

CANTO 5

*Minos—second circle: the lustful—Francesca da Rimini and
Paolo Malatesta*

1 Thus I descended from the first circle down to the
second, which encloses a smaller space, but so much
more suffering that it goads the souls to shriek.

4 There stands Minos bristling and snarling: he
examines the soul's guilt at the entrance; he judges
and passes sentence by how he wraps.

7 I say that when the ill-born soul comes before
him, it confesses all; and that connoisseur of sin
10 sees which is its place in Hell; he girds himself
with his tail as many times as the levels he wills the
soul to be sent down.

13 Always many stand before him; each goes in turn
to judgment, they speak and hear and are cast into
the deep.

16 “O you who come to the dolorous hospice,” said
Minos when he saw me, leaving off the exercise of
his great office,

19 “beware how you enter and to whom you entrust
yourself: be not deceived by the spacious entrance!”
And my leader to him: “Why still cry out?”

22 Do not impede his going, which is decreed: this is
willed where what is willed can be done, so ask no
more.”

25 Now the grief-stricken notes begin to make
themselves heard; now I have come where much
weeping assails me.

28 I came into a place where all light is silent, that
groans like the sea in a storm, when it is lashed by
conflicting winds.

31 The infernal whirlwind, which never rests, drives
the spirits before its violence; turning and striking, it
tortures them.

34 When they come before the landslide, there the
shrieks, the wailing, the lamenting; there they curse
God's power.

37 I understood that to this torment were damned
the carnal sinners, who subject their reason to their
lust.

40 And as their wings carry off the starlings in the
cold season, in large full flocks, so does that breath
carry the evil spirits

43 here, there, down, up; no hope ever comforts them,
not of lessened suffering, much less of rest.

46 And as the cranes go singing their lays, making a
long line of themselves in the air, so I saw coming
toward us, uttering cries,

49 shades borne by the aforesaid violence; so I said:
"Master, who are those people whom the black wind
so chastises?"

52 "The first of those about whom you wish to learn,"
he said to me then, "was empress over many
languages.

55 So broken was she to the vice of lust that in her
laws she made licit whatever pleased, to lift from
herself the blame she had incurred.

58 She is Semiramis, of whom we read that she
succeeded Ninus and was his wife: she ruled the
lands the Sultan governs now.

61 The next is she who killed herself for love and
broke faith with the ashes of Sichaeus; next is lustful
Cleopatra.

64 Behold Helen, who brought such evil times, and
see the great Achilles, who battled against Love at
the end.

67 Behold Paris, Tristan"; and more than a thousand
shades he showed me, and named them, pointing,
whom Love parted from our life.

- 70 After I had heard my teacher name the ancient
ladies and knights, pity came upon me, and I was
almost lost.
- 73 I began: "Poet, gladly would I speak with those
two who go together and seem to be so light upon
the wind."
- 76 And he to me: "You will see when they are closer
to us; and then beg them by the love that drives
them, and they will come."
- 79 As soon as the wind bends them toward us, I sent
forth my voice: "O wearied souls, come speak with
us, if another does not forbid it!"
- 82 As doves, called by their desire, with wings raised
and steady come to their sweet nest through the air,
borne by their will,
- 85 so did they emerge from the flock where Dido is,
coming to us through the cruel air, so compelling
was my deepfelt cry.
- 88 "O gracious and benign living creature who
through the black air go visiting us who stained the
world blood-red,
- 91 if the king of the universe were friendly we would
pray to him for your peace, since you have pity on
our twisted pain.
- 94 Of whatever it pleases you to hear and to speak
we will listen and speak to you, while the wind is
quiet for us, as it is now.
- 97 The city where I was born sits beside the
shore where the Po descends to have peace with its
followers.
- 100 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.
- 103 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.
- 106 Love led us on to one death. Caina awaits him
who extinguished our life." These words were borne
from them to us.

- 109 When I understood those injured souls, I bent my
face downward, and I held it down so long that the
poet said: “What are you pondering?”
- 112 When I replied, I began: “Alas, how many sweet
thoughts, how much yearning led them to the
grievous pass!”
- 115 Then I turned back to them and spoke, and I began:
“Francesca, your sufferings make me sad and piteous to
tears.
- 118 But tell me: in the time of your sweet sighs, by
what and how did Love grant you to know your
dangerous desires?”
- 121 And she to me: “There is no greater pain than to
remember the happy time in wretchedness; and this
your teacher knows.
- 124 But if you have so much desire to know the first
root of our love, I will do as one who weeps and
speaks.
- 127 We were reading one day, for pleasure, of
Lancelot, how Love beset him; we were alone and
without any suspicion.
- 130 Many times that reading drove our eyes
together and turned our faces pale; but one point
alone was the one that overpowered us.
- 133 When we read that the yearned-for smile was
kissed by so great a lover, he, who will never be
separated from me,
- 136 kissed my mouth all trembling. Galeotto was the
book and he who wrote it: that day we read there no
further.”
- 139 While one spirit said this, the other was weeping
so that for pity I fainted as if I were dying,
- 142 and I fell as a dead body falls.

