reproach, as they ran off from us;
 they use their shame to intensify the flames. 81

And ours was an hermaphroditic sin,
 but since we did not act like human beings,
 yielding instead, like animals, to lust, 84

- when we pass by the other group, we shout
to our own shame the shameful name of her
who bestialized herself in beast-shaped wood. 87
- Now you know what our guilt is. Should you want
to know our names, I do not know them all,
and if I did, there still would not be time. 90
- As for my name, I can fulfill your wish:
I am Guido Guinizelli—here so soon,
for I repented long before I died.” 93
- As King Lycurgus raged with grief, two sons
discovered their lost mother and rejoiced—
I felt the same (though more restrained) to hear 96
- that spirit name himself—father of me
and father of my betters, all who wrote
a sweet and graceful poetry of love. 99
- I heard no more, I did not speak, I walked
deep in my thoughts, my eyes fixed on his shade;
the flames kept me from coming close to him. 102
- At last my eyes were satisfied. And then
I spoke, convincing him of my deep wish
to serve him in whatever way I could. 105
- He answered me: “What I just heard you say
has made a deep impression on my mind,
which even Lethe cannot wash away. 108
- But if what you have told me is the truth,
now tell me what it is that makes you show
in words and looks this love you have for me?” 111
- And I to him: “Those graceful poems of yours,
which, for as long as our tongue serves for verse,
will render precious even the ink you used.” 114
- “My brother, I can show you now,” he said
(he pointed to a spirit up ahead),
“a better craftsman of his mother tongue. 117
- Poets of love, writers of tales in prose—
better than all of them he was! They're fools
who think him of Limoges a greater poet! 120

- They judge by reputation, not by truth,
 their minds made up before they know the rules
 of reason and the principles of art. 123
- Guittone was judged this way in the past;
 many praised him and him alone—though, now,
 most men have been won over to the truth. 126
- But now, if that high privilege be yours
 of climbing to the cloister, there where Christ
 is Abbot of the holy college, then, 129
- please say a *Paternoster* for me there—
 at least the part appropriate for us,
 who are by now delivered from all evil.” 132
- Then, to make room for someone else, perhaps,
 he disappeared into the depths of fire
 the way fish seeking deeper waters fade. 135
- I moved up toward the shade just pointed out,
 and told him my desire had prepared
 a gracious place of welcome for his name. 138
- He readily and graciously replied:
 “Tan m’abellis vostre cortes deman,
 Qu’ieu no me puesc ni voill a vos cobrire. 141
- Ieu sui Arnaut, que plor e vau cantan;
 consiros vei la passada folor,
 e vei jausen lo joi qu’esper, denan. 144
- Ara vos prec, per aquella valor
 que vos guida al som de l’escalina,
 sovenha vos a temps de ma dolor!” 147
- Then in the purifying flames he hid.

NOTES

4. *the sun shone on my shoulder from the right*: The travellers have not been long on the Seventh Terrace and already it would seem that the time must be between four and five o'clock in the afternoon. It was precisely two o'clock when they left the Sixth Terrace (see *Purg.* XXV, 1-3).

13. *Then some of them toward me began to strain:* The Pilgrim is walking alongside the flame, between the flame and the precipice, moving in the same direction as the passing shades. In order for them to join him, they would have to step out of the flame; what they do is to move as close to the burning edge as possible—what they will not allow themselves to do is to pass beyond the sacred edge of their self-maintained penance.

25. *So said a voice to me:* The voice, as we learn later (92), is that of Guido Guinizelli.

28-48

This passage describes the movements of the two groups of penitents. The groups move in opposite directions; at first this movement brings them together, then it separates them. In the first case, space seems to be constricted; the reader is invited to concentrate his gaze on the minimal: on the small movements of tiny ants. Then, space expands: the movement is the sweep of great wings, and we must extend our gaze to take in the extremes of north and south. Dante has given special force to this second image by inventing an impossible phenomenon (see note to 43).

29. *facing this group, another band of souls:* The group that moves in a direction contrary to the first group and the three travellers is that of the Lustful who practiced homosexuality. This sin will be suggested in verse 40 and will be made explicit by Guinizelli in verses 76-81. This is the only instance in the *Purgatory* of two groups moving in opposite directions. That the one group moves in the opposite direction is surely suggestive of the irregularity of their sin.

32. *to kiss each other:* The shades kiss each other briefly, in accordance with the apostolic admonition of Paul: "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16).

40. *the group that just arrived: "Sodom, Gomorrah!":* These words cried out by the newly arrived group are shouted in self-reproach. The city of Sodom gave its name to the sin of sodomy. For clear evidence that homosexuality was a common practice among the inhabitants of this city, see Gen. 19:1-28.

41. *The rest: "Pasiphaë enters the cow":* Pasiphaë was the wife of King Minos of Crete, to whom Poseidon sent a black bull to

be offered up as a sacrifice. Minos put it in his herd and Poseidon, out of revenge, caused Pasiphaë to lust after the bull. She had Daedalus, the craftsman, make a wooden structure in the shape of a cow, which was covered with a cowhide. Pasiphaë entered the cow and was possessed by the bull. The result of this union was the birth of Minotaur, a creature half bull, half human (see *Inf.* XII, 12-18). Dante could have taken the story from Ovid, *Metam.* VII, 131-37; *Ars amat.* I, 289-326, or from Virgil, *Aen.* VI, 24-26, 447; *Eclog.* VI, 45-60.

Curiously enough, the story of Pasiphaë is offered as an example of natural lust, as opposed to the unnatural lust of those who shout "Sodom and Gomorrah," yet Pasiphaë's intercourse with the bull would surely seem to be a form of sodomy. But the only form of unnatural lust considered by Guinizelli is that of homosexuality; just how he could consider Pasiphaë's act to represent natural lust is suggested in his belated explanation of the kind of lust practiced by him and those of his group: it was heterosexual, but instead of acting like human beings, they acted like animals, and so they shout the name of her "who bestialized herself in beast-shaped wood" (87). Thus, Pasiphaë's act is seen first of all as the most extreme case imaginable of human lust become bestial.

43. *Imagine cranes forming two flocks:* The flight of two separate flocks of cranes in opposite directions is, of course, an impossibility. No birds would migrate both north and south in the same season. There is only one other canto in the *Divine Comedy* in which the simile of cranes is used, and we are certainly meant to have it in mind at this point in the journey: the canto of the Lustful in Hell (*Inf.* V, 46-47).

59. *a lady has won grace for me:* To most scholars the lady in question is Beatrice; some, however, believe the Virgin Mary is involved.

62. *Heaven's greatest sphere:* The Empyrean, the place from which Beatrice descended to Limbo in order to help her lover.

67. *No less dumbfounded than a mountaineer:* The amazement of the group addressed by the Pilgrim is caused not by his last words to them but by his account in verses 55-60 of the heavenly grace he has received. It is interesting that these sophisticated souls, among whom are numbered two famous poets, and who are characterized as "being of noble heart" in

verse 72, should be likened, in their amazement, to a rude, rustic, speechless, gaping mountaineer. Yet that is how they appear in the context of comparison with the Pilgrim, who has received special grace.

73. *the same soul who had earlier questioned me*: Again Dante chooses to withhold from us the name of Guinizelli.

78. *called a 'Queen'*: Because of his supposed relationship with Nicomedes, king of Bithynia, Caesar at one of his triumphs was hailed as "Regina" by some of his men. Suetonius, in his life of Caesar (*De vita Caesarum* I, xl, ix), writes at length of the notoriety that this sexual relationship achieved and of the reactions provoked in the people. But Dante's authority was probably Ugucione da Pisa in his *Mag-nae derivationes*. See Toynbee (1902), pp. 97-114.

82. *hermaphroditic*: Heterosexual, male with female.

86. *the shameful name of her*: The name of Pasiphaë (see note to 41).

92. *Guido Guinizelli*: Few undisputed facts concerning Guinizelli's life exist, though it is generally believed he died before November 1276. Guinizelli was at first an admirer of the ornate and rhetorical Guittone d'Arezzo, whom he calls "father" in one of his sonnets (as the Pilgrim calls him here), but later he criticized him and went on to head a school of Bolognese poets and become the forerunner of the so-called *dolce stil novo*. He was also in poetic correspondence with Bonagiunta da Lucca, who attacks him in one of his poems for "altering the manner of pleasant love poetry" with "obscure discourses." On the poetry of Guinizelli, see Montanari and Biondillo. For the text of the poems, see Contini (1960, pp. 450-85, 893-98) and, concerning Guinizelli's most famous *canzone* ("Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore"), see Torracca (1933-34) and Muscetta.

94-95. *two sons / discovered their lost mother*: Hypsipyle, wife of Jason, to whom she had borne two sons, was captured by pirates and sold to Lycurgus, king of Nemea, who appointed her nurse of his infant son. While in her charge, the baby was bitten fatally by a snake. Lycurgus, in his grief and wrath, ordered her death. As she was being led to execution, her two long-lost sons appeared, recognized their mother, rushed to

embrace her in spite of the danger offered by her armed captors, and succeeded in having her freed.

96. *I felt the same (though more restrained)*: The Pilgrim does not brave the danger of the flame by rushing to embrace Guinizelli, in spite of his great joy at their unexpected meeting. The Pilgrim's fear of the flames is, understandably, very real (see verse 102 and note his reactions in the next canto).

108. *which even Lethe cannot wash away*: This is the traditional river of oblivion, which we are soon to see at the summit of the mountain of Purgatory.

112. *Those graceful poems of yours*: The possessive pronoun used in the Italian is not the singular *tuoi* but the plural *vostri*—evidently the honorific plural, reflecting the Pilgrim's respect for Guinizelli. The Pilgrim has met many distinguished souls so far in his journey, but up till now he has used the honorific plural only three times: first, with his close friend Guido Cavalcanti's father (*Inf.* X, 63); second, with his old teacher Brunetto Latini (*Inf.* XV, 30); third, with Pope Adrian V (*Purg.* XIX, 131).

117. *A better craftsman of his mother tongue*: The Provençal poet Arnaut Daniel, who flourished between 1180 and ca. 1210. He belonged to a noble family of Riberac in Périgord (the modern department of Dordogne), may have been a personal friend of Bertran de Born, and spent much of his time at the court of Richard Coeur de Lion. He is credited with the invention of the sestina, which Dante adopted, and he wrote in the obscure style of the *trobar clus*. He is also the author of some of the most pornographic poetry in Provençal literature (see Jernigan). For the critical edition of Daniel's poetry, see Toja.

Incidentally, the possessive pronoun ("*his* mother tongue") does not appear in verse 117 of the Italian text; we find *la lingua materna*. Accordingly, the opinion has been expressed that here Guinizelli is speaking not of the Provençal language but of the vernacular in general, and thus would be proclaiming Arnaut Daniel to be superior also to poets writing in other languages. But even if we interpret "*his* mother tongue," Guinizelli would be making the same claim of absolute superiority (if *lingua materna* is taken generically): Arnaut writ-

ing in his mother tongue (Provençal) is better than X, Y, or Z writing in their mother tongues (French, Spanish, Italian). Guinizelli has already confessed himself to be inferior to Arnaut; he would also be putting Dante on the same level with himself.

118. *Poets of love, writers of tales in prose*: In my translation I have altered the original text in a way that may have changed its meaning. Dante's words taken literally are, "love verses and tales in prose, / all of them he surpasses." These lines (in which a poet is represented as superior to poetry!) once inspired the idea among scholars that Arnaut Daniel had also written prose tales—an idea largely abandoned today, and rightly so, if one considers the concentrated, terse style of Arnaut's poetry. But these lines could still mean that Dante himself believed that Arnaut had written also in prose; and why should he believe this unless he had read or heard about examples of Arnaut's prose? There is a third possibility. Dante could simply have meant that Arnaut was the best vernacular writer of his time, his *opera* surpassing that of all others, whether they wrote poetry or prose or both. In spite of Dante's perplexing last-minute reference to prose, I have decided to adopt this last interpretation.

120. *him of Limoges*: Guiraut de Bornelh (1175–1220) was another famous Provençal poet, with a far simpler style than Arnaut Daniel's. He was called by his contemporaries "master of the Troubadours." Dante cites him (*De vulg. eloqu.* II, ii, 9), along with Arnaut Daniel and Bertran de Born, as one of three characteristic Provençal poets. His poetry is presented by Dante as that of "rectitude," in contrast to the martial poetry of the second and the love poetry of the first. See the critical edition of Kolsen (1935) and the excellent anthology of de Riquer.

124. *Guittone was judged this way*: For Guittone d'Arezzo, see note to *Purg.* XXIV, 56.

131. *the part appropriate for us*: The part of the Lord's prayer not appropriate for the Penitents is obviously the plea "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." The reader will remember that in *Purg.* XI, when the Proud quote this prayer, they comment on this verse as being irrelevant to them (22–24).

133. *Then, to make room for someone else, perhaps:* Guinizelli, who has been on stage since verse 16, now retreats farther into the flame.

138. *a gracious place of welcome for his name:* Note the *préciosité* of the Pilgrim's words addressed to Arnaut Daniel, the master of *préciosité*.

140-147

"Your elegant request so pleases me,
I could not possibly conceal my name. 141

I am Arnaut, singing now through my tears,
regretfully recalling my past follies,
and joyfully anticipating joy. 144

I beg you, in the name of that great power
guiding you to the summit of the stairs:
remember, in good time, my suffering here." 147

Since Arnaut Daniel is the only (non-Italian) character allowed to speak in his native language, I have left this Provençal passage untranslated in the text. Arnaut Daniel was the chief exponent of the *trobar clus* or hermetic style in poetry, and it is interesting that he is allowed to speak here in a very simple forthright manner, whereas the brief question addressed to him by the Pilgrim (137-38) is as elaborately contrived as anything in Arnaut's poetry—and is appreciated by Arnaut.

144. *e vei jausen lo joi qu'esper:* The manuscript tradition allows for *lo jorn* ("the day") instead of *lo joi*. Some editors consider this reading aesthetically superior, since it avoids repetition of the same idea, which would not be expected from such an elegant stylist as Arnaut. But the poets of Old Provençal love songs delighted in exploiting the repercussions of a key motif, as expressed by the same word-family.