

Francesca Revisited

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Canto V of *Inferno*,¹ in which Dante meets the souls of Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini, has long been a source of inspiration for poets, writers, and musicians. It also has been a source of much debate and critical entrepreneurship. Unhappily, Dante's characterization of Francesca, even until recently, has engendered a number of critical expositions that safeguard what can only be described as a fallacious dichotomy, whereby the figure of Francesca has been subjected to rigid stereotyping, resulting in extemporaneous fictions that are not borne out by the text.

The nineteenth century's Romantic portrayal of Francesca did much to promote a distorted view of her as "(un) essere fragile, appassionato" [a fragile, passionate creature] (De Sanctis 1955: 80; Rossi and Galpin 1957: 39),² one who "nella fiacchezza e miseria della lotta serba inviolate le qualità essenziali dell'essere femminile, la purità, la verecondia, la gentilezza, la squisita delicatezza de' sentimenti" [in the weakness and distress of her struggle, preserves inviolate the essential qualities of womanhood — purity, modesty, gentleness, exquisite delicacy of feeling] (De Sanctis 1955: 81; Rossi and Galpin 1957: 40-41). De Sanctis's view of the living Francesca as a delicate being "in cui niente è che resista e reagisca" [without the strength to resist or react] (De Sanctis 1955: 80; Rossi and Galpin 1957: 40) implies that Francesca yields to desire through no fault of her own. In other words, she cannot be held responsible for her actions and decisions because she is a weak and passive woman.

1. All quotations in Italian from Dante's *Divine Comedy* are taken from the 1966-67 edition (edited by Petrocchi). All English translations of the passages quoted are taken from the translation by D. Sayers and B. Reynolds.

2. All English translations of the passages by De Sanctis are taken from *De Sanctis on Dante*. Essays edited and translated by J. Rossi and A. Galpin (1957: 39).

However, such a view negates the practice of *libero arbitrio*, free will, the importance of which is stressed in the *Purgatorio*:

Color the ragionando andaro al fondo,
s'accorser d'esta innata libertate;
però moralità lasciaro al mondo.
Onde, poniam the di necessitate
surga ogne amor the dentro a voi s'accende
di ritenerlo è in voi la podestate.
(*Purgatorio* 67-72)

[They who by reasoning probed creation's plan
Root-deep, perceived this inborn liberty
And bequeathed ethics to the race of man.
Grant, then, all loves that wake in you to be
Born of necessity, you still possess
Within yourselves the power of mastery.]³

In the polarity of responses to Francesca, there is also the equally misleading view that she cannot be other than a morally abhorrent and evil character. To these critics she is narcissistic (Bergin 1969: 84; Grandgent 1933: 48-49; Musa 1971: 46-48), one of "le creature del male" (Montano 1956: 183) [an evil creature], a "lying temptress" and the "pathetic protagonist of an infernal encounter" (O'Grady 1987: 84).⁴ The latter remark is in stark contrast to the poet's engaging portrayal of

3. The importance of free will is stressed also in the Epistle to Can Grande della Scala: "The subject is man according as by his merits or demerits in the exercise of his free will he is deserving of reward or punishment by justice" (Epistola X, 8, Toynbee 1966: 200), although the question of the letter's authorship is still the subject of critical debate. For example, Dronke's study of the *clausulae* in the Epistle throws doubt on Dante's authorship of the expository part of the letter (Dronke 1986: 103-11). In any case, the focus on the faculty of free will in the *Divine Comedy* is clearly a move away from the sentiments expressed in sonnet CXI, "Risposta di Dante a messer Cino," in which Dante denies that the will can be free under the rule of "Amore":

Però nel cerchio della sua palestra
liber arbitrio già mai non fu franco,
sí the consiglio invan vi si balestra. (9-11)
[Thus within his arena's bounds free will was never
free, so that counsel loses its shafts in vain there.] (Foster and Boyde 1967: 201)

As the Francesca episode was written only a few years later, it is possible to identify an element of "palinodic self-analysis," as Barolini terms it (1984: 3). In Canto V, the mature poet Dante is reasserting his belief in the positive effects of literary achievement. The preoccupations of his early work, notably the theme of love, have been transformed and universalized to reflect his "convictions about the proper use of literary art" and the "social effect" of his art, for good or for ill" (Taylor 1983: 5).

4. See also Shapiro (1975) and Kirkham (1989).

Francesca, in which outbursts of moral indignation are conspicuously absent. Dante's Francesca is not varnishing. While there are no illusions as to the serious nature of the lovers' sin, Francesca is neither the passive, frail flower nor the wanton, licentious creature circumscribed by either of these two opposing groups of critics.

Historical evidence of the lovers is somewhat sketchy. It is known that, soon after 1275, Francesca, daughter of Guido da Polenta, lord of Ravenna, was given in marriage to Gianciotto Malatesta, lord of Rimini, in order to guarantee peace between the two feuding families. Francesca became enamored of her brother-in-law Paolo (who was already married), and the two lovers were murdered by Francesca's husband between 1283 and 1286. It is likely that Dante saw or perhaps met Paolo Malatesta when the latter was Capitano del Popolo in Florence, from February 1282 to February 1283.

In Canto V, then, powerful human emotions are cardinal points in a poetic structure born of reflection and order. In the Second Circle, where the souls of the lustful are carried aloft and buffeted by the angry currents of a howling black wind, the Wayfarer first encounters sinners in a circle of Upper Hell, and the violence and disorder of the storm are a reification of the irrational nature of blind sexual passion. Amid the strong visual and aural effects of the canto and its emotional impact on the Pilgrim, the author constructs an episode that is rich in literary associations and "associative relationships" (Scott 1979: 8).⁵ A closer examination of the episode reveals that the figure of Francesca serves an important function in the poet's exploration of the reforming power of literature. Francesca is presented as a reader of books, and her articulate and intelligent discourse demonstrates a familiarity with a number of literary works, the most obvious being Guido Guinizelli's poetry and the Old French prose romance *Lancelot du Lac*. However, there are a number of other texts whose presence signals the possibility of a new poetic direction for Dante the pilgrim, who has emerged from the "selva oscura" [dark wood], and whose shifting, evol-

5. Textuality in the Francesca episode is also discussed in Carli (1950); Poggioni (1957); Cambon (1961); Mattalia (1962); Pagliaro (1967 vol. I: 115-59); Caretti (1968 vol. I: 105-31); Hatcher and Musa (1968); Hollander (1969: 106-14); Perella (1969: 140-57); Dronke (1975); Cossutta (1977); Mazzotta (1979: 160-70); Paparelli (1979); Popolizio (1980); Della Terza (1981); BarberiSquarotti (1982); Bonora (1982); Noakes (1983); Taylor (1983); Barolini (1984: 4-14).

ing nature is in contrast to the stasis of the infernal inhabitants. Moreover, if one appropriates the journey motif, one could say that Canto V contains important "signposts" or "markers," which not only indicate the edification of the Pilgrim, but which also further the reader's understanding of Dante-poet's intention to create a new poetic credo that will surpass both the efforts of the *stilnovisti* and his own youthful poetic works.

In Canto V, Dante underlines this intention through the use of the book image, where the reading motif is an essential factor in the poet's exploration of how literature can reveal truths. Ernst R. Curtius states: "The highest activities and experiences of the mind are for Dante connected with learning, with reading, with assimilating through books, a preexistent truth. Hence, for him, writing and the book can be the media of expression for the 'highest moments' of poetry and human life" (1953: 326).⁶

Francesca's gracious speech, with its marked referentiality of text, offers important lessons, whereby, without concealing or diminishing the lovers' guilt, Dante shows how their limited response to literature, that is, to the courtly-chivalric literature of the day, is characteristic of the narrowness of their perception of the human condition. Clearly, those critics who perceive Francesca as merely a diabolical personification of *lussuria* [lust] overlook the literary dimension of Dante's characterization of her. The view should be rejected, therefore, that in *Inferno* Canto V Dante is "unable to comprehend the potential danger of Francesca" (O'Grady 1987: 73); danger, not in a physical sense, but in what the critic sees as Francesca's attempt to conceal a deceitful nature to elicit sympathy for her plight. On the contrary, Dante is able to comprehend the lesson offered by Francesca as a result of her intellectual pursuits. Although the focus on one type of literature can be seen as a motivating factor in the lovers' abandonment to sexual passion, Francesca's monologue, a remarkable concentration of literary references, contains a positive message for the Wayfarer-poet, for whom the highly charged encounter elucidates his own attitude to literature and human relationships. Moreover, the Wayfarer's fall into a death-like swoon does not arise simply from a sense of

6. John Freccero believes that Dante's poetic career was "a continual *askesis* in preparation for his last work" because "Dante's poetic history derives its significance retrospectively from its ending" (1973: 73). See also Hollander (1975: 348-63).

overwhelming pity and grief for the lovers' suffering in Hell. Rather, it constitutes a moment of self-realization and cognizance. The Pilgrim-poet recognizes that he has the potential to advance from poetry "per diletto" [for enjoyment] to literary art that uplifts and transforms the human spirit. Thus Dante's fall is not a condemnation of the lovers, nor indeed of the authors of courtly literature. It is, however, an affirmation by the poet of the further possibilities that Francesca's reading could have offered had she and Paolo not chosen to remain "earthbound" (like doves bound "ferme al dolce nido" [to their sweet nest]), unwilling to develop further and discover the truths that might have saved them from eternal perdition. The Wayfarer's loss of consciousness signifies his recognition that he has avoided that same unhappy fate. It is a moment of self-awakening; an awareness of his own fallibility in the light of Francesca's experience.⁷

The motif of reading and literature, what we may term the image of the book, is a crucial theme in the Francesca episode. Although Dante-protagonist is overcome with emotion when he hears the lovers' tale, Dante-poet is seeking an alternative to the romantic literature that acted as a catalyst for Paolo's and Francesca's illicit liaison. There are, of course, other instances in the *Commedia* where Dante highlights the reading motif. The most beautiful occurs in *Paradiso XXXIII* where, at the moment when the Pilgrim contemplates the Divine Light of God, the universe is described as a volume whose scattered leaves are bound together by the love of the Creator:

Nel suo profondo vidi the s'interna,
legato con amore in un volume,
ciò the per l'universo si squaderna. (*Paradiso*, 85-87)

[In that abyss I saw how love held bound
Into one volume all the leaves whose flight
Is scattered through the universe around.]

7. Antonio Enzo Quaglio defines Francesca as "questa donna libresca, questa creatura cartacea, the proietta sul pellegrino le ombre della propria ambivalenza morale" [this bookish woman, this papery creature who projects onto the pilgrim the shadows of her own moral ambivalence] (1973: 29). Fredi Chiappelli is equally dismissive of Francesca's literary pursuits in his description of "la trivialità delle sue parafrasi dottrinali," [the triviality of her doctrinal paraphrases] (1990: 16). However, Francesca's discourse fulfills an all-important function for the Wayfarer's development. As Vittorio Russo states: "Egli (Dante) ha riconosciuto nelle parole di Francesca gli echi della sua passata esperienza morale e intellettuale" [He (Dante) has recognized in Francesca's words the echoes of his past moral and intellectual experience] (1965: 102).

In Canto I of *Inferno*, the poet states that he applied himself to the study of Virgil's "volume":

O de li altri poeti onore e lume,
vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore
che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume. (*Inferno*, 82-84)

[Oh honor and light of poets all and each,
Now let my great love stead me — the bent brow
And long hours pondering all thy book can teach.]

And we learn in *Inferno* XX that Dante knows the *Aeneid* by heart: "ben lo sai tu che la sai tutta quanta" [well thou knowest that hast by heart the whole long rhyme] (114). Of course, Dante's familiarity with the *Aeneid* is evident in Canto V. For example, Francesca's statement:

Ma s'a conoscer la prima radice
del nostro amor tu hai cotanto affetto,
dirò come colui che piange e dice (*Inferno*, 124-26)

[Yet, if so dear desire thy heart possess
To know that root of love which wrought our fall,
I'll be as those who weep and who confess]

is a direct echo of Aeneas's words in Book II, where he gives an account of the fall of Troy:

Sorrow too deep to tell, your majesty,
You order me to feel and tell once more
.....
But if so great desire
Moves you to hear the tale of our disasters
.....
However I may shudder at the memory
And shrink again in grief, let me begin.⁸

Since Paolo does not utter a word for the entire duration of the canto, Dante pays homage to his "auctore" by means of a female character. However, why choose Francesca Da Rimini? It is striking that Dido, who in *Aeneid*, Book VI, gives a long monologue, should be mentioned only briefly by Dante in Canto V: "cotali uscìr de la schiera ov'è Dido" (85) [so these from Dido's flock came fluttering]. Instead, Dante chooses a pair of contemporary lovers who are of comparable social standing. This fact differentiates Francesca and Paolo from

8. Virgil, *The Aeneid*, translated by Robert Fitzgerald (1985: 33).

Guinevere and Lancelot, to whom Francesca alludes in the closing lines of her monologue. Guinevere is Lancelot's queen and therefore her bestowal of a kiss in the French prose romance is in keeping with this difference in social status. Dante's choice of a pair of contemporary lovers gives a sense of immediacy, since their experience would have seemed more pertinent to his readers.

Of no less importance than the book motif is the bird imagery that occurs in the canto. Prior to Francesca's monologue, Dante employs three sets of bird images: "stornei," "gru," and "colombe" [starlings, cranes, and doves]. Lawrence Ryan states "From ancient Christian times, the properties of these birds had been charged with moral and spiritual meaning, since all creatures were meant to be taken as signs written by the divine hand in the Book of Nature" (1976: 27).

Thus the starlings signify lust, the cranes order, and the doves "amore" [love]. Ryan goes on to mention an analogy between the aimless flight of the starlings and the movement of the eagle, whose flight heavenward was interpreted as the goal of philosophers who attempt to arrive at a clear vision of the truth through the exercise of their intellectual powers (1976: 30). The parallel with the starlings and the eagle has important implications for an understanding of the Francesca episode, where the starlings are seen flying in a wheeling, disordered way: "E come li stornei ne portan l'ali / nel freddo tempo, a schiera larga e piena" [Like as the starlings wheel in the wintry season / In wide and clustering flocks wing-borne, wind-borne] (40-41), the cranes flying in a direct line: "E come i gru van cantando for lai, / faccendo in aere di sé lunga riga" [And as the cranes go chanting their harsh lay, / Across the sky in long procession trailing] (46-47), and the two doves flying down toward the earth. There are, therefore, three types of movement or flight: disordered, ordered, and earthbound. One could say that the cranes and starlings form an antithetical pair denoting human society in a state of order and chaos — that is, with the faculty of Reason guiding human affairs on the one hand, and with the free reign of emotions and desires threatening to destroy ordered social networks on the other. The downward flight of the two doves therefore would constitute an inversion of the eagle's upward flight. This idea is represented vividly in the first canto of *Paradiso*, where Dante describes Beatrice's heavenward gaze in terms of bird imagery,

specifically those virtues associated with the eagle's legendary ability to gaze into the sun and the remarkable power of its flight:

Quando Beatrice in sul sinistro fianco
vidi rivolta e riguardar nel sole:
aguglia sì non li s'affisse unquanco
E sì come secondo raggio suole
uscir del primo e risalire in suso,
pur come pelegrin che tornar vuole,
così de l'atto suo, per li occhi infuso
ne l'immagine mia, il mio si fece,
e fissi li occhi al sole altre nostr'uso. (*Paradiso*, 46-54)

[When Beatrice, intent upon the sun,
Turned leftward, and so stood and gazed before;
No eagle e'er so fixed his eyes thereon.

And, as the second ray Both evermore
Strike from the first and dart back up again,
Just as the peregrine will stoop and soar,
So through her eyes her gesture, pouring in
On my mind's eye, shaped mine; I stared wide-eyed
On the sun's face, beyond the wont of men.]

Later, in Canto XXV, Beatrice is said to be guiding Dante in his "alto volo" toward the contemplation of the Divine:

E quella pia the guidò le penne
de le mie ali a così alto volo.⁹ (*Paradiso*, 49-50)

[And Beatrice, compassionate, the same
Who led my pinions soaring thus on high.]

In harnessing her intellectual skills to contemplate "amor sensibilis," Francesca can be seen as choosing the earthbound flight of the doves, thereby neglecting the contemplation of higher goals, "amor intellectualis," that is, the heavenward flight of the eagle and the lessons of Lady Philosophy. Particularly when the presence of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* is noted among Francesca's reading matter ("Nessun maggior dolore/ the ricordarsi del tempo felice/ ne la miseria" [The bitterest woe of woes / Is to remember in our wretchedness / Old happy times]), it becomes clear that Dante is pointing the reader in a particular direction. In her reading, however, Francesca does

9. See Shankland (1975 and 1977), Shoaf (1975), and Moleta (1980: 98-100).

not continue the process of cognition and illumination that leads to the ultimate goal of Paradise. Together with the other lustful sinners, the two lovers subvert reason to carnal appetite, "la ragion sommettono al talento"(39), and thereby ignore both the nurturing of the intellect and the soul's capacity for knowledge and virtue (the goal of sanctifying grace). In so doing, they forfeit all possibility of peace ("pace"), a word mentioned twice by Francesca. In the fulfillment of her nascent desire, Francesca, the exemplary reader, ultimately neglects the supreme text that would have promoted the possibility of peace among the Blessed in Heaven.

For Paolo and Francesca, the act of reading is the "prima radice" [first root] of their love; not only does it mark the realization of their mutual desire, "li occhi ci sospinse/ quella lettura" [as we read on, our eyes met now and then] (130-31), but it also signals the moment of their renunciation of the higher goals of learning and the development of a spiritual outlook; "quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante" [we read no more that day] (138). Not surprisingly, therefore, when Francesca speaks of the reason for her love, she makes reference to her reading and to a variety of texts and authors that may be grouped into three broad categories: classical (the works of Virgil and Ovid), medieval/contemporary (*Lancelot* prose, the works of Boethius and Cappellanus, *stilnovisti*), and divinely inspired works (the Bible, St. Augustine's *Confessions*). As with the symbolism of the cranes and starlings (order and disorder in human affairs), the first two groups of authors and texts may be seen as works dealing with the vicissitudes of human existence (themes of love, betrayal, suffering, and death), whereas the third group is the one neglected by Paolo and Francesca (the earthbound doves), and this action leads to their spiritual perdition.

Taking a closer look at the densely packed literary references, it can be seen that in verses 100-107, where the anaphora of the word "Amore" occurs, echoes of the stilnovistic credo may be found:

Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
prese costui de la bella persona
the mi fu tolta [...] (*Inferno*, 100-102)

[Love, that so soon takes hold in the gentle breast.]

The words recall the opening line of Guinizelli's "Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore" [Love returns always to a noble

heart], but omit the simile "come l'ausello in selva a la verdura" [like a bird to the green in the forest]. The Guinizellian echo is one of a number of literary reverberations that serve to stimulate both Dante's faculty of memory and his self-awareness.¹⁰ For example, the notion of the gentle heart harks back to Cappelanus's treatise on love, while the death of the lovers calls to mind the tragic account of Pyramus and Thisbe in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book IV, in which the fruits of the mulberry tree (where the lovers had planned to meet secretly) are stained with blood and have changed to a dark purple color. Ovid says, "The fruits of the tree were sprinkled with his blood, and changed to a dark purple hue. The roots, soaked with his gore, tinged the hanging berries with the same rich colour" (1955: 97).

This may be compared to Francesca's words to Dante:

O animal grazioso e benigno
the visitando vai per l'aere perso
noi the tignemmo il mondo di sanguigno. (*Inferno*, 89-90)

[O living creature, gracious and so kind,
Coming through this black air to visit us,
Us, who in death the globe incarnadined]

The idea of staining the earth with blood and the inclusion of the adjective "perso," which, we are told in *Convivio*, denotes a color that combines purple with black where black predominates, certainly has links with Ovid's tale.¹¹ The stilnovistic overtones also continue with "Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona" [Love, that to no loved heart remits love's score] (103), and the final "Amor condusse noi ad una morte" [Love to a single death brought him and me] (106) again recalls Thisbe's words: "our steadfast love and the hour of our death have united us" (Ovid 1955: 38). While the death of the two classical lovers is described by Ovid in vivid detail, Francesca and Paolo's murder is only alluded to, and links with the classical story thus serve to heighten the dramatic tension for Dante's readers, who knew only too well what grisly fate lay in store for the two contemporary lovers.

At first glance, Francesca's literary references appear to deal

10. With regard to "Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore," Moleta states: "The discreet changes by which, in *Inf. V*, Dante 'delyricises' the text which he so admired, are part of the complex moral vision through which, in the *Commedia*, he reviews his cultural formation" (1980: 97-98).

11. "Lo perso è uno colore misto di purpureo e di nero, ma vince lo nero, e da lui si domina" (*Il Convivio*, IV, xx, 2).

exclusively with themes of love and the vagaries of the human heart; for example, the lover's anguish, the physical aspect of the beloved, Love's driving force, and the credences of Love. Francesca's account of the reading of the Lancelot story, and the resulting awareness of desire, seem to confirm this (130-31). Moreover, comparisons may be made with Dante's account of his youthful experience of love in the *Vita Nuova*, where the sight of the beloved causes him to tremble and to turn pale.¹²

Dante's early poetry explores and analyzes the physical and psychological changes wrought by "Amore" and, in her doctrine of love, Francesca also emphasizes the various ways in which Love manifests itself. This is particularly evident in the choice of verbs that signal a dynamic change in her relationship with Paolo, for example, "s'apprende," "prese," and convey its tragic outcome; "condusse noi ad una morte" (106) and "chi a vita ci spense" (107) [Love to a single death brought him and me / Cain's place lies waiting for our murderer now]. Like the youthful protagonist in the *Vita Nuova*, the Wayfarer in Canto V experiences a powerful emotional response. In the latter case Dante is moved to tears by Francesca's revelation, "i tuoi martiri / a lagrimar mi fanno tristo e pio" [Thy dreadful fate, / Francesca, makes me weep, it so inspires / Pity] (116-17). At the same time, he desires to know more, and the concluding part of Francesca's monologue begins and ends with two literary "markers" that are crucial to the Wayfarer-poet's development. The first of these is contained in the observation that Francesca makes at the beginning:

Nessun maggior dolore
che ricordarsi del tempo felice
ne la miseria; e ciò sa 'l tuo dottore. (*Inferno*, 121-23)

[The bitterest woe of woes
Is to remember in our wretchedness
Old happy times; and this thy Doctor knows.]

The phrase is a direct echo of Boethius's words:

12. "Mi parve sentire uno mirabile tremore incominciare nel mio petto da la sinistra parte e distendersi di subito per tutte le parti del mio corpo," (XIV, 4) and "quasi discolorito tutto per vedere questa donna" (XVI, 4) [I felt the beginning of an extraordinary throbbing on the left side of my breast which immediately spread to all the parts of my body] and [all pale as I was, to go and see my may].

In the midst of adversity, the worst misfortune of all is to have once been happy.¹³

The reference to Boethius's sacred dialogue with Philosophy precedes the moment of Paolo and Francesca's mutual awakening to sexual desire, with the description of the latter set within the context of a famous courtly-chivalric episode, that is, Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere's first kiss:

Quando leggemmo il disiato riso
esser baciato da cotanto amante,
questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,
la bocca mi basciò tutto tremante. (*Inferno*, 133-36)

[We read of the smile, desired of lips long-thwarted,
Such smile, by such a lover kissed away,
He that may never more from me be parted
Trembling all over, kissed my mouth.]

Unlike Boethius, who reflects on the nature of happiness and the human condition, Francesca and Paolo misdirect their energies and disregard their responsibilities. They lose sight of the multiform aspects of human nature and surrender to the demands of carnal appetite. It is at this point that the noble Francesca seals her fate. She reads no further - a metaphor that conveys the narrowing of her vision. Conversely, her words help the Pilgrim-poet gain new insight into the future direction of his poetic voice. The full import of the message becomes clear only when Francesca's concluding words are set against the context of their literary source. The reference, although not an obvious one, endows the episode with great dramatic force, and is, in fact, the moment of Saint Augustine's dramatic conversion as recorded in his *Confessions*. Saint Augustine opens the Bible at random and reads from Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans:

Let us pass our time honorably, as by the light of day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites.¹⁴

He then adds:

13. *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book II, 4. The phrase also recalls *Aeneid*, Book II (see note 8).

14. Romans 13: 13-14. Saint Augustine does not quote the entire passage.

I had no wish to read more and no need to do so (nec ultra volui legere).¹⁵

Francesca's words are a direct parallel, but the comparison does not end there. Previous to the moment of revelation and conversion, Saint Augustine has been intent on soul-searching:

I probed the hidden depths of my soul and wrung its pitiful secrets from it, and when I mustered them all before the eyes of my heart, a great storm broke within me, bringing with it a great deluge of tears.¹⁶

The experience of Paolo and Francesca has been in the reverse order to Augustine's. They have neglected the study of God's text and so, in Hell, Paolo is unable to stop his flow of tears.¹⁷ In this way, Augustine's internal struggle, the "great storm" and the "deluge of tears" that precede his spiritual conversion are evoked by Paolo's fitful crying amidst the stormy wind that is now his eternal punishment:

Mentre l'uno spirto questo disse,
l'altro piangéa; sì the di pietade
io venni men così com'io morisse.
E caddi come corpo morto cade. (*Inferno*, 139-142)

[While the one spirit thus spoke, the other's crying
Wailed on me with a sound so lamentable,
I swooned for pity like as I were dying,
And, as a dead man falling, down I fell.]

The Pilgrim is overcome at this point, not by feelings of grief or helplessness, but by the gravity of his insight. He recognizes that he must change course, so that he may undergo the redemptive experience of *Purgatorio* and ensure that his literary endeavors follow the upward flight of the eagle, and in so doing, promote social and political reforms. In the richness of its literary dimension, Francesca's characterization reveals the direction that the Wayfarer-poet must take. Her fate is that of a character who no longer can experience change or renewal, but her impressive speech, with its subtle hues and intelligent articulation, is nei-

15. *Confessions*, Book VIII, 12. See Swing (1962: 299), Hollander (1969: 112-14), and Scott (1979: 14).

16. Book VIII, 12. See also Dronke (1975: 113-14).

17. Douglas Radcliff-Umstead states: "Part of the task of writing the *Divine Comedy* was to direct humankind away from romantic literature with its message of earthly love's supremacy to experience the redeeming grace of celestial affection" (1978: 54).

ther the whimsical fancy of a simpering maid nor the fatal lure of a beguiling siren. It is a speech of multiform elements, and the message contained therein offers hope and the possibility of change for the Pilgrim-poet and for all pilgrims undertaking the "cammin di nostra vita" [journey of our life].