University of Reading

Dante's 'Francesca' and the poet's attitude towards courtly literature

Article

Published Version

Scott, J. A. (1979) Dante's 'Francesca' and the poet's attitude towards courtly literature. Reading Medieval Studies, V. pp. 4-20. ISSN 0950-3129 Available at http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84220/

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See Guidance on citing.

Publisher: University of Reading

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the End User Agreement.

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

DANTE'S FRANCESCA AND THE POET'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS COURTLY LITERATURE

In the De Vulgari Eloquentia, Dante speaks of the supremacy of the langue d'oil where prose is concerned: 'propter sui faciliorem ac delectabiliorem vulgaritatem quicquid redactum sive inventum ad vulgare prosaycum, suum est: videlicet Biblia cum Troianorum Romanorumque gestibus compilata et Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime et quamplures alie ystorie ac doctrine.'[1] The epithet pulcerrime stands in intriguing opposition to the possible condemnation of the Arthurian romances contained in Francesca da Rimini's final speech in Inferno V.[2] Of course, pulcerrime is not a moral judgment; but for the later Dante at least, aesthetic beauty and goodness could not be divorced.

This brings us immediately to the problem of dating the Inferno. I believe that the Comedy cannot have been conceived in the form we know it before or during the composition of the De Vulgari Eloquentia, where the canzone reigns supreme and the poet draws up a retrospective balance-sheet. For reasons expounded elsewhere, I am convinced that the first cantos of the Inferno were written after the celebration of Aeneas's descent to the underworld in the Convivio; in an ideal scheme, shortly afterwards.[3] It is therefore likely that the fifth canto of the Inferno was written four or five years after the passage quoted from the DVE. In this space of time, did Dante change his attitude towards courtly literature or 'fiction' in general? If so, it would not be out of character in a writer whose writings show a deep-rooted need to re-examine and formulate anew his answers to the problems presented by literature and life.

The first thing to note is the key-word in Francesca's first speech: Love. One of the most striking examples of anaphora in the Comedy is found in Inf. V.100-108, where each terzina is introduced by the word Amor. In l. 100 ('Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende'), Francesca echoes the love credo of the poet's own youth, when he had referred to Guido Guinizzelli's celebration of the essential bond between love and the noble heart.[4] In Francesca's addition of the word 'ratto' ('quickly') there is further agreement with Dante's own experience of youthful love, while the verses that follow illustrate his early declaration:

> Bieltade appare in saggia donna pui,
> che piace a li occhi sì, che dentro al core
> nasce un disio de la cosa piacente;
> e tanto dura talora in costui,
> che fa svegliar lo spirito d'Amore.
> E simil face in donna omo valente.[5]

There are two other points of contact with the Vita Nuova: one is the personification of love: the other - less direct - is the link between love and the writing of poetry in the vernacular tongue. The former had been regarded by Dante as the raison d'être for writing in a language easily understood by women: 'E lo primo che cominciò a dire sì come poeta volgare, si mosse però che volle fare intendere le sue parole a donna, a la quale era malagevole d'intendere li versi latini. E questo è contra coloro che rimano spora altra matera che amorosa ...' (Vita Nuova XXV.6). Nothing could be farther from the Comedy's vision, which attempts to include every aspect of human experience, than this narrow horizon - already extended to embrace salus, venus, virtus in the De Vulgari, where, after the bitter experience of exile, the love poet of the Vita Nuova was transformed into the cantor rectitudinis of DVE II.ii.9.

The same chapter of the Vita Nuova discusses the use of allegory and poetic licence, leading to the personification of love 'sì come fosse sustanzia corporale: la quale cosa, secondo la veritade, è falsa: chè Amore non è per sè sì come sustanzia, ma è uno accidente in sustanzia' (XXV.1). In other words, the author-commentator of the Vita Nuova sets out to 'alienate' his readers from one of the basic conventions of courtly literature: that which required love to be an actor in the drama, the overwhelming force of the Virgilian Amor vincit omnia; et nos cedamus amori.

That belief is found in courtly guise in Francesca's second axiom ('Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona'). [6] It is not one to which the author of the Comedy subscribed. In fact, at the very centre of the poem, he goes to great lengths to remind us of the supremacy of reason and free will (God's greatest gift to man, as Dante was to repeat in both Paradiso V.19-21 and Monarchia I.xii.6):

> Onde, poniam che di necessitate,
> surga ogne amor che dentro a voi s'accende,
> di ritenerlo è in voi la podestate.
>
> (Purgatorio XVIII.70-72)

Only a few years before beginning the Comedy, however, Dante had written a sonnet to Cino da Pistoia in which he had stated categorically that man's will is never free in Love's arena:

> Però nel cerchio de la sua palestra
> liber arbitrio già mai non fu franco,
> sì che consiglio invan vi si balestra. [7]

I do not think it entirely fanciful to suggest that one of the reasons that led Dante to choose Francesca as his exemplum of sinful love and the illusions that

could ensnare even the 'noble heart' may have been the memory of his own assertion of love's omnipotence through the cognate franco. The poet was highly sensitive to the etymology of the words and names he used; and here the irony of hell subverts his belief 'Nomina sunt consequentia rerum' (VN XIII.4). Beatrice remains the true bringer of beatitude; but Francesca has sacrificed her eternal freedom, just as her name also reminds us of her link with the French literature of love that plays such a dramatic role in this sacrifice whereby her will becomes enslaved to passion: liber arbitrio ... non fu franco. [8] Moreover, as late as 1307-1308, in what is possibly the last poem written before the Comedy, Dante had described himself as love's fool. [9] It is therefore important to realise that a fundamental conversion took place between that moment and the inspiration that led to the writing of the 'sacred poem', where Francesca represents the first stage in the sinner's understanding of evil and the process by which his will is restored to true freedom (Purgatorio XXVII. 140).

Just as significant as Francesca's threefold use of the personification of love is the way the poet uses this same device to highlight the pilgrim's dilemma. Exactly half-way through the canto, he falls a prey to pity for the 'donne antiche e' cavalieri' in words that echo the opening scene of the Comedy. [10] After Francesca's first speech, the wayfarer is troubled by the recognition of the dolci pensier that had led the two lovers to the doloroso passo - thoughts which must have been akin to those he had harboured in his love for Beatrice. Francesca's suffering makes him tristo e pio (ll. 116-117). This has led generations of critics to speak of the poet's all-too-human compassion for Francesca, rooted in a conflict between his judgment as a moralist and his sympathies as a man. There is no conflict; the two coexist. And it is precisely because Francesca has a noble, attractive side to her nature that the pilgrim and we, as readers, can identify with her. The theological meaning of tristitia has been correctly illustrated by Vittorio Russo in a fine essay as leading to and arising from cognitio et recusatio mali, an awareness of one's own sins which is a necessary condition for true tristitia-misericordia. [11] The climax comes when pity makes the pilgrim fall into a dead faint, echoing the theme of the Liebestod that is central to the whole episode. [12]

What has led to this is Francesca's answer to the question:

> ... al tempo d'i dolci sospiri,
> a che e come concedette amore
> che conosceste i dubbiosi disiri? (ll. 118-120)

This is the pilgrim's supreme dilemma: how were such grace and nobility transformed into such guilt? How did the 'sweet thoughts' lead to adultery and incest? [13] Here I must point out that I cannot accept the traditional inter-

pretation of i dubbiosi disiri as indicating that the brother and sister-in-law were still uncertain whether or not their desire was mutual. Poetry is often ambiguous; and I do not reject what other readers have seen in the text. But for me at least what is of paramount importance is the opposition between the sweetness of innocent love and the torment of guilty passion. It is the moment of truth, when the 'dolci sospiri' give way to the 'dubbiosi disiri'. And here I think we must recognise the presence of dubbiare in the sense of 'to fear' (as in the previous canto, l. 18), so that the pilgrim's words must refer to the transformation of sweet thoughts into the fearful desires of a guilty love - where the English epithet happily retains at least some of the range of possible meanings. And the Italian text - one of the richest in vertical, associative relations - may well send us to the romance mentioned in Francesca's speech: Le Livre de Lancelot del Lac, where Galehot tells Guinevere 'Car on ne puet nule rien amer que on ne dout'. [14]

The pilgrim's echoing of Francesca's personification of love must, however, be offset against the use of the word amor in l. 78. Commentators take this to refer to the lovers' passion, their guilty love. Now this should be possible according to Francesca's own words 'Amor ... ancor non m'abbandona' (ll. 103-105) and the poet's reminder to us (Purgatorio XVII. 103-105) that love is the motive force behind all good and evil actions. But does it fit the context? Here, Virgil tells his charge that, when the two souls are blown nearer, he should entreat them to come 'by that love which drives them, and they will come' (l. 78). Dante's words are short and to the point: 'O tormented souls, come to speak to us, if Another does not prevent it!' Where then is the reference to the 'love which drives them' in the pilgrim's exhortation? The souls are described as affannate ('tormented'), and the commentators would seem to have taken it for granted that through this adjective Dante refers to Paolo's and Francesca's love, which is of course, the cause of their affanno. But this is surely a trifle far-fetched. A key is to be found in the word mena ('drives'), used in two previous lines to indicate the beating of the eternal storm which 'seizes and drives the spirits before it' (mena li spirti con la sua rapina, l. 32), buffeting them 'this way, that way, down and up' (di qua, di là, di giù, di sù li mena, l. 43). It is of course a punishment fit for those who had allowed themselves to be tossed on the storms of passion. But in what sense can the bufera infernal be called 'that love which drives them' (quello amor che i mena)? The answer must be that, in this first encounter with sin, Virgil attempts to remind his pupil that the punishment of this sin is willed by God, 'the First Love' ('l primo amore), that love which moves the sun and the other stars and which is also symbolized in the sun which leads man to salvation (Inf. I.18: 'che mena dritto altrui per ogne calle').

As may be inferred from Francesca's mention of the 'king of the universe' (l. 91), God is never directly named in hell. Altri ('another') refers to

God, as does altrui in Inferno XXVI.141.[15] Altri is thus the pilgrim's way of invoking God when speaking to the damned; and the epithet affannate applied to those souls clearly means, as Sapegno points out 'tormentate. In vita, dalla passione; e qui, dalla giustizia divina'.[16] If this is so, I would propose a capital A for Amor in l. 78. Virgil's words may then be seen as a preliminary correction of both Francesca's references to Amor as the omnipotent personification of the courtly tradition and the pilgrim's own error in taking up this fiction in his final question.[17] We must also note that Francesca's reply to this question omits all reference to Amor. Instead, the word leggere ('to read') returns no less than four times in her speech, creating an ideal arc from Noi leggiavamo ('We were reading') to the final piú non vi leggemmo avante ('we read in it no further') and a semantic frame for the accusation: Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse ('A Galehot was the book and he who wrote it'). The god of love has been replaced by a book and its author: they lead the couple to damnation and the eternal punishment meted out by the true God of Love, 'quello amor che i mena'.

Mention of 'the book' leads to two questions: first, the problem of literary models or sources; second, Dante's assessment of the relationship between literature and life.

Few passages can be so dense in their associative relationships. We have already noted the links with Guinizzelli and perhaps Virgil and Andreas Capellanus in ll. 100-105. Line 106 (Amor condusse noi ad una morte) is, as we shall see, redolent of the Tristan and Pyramus legends and at the same time an oblique caricature of the sacrament of matrimony ('ex ambobus fieri unum': cf. l. 135). But the densest part of the whole canto is found in Francesca's last speech, where in the course of eighteen lines (vv. 121-138) we find no less than four references to various authors.

The first occupies ll. 121-123. It is sparked off by the anguished memory of past happiness as described by Boethius in his De Consolatione Philosophiae (II.iv): 'Nam in omni aduersitate fortunae infelicissimum est genus infortunii fuisse felicem'. The controversial words 'e ciò sa 'l tuo dottore' may be a direct reference to Boethius made by this 'provincial intellectual'.[18] It is, however, more likely that Francesca is alluding to the eternal frustration experienced in Limbo by Virgil, already described as 'l mio dottore in l. 70 of the present canto (indeed, the term is exclusively his until the meeting with Statius, whereupon the latter joins Virgil in the phrase a' miei dottori in Purg. XXIV.143). What is beyond doubt is the Virgilian reminiscence in the following terzina ('But if you have so great a desire to know the first root of our love, I shall speak like one who weeps and yet speaks', ll. 124-126). This is based on Aeneas's reply to Dido when she asks him to tell the story of the fall of Troy: 'infandum, regina, iubes renouare

dolorem/ ... sed si tantus amor casus cognoscere nostros/ ... quamquam animus meminisse horret luctuque refugit,/ incipiam'.[19]

Two of the four references have been rapidly indicated. The other two are the most telling: one transparent, the other hidden from most readers. The first springs from the epicentre of courtly romance and concerns Lancelot, 'modèle accompli de cette chevalerie de l'amour qui érige le culte de la femme en religion'.[20] Francesca's account of her fall has a number of points of contact with the French story when it describes the meeting between Lancelot and Guinevere which led to their first kiss. The affinity links the characters of Lancelot, Paolo and Dante himself. The first common feature is that each trembles before his beloved: '& li cheualiers tramble si durement que a paines puet la roine saluer'; and in the scene of the gab Dante recounts how he had felt 'uno mirabile tremore incominciare nel mio petto da la sinistra parte e distendersi di subito per tutte le parti del mio corpo' (VN XIV.4). During their reading of the romance, both Francesca and Paolo turn pale (l. 131): even so, Lancelot 'a toute la color perdue' and Dante became 'quasi discolorito tutto per vedere questa donna'.[21] Other details are shared by the romance and Inferno V. Lancelot is so troubled by Guinevere's presence and behaviour that he 'en fu si angoisseus que pa . j . poi [quil] ne so pasme ... & la roine meismes le douta qui le vit muer & cangier . si le prinst par lespaule que il ne caist'; nevertheless, the knight 'est si dolans & mas & ne fina onques puis de plorer'.[22] In the Comedy, Paolo's constant weeping accompanies Francesca's account. Their combined effect, as we have already seen, is so to overwhelm the pilgrim with pietade and trestizia that he faints 'cosî com'io morisse/ E caddi come corpo morto cade' (ll. 141-142: 'as though I were dead/ And I fell as a dead body falls'). Here, the Italian poem combines the salient features of two of the most celebrated romances: that of Lancelot and the equally famous Tristan story.

As N.J. Perella has reminded us: 'Tristan and Iseult and Pyramus and Thisbe offered the best-known cases of a love that led a couple to a single death. Precisely because Dante knew this, it is of the utmost significance that he does not name Iseult and makes no mention of Ovid's unlucky adolescent lovers in the canto' (op.cit., p. 149). The poet's dramatic genius knew that his ill-fated couple from Rimini, united for all eternity, must not share the spotlight with any other. Significantly enough, in Inferno V, Tristan is the only other exemplum from the Middle Ages (there are nine altogether: six from antiquity, three from 'modern times'). His name on its own was sufficient to remind the reader that his whole raison d'être was his love for Iseult, his uncle's wife: here was a tale of adultery and incest, of union in death, far closer to the Francesca-Paolo story and free from all associations with the Holy Grail. It was perhaps because of this that Dante rejected it: its power was too great on its own account, its end too well known. Besides,

Tristan and Iseult's passion depended on the essential element of the love potion: it precluded freedom of choice. [23] Dante required the supreme literary monument to the cult of courtly love, which epitomized the essential theme of the misuse of free-will. Above all, he needed the climactic scene of the kiss between Lancelot and Guinevere, which sets the seal on Guinevere's choice of lover according to Galehot's words: '& ie vous pri que vos li dones vostre amor & que vous le prenes a vostre cheualier a tous iours ... dont le baisies deuant moi par commenchement damor vraie' (Le Livre ...., p.263).

The kiss has occupied a number of critics. In the French romance, it is Guinevere who takes the initiative: 'Et la roine voit que li cheualiers nen ose plus faire . si le prent par le menton & le baise deuant galahot asses longement . si que la dame de malohaut seit quele le baise' (ibid.). Some have imagined that Dante may have known a different version, according to which it was Lancelot who kissed the Queen. Apart from the consideration that such an action tends either to cease abruptly or to become mutual (cf. Old French s'entrebaiser), Dante must have known Guinevere as the 'prime mover', according to Paradiso XVI.13-15, where the reference to 'quella che tossio/ al primo fallo scritto di Ginevra' makes it clear that Dante had read 'si que la dame de malohaut seit quele le baise' or words to that effect. Two American scholars have expressed the view that Dante makes Francesca alter the details of the romance to cover up the fact that it was she who 'made advances to her brother-in-law', thus throwing the blame on Paolo and attempting to 'seduce the pilgrim into believing her words and pitying her deeply'. [24] I find little in Dante's text to support this ingenious elucubration.

It is of course true that Francesca tells the pilgrim that she and Paolo were reading about Lancelot and 'come amor lo strinse'. One point in the story overcame them:

> Quando leggemmo il disïato riso
> esser basciato da cotanto amante,
> questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,
> la bocca mi basciò tutto tremante. (ll. 133-136)

At this point in our reading of Dante's story we should perhaps be less ingenious and more naive. It is hardly surprising to find that the poet has altered a detail in a well-known plot: we need only remember the way he turns his beloved Virgil's words upside-down in Purgatorio XXII.37-42. We ought occasionally to remember that Dante was not writing for scholars with modern libraries at their disposal. It must have seemed obvious to a medieval reader (as surely it does, nowadays) that Lancelot was 'dying' to kiss Guinevere. Her action described in the romance made that possible. He did kiss il disïato riso - Guinevere's smile, her laughing parted lips, whose romantic

halo is rent on Francesca's bocca, just as both stand in exemplary opposition to Beatrice's santo riso finally revealed in all its glory to her true lover in Paradiso XXIII.46-60. To return to hell, however, we must note the difference in situation between the Italian scene and its French counterpart. The latter had described a typically courtly relationship, one where the lover humbly laid himself prostrate before the awesome beauty and majesty of his beloved, his midons or 'lord'. So literature reflected and distorted the feudal act of homage. 'In this ceremony it was the lord who conferred the kiss, especially when it was to be on the mouth' (Perella, op.cit., p.129). This is of course the function of Guinevere's kiss in the French romance. She is in reality - as well as in the courtly convention - Lancelot's superior, as Arthur's Queen. It is through the osculum interveniens that she bestows the supreme gift, as we have already seen in Galehot's entreaty to her to grant the kiss as a pledge and as we may note again in the scene where she kisses Lancelot in public and addresses him in words whose significance escape the multitude, including her own husband: 'Et elle laisse tous lez autres & iete a lancelot les braus au col & le baise voiant tous cheuls qui ve[o]ir le volrent ... & por la moie honnor que vous aues hui maintenue vous otroi iou mamor & moi' (Le Livre de Lancelot ..., p.427).

But all this is far removed from the relationship that existed between Francesca and Paolo. What is even more important is that it is utterly foreign to Dante's poetic universe: not only was it inconceivable that Beatrice could take such an initiative, but 'No woman in the world of the dolce stil nuovo alludes to her own beauty, or speaks openly of being sexually attracted to the man she loves' (Dronke, op.cit., p.125). To go beyond this would have been to transform Francesca into a shameless creature who could not gain or retain the reader's sympathy - an element so necessary to the poet's purpose. He had jettisoned the personifications of Lust in order to present a being of flesh and blood, but one endowed with grace and a certain nobility with whom the poet and his readers can and must identify: 'there but for the grace of God ...' is an essential response, if Dante's purpose is to be realized. Francesca's literary creator did not fall into the trap of sermonizing, of making all his sinners utterly evil, of making this most attractive of sins unappetizing. Homo sum ...: Francesca must retain her attraction in order to elicit this reaction in us.

It is also important to judge the distance that separated Dante from the feudal world of courtly love. This is well brought out in Guido da Pisa's commentary, most probably written some six or seven years after Dante's death: 'In isto quinto cantu autor tangit duas historias, unam antiquam et unam modernam ... Antiquam vero tangit ibi: "Noi leggiavam un giorno per diletto/ di Lancialotto" ...' [25] This is a salutary reminder that the term 'medieval' is a dangerous yardstick. Indeed, we must go one step

further and realize that Dante's method in the Inferno and Purgatorio is essentially to turn away from the exempla of the past in order to turn the full force of his poetic spotlight on men and women who had for the most part died in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. His great sinners in hell obey a rule which tolerates only one exception: the eloquent figure of ancient Ulysses.

And so we come to see that the Italian poet not only rejects some elements of a past feudal world, he also makes his guide Virgil act quite out of character in dismissing his great heroine, Dido. H. Gemelin quite misses the point, when he writes 'Sie ist so bekannt, dass Dante nicht einmal ihren Namen nennt'. [26] Even more than with Tristan, the poet realizes the danger that another great literary creation may steal the limelight. He therefore places her (by periphrasis, in ll. 61-62) among the catalogue which is immediately forgotten in the second half of the canto, when the poet wills his readers to see the image of sin mirrored in a man and a woman who had been part of the contemporary scene. We should never forget that the Comedy enjoyed a succès de scandale. Paolo had been in Florence in 1282-1283; Francesca's father was there in 1285; and a twist of fate willed that Dante himself should end his days at the court of Francesca's nephew. The impact of the scene described in the second half of Inferno V must overwhelm us with it sheer topicality in all senses of the word.

As for the relationship between art and life, it is hardly necessary to insist on the way the author of the Comedy attempted to hold up a divine mirror to life as he saw and judged it. The realism of this work, which has struck countless readers, is in stark contrast with the romantic world of the Lancelot legend - or for that matter with the youthful world of the Vita Nuova. The poet's purpose was now to express an urgent moral message 'on behalf of the world that lives badly'. Nothing could be allowed to detract from that mission. Every detail had to fit in with the overall plan.

And so, we come back to the intriguing line: 'Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse' (137). The meaning is clear: in Francesca's and Paolo's sinful love, the book and its author played the same rôle as Galehot in the decisive meeting between Lancelot and Guinevere. Galehot is, of course, the one who does all the speaking while Lancelot remains silent '& ne fina onques puis de plorer'. Galehot tells the queen that Lancelot's loyalty in love is as great as his prowess at arms: 'Car autresi com il est plus preus dautre hommes . autresi est ses cuers plus vrais que tout li autre'. Lancelot's love and devotion are the greatest treasure in the world: 'Et se ie ne vous em prioie si vous en deuries vous porcachier . Car plus riche tresoir ne porries vous mie conquerre'. But above all Dante's line refers to the fact that it was Galehot who 'arranged' the lovers' kiss. So, here, the book and

its author brought Paolo and Francesca to their fateful kiss.

It is perhaps not easy for us to attribute the condemnation to Dante the author of the Comedy: we can try to avoid the issue by dismissing Francesca's statement as an excuse, a desperate attempt to find a scapegoat. It is true that the reading-matter acts as a catalyst, and that the lovers would no doubt have misused any other means at hand (in the Tristan story, a game of chess which brings the lovers into intimate contact). But it is also true that there are a number of other elements to be considered. The first is Francesca's direct reference to the bond between love and the noble heart: here, the poetic credo of Dante's youth is placed in the mouth of an adulteress to describe the origin of her sinful passion. This, too, is perhaps the misuse of literature that worries the poet of the Comedy. It is certainly a reference to a physical passion:

> Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
> prese costui de la bella persona
> che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende.
> (ll. 100-102)

Moreover, we must never forget that Guinizzelli has been placed - mirabile visu - among the lustful in Purgatory. Dante's experience of sin therefore begins and ends with his 'poetic master'; and his final judgment on the man (or rather his writings) creates an astonishing link with the lovers of Rimini.[27] It is as if Dante were contemplating an image of his own youthful love, partly inspired by that same master, an image transformed almost beyond recognition in the distorting mirror of hell (and this is surely not alien to the pilgrim's final swoon).

The message is made plainer and given a further dimension by the antithetical presence of another book, hidden in the final line of Francesca's speech: 'that day we read in it no further' (l. 138). Critics have usually seen in this an example of Francesca's reticence - a perfect finishing touch to the portrait so carefully built up in the space of some fifty lines of verse, a miracle of artistic concision.[28] What they have missed is the link with the preceding line, emphasized quite naturally by the pronoun vi:

> Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse:
> quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.

Francesca's book stands in exemplary contrast to another found in the last line's associative dimension: God's Book, the Bible which Augustine had taken up and read at the turning-point in his conversion. It is hardly necessary for me to mention that the Confessions were one of the most widely read

texts in the Middle Ages. The book was certainly well known to Dante. In the passage that concerns us, Dante could even read of the saint's experience of that 'procella ingens ferens ingentem imbrem lacrimarum' (VIII.xii.28) which may well have inspired the contrapasso of the infernal storm as well as Paolo's unceasing torrent of tears. [29] Then, the decisive moment, when Augustine opens the Bible at random, his eyes falling on Romans XIII.13 ('Non in comisationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et inpudicitiis ... sed induite dominum Iesum Christum et carnis prouidentiam ne feceritis in concupiscentiis'). Ne feceritis in concupiscentiis: the commentary on Francesca's and Paolo's behaviour is almost too obvious, followed as it is by the pregnant words Nec ultra uolui legere. The parallel with Francesca's closing words is one that would have struck an attentive reader familiar with Augustine's text. [30] So, too, he might notice the similarity in the pilgrim's situation, overcome by pity and grief at the beginning of his moral journey, and that of the saint who had shed youthful tears when reading of Dido's fate ('colei che s'ancise amorosa').

And now we notice why the ideal arc between Noi leggiavamo and leggemmo (127-138) insists so much on the act of reading. Paolo and Francesca, unaware as yet of their deepest feelings (l. 129), read a book per diletto ('for entertainment'). That book had been banned by Innocent III. A saint of old had read God's Book - on which Dante modelled his sacred poem - with a very different purpose, seeking the truth, a message from the God of Love. We may now understand why Dante replaces the god of love of Francesca's first speech by the book which became her Galehot: both led to sin and damnation. But the author of the Comedy wished to highlight the opposition between two acts of reading: one of the most famous in the Middle Ages, which had led to the exemplary conversion of Augustine; the other, a possibly fictitious account of the reading of a French romance which had led two otherwise unknown lovers to perdition in thirteenth-century Italy. The author of the Comedy could not know that it was his creation that would become the more celebrated of the two, but he would have expected his readers to follow his own conversion from cantor amoris to cantor rectitudinis and then to the miraculous fusion which produced the Divine Comedy. In that conversion, the allurements of courtly literature and other secular writings had to be transcended and purified in the sacred poem. The process begins spectacularly enough in the pilgrim's encounter with Francesca. And we may be sure that the poet would not have accepted Huizinga's judgment 'that the courtly notions of love were never corrected by contact with real life'. [31]

JOHN A. SCOTT
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

NOTES

1. Dante Alighieri, De Vulgari Eloquentia, ed. P.V. Mengaldo, Padua, 1968, pp.16-17 (I.x.2). This passage seems to have been written before February 1305 (Marquis Giovanni di Monferrato is referred to as still alive in I.xii.5).

2. See esp. l. 137 'Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse' ('Galehot was the book and he who wrote it'). In one of the most illuminating analyses of the episode, N.J. Perella remarks: 'Without detracting from the guilt of the lovers, we may consider Francesca and Paolo to be victims of the tradition and the literature of courtly-chivalric love' (The Kiss Sacred and Profane, Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1969, p.145). I must here record the great debt I owe to Perella's sensitive scholarship, as well as to the following: F. De Sanctis, 'Francesca da Rimini', Saggi critici, II, Bari, 1963, pp.240-256; N. Sapegno, commentary to Inferno V in: Dante Alighieri, La Divina Commedia, Milan-Naples, 1957, pp.55-70; G. Contini, 'Dante come personaggio-poeta', L'Approdo letterario IV (1958), pp.19-46 (reprinted in Varianti ed altra linguistica, Turin, 1970, pp.335-361, and in Un'idea di Dante, Turin, 1976, pp.33-62); V. Russo, 'Tristitia e Misericordia nel canto V dell 'Inferno', Sussidi di esegesi dantesca, Naples, 1966, pp.53-70; R. Hollander, Allegory in Dante's 'Commedia', Princeton, N.J., 1969, esp. pp.104-114; P. Dronke, 'Francesca and Héloïse', Comparative Literature, XXVI (1975), pp.113-135. A comprehensive bibliography is to be found in: Dante Alighieri, La D.C.: Inferno, ed. F. Mazzoni, Florence, 1972, pp.103-105. The reader may also wish to consult R. Boase, The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love, Manchester, 1977 (with extensive bibliography).

3. The link between Aeneas's 'magnanimity' (Convivio IV.xxvi. 9) and Dante's 'pusillanimity' (Inferno II.32-45) is analysed in my study Dante magnanimo, Florence, 1977, pp.270-275.

4. See Vita Nuova XX.3: 'Amore e 'l cor gentil sono una cosa,/ sì come il saggio in suo dittare pone' (the reference is to Guinizzelli's poem 'Al cor gentil rempaira sempre Amore').

5. Vita Nuova XX.5. Cf. Inferno V. 100-105:

> Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
> prese costui de la bella persona

Continued ...

che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende.
Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,
mi prese del costui piacer sì forte,
che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.

There is only an apparent contradiction with Convivio II.ii.3 ('Ma però che non subitamente nasce amore e fassi grande e viene perfetto, ma vuole tempo alcuno e nutrimento di pensieri, massimamente là dove sono pensieri contrari che lo 'mpediscano'), where commentators have not always understood the point Dante is making - which has nothing to do with the 'birth' of love but is concerned with its growth or development as can be seen in the second part of the sentence, beginning 'convenne, prima che questo nuovo amore fosse perfetto ...'

6. Inf. V.103. Cf. Andreas Capellanus, De Amore, Regula IX - 'Amare nemo potest, nisi qui amoris suasione compellitur' - and Regula XXVI - 'Amor nil posset amori denegare'; A. Capellano, Trattato d'amore, ed. S. Battaglia, Rome, 1947, pp.356-358.

7. Emphasis mine. The sonnet, written between 1303 and 1306, begins Io sono stato con Amore insieme (text in Dante's Lyric Poetry, ed. K. Foster & P. Boyde, I, Oxford, pp.198-200). As the commentary points out (II. p.323): 'here ... D is implicitly admitting to a carnal love for Beatrice, as the prose letter accompanying the sonnet, Epist. III, clearly shows ...'

8. 'Francesca' could mean 'the French woman' (cf. la francesca in Inf. XXIX. 123).

9. The poem is Amor da che convien pur ch'io mi doglia (see Dante's Lyric Poetry ..., I, pp.204-210; II, pp.330-340).

10. Inf. V.69-72. The echo was first caught by R. Hollander, op.cit., pp.106-107.

11. V. Russo, op.cit., esp. pp.61-67.

12. A swoon which is the direct result of tristitia as we learn from the opening lines of canto VI:

Al tornar de la mente, che si chiuse
dinanzi a la pietà d'i due cognati,
che di trestizia tutto mi confuse ...

13. The double crime of the lovers' adultery and their murder by Francesca's husband - Paolo's brother, Gianciotto Malatesta - is unrecorded. It must have occurred between 1283 and the date of Gianciotto's second marriage (1286). Of special significance is the fact that 'The rhyme words in Dante's address to Francesca - martiri, sospiri, disiri - deliberately echo the identical words and rhymes in one of Dante's sonnets in the Vita Nuova, a sonnet grieving at his own inconstant desires after Beatrice's death' (Dronke, op.cit., p. 126). The poem marks the end of the 'donna gentile' episode and it contains the pregnant reference to 'due disiri/ di lagrimare e di mostrar dolore' (VN XXXIX.8-10).

14. The Vulgate Version of the Arthurian Romances, Edited from Manuscripts in the British Museum by H. Oskar Sommer, III, Washington, 1910, p.263.7-8. It should be noted that 'Quel dubbioso passo' is used by Petrarch to signify death in his Rime (CXXVI.22). A very different pointer to the 'code' of courtly love is Francesca's reference to her bella persona ('parola-emblema di una concezione cavalleresca e sensuale dell'amore e della bellezza': A. Niccoli, Enciclopedia Dantesca, IV, Rome, 1973, p.436). An important gallicism, lai, is found in l. 46: 'Ed è questo vocabolo preso, cioè 'lai', dal parlar francesco, nel quale si chiamano 'lai' certi versi in forma di lamentazione nel lor volgare composti' (G. Boccaccio, Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante, ed. G. Padoan, Milan, 1965, p.292).

15. Cf. Paradiso XVIII.12; Conv. IV.ix.7 ('Altri l'ordinò ...').

16. D.A., La D.C., ed. N. Sapegno, p.62 (emphasis mine).

17. The pilgrim's acceptance of the fiction is in diametrical contrast to his later poetic credo, when - towards the end of his journey through Purgatory - he tells Bonagiunta da Lucca, an older poet:

> ... I' mi son un che, quando
> Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo
> ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando.
> (Purg. XXIV.52-54).

The opposition between the conceptions of love that had inspired the poetry of Dante's predecessor and his own, is emphasized by the fact that these words echo those of a twelfth-century theologian: 'Solum proinde de ea [charity] digne loquitur, qui secundum quod cor dictat interius, exterius verba componit' (emphasis mine). Dante considers charity as primarily the love of God in Paradiso XXVI, where

continued

vv.16-18

> Lo ben che fa contenta questa corte,
> Alfa e O è di quanta scrittura
> mi legge Amore o lievemente o forte.

add a further theological dimension to the lines in Purgatorio XXIV, which are modelled on Brother Ivo's Epistula ad Severinum de caritate (formerly known as the Tractatus de gradibus charitatis and attributed to Richard of St. Victor). Cf., too, I Corinthians XIII.1: 'Si linguis hominum loquar, et angelorum, caritatem autem non habeam, factus sum velut aes sonans, aut cymbalum tinniens'.

18. G. Contini, Un'idea ..., p.42: 'Dovrebbe dolermi, e non mi riesce abbastanza, di averla a risospingere nella parte d'un'intellettuale di provincia' (Contini is one of the scholars who equate ''l tuo dottore' with Boethius: the latter had in fact helped Dante to overcome his anguish after Beatrice's death, according to Conv. II.xii.2).

19. Aeneid II.3-13. R. Hollander (op.cit., p.111) drives home the parallel: 'As Aeneas, questioned by Dido, has lost the realm of Troy to the Greeks, so Francesca, questioned by Dante, has lost the realm of God's kingdom to lust'. Going back to Francesca's frustrated 'prayer' (ll. 91-93) beginning 'se fosse amico il re de l'universo', I cannot help wondering whether we should see an ironic parallel with the passage in the Roman de la Rose where Héloïse calls God to witness her proud boast:

> si vodroie je mieuz, fet ele,
> et Dieu a tesmoign en apele,
> estre ta putain apelee
> que empereriz coronee.

(Guillaume de Lorris & Jean de Meun, Le Roman de la Rose, ed. F. Lecoy, II, Paris, 1973, p.18, ll. 8791-94). Cf. Virgil's reference to 'quello imperador che là sù regna' in Inf. I.124.

20. R. Dragonetti, Aux frontières du langage poétique, Ghent, 1961, p.113, who quotes Mario Roques' summing up: 'Lancelot est un amant extatique, sur lequel agit jusqu'à l'annihilation de sa personnalité propre et l'acceptation de tous les sacrifices, la seule pensée de l'objet aimé'(emphasis mine).

21. VN XVI.4. Such behaviour was of course part of the stereotype (e.g., Andreas Capellanus, op. cit., p.358: 'XV. Omnis consuevit amans in coamantis aspectu pallescere. XVI. In repentina

continued

coamantis visione cor contremescit amantis').

22. For Lancelot's reactions, see: Le Livre de Lancelot ..., pp.258. 19-21 and 262.14-17, 40-41.

23. D'Arco Silvio Avalle, Modelli semiologici nella Commedia di Dante, Milan, 1975, p.107, places the love potion in Tristan and the reading of the Lancelot romance on the same level in the semiological model. I do not deny the intellectual fascination of the semiotic quest; but I must emphasize the danger of reducing works of art to their lowest common denominator. As my Italian colleague would doubtless agree, it is precisely the differences in the way a common element is handled that must be the critic's ultimate concern. The act of reading in Inferno V does not fulfil the same function as the love potion, quite simply because it does not take away the lovers' freedom of choice (as the pilgrim learns and the poet insists in Purgatorio).

24. A. Hatcher & M. Musa, 'The Kiss: Inferno V and the Old French Prose Lancelot', Comparative Literature, XX (1968), pp.97-109.

25. Guido da Pisa, Expositiones et Glose super Comediam Dantis, ed. V. Cioffari, Albany, N.Y., 1974, p.115 (we may now note what Guido says about Tristan's fame: 'Cuius Tristani gesta non explico, quia sunt omnibus quasi nota', ibid., p.112).

26. Dante Alighieri, Die Göttliche Komödie: Kommentar, I, Stuttgart, 1954, p.112.

27. Another fundamental link exists between the kiss in Inferno V (which leads the souls to damnation) and the kiss exchanged by the penitent souls on the terrace of Lust (Purgatorio XXVI.31-33). Guinizzelli and his companions confer on each other the true osculum pacis, in contrast with Francesca's frustrated longing for peace (a key-word in ll. 92 and 99).

28. As usual in Dante scholarship, there are those who disagree. Of the latter, R. Poggioli is the most stimulating in his article 'Tragedy or Romance? A Reading of the Paolo and Francesca Episode in Dante's Inferno', PMLA, LXXII (1957), pp.313-358.

29. Dronke, op.cit., pp.113-114, notes Virgilian and Ciceronian parallels, while affirming that no literature antecedent 'has an image of the sheer imaginative power of the bufera ... a wind that has become part of poetic mythology, even into modern poetry (Pound, Montale)'. I would refer the reader once more to this essay for the brilliant demonstration that 'Dante, in choosing to focus closely on a pair of modern lovers, a pair of lovers with a taste for reading, had Jean's episode [in the Roman de la Rose] in mind, and that Jean's presentation of Héloïse played a part in the way Dante chose to present Francesca' (ibid., p.133).

30. The connection was first pointed out by T.K. Swing in The Fragile Leaves of the Sybil, Westminster, Maryland, 1962, p.299; it is taken up by Hollander (op.cit., pp.112-114) but does not seem to have crossed the Atlantic. For the importance of memory and its special training in the Middle Ages, see: M.McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy, Toronto, 1962; F. Yates, The Art of Memory, London, 1966.

31. J. Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages, Garden City, N.Y., 1954, p.127.