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Cosi discesi del cerchio primo
giù nel secondo, che men loco cinghia
e tanto più dolor, che punge a guaio.

Stavvi Minòs orribilmente, e ringhia:
cessur le colpe ne l'intrata;
giudica e manda secondo ch'avinghia.

Dico che quando l'anima mal nata
li vien dinanzi, tutta si confessa;
e quel conoscitor de le peccata
vede qual loco d'inferno è da essa;
cignesi con la coda tante volte
quantunque gradi vuol che giù sia messa.

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

"O tu che vieni al doloroso ospizio,"
disse Minòs a me quando mi vide,
lasclando l'atto di cotanto afizio,
"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 gridi?

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

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

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

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

I mean that when the ill-begotten soul
stands there before him it confesses all,
and that accomplished judge of sins
decides what place in Hell is fit for it,
thens coils his tail around himself to count
how many circles down the soul must go.

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

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

'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?

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

Now I can hear the screams
of agony. Now I have come
where a great wailing beats upon me.
Io venni in loco d’ogne luce muo,
che mugghia come fa mar per tempesta,
se da contrari venti è combattuto.

La bufiera infernal, che mai non resta,
mena li spiri con la sua rapina;
voltando e percotendo li molesta.

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

Intesi ch’a così fatto tormento
enno dannati i peccator carnali,
che la ragion sommetsono al talento.

E come li stornai ne portan l’ali
nel freudo tempo, a schiera larga e piena,
cosi quel fiato li spiriti mali
di qua, di là, di giù, di sù li mena;
nulla speranza li conforta mai,
non che di posa, ma di minor pena.

E come i gru van cantando kor lai,
faccendo in aere di sè lunga riga,
cosi vid’io venir, traendo guai,
ombre portate da la detta briga; per ch’i’ dissi: “Maestro, chi son quelle genti che l’aura nera si gastiga?”

“La prima di color di cui novelle
tu vuol sapere,” mi disse quelli allotta,
“fu imperatrice di molte favelle.

A vizio di lussuria fu sì rota,
che libito fè licito in sua legge,
per tòrre il biamino in che era condotta.

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

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

Caught in that path of violence,
they shriek, weep, and lament.

Then how they curse the power of God!

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

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

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

Just as cranes chant their mournful songs,
making a long line in the air,
thus I saw approach, heaving plaintive sighs,
shades lifted on that turbulence,
so that I said: ‘Master, who are these whom the black air lashes?’

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

‘She was so given to the vice of lechery
she made lust licit in her law
to take away the blame she had incurred.'
Ell'è Semiramis, di cui si legge
che succedette a Nino e fu sua sposa:
tenese la terra che 'l Soldan corregge.

L'altra è colei che s'ancise amorosa,
e rappe fede al cenere di Sicerno;
poi è Cleopatra lussuriosa.

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

Vedi Paris, Tristan; e più di mille
ombre mostrommi e nominommi a dito,
ch'amar di nostra vita dipartille.

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

l' commincia: "Poeta, volentieri
parlerai a que'due che 'nsieme vaano,
e paion si al vento esser leggieri."

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

Si tosto come il vento a noi si piega,
mossi la voce: "O anime affannate,
venite a noi parlar, s'altro nol negai!"

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

cotali uscire de la schiera ov'è Dido,
a noi venendo per l'aere maligno,
si forte fu l'affettuoso grido.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.'

As doves, summoned by desire, their wings
outstretched and motionless, move on the air,
borne by their will to the sweet nest,
so did these leave the troop where Dido is,
coming to us through the malignant air,
such force had my affectionate call.'
"O animal grazioso e benigno
che visitando vai per l'aere perso
noi che tignemmo il mondo di sanguigno,
se fosse amico il re de l'universo,
noi pregheremmo lui de la tua pace,
poi c'hai pietà del nostro mal perverso.

Di quel che udire e che parlar vi piace,
noi udiremo e parleremo a voi,
mentre che 'l vento, come fa, ci tace.
Siede la terra dove nata fui
su la marina dove 'l Po discende
per aver pace co' seguaci sui.

Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
prese costui de la bella persona
che mi fa tolt'a; e 'l modo ancor m'offende.
Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,
mi prese del costui piacer si forte,
che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.

Amor condusse noi ad una morte:
Caina attende chi a vita ci spense."
Queste parole da lor ci fisor porto.

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

Quando risposi, cominciai:"Oh lasso,
quanto dolci pensier, quanto disio
menò costoro al doloroso passo!"
Poi mi rivolsi a loro e parla'io,
e cominciai:"Francesca, i tuoi martir
a lagrimar mi fanno tristo e pio.

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

'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.

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

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

'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.

'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.

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

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?'

In answer I replied: 'Oh,
how many sweet thoughts, what great desire.
have brought them to this woeful pass!' Then I turned to them again to speak
and I began: 'Francesca, your torments
make me weep for grief and pity,
Ma dimmi: al tempo d’i dolci sospiri,  
a che e come concedette amore  
che conosceste i dubiosi destini?

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

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

Noi leggiavamo un giorno per dilettò  
di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse;  
soli eravamo e sanza alcun sospetto.

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

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

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

Mentre che l’uno spirto questo disse,  
138 l’altro piangèa; si che di pietaèe  
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  
aquaint you with your hesitant desires?’

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

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

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

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

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

‘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.’

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.
1-1. 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 some 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 theirreckless conduct (Inf. III.65-66).

4-5. Padoan, in his gloss, argues that the present tense of the verbs in this tercet (sta, ringbia, essamina, giudica, manda, avvinghias) 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 Sanguinetti (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); Brutas 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. 1916.1, pp. 181-84; the texts are found at Aen. 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 vase 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 of 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. 1983.4). The word confessa marks the beginning of this canto's concern with confession, which will be paralleled 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 these 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—seals a moment from his incessant judgment to offer this warning. How kindly are his intentions? Most commentators seem to think he is the most "human" 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]); Math. 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).

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

26–33. The "hel sophisticated" 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.

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 _Inf._ 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_, v. 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. 193–227.) 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 "eudition": 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 topos that we find in medieval writers—
and certainly in Dante—a 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 emperors 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),
al three lustful queens of the African coast; Helen and Paris (Greek and
Trojan lovers whose lust brought down a kingdom) with Achilles (Greek
lover of the Trojans woman Polyxena); Tristan (a man caught up in destruc-
tive 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. 1283] in Rimini, here in Italy).

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.332, 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 mis-
placed affection. He was, indeed, near death as a result of his transgres-
sions. 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, 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. 105–117) 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 breaths” (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 Shoa (Shoa. 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.4.14.

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 locations 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]).

94. For the source of this verse in Cavalcanti’s line “Se Mercè fosse amica a’ miei desiri” (“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 dita of Andreas Capellanus are often cited as lying behind Francesca’s speech (e.g., De amore II, 8): “Amor nil posset amori denegare”
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" rather 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 Boètius" (Tsaaf. 1822, 1, p. 326). See the Consolation of Philosophy II, pr. 4: "in omni adversitate fortunae infelicissimam est genus infortunii suisse 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, I, 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 ungratifying 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. 79), 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. 1966, 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. XXXI.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-

137. Once again Francesca blames another for their predicament, this time the go-between, Callebaut, 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, Callebaut 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 [Finn.1951.1, 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 leggemo avante (that day we read in it no further), seem more than coincidentally close to Augustine’s nec ulterius 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 Scutt.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, Ruggiero 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 sexuality 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 Galehoto 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 Ysolde’s death is described as follows: “E cadde si 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 emblematizes 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 pensi?” [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 theoretically-oriented a reader as Mazzoni (Mazz.1977.1, pp. 125–20) 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” (Poggi.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. Francesco it, 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.