

# INFERNO V

## OUTLINE

- 1-3 descent to the second Circle: the lustful  
4-15 proem: Minos judge of the damned  
16-20 Minos attempts to discourage Dante  
21-24 Virgil repeats his magical phrase (III.95-96)  
25-30 again, impressions of sound are the first Dante has  
31-39 the "hellscape": weeping, darkness, storm  
40-49 two similes: starlings and cranes  
50-51 Dante wants to know who are punished here; Virgil:  
52-63 Semiramis, Dido, Cleopatra  
64-69 Helen, Achilles, Paris, Tristan, and many others  
70-78 Dante's piteous reaction and desire to speak  
79-81 he calls out to the pair of lovers  
82-87 simile: doves returning to nest  
88-108 Francesca's first speech:  
88-96 her kind words for Dante's kindness  
97-99 she is from Ravenna  
100-108 Love . . . Love . . . Love . . . : her litany of joy, woe  
109-111 Dante's reaction and Virgil's laconic question  
112-120 Dante's rumination and question to Francesca  
121-138 Francesca's second response:  
121-126 despite the pain it will cause, she will speak  
127-129 she and Paolo were reading of Lancelot in love  
130-138 enflamed by the reading, they embraced  
139-142 coda: Francesca concludes, Paolo weeps, Dante faints

## INFERNO V

3 Così discesi del cerchio primaio  
giù nel secondo, che men loco cinghia  
e tanto più dolor, che punge a guaio.

6 Stavvi Minòs orribilmente, e ringhia:  
essamina le colpe ne l'intrata;  
giudica e manda secondo ch'avvinghia.

9 Dico che quando l'anima mal nata  
li vien dinanzi, tutta si confessa;  
e quel conoscitor de le peccata

12 vede qual loco d'inferno è da essa;  
cignesi con la coda tante volte  
quantunque gradi vuol che giù sia messa.

15 Sempre dinanzi a lui ne stanno molte:  
vanno a vicenda ciascuna al giudizio,  
dicono e odono e poi son giù volte.

18 "O tu che vieni al doloroso ospizio,"  
disse Minòs a me quando mi vide,  
lasciando l'atto di cotanto officio,

21 "guarda com' entri e di cui tu ti fide;  
non t'inganni l'ampiezza de l'intrare!"  
E 'l duca mio a lui: "Perché pur gride?"

24 Non impedir lo suo fatale andare:  
vuolsi così colà dove si puote  
ciò che si vuole, e più non dimandare."

27 Or incomincian le dolenti note  
a farmisi sentire; or son venuto  
là dove molto pianto mi percuote.

3 Thus I descended from the first circle  
down into the second, which girds a smaller space  
but greater agony to goad lament.

6 There stands Minos, snarling, terrible.  
He examines each offender at the entrance,  
judges and dispatches as he encoils himself.

9 I mean that when the ill-begotten soul  
stands there before him it confesses all,  
and that accomplished judge of sins

12 decides what place in Hell is fit for it,  
then coils his tail around himself to count  
how many circles down the soul must go.

15 Always before him stands a crowd of them,  
going to judgment each in turn.  
They tell, they hear, and then are hurled down.

18 'O you who come to this abode of pain,'  
said Minos when he saw me, pausing  
in the exercise of his high office,

21 'beware how you come in and whom you trust.  
Don't let the easy entrance fool you.'  
And my leader to him: 'Why all this shouting?'

24 'Hinder not his destined journey.  
It is so willed where will and power are one,  
and ask no more.'

27 Now I can hear the screams  
of agony. Now I have come  
where a great wailing beats upon me.

30 Io venni in loco d'ogne luce muto,  
che muggia come fa mar per tempesta,  
se da contrari venti è combattuto.

33 La bufera infernal, che mai non resta,  
mena li spirti con la sua rapina;  
voltando e percotendo li molesta.

36 Quando giungon davanti a la ruina,  
quivi le strida, il compianto, il lamento;  
bestemmian quivi la virtù divina.

39 Intesi ch'a così fatto tormento  
enno dannati i peccator carnali,  
che la ragion sommettono al talento.

42 E come li stornei ne portan l'ali  
nel freddo tempo, a schiera larga e piena,  
così quel fiato li spirti mali

45 di qua, di là, di giù, di sù li mena;  
nulla speranza li conforta mai,  
non che di posa, ma di minor pena.

48 E come i gru van cantando lor lai,  
faccendo in aere di sé lunga riga,  
così vid' io venir, traendo guai,

51 ombre portate da la detta briga;  
per ch' i' dissi: "Maestro, chi son quelle  
genti che l'aura nera sì gastiga?"

54 "La prima di color di cui novelle  
tu vuo' saper," mi disse quelli allotta,  
"fu imperadrice di molte favelle.

57 A vizio di lussuria fu sì rotta,  
che libito fé licito in sua legge,  
per tòrre il biasmo in che era condotta.

30 I reached a place mute of all light,  
which bellows as the sea in tempest  
tossed by conflicting winds.

33 The hellish squall, which never rests,  
sweeps spirits in its headlong rush,  
tormenting, whirls and strikes them.

36 Caught in that path of violence,  
they shriek, weep, and lament.  
Then how they curse the power of God!

39 I understood that to such torment  
the carnal sinners are condemned,  
they who make reason subject to desire.

42 As, in cold weather, the wings of starlings  
bear them up in wide, dense flocks,  
so does that blast propel the wicked spirits.

45 Here and there, down and up, it drives them.  
Never are they comforted by hope  
of rest or even lesser punishment.

48 Just as cranes chant their mournful songs,  
making a long line in the air,  
thus I saw approach, heaving plaintive sighs,

51 shades lifted on that turbulence,  
so that I said: 'Master, who are these  
whom the black air lashes?'

54 'The first of them about whom  
you would hear,' he then replied,  
'was empress over many tongues.

57 'She was so given to the vice of lechery  
she made lust licit in her law  
to take away the blame she had incurred.

60 Ell' è Semiramis, di cui si legge  
che succedette a Nino e fu sua sposa:  
tenne la terra che 'l Soldan corregge.

63 L'altra è colei che s'ancise amorosa,  
e ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo;  
poi è Cleopatràs lussuriosa.

66 Elena vedi, per cui tanto reo  
tempo si volse, e vedi 'l grande Achille,  
che con amore al fine combatteo.

69 Vedi Paris, Tristano"; e più di mille  
ombre mostrommi e nominommi a dito,  
ch'amor di nostra vita dipartille.

72 Poscia ch'io ebbi 'l mio dottore udito  
nomar le donne antiche e ' cavalieri,  
pietà mi giunse, e fui quasi smarrito.

75 I' cominciai: "Poeta, volentieri  
parlerei a que' due che 'nsieme vanno,  
e paion sì al vento esser leggieri."

78 Ed elli a me: "Vedrai quando saranno  
più presso a noi; e tu allor li priega  
per quello amor che i mena, ed ei verranno."

81 Sì tosto come il vento a noi li piega,  
mossi la voce: "O anime affannate,  
venite a noi parlar, s'altri nol nega!"

84 Quali colombe dal disio chiamate  
con l'ali alzate e ferme al dolce nido  
vegnon per l'aere, dal voler portate;

87 cotali uscir de la schiera ov' è Dido,  
a noi venendo per l'aere maligno,  
sì forte fu l'affettüoso grido.

60 'She is Semiramis, of whom we read  
that she, once Ninus' wife, succeeded him.  
She held sway in the land the Sultan rules.

63 'Here is she who broke faith with the ashes  
of Sichaesus and slew herself for love.  
The next is wanton Cleopatra.

66 'See Helen, for whose sake so many years  
of ill rolled past. And see the great Achilles,  
who battled, at the last, with love.

69 'See Paris, Tristan,' and he showed me more  
than a thousand shades, naming as he pointed,  
whom love had parted from our life.

72 When I heard my teacher name the ladies  
and the knights of old, pity overcame me  
and I almost lost my senses.

75 I began: 'Poet, gladly would I speak  
with these two that move together  
and seem to be so light upon the wind.'

78 And he: 'Once they are nearer, you will see:  
if you entreat them by the love  
that leads them, they will come.'

81 As soon as the wind had bent them to us,  
I raised my voice: 'O wearied souls,  
if it is not forbidden, come speak with us.'

84 As doves, summoned by desire, their wings  
outstretched and motionless, move on the air,  
borne by their will to the sweet nest,

87 so did these leave the troop where Dido is,  
coming to us through the malignant air,  
such force had my affectionate call.

90 "O animal grazioso e benigno  
che visitando vai per l'aere perso  
noi che tignemmo il mondo di sanguigno,

93 se fosse amico il re de l'universo,  
noi pregheremmo lui de la tua pace,  
poi c'hai pietà del nostro mal perverso.

96 Di quel che udire e che parlar vi piace,  
noi udiremo e parleremo a voi,  
mentre che 'l vento, come fa, ci tace.

99 Siede la terra dove nata fui  
su la marina dove 'l Po discende  
per aver pace co' seguaci sui.

102 Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,  
prese costui de la bella persona  
che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende.

105 Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,  
mi prese del costui piacer sì forte,  
che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.

108 Amor condusse noi ad una morte.  
Caina attende chi a vita ci spense."  
Queste parole da lor ci fuor porte.

111 Quand' io intesi quell' anime offense,  
china' il viso, e tanto il tenni basso,  
fin che 'l poeta mi disse: "Che pense?"

114 Quando rispuosi, cominciai: "Oh lasso,  
quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio  
menò costoro al doloroso passo!"

117 Poi mi rivolsi a loro e parla' io,  
e cominciai: "Francesca, i tuoi martiri  
a lagrimar mi fanno tristo e pio.

90 'O living creature, gracious and kind,  
that come through somber air to visit us  
who stained the world with blood,

93 'if the King of the universe were our friend  
we would pray that He might give you peace,  
since you show pity for our grievous plight.

96 'We long to hear and speak of that  
which you desire to speak and know,  
here, while the wind has calmed.

99 'On that shore where the river Po  
with all its tributaries slows  
to peaceful flow, there I was born.

102 'Love, quick to kindle in the gentle heart,  
seized this man with the fair form taken from me.  
The way of it afflicts me still.

105 'Love, which absolves no one beloved from loving,  
seized me so strongly with his charm that,  
as you see, it has not left me yet.

108 'Love brought us to one death.  
Caina waits for him who quenched our lives.'  
These words were borne from them to us.

111 And when I'd heard those two afflicted souls  
I bowed my head and held it low until at last  
the poet said: 'What are your thoughts?'

114 In answer I replied: 'Oh,  
how many sweet thoughts, what great desire,  
have brought them to this woeful pass!'

117 Then I turned to them again to speak  
and I began: 'Francesca, your torments  
make me weep for grief and pity,

120 Ma dimmi: al tempo d'i dolci sospiri,  
a che e come concedette amore  
che conosceste i dubbiosi disiri?"

123 E quella a me: "Nessun maggior dolore  
che ricordarsi del tempo felice  
ne la miseria; e ciò sa 'l tuo dottore.

126 Ma s'a conoscer la prima radice  
del nostro amor tu hai cotanto affetto,  
dirò come colui che piange e dice.

129 Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto  
di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse;  
soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto.

132 Per più fiate li occhi ci sospinse  
quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso;  
ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.

135 Quando leggemmo il disiato riso  
esser baciato da cotanto amante,  
questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,

138 la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante.  
Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse:  
quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante."

142 Mentre che l'uno spirto questo disse,  
l'altro piangëa; sì che di pietade  
io venni men così com' io morisse.  
E caddi come corpo morto cade.

120 'but tell me, in that season of sweet sighs,  
how and by what signs did Love  
acquaint you with your hesitant desires?"

123 And she to me: "There is no greater sorrow  
than to recall our time of joy  
in wretchedness—and this your teacher knows.

126 'But if you feel such longing  
to know the first root of our love,  
I shall tell as one who weeps in telling.

129 'One day, to pass the time in pleasure,  
we read of Lancelot, how love enthralled him.  
We were alone, without the least misgiving.

132 'More than once that reading made our eyes meet  
and drained the color from our faces.  
Still, it was a single instant overcame us:

135 'When we read how the longed-for smile  
was kissed by so renowned a lover, this man,  
who never shall be parted from me,

138 'all trembling, kissed me on my mouth.  
A Galeotto was the book and he that wrote it.  
That day we read in it no further.'

142 While the one spirit said this  
the other wept, so that for pity  
I swooned as if in death.  
And down I fell as a dead body falls.

1-3. A descent again marks a border, this time between the Limbus and the second Circle. Singleton's gloss argues that the presence here of Minos in judgment indicates that "real hell" begins only now, that Limbo is "marginal." It is true, however, that the Limbus is inside the gate of hell. Not only does "real hell" begin there, it in a sense begins with those who are barely inside the gate, the neutrals. They are so pusillanimous that they are not even allowed "a proper burial," as it were. One may not even say, as some have, that only with the second Circle do we begin to witness actual punishment being meted out for past sins, since the neutrals are indeed tormented by stinging insects as a fit punishment for their feckless conduct (*Inf.* III.65-66).

4-5. Padoan, in his gloss, argues that the present tense of the verbs in this tercet (*sta, ringhia, essamina, giudica, manda, avvinghia*) reflects the continuous condition of Minos's behavior. In fact *all* the verbs in the passage describing Minos's judgment, vv. 4-15, are in the present, as Dante leaves little doubt but that he wants his readers to imagine themselves—unless a life of good conduct and God's grace combine to gain a better end—coming before that judgment in the future. This is the everlasting present of the moment of damnation, occurring, the text would make us feel, even as we read. For a study of the historical present in the *Commedia*, with attention (pp. 266-68) to this passage, see Sanguineti (Sang. 1958.1).

Dante fairly often portrays infernal monsters and characters as having bestial traits. For this particular one, canine vociferation, see also Cerberus (*Inf.* VI.43), Plutus (*Inf.* VII.43), Hecuba (*Inf.* XXX.20), Bocca degli Abati (*Inf.* XXXII.105; *Inf.* XXXII.108); Brutus and Cassius in *Inferno* XXXIV (described as "barking" retrospectively at *Par.* VI.74). See discussion in Spag. 1997.1, p. 112.

For the conflation here in the figure of Minos of the roles of Minos and of Rhadamanthus in Virgil's underworld, see Moor. 1896.1, pp. 183-84; the texts are found at *Aeneid* VI.432-433 and 566-569.

6. The precise way that Minos winds his tail about himself is a subject in dispute. Does he flap it back and forth as many times as he wishes to indicate the appropriate Circle? Or does he wind it like a vine around a tree? See Mazz. 1977.1, pp. 104-5, for a brief summary of the debate and reasons to prefer the second hypothesis.

7. Sinners are "ill-begotten" in that their end is this, eternal damnation, because of their sins (and not because their procreation in itself so fated them). Padoan, commenting on this verse, points out that Dante himself is later described as "bene nato" (wellborn)—*Par.* V.115.

8. Dante presents Minos as a parody of a confessor meting out penance to a sinner (see Beno. 1983.1). The word *confessa* marks the beginning of this canto's concern with confession, which will be parodied again when Dante "confesses" Francesca (vv. 118-120). For now we are perhaps meant to ruminate on the perversity of sinners. In the world above they were offered, through this office of the Church, the possibility of confession and remission of sins. We may infer that those sinners whom we find in hell probably did not avail themselves of their great opportunity. (We never hear the word "confession" on the lips of any of them except for Guido da Montefeltro [*Inf.* XXVII.83]. And he, having confessed and become a friar, then sins again and is condemned. His second [and vain] confession is made, too late, in hell and only to Dante.) This moment offers a brief but cogent vision of human perversity: in their lives all those whom we see in hell had the opportunity to be rid of their sins by owning up to them in confession. They apparently did not do so. Here, in hell, what is the very first thing that they do? They make full disclosure of their sins . . . to Minos.

9-12. The mechanical nature of Minos's judgment—he is a judge who renders judgment with his tail, not his head—underlines the lack of authority of the demons in hell: Minos is merely doing God's work. Hell is presented as a perfectly functioning bureaucracy. If some of Satan's minions are at times rebellious (e.g., the rebel angels in *Inf.* IX, the winged demons in XXI-XXIII), they are so in vain. Hell, too, is a part of God's kingdom.

17. Once the narrated action of Dante's descent continues (it had been suspended at v. 3), the tense moves back to the past definite: "Minos said."

18-19. Minos, seeing a rarity, to say the least—a living man before him at the entrance—steals a moment from his incessant judgment to offer this warning. How kindly are his intentions? Most commentators seem to think he is the most "humane" of the infernal demons, and even courteous to Dante. However, and as Padoan points out (in his commentary), his calling into question, albeit indirectly, the competence of Virgil as guide

("beware . . . whom you trust"), is evidently meant to unsettle Dante. He would obviously prefer not to have such visitors.

20. Commentators customarily note that here Dante builds his line out of two sources: *Aeneid* VI.126: "Facilis descensus Averno" (the descent to the underworld is easy [but not the return from there]); Matth. 7:13: "spatiosa via est, quae ducit ad perditionem" (broad is the way that leads to perdition).

22–24. Virgil obviously understands that Minos's words were meant to scare Dante off (and perhaps he also understands the implicit insult to himself contained in them). For the repetition here of the identical verses (23 and 24) used to quell Charon's rebellious desires see *Inf.* III.95–96 and note. It seems clear that Virgil would not have used them again had they not been efficacious the first time, that is, had Charon not relented and rowed Dante across (see note to *Inf.* III.136).

25. Here the present tense is an example of the "historical" (or "vivid") present.

26–33. The "hellscape" that is established by the sounds in the darkness (once again Dante's eyes need to adjust to the deepening shadows) mates well with the sin of lust: darkness, passionate winds in conflict that bear their victims in unceasing agitation in their storm of passion. For a passage that might have had some effect on Dante's shaping of this scene, see II Peter 2:10–22, the Apostle Peter's denunciation of the lustful.

34. One of the most debated verses in this canto because of the word *ruina* (literally, "ruin"). What precisely does it mean? Two discussions of the commentary tradition are available, the first by Letterio Cassata (*Cass.* 1971.1), the second, still more complete, by Nicolò Mineo (*ED*, vol. 4, 1973), pp. 1056–57. Mineo points out that there have been six identifiable schools of interpretation for the meaning of *la ruina*. Unfortunately, there are severe problems associated with all of them. Many American and some Italian students of the problem have been drawn to Singleton's solution (commentary to *Inf.* XII.32 and XII.36–45): Dante suppresses the meaning of the noun here only to reveal it at *Inferno* XII.32–41, where *questa ruina* (v. 32) refers to the crack in the wall of hell made by the earthquake that accompanied Christ's crucifixion. However, it does remain

extremely dubious, as many rightly point out, that Dante would, for the only time in his poem, hold back the reference necessary to a word's clear literal sense for seven cantos. We agree with Mazzoni's tentative judgment (*Mazz.* 1977.1, pp. 106–8) that the meaning of *ruina* here is not "ruin," but "fury, violence," as in the impetus of the wind that drives these sinners.

40–49. The first two similes of the canto (and see the third one, vv. 82–85) associate the lustful with birds, a natural association given their condition, driven by the wind, and one in accord with the medieval view that lust is the property of beings less than human, and indeed frequently of birds.

40–43. The first vast group of the "ordinary" lovers is compared to a flock of starlings, with their ragged, darting, sky-covering flight on a winter's day. (T. S. Eliot's typist and house agent's clerk in *The Waste Land*, vv. 222–248, would eventually be assigned here, one imagines.)

46–49. The group in the second simile of the canto is more select, the "stars" of lustful living. Where the starlings are as though without individual identities, the "masses" of the lustful, as it were, each of these has a particularity and a certain fame, and is thus worthy of being treated as exemplary. (For a discussion of exemplary literature in the middle ages see Delc. 1989.1, with special attention to Dante, pp. 195–227.) Padoan (commentary), on the other hand, suggests that this second group is distinguished from the first on moral grounds, since they all died by their own hand or at the hand of others, and are as a result more heavily punished. The evidence for such a view does not seem present in the text.

For the cranes see *Aeneid* X.264–266 as well as Statius, *Thebaid* V.11–16.

58–67. This is the second important "catalogue" that we find in *Inferno*. The first named the forty identified inhabitants of Limbo (see note to *Inf.* IV.102—at the end of that note). In the Circle of lust we find these seven identified sinners and two more: Francesca and Paolo, who bring the total to nine. As Curtius argued quite some time ago, given the importance for Dante of the number nine (the "number" of his beloved Beatrice), it seems likely that these nine souls who died for love are associated with her by opposition (*Curt.* 1948.1, p. 369).

It is also notable that Dante's catalogues are unlike (and pronouncedly



so in this case) later humanist catalogues of the famous, which thrive on additions, in display of "erudition": *the more the better* seems to be the motto of such writers. Dante, on the other hand, frequently sculpts his groupings to a purpose.

One of the insistent poetic *topoi* that we find in medieval writers—and certainly in Dante—is that of *translatio*. This is the notion that certain ideas or institutions have their major manifestations in movement through historical time and space. The two most usually deployed examples of this *topos* are *translatio imperii* (the movement of imperial greatness from Troy to Rome to "new Rome"—wherever that may be in a given patriotic writer's imagination [in Dante's case the empireless Rome of his own day]) and *translatio studii* (the development of serious intellectual pursuit from its birth in Athens, to its rebirth in Rome, to its new home [Paris, according to some, in Dante's day]). It is perhaps useful to think of Dante's catalogues as reflecting a similar sense of history, of movement through time and space. In this one, a sort of *translatio amoris*, we have three triads: Semiramis (incestuous paramour of her own son), Dido (partner of Aeneas, abandoned by him), Cleopatra (lover of Julius Caesar and of Mark Antony), all three lustful queens of the African coast; Helen and Paris (Greek and Trojan lovers whose lusts brought down a kingdom) with Achilles (Greek lover of the Trojan woman Polyxena); Tristan (a man caught up in destructive passion for King Mark's wife, Isolde, in the court of Cornwall, as we move into Europe and toward the present); Francesca and Paolo (lovers from the recent past [ca. 1285] in Rimini, here in Italy).

58. Semiramis was the legendary queen of Assyria (Dante has confused the name of her capital, Babylon, for that of the Egyptian city, and thus misplaced her realm). She was supposed to have legalized incest in order to carry out her sexual liaison with her son. For more about her see Samu. 1944. 1 and Shap. 1975. 1.

61–62. Dante's use of periphrasis (circumlocution) represents one of his favored "teaching techniques," in which he (generally, but certainly not always) offers his readers fairly easy problems to solve. Use of periphrasis has a second effect: it tends to emphasize the importance of the person or thing so presented. The "Dido" that we scribble in our margins, remembering that her husband's name was Sichaeus, stands out from the page, partly because it is we who have supplied the name. That Dido is the quintessential presence in this "flock" is underlined by v. 85, where she is the *only* named presence in it, having previously been alluded to only indirectly.

61. Dido's presence here frequently upsets readers who think that she ought to be found in Canto XIII, since she committed suicide. It is clear that Dante thinks of the psychology of sin with a certain sophistication, isolating the impulse, the deeper motive, that drives our actions from the actions themselves. In Dido's case this is her uncontrolled desire for Aeneas. She does not kill herself from despair (as do the suicides in the thirteenth canto), but rather to give expression to her need for her lover—or so Dante would seem to have believed.

62. Virgil's similar one-line description of Dido's "infidelity" occurs at *Aeneid* IV.552, where she admits that she had not "kept the faith promised to the ashes of Sichaeus."

63. For Dante's knowledge that Cleopatra committed suicide by having an asp bite her, see *Paradiso* VI.76–78.

65. It is important to remember that Dante, Greekless, had not read Homer, who only became available in Latin translation much later in the fourteenth century. His Achilles is not the hero of the *Iliad* known to some of us, but the warrior-lover portrayed by Statius and others.

69–72. *di nostra vita*. The echo of the first line of the poem is probably not coincidental. Dante was lost "midway in the journey of our life" and, we will later learn, some of his most besetting problems arose from misplaced affection. He was, indeed, near death as a result of his transgressions. The repetition of the word *smarrito* to describe Dante's distraught condition also recalls the first tercet of the poem. Here we can see an emerging pattern in his reuse of key words from previous contexts in order to enhance the significance of a current situation in the poem.

71. Dante refers to the great figures of the olden days with strikingly anachronistic terms, the medieval "ladies and knights" emphasizing the continuity of the historical record. No "humanist" writer would be likely to use such a locution that so dramatically erases the gap between classical antiquity and the present age.

74. To be "light upon the wind" is, to some readers, a sign of Francesca's and Paolo's noble ability to triumph over their dismal surroundings; to others, it indicates that they are driven even more wildly than some other shades by the winds of passion. This first detail begins a series of

challenging phrasings that invite the reader to consider closely the ambiguities of the entire episode. For a summary of the issues at stake here, see Mazz.1977.1, pp. 124–28. And for a thorough consideration of the history of interpretation of the episode of Francesca see A. E. Quaglio, “Francesca” (*ED*, vol. 3, 1971, pp. 1–13).

76–78. Virgil’s only complete tercet in the second half of the canto (see note to vv. 109–117) is laconic, as though he were aware of the emotions felt by Dante (which he himself had so devastatingly presented in *Aeneid* IV, the story of love’s destructive power over Dido) and realized there was nothing he had said or could say that might rein in his excited pupil.

80. The protagonist’s adjective for the two sinners (they are “anime *affannate*”) may well be meant to remind us of the only other time we find that adjective in *Inferno* (*Inf.* I.22), when Dante is described as being like a man who has escaped from the sea “with laboring breath” (*con lena affannata*). If that is true, it further binds the character’s sense of identity with these sinners.

82–84. The third simile involving birds in this canto (and there are only three similes in it) compares the two lovers to doves. As Shoaf (Shoaf.1975.1) has demonstrated, there is a “dove program” in the *Comedy*, beginning with the Venereal doves reflected here, passing through the doves at their feeding in *Purgatorio* II.124–129, and finishing in the reference to James and Peter as “doves” of the Holy Spirit in *Paradiso* XXV.119–121. Dante’s doves here seem to reflect both *Aeneid* V.213–217 and *Georgics* I.414.

88. Francesca da Polenta of Ravenna was affianced to Giovanni Malatesta of Rimini, who was crippled. History or legend has it that the marriage was arranged when his younger brother, Paolo, was sent to make the pledge of betrothal. Francesca, seeing him, was under the impression that it was this handsome man who was to be her husband. Her delusion on her wedding day is not difficult to imagine. Commentators point out that her adulterous conduct was a lot more calculated than Dante presents it (she and Paolo, also married, both had children and she had then been married for ten years). The fact is, however, that Dante’s version of the story makes her conduct seem about as understandable as possible, an effort on which the character herself spends her considerable resources of persuasion.

The beginning of her highly rhetorical speech reflects the tradition

of classical rhetoric that would have a speaker first seek to gain the sympathy of the audience, a device referred to as *captatio benevolentiae*, the capturing of the goodwill of one’s auditors. For noteworthy earlier examples of *captatio* see Beatrice’s first words to Virgil (*Inf.* II.58–60) and Virgil’s first words to her (*Inf.* II.76–81).

91–93. Francesca’s locutions are revealing and instructive: God is portrayed as having turned away from the two lovers, while Dante is welcomed for not having done so, for feeling *pietà* for them. This canto has one of its “key words” in *amore*, which occurs fully eleven times in it (vv. 61, 66, 69, 78, 100, 103, 106, 119, 125, 128, 134). But this word, “pity,” is crucial as well (vv. 72, 93, 117, 140, and, in the continuing narrative of the next canto, VI.2). Dante is filled with pity for lost lovers. Should he be? That may be the central question facing a reader of *Inferno* V (see further discussion, below [note to v. 142]).

91. For the source of this verse in Cavalcanti’s line “Se Mercé fosse amica a’ miei disiri” (Were Mercy friendly to my desires) see Contini (Cont.1976.1), p. 155.

100–106. The use of anaphora (repetition) here at the beginning of each tercet, “Amor . . . Amor . . . Amor . . .,” underlines the rhetorical skill of Francesca, who presses her case with listening Dante: it was Love’s fault that she and Paolo fell into carnal passion. “Amor” appears three times as the first word in a tercet after an end-stopped line and thus must be capitalized. It seems also reasonable to believe that Francesca is here referring to her “god,” the Lord of Love, Cupid, whose name is “Amor.” He is the only god she seems to own, since, by her account (v. 91), the “King of the universe” is not her friend.

102. Against Pagliaro (Pagl.1967.1), pp. 136–49, who argues that Francesca is referring to the way in which she was made to fall in love, Padoan (commentary and Pado.1993.1, pp. 189–200) argues persuasively that she refers in fact to the brutal manner of her death. This verse is much debated. The wording of the text allows, in itself, either interpretation. Our translation therefore leaves the meaning ambiguous, as does, indeed, the original, whatever Dante’s intentions.

103. The *dicta* of Andreas Capellanus are often cited as lying behind Francesca’s speech (e.g., *De amore* II, 8): “Amor nil posset amori denegare”

(Love can deny love nothing at all). A closer parallel exists between a line in a love poem by Cino da Pistoia and this one: "A nullo amato amar perdona amore" ("Love allows no one beloved not to love," cited by Enrico Mestica [commentary]). But we do not know if Dante is echoing Cino or Cino, Dante.

107. Francesca, whose chief rhetorical strategy is to remove as much blame from herself as she is able, finding other forces at fault wherever possible (e.g., Paolo's physical beauty, her despicable husband, the allure of a French romance), here tries to even the score with her husband. She may be damned, but he, as the killer of his wife and brother, will be much lower down, in the ninth Circle. Since Gianciotto, who killed them in 1283–84, lived until 1304, his shade could not be seen by Dante in Caïna. We have, as a result, no basis on which to question her opinion. However, had Dante wanted to guarantee it, it would have taken a line or so to do just that—and he does several times have sinners tell of the impending arrival of still others in a given Circle in ways that clearly call for acceptance (see note to *Inf.* XXXII.54–69). And so we are left wondering at Francesca's remark, and should at least keep this question open. It seems better to view her prediction as a wish stated as a fact than as a fact. However, for an example of the view that accepts Francesca's predictive placement of her husband in hell see Bald. 1988.1, p. 1070.

Iannucci suggests that Gianciotto may have been conceived by Dante as being misshapen and lame like Vulcan, the cuckolded husband of Venus (Iann. 1980.1, p. 345).

109–117. These nine verses contain the "drama" of the canto *in nuce*. Dante's pensive condition in the first tercet reflects his being moved deeply by Francesca's beautiful speech; Virgil attempts to spur him to thoughtful appreciation of what he has seen and heard; the second tercet records his more emotional than rational outburst: he is totally sympathetic to the lovers, and now, in the third, he turns to tell Francesca that he is filled with pity for her. She has won him over.

Some twenty years ago Dante's tearful state (v. 117) reminded Elizabeth Raymond and Susan Saltrick (both Princeton '78) of the tears Augustine shed for Dido—see Pine. 1961.1, p. 34 (*Confessions* I.13).

118–120. In 1972, Georgia Nugent, then a student at Princeton, pointed out that Dante's question mimics the questions used by confessors to

ascertain the nature of a penitent's sins. Here, we may reflect, Dante is behaving more like a priest in the so-called "religion of Love" than a Christian confessor. See the earlier discussion of confession in this canto, note to v. 8.

121–126. "This [the first tercet] imitates Virgil . . . but literally translates Boëtius" (Taaf. 1822.1, p. 326). See the *Consolation of Philosophy* II, pr. 4: "in omni adversitate fortunae infelicissimum est genus infortunii fuisse felicem" (among fortune's many adversities the most unhappy kind is once to have been happy).

For the Virgilian resonances (*Aen.* II.3–13), see the fairly detailed account in Holl. 1969.1, pp. 110–11.

123. There is debate as to whether the word *dottore* (here "teacher") refers to Boethius or Virgil. Most prefer the second hypothesis. We should realize that either choice forces upon us a somewhat ungainly hypothesis, the first that Francesca knows Boethius well (it is only several years since Dante had characterized the *Consolation of Philosophy* as a work known only to few [*Conv.* II.xii.2]), the second that she recognizes the Roman poet Virgil without having had him identified by Dante. Since Virgil is referred to by Dante as "il mio dottore" in this very canto (v. 70), it seems the wiser choice to accept the notion that Dante, taking advantage of poetic license, allows Francesca to recognize Virgil.

127–128. In the Old French *Lancelot of the Lake*, King Arthur's queen, Guinevere, betrayed her husband with the knight Lancelot. Much has been written on the sources of this scene. Work in English includes articles by Carozza (Caro. 1967.1) and Maddox (Madd. 1996.1). And for a possible link to the love story of Eloise and Abelard see Dronke (Dron. 1975.1).

132. Francesca's account of her and Paolo's conquest by Amor is "corrected" by a later text, Dante's reference to God as the "punto che mi vinse" (*Par.* XXX.11), where Dante is, like Paolo, "constrained" by love (*strinse* [v. 128]; *Paradiso* XXX, 15: *amor mi costrinse*)—but his desire is for Beatrice, not for a fleshly liaison. The passage in *Paradiso* is clearly meant to reflect negatively, not only on the amorous activity of Francesca and Paolo, but on the protagonist's reactions to it. The god of Love and Francesca are being played against God and Beatrice—or so we will understand once we reach the last *cantica*. For the resonance of this self-

citation see Holl.1988.1, pp. 7–8, discussing the contributions of Contini (Cont.1976.1), p. 206; Hollander (Holl.1983.1), pp. 139–40; and Dronke (Dron.1989.1), p. 30.

137. Once again Francesca blames another for their predicament, this time the go-between, Gallehaut, in the tale of Lancelot and Guinevere as well as its author. By now we have come to see—or should have—how often she lays her problems at the doors of others. At least in part because of Dante's reference to him here, Gallehaut became synonymous with "pander."

138. Francesca, reading a book that leads to her "conversion" to sin and death in the company of a man named Paul, is the "negative antitype" of St. Augustine, reading a book by Paul that leads to his conversion (*Confessions* VIII.xii [Pine.1961.1, p. 178]—see Swing for what seems to be the first observation of this striking connection [Swin.1962.1], p. 299, and further discussion by Hollander [Holl.1969.1], pp. 112–13). Augustine is converted by reading a passage in St. Paul (Romans 13:13–14): "Let us walk honestly as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Here, we may reflect, Francesca reads a book and is "converted," by doing so, to the lust that leads to death. And if Augustine was converted by reading a man named Paul, Francesca gives herself to adultery with a man bearing the same name. As Swing has pointed out, Francesca's last words, *quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante* (that day we read in it no further), seem more than coincidentally close to Augustine's *nec ultra volui legere* (and I did not wish to read any further). For support of the idea that Dante is here thinking of this pivotal moment in Augustine's spiritual autobiography, see Scot.1979.1, p. 14. If we are meant to think of Augustine's *Confessiones* here, that would round off this canto's concern with confession (see discussion, above, in notes to vv. 8 and 118–120).

140. We now realize that during the entire episode we have not heard a word from Paolo. Dante will return to this strategy when he twice again involves pairs of sinners in suffering together, Diomedes with Ulysses in *Inferno* XXVI, Ruggieri with Ugolino in *Inferno* XXXIII. In each case one of the two is a silent partner. We can try to imagine what an eternity of silence in the company of the voluble being who shares the culpability for one's damnation might be like.

141. Dante's death-like swoon has him experiencing something akin to the death in sensuality experienced by Francesca and Paolo. This is to be at odds with the view of Pietrobono (commentary), who argues that Dante's death-like collapse mirrors his attaining of the state urged by Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, chapter 6, wherein the Christian "dies" to sin in imitation of Christ (e.g., "For he that is dead is freed from sin"—Romans 6:7). It would rather seem that this is exactly *not* the state attained by the protagonist at this point in the poem.

Maddox (Madd.1996.1), pp. 119–22, draws a parallel between Dante's fainting spell and that suffered by Galehot in the prose *Lancelot*.

142. Torraca, commenting on this verse, was perhaps the first commentator to note the Arthurian material that lies behind Dante's famous line: the Italian prose version of the stories of Arthur's court, *La tavola ritonda*, XLVII, where Tristan's response to Isolde's death is described as follows: "e cadde sì come corpo morto." The protagonist is thus compared to the victim of overwhelming passion. His fainting marks him here as unable to control his pity, as it had had the same effect with respect to fear two cantos earlier (*Inf.* III.136).

The fifth Canto of *Inferno* is the cause of continuing debate. Where are we to locate ourselves as witnesses to these scenes? Romantic readers understandably tend to align themselves with the love that Francesca emblemizes and/or the pity that Dante exhibits; moralizing ones with the firmness that an Augustinian reader would feel. Virgil perhaps, given his silence through most of the second half of the canto (once Francesca appears on the scene he speaks only two words: "che pense?" [what are your thoughts?—v. 111]), would then seem to be trying to rein in Dante's enthusiastic involvement with this enticing shade. Yet even as theologically-oriented a reader as Mazzoni (Mazz.1977.1, pp. 125–26) finds it important to distance himself from such "rigid moralizing" as is found in Busn.1922.1 and Mont.1962.1. A view similar to Mazzoni's is found in a much-cited essay by Renato Poggioli: "The 'romance' of Paolo and Francesca becomes in Dante's hands an 'antiromance,' or rather, both things at once. As such, it is able to express and to judge romantic love at the same time" (Pogg.1957.1, p. 358). In America, the role of the "rigid moralizer" has been played, in recent times, most notably by Cassell (Cass.1984.1), with similar responses from most of his reviewers. For Mazzoni and many, perhaps most, contemporary readers, the canto needs to be responded to more generously than the "moralizers" would like. And, to be sure, there is at times a certain perhaps unfortunately zealous tone in

the words of such critics. On the other hand, their views seem only to accord with the overall aims of the poet and his poem. Francesca is, after all, in hell. The love she shares with Paolo was and is a "mad love" (for this concept see Aval.1975.1). The text clearly maintains that the lustful punished here "make reason subject to desire" (v. 39). And so, where some would find pity the middle ground for the reader to occupy, between the sinful lust of Francesca and Paolo and the "rigid moralizers," others, including this commentator, argue that it is pity itself that is here at fault. *Amore* and *pietà* are no doubt among the "key words" of the canto (see above, note to vv. 91-93); that does not mean that they must function in opposition to one another; they may be versions of the same emotion. Indeed, if we see that Francesca's aim is precisely to gain Dante's pity, and that she is successful in doing so, we perhaps ought to question his offering of it. Sympathy for the damned, in the *Inferno*, is nearly always and nearly certainly the sign of a wavering moral disposition.