

pany," 31.17), as well as the Eagle's presentation of Charlemagne as the sixth and final Roman emperor in *Par.* 6.96 (relevant, as mentioned above, to Dante's devalorization of the "merely French" Capetians as lacking legitimacy in terms of the Roman imperium; cf. *Purg.* 20.52).

Dante locates France geographically and linguistically in *DVE* 1.8.5–6. He differentiates French from the two other Romance vernaculars ("Hispanic" and "Italian") in his taxonomic system, using its affirmative particle (*oil*) as its identifying label (as opposed to *oc* and *si*, respectively). He situates the territory of French speakers as bordered by the Germans to the east, by the sea to the north and west, and by the Aragonese mountains, Provence, and the Apennines to the south.

In *DVE* 1.10.2, Dante expounds in general terms the forms, subjects, and genres that he deems most appropriate to the particular qualities of the French vernacular: *Allegat ergo pro se lingua oil quod propter sui faciliorem ac delectabiliorem vulgaritatem quicquid redactum est sive inventum ad vulgare prosaycum, suum est: videlicet Biblia cum Troianorum Romanorumque gestibus compilata et Arturi regis ambages pulcherrime et quamplures alie ystorie ac doctrine* ("Thus the language of *oil* adduces on its own behalf the fact that, because of the greater facility and pleasing quality of its vernacular style, everything that is recounted or invented in vernacular prose belongs to it: such as compilations from the Bible and the histories of Troy and Rome, and the [very beautiful adventures] of King Arthur, and many other works of history and doctrine").

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Francesca da Rimini

The daughter of Guido Minore da Polenta (also referred to as Guido il Vecchio da Polenta), lord of Ravenna, and the aunt of Guido Novello da Polenta, Dante's host in Ravenna during the last years of the poet's life, Francesca married Giovanni Malatesta (called Gianciotto, "crippled John"), the second son of Malatesta da Verrucchio, lord of Rimini, circa 1275. The marriage, which testifies to the political alliance between the two principal incipient despotisms of Romagna (both Guelf), and which produced a daughter, Concordia, ended in tragedy. According to the stories that have accreted around *Inf.* 5, Francesca entered into an adulterous love affair with Paolo Malatesta, known as Paolo il Bello and third son of Malatesta da Verrucchio. She and Paolo were killed by Gianciotto, most likely between 1283 and 1286. The date of death must be inferred circumstantially, like every other event of Francesca's unrecorded life. Paolo, who in 1269 married Orabile Beatrice, countess of Ghiaggiolo (by whom he had two children), was in Florence as *capitano del popolo* ("commander of the local militia") in 1282; he tendered his resignation on the first of February, 1283, and returned to Rimini. By 1286 Gianciotto had remarried (his second wife, Zambrasina, daughter of the traitor Tebaldello de' Zambrasi of Faenza, bore him five children).

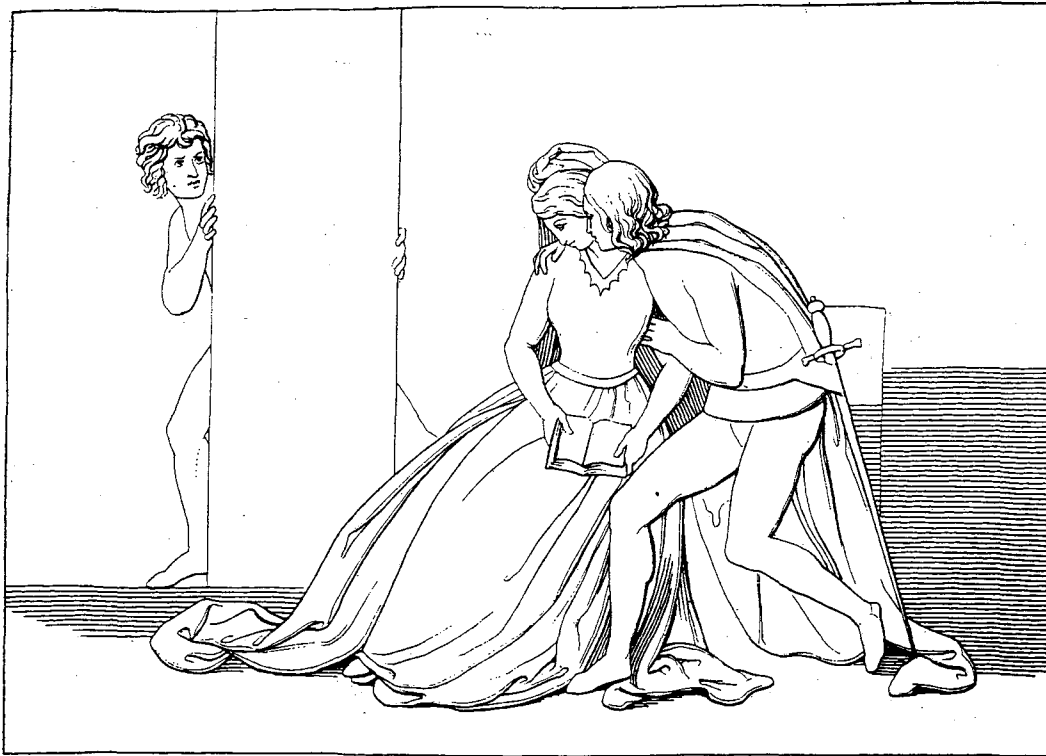
Dante condemns the two lovers to the second circle of Hell, reserved for the souls of the lustful, or carnal sinners: *i peccator carnali, / che la ragion sommettono al talento* ("the carnal sinners, who subject reason to desire," *Inf.* 5.38–39). Hardly prolix, the text of the *Commedia* offers only the following information, in this order: Francesca's birth place (*Siede la terra dove nata fui / su la marina dove 'l Po discende / per aver pace co' seguaci sui*, "The city where I was born sits beside the shore where the Po descends to have peace with its followers," *Inf.* 5.97–99), her Christian name (*Francesca, i tuoi martiri*, "Francesca, your sufferings," *Inf.* 5.116), the fact that she and her lover were killed by a relative (*Caina attende*

F *chi a vita ci spense*, “Caina awaits him who extinguished our life,” *Inf.* 5.107), the fact that the lovers are in-laws (*i due cognati*, “the two in-laws,” *Inf.* 6.2). This presentation is remarkably oblique, on a number of counts. First, it forgoes altogether the names of both Francesca’s lover and her husband. Second, while Francesca’s Christian name is registered, her family name must be inferred from her natal city, Ravenna, which in turn is never named but alluded to in an ambiguous geographical periphrasis. Third, the fact that she and her lover were killed by a relative is presented in one compact and elliptical verse that in itself requires glossing: “Caina awaits him who extinguished our life” implies that the lovers’ murderer is a relative, destined for the zone of the ninth circle, named after Cain—the first fratricide—and reserved for the traitors of kin. It is information that is meaningless without a good commentary or prior knowledge of the *Inferno*. Fourth, the fact that the murderer is related to *both* lovers, in other words the fact that the lovers were themselves related, is given to us only after the encounter with Francesca has ended, at the beginning of canto 6 when the narrator refers to them as “the two in-laws.”

In weighing the significance of Dante’s intervention vis-à-vis Francesca, it is important to bear in mind that there is virtually no independent documentation of her story; we are indebted for what we know to Dante and to his commentators. The qualifier “virtually” in the preceding sentence is intended to leave space for the fourteenth-century historian Marco Battagli, whose passing reference in his history of the Malatesta (1352) serves as precious, plausibly independent (despite postdating the *Commedia*) confirmation of an occurrence that presumably lived in local memory and oral sources. Battagli alludes to the event in which Francesca died without naming her: *Paulus autem fuit mortuus per fratrem suum Iohannem Zottum causa luxurie* (“Paolo was killed by his brother Giovanni the Lame, *causa luxurie*,” *Marcha*). Like Battagli, the anonymous author of the fourteenth century *Cronaca malatestiana* (this author certainly knew the *Commedia*, which he cites elsewhere) refers to the killing of Paolo and Francesca in passing—though while he does accord Francesca a role in the drama, he too dispenses with her name, referring to her merely as wife, *la donna sua*. What is most noteworthy about the historical record regarding Francesca, then, is its silence. This silence was broken by Dante, who in

effect saved Francesca from oblivion, giving her a voice and a name.

Dante’s commentators at first step into the information vacuum gingerly. Jacopo Alighieri (c. 1322), for instance, offers little more than the names of all the protagonists and a schematic rendering of events, summing up the “Paolo and Francesca plot” in four dry and unsensationalist consecutive clauses: “having carnal relations with her, that is she with her aforementioned brother-in-law, on a few occasions together, they were killed by the husband.” Shortly afterwards, Jacopo della Lana (1324–1328) adds some color, including a first description of the death scene: “finally he found them while sinning, he took a sword and pierced them at the same time in such a way that locked together in an embrace they died.” The *Ottimo Commento* (1333–1340) goes further, adding the dynastic frame, character sketches of the protagonists, and a servant who conveys the news of the adulterous liaison to Gianciotto. He also dwells at length on the *Commedia*’s scene of the lovers reading together about Lancelot and Guinevere. It is Boccaccio, the great raconteur, who elaborates Francesca’s story to novella-like proportions and whose imprint on it is most indelible. Picked up by subsequent commentators, his melodramatic tale has achieved canonical status and has utterly contaminated the reception of Francesca’s story. In Boccaccio’s tale Francesca is effectively innocent of any misdeed, since her father deceives her into wedlock with the ugly Gianciotto through the use of the handsome Paolo as a proxy for his brother. One could say that Boccaccio thus initiates the romantic reading of Dante’s Francesca, a reading that has been cultivated passively by commentators who have repeated Boccaccio’s version of the story over the centuries, as well as actively by genuine romantics like Foscolo, or De Sanctis, who writes of Francesca’s *Eternità d’amore, eternità di martirio* (“eternal love, eternal suffering”). However, the romantic reading has always coexisted with a moral interpretation of the canto (Boccaccio provides this too, in his *esposizione allegorica*), which views romance and eros as under the aegis and control of reason, an unabashed moralistic reading that not only has no sympathy for Francesca but even views her as manipulative and mendacious, and has come to the fore in our own century. Whatever the critical scenario, by now our cultural imagination has been for so long overstocked with commentaries



Lanciotto

Francesca

Paolo

La bocca mi baciò tutto tremante.

Inferno Canto 5.

Paolo and Francesca. Invenzioni di Giovanni Flaxman sulla Divina commedia, illustrated by John Flaxman and Beniamino del Vecchio, Rome, 1826. Giamatti Collection: Courtesy of the Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.

that mechanically repeat their predecessors, not to mention the many paintings, dramas, tragedies, poems, and musical responses to Francesca, that we only with difficulty clear away the cultural underbrush and concentrate on Dante's story.

Dante's Francesca is, as is usually the case with his characters, less reducible and linear than his commentators find acceptable. She offers no extenuating circumstances to justify her behavior, no deceitful father or proxy marriage, just the overwhelming force of overriding passion. Desire compels her, and she sins. That is her story, and it is one that foregrounds the key philosophical issues at stake here for Dante, issues of compulsion and the will, already condensed in the key verse *che la ragion sommettono al talento*: reason struggles with desire, and in Francesca's case desire triumphs. Her discourse of justification engages a deeper logic than Boccaccio's circumstantial inventions: her point, reflected in her very syntax, is that desire cannot be withstood. Dante is passionately invested in the belief that desire can

be withstood, that reason can and must triumph, and it is this profoundly psychological and ethical drama, with deep roots in the courtly tradition, that is ultimately played out in his treatment of lust. Whereas vision literature (see Gardiner) emphasizes sex itself as sinful, subjecting carnal sinners to degrading and sexualized punishments, the contrapasso fashioned by Dante in *Inf.* 5—where the lustful are tossed by the hell-storm as in life they were buffeted by their passions—emphasizes the psychology of desire. For Dante, the issue is not fornication or adultery per se (after all, Cunizza da Romano, a scandalous adulterer, is in paradise, along with Rahab, a prostitute), but the sinful surrender to desire, a surrender with which the pilgrim so thoroughly identifies that he faints to the floor of Hell at the conclusion of Francesca's story.

In her famous tercets, each beginning with "Love" as subject, Francesca draws on the fundamental tenets of the established amatory code to tell her story in, precisely, coded form. The chosen code dictates biographical and historical opacity;

F in place of recognizable humans engaging in recognizable human behavior, the code renders the lovers as particles adrift in a force field governed by powers beyond their control: love, beauty, nobility. To the degree that other people enter the lovers' realm, they are rendered as demonized abstractions. Deftly and densely these verses weave a plot that contains no human agency. The first tercet goes to the heart of Francesca's story by placing her and her lover in a matrix of love and violent death, while at the same time evading all responsibility for either that love or that death. While fundamentally ahistorical, the tercet sketches the lineaments of a history that is initiated with the passions of the man. In this chronology, Paolo is the first to love: *Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende, / prese costui de la bella persona / che mi fu tolta; e 'l modo ancor m'offende* ("Love, which is swiftly kindled in the noble heart, seized this one for the lovely person that was taken from me; and the manner still injures me," *Inf.* 5.100–102). The syntactic density of this language creates a sense of tightly compacted ineluctability, of a destiny that cannot be escaped. Francesca tells us that love, which is quickly kindled in a noble heart, seized Paolo, that the love that seized him was for her beautiful body, the same body that was taken from her, and that the mode (of what? of loving? of being murdered?) still offends her. The agents of causality here are love (which the noble-souled are not able to withstand)—this precept recapitulates the poet Guido Guinizzelli, implicitly an authority, and thus another agent of causality), Francesca's physical beauty (which seizes Paolo), the unnamed agents that take Francesca's body from her, and the mysterious *modo*—the way, the modality—that still offends her. The next tercet is only somewhat less dense. She explains that, since reciprocity in love is obligatory (here she draws on the late twelfth-century treatise *The Art of Courtly Love* by Andreas Capellanus, another implicit authority, hence agent), love caused by his beauty bound her reciprocally—and eternally: *Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona, / mi prese del costui piacer sì forte, / che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona* ("Love, which pardons no one loved from loving in return, seized me for his beauty so strongly that, as you see, it still does not abandon me," *Inf.* 5.103–105). Francesca's two-verse conclusion is less syntactically complex, more stark, still opaque however, and equally devoted to maintaining the role of object: *Amor*

condusse noi ad una morte. / Caina attende chi a vita ci spense ("Love led us to one death. Caina awaits him who extinguished our life," *Inf.* 5.106–107).

These abstract and codified declarations manage to reveal the speaker's identity to her interlocutor, causing him to speak to her by name: *Francesca, i tuoi martiri / a lagrimar mi fanno tristo e pio* ("Francesca, your sufferings make me sad and piteous to tears," *Inf.* 5.116–117). Once he knows her identity, the pilgrim formulates a query that is undeniably voyeuristic: how did love first permit the lovers to recognize their desires? Her response is classically Dantesque, in terms of poetic yield, that is, the ratio of poetic richness achieved (very great) to linguistic expenditure (very sparing). It introduces a new subtext, the romance *Lancelot du Lac*, to whose protagonists Francesca compares herself and Paolo. It brings the complicity of writing and literature ever more to the attention of the reader as a main theme of the canto, a theme that culminates in Francesca's indictment of the *Lancelot* and its author as the "go-betweens" who brought her and Paolo to the point of surrendering to passion. And Francesca responds to the implicit voyeurism of the pilgrim's request by providing a more detailed window onto her affair, portraying a scene that is powerfully specular, a *mise en abyme* where our passions are engaged as we read of passionate readers reading about passion.

Reading together one day for pleasure, *per diletto*, the couple read of how love seized Lancelot. The reading constrained their eyes to meet and their faces to pale, and finally—but only when they read of how Lancelot kissed Guinevere—Paolo kissed Francesca. But this account is brought up short by two remarkable consecutive statements. Francesca's famously elliptical conclusion, *quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante* ("that day we read there no further," *Inf.* 5.138), leaves both pilgrim and reader to grapple with a declaration that suggests volumes but tells nothing, and whose very reticence has generated the voyeuristic fascination that we find in the commentaries. And her preceding statement, *Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse* ("Galeotto was the book and he who wrote it," *Inf.* 5.137), is an indictment that masterfully synthesizes the canto's fundamental questions about agency and art. The verse states that the Old French romance and its author occupied the same role—the role of go-between—

in the lives of Francesca and Paolo that the knight Gallehaut occupied in the lives of Guinevere and Lancelot. Thus, the *Lancelot* romance and its author—*Il libro e chi lo scrisse*—are responsible for bringing together Francesca and Paolo and causing them to sin. Does moral responsibility lodge with the author or the reader? In contemporary terms, does it lodge with the creator/producer of the violent film or with the viewer/consumer?

There is no doubt that, for Dante, Francesca has to bear responsibility for her own destiny; her syntactic passivity mirrors her sinful refusal of moral agency, of reason—indeed, in Dante's scale of values, of life itself. But the pilgrim's swoon marks the end of an episode that is deeply complicated, for Dante as a love poet had himself once been under the sway of a dark and deadly eros. While the linking of love and death in *Inf.* 5 has classical antecedents, figured in Dido, *colei che s'ancise amorosa* ("she who killed herself for love," *Inf.* 5.61), the most powerful contemporary theorist of the death-love was Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's best friend of the *Vita Nuova*. When Francesca declares that *Amor condusse noi ad una morte*, she inscribes the true rubric of *Inf.* 5, whose topic is not just sinful love but the love that leads to death, the love of which one could say—with Cavalcanti—that *Di sua potenza segue spesso morte* ("From its [love's] power death often follows," "Donna me prega," 35).

Now, viewed teleologically, Dante's work and thought is governed by one principle: that love is a life force, and that the life force is love. Beatrice's salvific *amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare* ("love has moved me and makes me speak," *Inf.* 2.72) is at the antipodes of Francesca's *Amor condusse noi ad una morte*. The bedrock principles of the *Commedia* are that love can save, love can beatify, love can give life. *Inf.* 5, which constitutes Dante's most synthetic and compelling meditation on love as a death force, on love as a power that is not death defying but death inducing, on love as a dark compulsion that leads not to salvation but to damnation, thus derives its extraordinary importance within the economy of Dante's oeuvre from its perverse mirroring of the poet's primal foundational belief. *Inf.* 5 is, moreover, concerned not just with love but with the linguistic means by which love is communicated: with speaking, writing, and reading, and with the modalities wherein speaking, writing, and reading about love occur, in particular the literary genres of lyric and romance. By

enabling the canto's chief protagonist, Francesca, to draw with great precision on both lyric and romance registers in her speech, Dante raises the question of the complicity of language and literature in her damnation, thus broaching a topic of enormous relevance to himself and his own enterprise, which is after all nothing less than the construction of a literary text that self-consciously sets out to procure the salvation of its readers through the deployment of words and language.

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Teodolinda Barolini

Francesco da Buti

Francesco di Bartolo da Buti, known generally by the abbreviated form of Francesco da Buti, was born in Pisa in 1324 and died in his native city on July 15, 1405 of the Pisan calendar. A modest classroom teacher who spent his mature years as an instructor at the Studio di Pisa, Buti read and discussed with his students the Latin classics as well as Italian literature, the best example of which was Dante's *Commedia*. After years of commenting orally about this great poem with his students, he composed a formal, written commentary. This explication is divided in two parts: the first half is a literal paraphrase of the verses, the second half a cultural and allegorical interpretation. Buti was influenced by Guido da Pisa's *Expositio*, on the whole of the *Inferno*, and by Boccaccio's commentary on the first half of the *Inferno*. The first draft of Buti's explication was apparently written in 1385, but a full draft did not appear until 1395. Francesco da Buti's commentary has been published only once.

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Vincenzo Cioffari

Francesco de' Cavalcanti

The early commentators are all but unanimous in identifying Francesco (also named Guercio) as the last of the five noble Florentine thieves encountered in the seventh ditch of the eighth circle of Hell (Malebolge), who, first appearing in serpent form, exchanges shapes with Buoso, stealing the latter's human features. His name does not occur in Dante's text, although he is referred to obliquely by a circumlocution: *quel che tu, Gaville, piagni* ("the one that makes you, Gaville, weep," *Inf.* 25.151). His murder by men from Gaville, the commentators claim, led to savage reprisals by his family against the town. Although the text would seem to allude to an incident sufficiently well known to require no further elaboration, no historical record of it survives. History has conspired with Dante to condemn this particular member of the Cavalcanti clan to anonymity.

Anthony Oldcorn

Francis of Assisi, St.

Francesco Bernardone, Francis of Assisi, was born in 1182, the son of a prosperous merchant. Following a carefree youth he suffered an illness, after which deep religious feelings led to his renunciation of his earthly possessions. He began giving his money and some family belongings to the poor. Called to account by his father at the court of the bishop of Assisi, he stripped himself naked, returned his clothes to his father, and declared that henceforth he would be loyal only to his father in Heaven. He then settled in a small church called the Porziuncola (Santa Maria degli Angeli) and, together with a few other men from Assisi, lived a life of poverty, prayer, and good works. In 1209, he traveled to Rome to receive permission from Pope Innocent III to found an order dedicated to living a life of poverty and preaching repentance. The order grew rapidly after Innocent's approval. In addition, Francis established a female branch of the movement, called the Clares (after Clare of Assisi, the first woman converted to his way of life). A so-called third order was also formed for those in secular life who wished to practice Franciscan virtues as far as their station in life allowed.