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Francesca's Sweet Lament: An Operatic Adaptation of Canto V from Dante's Inferno

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Francesca's Sweet Lament: An Operatic Adaptation of Canto V from Dante's *Inferno*

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2021

Dedication

This project is for my family. Graduating from college is by far the biggest accomplishments of my life thus far, one that I did not believe I would successfully complete. So I dedicate this to them: my older brother Juan, my cousin Adia, my father Juan Sr., my younger brother Ariel, my sister Jazzmin, my cousins Nina, Quentin, Charlotte, and Azaira, my uncle Charly, my aunt Maria, my aunt Carol, my cousin Avery, and my Godmother Rachel.

A special dedication to my late mother Sharon, and my late uncle Daryl.

Acknowledgements

I want to give a sincere thank you to those who helped me through this strenuous and rewarding process. There was a point I did not know, in fact, I highly doubted that I would make it to the end of the tunnel but lo and behold; we made it!

I thank my advisor, Karen Raizen. You have been there for me since the beginning and having you here for most of my time at Bard made this an enjoyable experience. You are a true inspiration to me and I hope I was able to make you proud. Who knew that in my Italian major, I would find a like minded violist as my advisor! I am beyond lucky. I am honored.

I thank my deans, Dorothy Albertini and Eileen Brickner. Simply thinking of how much support the two of you have given me throughout my time here, from the lowest of lows to moments of joy, brings tears to my eyes. I would not have made it even a quarter of the way through without you two. Thank you for holding all the space for me. I am forever grateful.

I also want to thank Franco Baldasso, the director of the Italian Studies Department. You welcomed me into the Italian program in such an impressionable way that I had to become an Italian major. I will never forget our class going to Sicily for the intensive because it changed my life. Thank you for turning on that switch in my head. Without you, I would have gone a different route and missed all the amazing experiences I have had thus far. I deeply appreciate you.

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Introduction

I am creating a libretto for an operetta scene of Canto V of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*. This canto speaks of love and lust, specifically, those who have fallen to the sin of lust in the second circle of hell. I will be breaking down Dante's intent with the numerous characters at the center of this chapter. Canto V's focus is predominantly on women, having the most characters that are women in the entirety of *Inferno*. The first of five major soliloquies by women in *The Divine Comedy*, is expressed by Francesca Da Rimini. I will be composing a piece based on her soliloquy, using text painting, harmonization, and more composing techniques.

Dante in Text

Victoria Kirkham's work *A Canon of Women in Dante's Commedia* points to the importance of numerology and its connection to the purpose of each character's placement. Numerology was a pivotal tool for Dante, dating back to his first major work *Vita Nuova*, a collection of poetry and analysis centered around his muse and love of his life, Beatrice Portinari. Her name translates to "thrice blessed one", deeming the numbers 3 and 9 critical to Dante. Numerology prevalently appears in many of his works. Kirkham fleshes out the meaning of the number 5, and its resurfacing not only within *Inferno* but in religion, in the physical body. This relates to Giovanni Boccaccio's study on Dante's *Comedy*, *Expositions on Dante's Comedy*, which Kirkham draws from as she speaks on on "fiveness."¹ The number five has great significance in Christianity, the five senses in the body, and additionally the five different kinds

¹ Victoria Kirkham, "Canon of Women in Dante's Commedia," *Annali d'Italianistica*, Vol. 7 (1989): 16-41, 25-27.

of lust, which Boccaccio articulates as fornication, rape, adultery, incest, and sodomy. Francesca Da Rimini represents the lust of adultery.

When discussing Dante, it is imperative to at least mention *Vita Nuova*, as it was one of his starting points as a writer. Since I am focusing on the women in Dante's writing, it is worth noting one of the most, if not the most, important woman in his life: Beatrice. In *Vita Nuova*, Beatrice speaks only once at the beginning: though she is the center of the text, she is an engaged noblewoman and would seldom look upon another man.² She was Dante's speechless muse; what we know of her mostly comes from Dante's recounting of his sightings of her. Beatrice is a crucial figure to understanding the character that Francesca da Rimini is. She is the foil to Beatrice, a close anti-Beatrice if anything. These two women were nobles that chose two entirely different outcomes in life. Francesca is filled with rhetoric, referencing popular writers of her time, using Aristotilian modes of persuasion. She is not a mere muse to be gazed upon, but a woman to be interacted with. She is not a symbol of holiness like the "thrice blessed one" as Beatrice was. Francesca was a sinner, entrapped with her lover by their mortal actions in the world of the living.

Continuing on Boccaccio's essential commentary, Sun Hee Kim Gertz also analyzes Boccaccio's findings in her work "The Readerly Imagination: Boccaccio's Commentary on Dante's *Inferno*." Gertz points out the similar relationship Boccaccio has to speaking on Dante as Dante has to speaking on the likes of Francesca and Virgil. He echoes Dante's thought processes on the psychology of sin and human behavior.³ This struck me as important because it further clarifies Dante's view on how Francesca functions within his work. She is somewhat of a veil,

² Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), 5.

³ Sun Hee Kim Gertz, "The Readerly Imagination: Boccaccio's Commentary on Dante's *Inferno*," *Romanische Forschungen* Vol. 105 No. 1 (1993): 1-29, 6-8.

uncovering Dante's underlying passion of love and sin within his own writing. Gertz also focuses on the important relationship between the act of reading, writing, and sin.

By the end of Canto V, Dante breaks down after listening to Francesca's soliloquy, which occurs for different reasons. One of them being that the love between Francesca and Paolo surpassed death, similar to the love Dante and Beatrice shared; the other being that he, a writer of prose and poetry, could have been the reason Francesca and Paolo fell to sin in the first place. Here is where Dante the poet and Dante the pilgrim converge, as we see both genuine reactions Dante has to relatable lovers uprooted by death, feeling insecure and vulnerable as a poet who might lead readers to sin. The Lovers foil Dante and Beatrice's connection because of their sin, crossing the religiously virtuous line that he and his muse never crossed.

Dante in Music

Franz Liszt was one composer who set Dante's *Inferno* to music: his *Dante Symphony*, with its overdramatic melodrama and repetition of grandeur, depicts the souls suffering in hell. The first movement of the symphony is filled with palpable turmoil and spirals that are present within Dante's text. This rapture of sound is sustained through most of the piece, keeping up its intensity through copious repetition, as well as Liszt's use of chromaticism as being the engine that runs below the surface. There are three main themes in this first section. One is a chromatic, percussive sounding scale downward, the second is a theme that gets varied and inverted, and the third motif is consistently restated, usually intervening within the action, never being altered. In his work *Liszt's 'Dante Symphony' and Tone Poems*, M. D. Calvocoressi analyzes the first movement of *Dante Symphony*. He brings up the shift into the bass clarinet recitative that seems

to bring everything not only to a slight pause, but to a clearing for a new section of dreaminess and sweetness.⁴

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, in his symphony *Francesca da Rimini*, depicts hell, and more specifically Canto V of Dante's *Inferno*, by using outer layers of sound, spiraling throughout the orchestra at the beginning. This helps contextualize the music by introducing the setting that is the second circle of hell. Catherine Coppola, in her analysis "The Elusive Fantasy: Genre, Form, and Program in Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini*," makes an astute observation that the representation of hell in Tchaikovsky's work is similar to Liszt's presentation.⁵ The two composers took similar liberties in depicting Dante's hell. The difference that Coppola hones in on are their focuses. Liszt draws in the listener by way of chaos and hell's generally energy. While Tchaikovsky focuses on the lovers, as conveyed by the work's title. Although both use ternary form (a three-part piece in which the third part is simply a repetition of the first), Liszt's *Dante Symphony* focuses less on the sweet dreaminess and develops the chaotic nature through chromaticism. Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini* is centered on love, paying homage to her soliloquy and developing her story throughout the orchestra. Coppola speaks on Tchaikovsky's conveyance of forbidden love in motifs through recitative: one introduced by a cello recitative, and the other later continued in a clarinet, much like Liszt's notable bass clarinet recitative.

⁴ M.D. Calvocoressi, "Liszt's 'Dante' Symphony and Tone Poems," *Musical Times* Vol 66, No. 988 (1925): 505-507. On Liszt's *Dante Symphony*, see also Vernon Harrison, "The Dante Symphony," *Liszt Society Journal* 11 (1986): 56-69; Ellen Knight, "The Harmonic Foundation of Liszt's Dante Symphony," *Journal of the American Liszt Society* 10 (1981): 56-63.

⁵ Catherine Coppola, "The Elusive Fantasy: Genre, Form, and Program in Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini*," *19th-Century Music* Vol. 22, No. 2 (1998): 169-189, 185-187.

Close Reading

Canto V: Francesca's Monologue

*'O animal grazioso e benigno
che visitando vai per l'aere perso
noi che tignemmo il mondo di sanguigno,
se fosse amico il re dell'universo,
noi pregheremmo lui della tua pace
poi c'hai pietà del nostro mal perverso.⁶*

Francesca's opening lines are appealing to the voyagers, Dante and Virgilio. "O gracious and benign animal," she says, welcoming these visitors of hell to what seems like her abode. This starts right off with Francesca shown as a foil to the character and person that is Beatrice. First and foremost, she speaks. She is not a mysterious woman or muse, speechless and demure. She articulates herself smoothly and seductively, not so much in a sexual nature, but more so with her use of appeasement in putting Dante and Virgilio above her and Paolo.

*Di quel che udire e che parlar vi piace
noi udiremo e parleremo a vui,
mentre che 'l vento, come fa, ci tace.⁷*

Francesca simply states that she would be glad to elaborate on the story of her and her lover Paolo. The story, in reference, which Dante has come to listen to with the first line meaning, "Of what you wish to hear and to speak." Lastly, the third line is Francesca speaking on the wind, saying "while the wind, as it does, is quiet". This gust of powerful wind is part of The Lovers' *contrapasso*, counter punishment. This is the torture each sinner is put through, the level and manner of torture not only depending on the sin, but the way by which the sin was committed: this is a crucial part of Dante's system of punishment throughout the *Inferno*. Through Francesca

⁶ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. John D. Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961 [1939]), *Inferno* V.87-93. All translations in this section are Sinclair's.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 94-96.

and Paolo “falling in love”, an involuntary motion of lust, Dante plays with this notion by having them blown about, involuntarily, by a strong wind. This mimics the action of falling and being cast into lust. This last line shows that the wind momentarily paused as Francesca made her soliloquy on her and Paolo’s demise.

*Siede la terra dove nata fui
su la marina dove ‘l Po discende
per aver pace co’ seguaci sui.*⁸

Francesca speaks of Ravenna, the ancient city she is from. According to Boccaccio’s “Literal Exposition on Dante”, Dante highlights the shore Francesca speaks of, “su la marina dove ‘l Po discende”, which translates to ‘on the shore where river Po descends’. The shore is in reference to the Adriatic Sea which is two miles away from Ravenna. The river Po comes from the mountains that divide Italy and Provence, breaking into thirty rivers, one of them flowing into Ravenna and eighteen miles farther connects to the Adriatic. The last line of this verse translates to ‘to be at peace with its followers,’ referencing the rivers joining each other at peace in the sea.

*Amor, ch’al cor gentil ratto s’apprende,
prese costui della bella persona
che mi fu tolta; e ‘l modo ancor m’offende.*⁹

Here, Dante references his first major work *Vita Nuova*, with the capitalized ‘Love’, alluding to the same Love that had a hand in his connection with Beatrice, his muse. Every mention of this ‘Love’ in particular motions to that same character. This is not just simply the notion of love, but also the god of Love. It also becomes apparent that Francesca is a true master of words, continuing her use of the modes of persuasion such as pathos and logos. Francesca demonstrates her intellect by quoting Guido Guinizelli’s poetry ‘Love, which is quickly kindled in the gentle

⁸ Ibid., 97-99.

⁹ Ibid., 100-102.

heart'. Those in Dante's social circle, as well as those who were great poets and intellects of the time could recognize this reference immediately. Guinizelli is known as the father of *dolce stil novo*, the sweet new style, which became prevalent in poetry writing after his creation of it. The fact that Francesca uses this *dolce stil novo* in her soliloquy, again, evokes logos by showing her credibility in her use of language and reference.

*Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona,
mi prese del costui piacer sì forte,
che, come vedi, ancor non m'abbandona.*¹⁰

With the repetition of *Amor*, Francesca continuously displays her way with language by use of anaphora. The emphasis given by this exclamation of Love once again, draws in the reader, as well as drawing in Dante the pilgrim, into her tragic story of her and Paolo's demise. This line in particular is also a similar restatement of the previous one but turned onto her own heart rather than her lover's heart. It says here, "Love...seized me so strongly with his charm," while previously stating, "Love...seized this man for the fir form that was taken from me". This act of mirroring further drives Francesca's point across that these lovers were drawn together as one, even under the guise of lust, without specifically mentioning lust.

*Amor condusse noi ad una morte:
Caina attende chi vita ci spense.'
Queste parole da lor ci fur porte.*¹¹

One last time, Francesca's use of anaphora with 'Love' closes this first part of her soliloquy. She unifies herself and Paolo by saying, "Love brought us to one death". In this, Dante displays the true punishment that the lovers face in this circle of hell. They fell in love through lust but are now subject to being together as spirits in this realm, without forms to physically express or

¹⁰ Ibid., 103-105.

¹¹ Ibid., 106-108.

consummate their love. The reference to Cain speaks about Francesca and Paolo's murderer, Giancotto, and his demise. Because of his hand in their deaths, this means he will end up in the same circle of hell as Cain, the son of Adam who killed his brother. The sin of fratricide, in Dante's *Inferno*, belongs in the ninth circle of hell. Giancotto not only killed his wife, Francesca, but his brother Paolo as well.

*E quella a me: 'Nessun maggior dolore
che ricordarsi del tempo felice
nella miseria; e ciò sa 'l tuo dottore.*¹²

In this verse, it is apparent the kind of torture Francesca is put through, which is to recount her and Paolo's demise. To translate, "There is no greater pain than to recall the happy time in misery, and this thy teacher knows." This resonates with Dante's own painful memories in Canto I of *Inferno*.¹³ In this wind tunnel of torment, there is nothing but pain and sorrow. Sonically, the first line has a smoothness, as in the sounds that create an "oo" and "oh" sound with the rounding of the mouth, conveying a melancholy energy: *Nessun maggior dolore*. There is a somber tone with Dante's use of closed vowels *un*, *ggior*, and *lore*. The word *felice* stands out, not only because it is the first mention of happiness among the pain, but the sound even differs from the use of open sounding vowels. It is the glimpse of light in this dark wind tunnel, which does not make things better for Francesca and Paolo's situation, but emphasizes the darkness that surrounds them.

*Ma s' a conoscer la prima radice
del nostro amor tu hai cotanto affetto,
dirò come colui che piange e dice.*¹⁴

¹² Ibid., 121-123.

¹³ Ibid., I.4-6.

¹⁴ Ibid., V.124-126.

Francesca has been describing, up until this point, the feelings that arose from her and her lover as they lie in misery. Here, the first line is introducing the literal happenings of her and Paolo's encounter, *la prima radice*, the first root.

*Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto
di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse:
soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto.*¹⁵

The first line seems innocent enough, translating to, "We read one day for pastime," but their choice of reading was Lancelot and Guinevere. With the third line, "we were alone with no misgivings," it seems as though Francesca is playing with the terms of innocence and guilt. The story of Lancelot and Guinevere, from the chivalric tradition, bears resemblance to *The Lovers* and Dante creates a connection through word choice with the use of *lo strinse*, Lancelot's constraint, similar to Francesca and Paolo's demise in *Inferno*.

*Per più fiate li occhi ci sospinse
quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso;
ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.*¹⁶

In this sentence, the term *ci sospinse*, their eyes being gently suggested to one another, shows a lack of agency of Francesca and Paolo. This occurs in the second line with the verb *scolorire*, loss of color in their faces, with its addition of *-ci*, as well as occurring at the end of the sentence with *ci vinse*, their defeat. Grammatically, the direct object pronoun *ci* shows the inevitability of their committed sin of lust: the lovers did not have any choice in the matter. Paolo and Francesca are almost pushed together, with lust acting upon them. Rather than simply looking at each other, a force compelled their eyes to meet. This means by first glance, the sin has already begun, if anything, has already been committed. Rather than saying they blushed, a force made the color

¹⁵ Ibid., 107-109.

¹⁶ Ibid., 130-132.

drain from their faces. This force that defeated them unsuspectingly, was their lust. Dante de-sexualizes lust here, not only focused on the physical but on the power of reading.

*Quando leggemmo il disiato riso
esser baciato da cotanto amante,
questi, che mai da me non dia diviso,
la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante.
Galeotto fu il libro e chi lo scrisse:
Quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.*¹⁷

Here, the focus is not on the eyes but rather the act of reading. Reflecting on Guinevere and Lancelot's kiss is what led to their physical sin, Francesca and Paolo's first kiss. Galeotto, or Galehaut, refers to an intermediary figure in the chivalric story of Lancelot and Guinevere. Galeotto was to Lancelot and Guinevere what the book was to Francesca and Paolo; an intermediary to their love connection. The second to last line translates to, "Galeotto was the book and he that wrote it," which compares the intermediary between Lancelot and Guinevere to their story, which is the intermediary between Francesca and Paolo.

*Mentre che l'uno spirto questo disse,
l'altro piangea, sì che di pietade
io venni men così com'io morisse;
e caddi come corpo morto cade.*¹⁸

Although this is the telling of Paolo and Francesca's story, only Francesca speaks. As the first line says 'while one spirit spoke of this, the other wept,' showing Paolo too distraught and defeated. Now here, Dante refers back to himself, feeling extreme sadness and guilt. The Lovers' story strikes a nerve with their connection to poetry and reading leading to their sin. Dante himself falls faint to the ground, in a way acknowledging that his works of love poems and works like *Vita Nuova* could have led to Francesca and Paolo's demise and any other's path to

¹⁷ Ibid., 133-138.

¹⁸ Ibid., 139-142.

sin. The love they shared also bears resemblance to Dante's love for his muse, Beatrice, who was engaged to another man.

Libretto

Virgilio and Dante descend into the second circle, a tighter fitting space, with sounds of distant wailing and moaning. Upon arrival, they see Minos, the relentless judge and punisher of this second circle of hell, The Lascivious. The sinners who occupy this zone are sinners of Lust. Their contrapasso (counter-punishment) is equivalent to the sin committed and bestowed upon them in the similar fashion of the sin.

MINOS

O tu che vieni al doloroso ospizio,
guarda com'entri e di cui tu ti fide;
non t'inganni l'ampiezza dell'entrare!

VIRGILIO

Perchè pur gride?
Non impedir lo suo fatale andare:
Vuolsi così colà dove si puote
ciò che si vuole, e più non dimandare.

*O you that comes to this place of pain, look at who enters and who you trust;
do not let the expanse of this entrance deceive you!*

*Why do you shout? Do not hinder his fateful pilgrimage:
it is decreed, where will and power are one in the same, do not ask any further.*

[They descend into the wind tunnel with no light, hearing the shrieks gradually getting louder, sounding more hysterical as Minos, Virgilio, and Dante arrive to the flurry of spirits being whisked about by the wind in every direction.]

DANTE

Maestro, chi son quelle
genti che l'aura nera sì gastiga?

VIRGILIO

La prima di color di cui novelle tu vuo' saper',
fu imperadrice di molte favelle.
A vizio di lussuria fu sì rotta,
che libito fè licito in sua legge
per tòrre il biasmo in che era condotta.
Ell' è Semiramìs, di cui si legge

che succedette a Nino e fu sua sposa:
tenne la terra che l' Soldan corregge.

L'altra è colei che s'ancise amorosa,
e ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo;

Poi è Cleopatràs lussuriosa.

Elena vedi, per cui tanto reo
tempo si volse, e vedi il grande Achille,
che con amore al fine combattèo.

Vedi Paris, Tristano--

Master, who are these spirits that the black air afflicts?

The first of whom you would know, was Empress of many, with a way with words, who led a lifestyle so polluted by the vice of lust, that she legalized it to excuse her of her own condemnation. She is Semiramis, of whom we read that succeeded Ninus, as his wife, to rule the Soldan land. The next is she that killed herself over love and broke faith with the ashes of Sychaeus. Then is the lustful Cleopatra. See Helen, for whom sickness revolved around for so much time, and see the great Achilles, who fought with love until the end. See Paris, Tristan--

[Virgilio gestures to the numerous spirits surrounding them, naming each and telling their stories. Dante becomes additionally shocked.]

DANTE

Poeta, volontieri
parlerei a quei due che 'nsieme vanno,
e paion sì al vento esser leggieri.

VIRGILIO

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

Poet, I would gladly speak to those two who go together, and seem light among the wind.

*You shall see when they are closer to us;
and implore them for the love that leads them, and they will come.*

[The wind becomes loud as it surrounds them and Dante raises his voice.]

DANTE

O anime affannate,
venite a noi parlar, s'altri nol niega!

O wearied souls, come and speak to us, if one permits!

[Doves descend upon them, indicating where Dido lays, distraught with her monologue.]

FRANCESCA

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

se fosse amico il re dell'universo
noi pregheremmo lui della tue pace,
poi c'hai pietà del nostro mal perverso.

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

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

Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende,
prese costui della bella persona
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.

Amor condusse noi ad una morta:
Caina attende chi cita ci spense.

New Italian:

O graziosa, benevola creatura
che visitarci tramite l'aere perso
noi che schernimmo il mondo di sanguigno,

se fosse amico 'l re dell'universo
noi pregheremmo lui della tu pace,
abbia pietà del nostro sbaglio perverso.

Di quel che tu vorresti sentire, parlar
noi sentiremo e parleremo con te,
mentre il vento, com' adesso, è mite.

Sulla terra dove nata io fui
siede la marina dove 'l Po discende
con un flusso calmo ai seguaci sui.

Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende
prese costui con forma bella piacevole
che ho preso; e 'l modo ancor m'affligge.

Amor, che a nullo amato amor perdona,
mi prese del costui con forma bella
che, come vedi, ancor mi abbandona.

Amor condusse noi ad una morta:
Caina attende chi cita ci spense.

O gracious and benign animal, that goes through the dirty air to visit us, who stained the world with blood, if the King of the universe were our friend, we would pray to him for peace. He has pity on our perverse intent. Of that which you would like to hear and speak, we will hear and speak with you while the wind, as it is now, is quiet. On the land where I was born, sits the shore where the river Po descends with a peaceful flow, to its followers. Love, quick to arise in the gentle heart, seized this man with the pleasing form I have taken and the mode of which afflicts me still. Love, which pardons no one beloved from loving, seized me so strongly with his pleasing form that, as you can see, has not abandoned me still. Love brought us to one death: Cain waits for him who quenched our lives.

[After hearing Francesca's first lament, Dante bows his head in silence and in thought.]

VIRGILIO

Che pense?

What do you think?

[Dante begins, turned to Virgilio.]

DANTE

Oh lasso,
quanti dolci pensier, quanto disio
menò costoro al doloroso passo!

Alas, how many sweet thoughts, how much desire, brought them to a painful pass.

[Dante turns back to the spirits]

Francesca, i tuoi martiri
a lacrimar mi fanno tristo e pio.
Ma dimmi: al tempo de' dolci sospiri
a che e come concedette amore
che conosceste i dubbiosi disiri?

*Francesca, your torments make me weep out of grief and sorrow. But tell me:
at the time of your sweet sighs how and by what means did love bestow the knowledge of your
uncertain desires?*

FRANCESCA

Nessun maggior dolore
che ricordarsi del tempo felice
nella miseria; e ciò sa l' tuo dottore.

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

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

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

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

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

New Italian:

Nessun maggior dolore
che ricordarsi del tempo gioioso
nella penuria; e ciò sa l' tuo maestro.

Pero s' a conoscer la prima radice
del nostro amore tu hai esteso affetto
dirò come colui che piange e dice.

Un giorno, leggevamo per diletto
di Lancialotto, come amore lo strinse:
soli eravamo e senza alcun timore

I nostri occhi ci sospinse a volte
quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso;
ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.

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

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

There is no greater pain than to recall a time of bliss in our misery, and this your teacher knows. But if you truly want to know the first root of our love, with such longing, I will tell you as one weeps in telling. One day, we were reading for our delight, of Lancelot, how love embraced him; we were alone and without any reservations. More than once did our eyes meet from the reading, and drained the color from our faces; but only at one point did it defeat us. When we read the laughter so longed for, was met by a kiss from the lover, this man, who shall never be detached from me, quiveringly kissed my lips. Galeotto was the book and he that wrote it: that day we read no further.

[While Francesca spoke, Paolo wept. This brings Dante so much emotion, that he faints.]

Translation Reflection

Translating is quite the process, especially when going from older Italian, of Dante's time, to modern Italian. Both versions of the Italian language are not too far off since the Italian we know today is based off of Dante's Italian, the Tuscan dialect. Dante is a notable and important writer of Italian history, as a prominent figure of written Italian vernacular and his formulaic poetic style. He uses an interlocking tercets rhyme scheme (ABA BCB CDC, etc.) in his *terzine* (tercets) as well as using an *endecasillabo*, an eleven-syllable line for each and every line, for the entirety of *The Divine Comedy*. This is a rigid protocol to follow and was quite difficult for me to duplicate but I tried my best to form my own version with a protocol, even if it was a bit looser than Dante's. There were two problems that arose in doing this: having a steady rhyme scheme and adhering to a twelve-syllable line, for each and every line. I planned on using a rhyme scheme format (ABA/BCB, ABB/BBA, or AAA, BBB) but it did not completely line up. For example, in the very first tercet, I thought I would use an ABB rhyme:

*O graziosa, benevola creatura
che visitarci tramite l'aere perso
noi che schernimmo il mondo di sanguigno,*

However, *verso* and *sanguigno* do not rhyme so well. A word like *perverso* or *diverso* would be better off since not only does the ending "o" rhyme but the ending syllable as a whole rhymes. I ran into this problem throughout my first attempt at the full translation, mistakenly inserting words I thought were rhyming but were inherently missing identical sounding ends. The second problem, being the twelve-syllable line, seemed quite doable and if anything, I was convinced I achieved this for each line of Francesca's soliloquy. What I forgot to pay attention to is the flow

of Dante's lines and how some words, depending on their sonic make-up, would combine to make the syllable count shorter. Using the first tercet again, but specifically the third line, one can see this:

noi che scher-nim-mo il mon-do di san-gui-gno
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

At first glance, if every word is pronounced at its fullest, this line does adhere to my twelve-syllable line rule. Yet, Dante combines words that are next to one another if the first word ends in a vowel and the next starts with a vowel. Therefore, this same line combines *schernimmo* and *il*, cutting down one syllable and it would go as follows:

noi che scher-nim-mo 'l mon-do di san-gui-gno
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

After having major difficulty adhering to these protocols of my own, I switched to free verse. In examining works on free verse libretto, Charles Gounod states the exact thought I came upon in writing and composing this scene. There is freedom gained in setting prose to music, that transcend the rigid bounds the text itself can set. He states the following:

The infinite variety of stress, in prose, offers the musician quite new horizons which will save him from monotony and uniformity. Independence and freedom of pace will then come to terms with observance of the higher laws that govern periodic pulse and the thousand nuances of prosody. Every syllable will then have its own quantity, its own precise weight in truth of expression and accuracy of language. Longs and shorts will not have to make those cruel concessions, those barbarous sacrifices of which composers and singers, it must be admitted, take so little notice [...] It seems obvious to me that if he is induced to care for truth by the natural shape of prose, the composer has everything to gain in expressiveness, and nothing to lose but predictability.

¹⁹

In the first half of Francesca's soliloquy is where I figured out that there were different paths to take when forming my process of translating. I could either go line by line, weighing my options of which words I could use, while minorly paying attention to an end-of-the-word rhyme

¹⁹ Charles Gounod, *Autobiographie de Charles Gounod*, ed. Georgina Weldon (London 1875), 88-93, cit. Hugh MacDonald, "The Prose Libretto," *Cambridge Opera Journal* Vol. 1, No. 2 (1989): 155-166, 155.

scheme (rather than carrying one with the aforementioned rigid rhyme scheme). Or, I could translate the entire section and then go back, checking for the rhyme scheme, therefore breaking down each step more. I chose the latter path. With that, however, I had a specific goal when changing the Italian of the text. Since I am setting the text to music, I had to change the text to singable text. Before anything, I translated the original text to English, with the help of John D. Sinclair's translation, as well as Robert Hollander's translation, making my own version.

From there, I retranslated each line back to this "singable" modern Italian, in the effort to test my translation skills, even if the original sentence was sound. For example, the very first line of Francesca's soliloquy has a sonorous feel to the flow of the sentence: *O animal grazioso e benigno*. It flows and I enjoy the sounds that *grazioso* and *benigno* make, ending each word in a vowel, which is optimal when set to music. I changed this sentence however to the following: "*O graziosa, benevola creatura*". My intention here was to introduce Francesca with an open sound, using words ending in vowels. She invites Dante to hear her and her lover's story and an open feeling sound evokes this welcoming gesture. I generally kept the two following lines the same as Dante's original text, to preserve the rhyme scheme, more specifically the end of the line's vowel sounds. I did switch out a couple of words, for instance going from *che visitando vai* to *che visitarci tramite*. This change exemplifies the modernization of Dante's words. For the next few lines I stay closer to Dante's original text other than using additional syllables, since it aligns with his interlocking tercet rhyming format. I carried on in a similar fashion when completing this first half of Francesca's soliloquy.

My process for translating the second part of Francesca's soliloquy was the same as the first. The only major difference was the first line being significantly shorter in syllables since Francesca starts her lament halfway through the tercet Dante writes.

Composition

FRANCESCA'S
SWEET LAMENT

Adagio $\text{♩} = 84$ Free

O gi-a-zi-o-sa len-e vo-la cre-2-tu-ra de-Vi-i-ta-ci tu-ra, le Pa-e-re per-so ri-chie-sa-man-to il no-stro so-
-gri-no se fosse z-mi-co il re dell'uni-ver-so noi per-ge-na-mo lu-i del-la tu-a pa-ce so-bis-pie-z
del no-stro sin-glo per-ve-so. Di quel-te tu vor-re-si ser-ti-rei par-la-re noi
sen-ti-re-mo par-ler-re-mo con te ren-trèl ven-to com'a-des-so è mi-te. $\text{Al} \frac{1}{2}$

mp *mf* *f*

terre do-ve na-ta i-o l'u-i sie-belle ma-ri-ne do-vel po-di-se-n-de con un flus-so ca-mo zo-se-ga-ci su-i A

-mar diel cor gen-til rit-to s'ap-pren-de pre-se ros-tu-ri con fer-ra-tili ri-se-vo-le chio

rit. r. largo

p *sim.*

pre-se del ma-zo-ri con in-dif-feren-za A nor-zi-al-ten-za-za-za-za-za-za-za ma pre-se del co-stu-ri con fir-ma-bi-ltè che

rit. r. largo

mf *p*

co-me ve-di-vo-ri mi-zi-vo-ri A-vo-ri-vo-ri-vo-ri-vo-ri-vo-ri Ce-ri-vo-ri

mp *f* *p* *f* *mp*

tan k'um-é ci' se se rit.

mf mp p

Composition Synopsis

Throughout the entire composition, I made it my goal to illustrate the text through the musical device of text painting, bringing Francesca's words to life as well as demonstrating the setting of *Inferno*. The first tercet melody, *o graziosa benevola creatura che visitarci tramite l'aere perso*, mimics the wind that blows, having the lines direction go up and down like a gentle breeze. The piano accompaniment starts only with the left hand playing. This shifts throughout the piece, sometimes the piano part is filling the listener's ears and other times it becomes scarce, if present at all. I did this with the intention of mimicking the harsh wind that blows Francesca and Paolo every which way, as their *contrapasso*. When the vocal line arrives at *noi che schernimmo il mondo di sanguigno*, the piano accompaniment halts, giving room to the vocal line to be heard. The line also speaks of Francesca describing herself and Paolo as "us who stain the world with blood", referring to their sin. I thought of this to be an isolating line, so I isolated the vocal melody by having it as a solo.

The next line is as follows: *se fosse amico il Re dell'universo noi pregheremmo lui della tua pace*. At the mention of God (il re) is the first sign of a major key, C major specifically, although the piece is in e minor. I thought it was fitting to have a sense of light burst out through the clouds at the sight of this major key, at the mention of God. Dante's love for God and religious value permeates throughout *The Divine Comedy* so it was fitting I give that effect when God enters the picture. This is the same intention I had at the word peace (pace), where the cadence falls on the relative major of G, which elicits tenderness and faithfulness. Each key has certain characteristics. The great composers of history, like Mozart, Beethoven, or Schubert knew this and used these energies to their advantage (for example: using A \flat major as the 'key of the grave'). I thought I would speak on that notion and use the key's energies intentionally,

sometimes unintentionally, as some chord progressions just made sense, like going from a minor key, to its relative major. The last line of the first tercet ends on Francesca speaking of her and Paolo's perverse intentions, which is where the piano accompaniment plays an A minor seventh chord, with the 6th degree. This feels like a subtle clash on *perverso*, which is fitting, but a harmonious clash of notes that are sweet on the ear.

Now, at the mention of sweetness, this must be said: I am well aware that the piano accompaniment has a certain beauty to it, more specifically, it sounds very pretty. It is too pretty at points, distracting from Francesca's words. I did this intentionally to mimic her use of beauty in her words. As said in the close reading of her monologue, Francesca uses pathos and logos, to appeal to Dante's senses not only as a listener of her story but to him as a lover, as a thinker. He is struck so hard by her lament that he faints at the end of Canto V. With this said, she seductively describes her fall to hell, making the reader and Dante focus on the sadness of two sweet lovers, making us almost forget that true treachery exists here in hell. She speaks elaborately, 38 lines in all, just to say that she was killed by her husband for committing adultery with his brother. So I incorporated that elaborateness in the piano accompaniment.

Another time the music mimics the actions of the wind with text painting is the third line of the third tercet: *mentre il vento com'adesso è mite*. I had the piano minimized to one line "while the wind, as it is now, is quiet," to show the increase in silence around them. The next instance of text painting is where the vocal line descends and ascends quickly with sixteenth notes, in order to illustrate the river Po's movement in its flow: *siede la marina dove 'l Po discende con un flusso calmo ai seguaci sui*.

This next section is my favorite section because I simply love sweet sounding music. I composed an atmosphere of *dolcezza* by returning to G Major with the left hand of the piano

accompaniment playing G-E-D-E-D-E. The major sixth interval from G to E, creates a soft suspension as it cadences and settles from E-D, as G and D create a fifth, an open, stately, and perfect interval. The right hand plays a lovely off-beat cluster of consecutive notes G, A, and B. All of this sweetness in the atmosphere, sets up Francesca's direct quote of Guido Guinizelli, *Amor ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende*. I repeated the same melody for the next tercet as well, which continues the Guinizelli homage. I wanted the music to wrap the listener up in harmonious sounds as the text speaks on how love wrapped the hearts of Francesca and Paolo together.

The next shift to e minor with an emphasis on the arrival of the key is the mention of death: *Amor condusse noi ad una morta*. Shifting to minor at the site of death seemed appropriate. The piano repeats that vocal melody for emphasis since Francesca speaks of her and Paolo's arrival to Inferno in death.

Lastly, the final line of the soliloquy speaks on Gianciotto, Francesca's husband and murderer of her and Paolo. It only made sense to let the music indicate Gianciotto's demise. *Caina attende chi cita ci spense* suggests that Cain awaits Gianciotto in the last circle of hell since he too killed his brother, committing an ultimate sin. At the end of this vocal line, I composed a descending chromatic line, demonstrating a fall through Inferno's levels of hell to the bottom. My use of chromaticism is in reference to Liszt's expression of hell and the chaos throughout. Although my intentions throughout the entire piece aligned more with Tchiakovsky's ideas of love in his work, rather than Liszt's overarching mood of disarray, it felt right to reference Liszt's attitude in the mention of characters in the lower, more ominous and treacherous circles of hell.

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