

A STUDY OF CERTAIN VERSIONS OF THE  
FRANCESCA DA RIMINI THEME

A THESIS

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FRANCES HAMMAN

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K. S. T. C.  
EMPORIA, KANSAS

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Frances Hamman - 3

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Approved for the Major Department

Harold M Priest

Approved for the Graduate Council

*[Signature]*

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Frances Hamman

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## INTRODUCTION

### NATURE AND PURPOSE

Since Dante first told the tragic love story of Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta in the fifth canto of the "Inferno" of The Divine Comedy, the theme has been interpreted in many forms of art in many nations. Painters, sculptors, musicians, poets, and dramatists in great numbers have made the story a subject for their art. Ingres, Scheffer, Watts, Cabanel are some of those who have interpreted the theme in art. Hermann Gotz and Ambroise Thomas have composed operas on the theme, and Tschaikowsky has used it in a symphonic poem for orchestra.<sup>1</sup> Although it is only the works of the poets and dramatists which are of concern in this study, the number of their works is by no means small. Not only have Dante's fellow countrymen attempted versions of the story, but also the poets and dramatists of France, Germany, England, and the United States have made their interpretations of the tragic theme. Neither has this literary activity been limited to one period but extends from the fourteenth to the twentieth century.

The purpose of this thesis is to study and compare certain treatments of this theme. Dante's story and six later versions of the theme will be considered. Five of the six versions were written during the nineteenth century, one having been written at the beginning of the twentieth century. Four of the versions are dramatic treatments of the tragic

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<sup>1</sup>New International Encyclopedia, Vol. 9, p. 159.

love story; the other two are narrative poems. All the dramatic versions are poetic dramas. Three nations will be represented by the dramas discussed. Two of the works are Italian, two are English, and two are American.

The Rimini story is not an invention of Dante's imagination but is based on actual historical facts in the lives of people who lived not long before Dante wrote his great poem. Henderson reports the results of the research of Mr. Charles Yriate, who went to Rimini in 1883 in order to examine the records and ascertain the historical facts of the story:

. . . . Paolo [son of Malatesta da Verruchio, brother of Giovanni] was married at the age of sixteen, in the year 1269, to Orabile Beatrice, daughter of Uberto, Count of Chiaggioli, and that this marriage was consummated for reasons of state. . . . Giovanni and Francesca were married for ten years (1275-1285) and she bore him a daughter named for its grandmother Concordia. . . . Francesca was untrue to her husband, loving his brother, Paolo, and in the year, 1285, when Giovanni was podesta, or ruling magistrate of Pesaro, a town near Rimini, he discovered the lovers alone together and slew them. Amid the weepings and lamentations of the populace, the slain lovers were laid side by side in one grave. Giovanni afterwards married again, had children by his second wife, and died in the year 1304. The record shows that Francesca was given to Giovanni as a reward for the assistance he had given Polenta in subduing the Ghibellines, but nothing is said of any deception practiced upon Francesca [in connection with her marriage to Giovanni].<sup>2</sup>

The idea of the deception is first introduced by Boccaccio in his Commentary on The Divine Comedy.

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<sup>2</sup>Archibald Henderson, "The Story of Rimini"; THE ARENA, Vol. 39, January, 1908, p. 22.

## SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

The following treatments of the Francesca da Rimini theme will be considered in this study: 1. Silvio Pellico, Francesca da Rimini, (1814), a drama; 2. Leigh Hunt, "The Story of Rimini", (1816), a narrative poem; 3. George Henry Boker, Francesca da Rimini, (1855), a drama; 4. Arthur Sherburn Hardy, Francesca of Rimini, (1872), a narrative poem; 5. Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, (1899), a drama; 6. Gabriele d'Annunzio, Francesca da Rimini, (1901), a drama.

These treatments have been selected from the many versions as those which have best stood the test of time. This study has been limited to those works treating Dante's own characters, using their names, and the historical background of their lives. Therefore, such works as Maeterlinck's Pelleas and Melisande and Echegaray's The Great Galeoto, which Gertrude Brainerd<sup>3</sup> regards as treatments of the theme, are automatically excluded because these plays do not do this. In Maeterlinck's play the names have been changed and there is not the slightest trace of Italian geography nor any attempt to make the setting historical. Echegaray's work has also changed the names and is a modern play which might be regarded as a variation of the theme but not as a version of it. Although there are frequent allusions to the Paolo and Francesca theme and although the inter-relation of the characters is essentially the same, the details of the story are entirely different than those of the story told by Dante.

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<sup>3</sup>Gertrude Gardner Brainerd, "The Paolo and Francesca Theme in Modern Drama", POET LORE, Vol. 27, pp. 390-405, July, 1916.

## SOURCE OF DATA

In the first steps of the research for this study The New International Encyclopedia was of considerable assistance with its bibliography of the treatments of the theme. Magazine material on this subject has not been voluminous, but much of it has been helpful. Of especial value were "The Story of Rimini"<sup>4</sup> and "The Rimini Story in Modern Drama"<sup>5</sup> by Archibald Henderson and "The Three Francescas"<sup>6</sup> by Edith Wharton. Mazzoleni has a fairly complete bibliography<sup>7</sup> in Italian on the Francesca passage in The Divine Comedy. It contains lists of critical accounts, historical accounts, versions of the theme, general comments, and special comments on the subject. There are over two hundred works listed in this bibliography.

After the writers to be included in this study were selected, various histories of Italian, English, and American literature were consulted for information concerning the lives of the writers and the relation of the work under consideration to their other writings. However, the main source of information has been the plays and poems themselves, each of which will be considered later.

<sup>4</sup>THE ARENA, Vol. 39, pp. 20-26, January, 1908.

<sup>5</sup>THE ARENA, Vol. 39, pp. 142-148, February, 1908.

<sup>6</sup>THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, Vol. 175, pp. 17-30, July, 1902.

<sup>7</sup>Achille Mazzoleni, "Saggio bibliografico all'episodio della Francesca da Rimini (Inf. v, 73-142)"; ATTI DELL'ATENEO DI SCIENZE LETTERE ED ARTI IN BERGAMO, Vol. 16, 1900-1901.



So far as the writer has been able to ascertain, there have been no previous studies on the subject except the bibliography and the various magazine articles already mentioned. None of these articles have considered more than three or four versions.

#### METHOD OF TREATMENT

In the chapter on Dante only the form and detailed features of the plot will be discussed. The subsequent chapter will consist of these divisions: (1) an historical account of the play or poem; (2) a discussion of the form and other characteristics of construction; (3) a review of the play emphasizing plot differences; and (4) a discussion of the dramatic effect or tragic power of the version. The discussion will begin with Pellico's play, which is the earliest of the six to be studied, and the others will follow in chronological order.

## CHAPTER ONE

## DANTE'S FRANCESCA

Dante in the first part of the fourteenth century wrote the passage which Karl Vossler<sup>1</sup> designates as "the introductory tragedy of the 'Inferno'." Within less than seventy lines the Italian poet sketches the episode which was to become one of the most famous of The Divine Comedy. In the original the passage was written in iambic verse of eleven syllables in terza rima. Fletcher's translation<sup>2</sup>, which will be used in this study, is written in rhymed but unlinked tercets of iambic pentameter.

Dante and Virgil, his guide, have descended into the second circle of the 'Inferno', that in which the carnal sinners are punished. Their punishment is that

"The hellish hurricane, that ne'er relents,  
Hurtles along the spirits in its raging,  
And buffeting and whirling them, torments.

. . . .  
Hither, thither it sweeps them high and low;  
They are not comforted by any hope  
Of quietness, not even of less woe."<sup>3</sup>

Here Dante sees Semiramus, Dido, Cleopatra, Helen, Paris, Tristan, Achilles, and many others who have sinned in love. The poet says that pity almost overcame him at the sight. Then follows the

<sup>1</sup>Karl Vossler, Medieval Culture, An Introduction to the Study of Dante, translated by William Cranston Lawton, Vol. 2, p. 239, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929.

<sup>2</sup>Jefferson Butler Fletcher, translator, The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933.

<sup>3</sup>'Inferno' v, 31-33, 43-45.

famous passage about Paolo and Francesca:

And I began: 'Peet, gladly I might  
 Speak with those two that close together go  
 And seem upon the wind to be so light.'  
 And he to me: 'Tarry until their doom  
 Shall bring them nearer; then in that love's name  
 Which led them hither, ask; and they will come.'  
 Soon as the wind had driven them our way,  
 I lifted up my voice: 'O weary souls,  
 Come speak to us, if One not bid you nay!  
 As doves, when their desire is calling, fly  
 On spread and level wing to the sweet nest,  
 Carried by their own will along the sky  
 So, issuing from the troop where Dido is,  
 Came these through the malignant air to us,  
 Such virtue had my gentle urgencies.  
 'O mortal one, courteous and humane,  
 Who through the livid air goest greeting us  
 That left upon the world a crimson stain,  
 Were friend the Ruler of the universe,  
 Truly would we entreat him for thy peace  
 For having pity on our fault perverse.  
 Whate'er to hear or say it be thy will,  
 That we will hear, and thereof speak to thee,  
 The while for us the wind, as now, is still.  
 Seated the city is which gave me birth  
 Upon the seashore, where the Po descends  
 To peace with them pursuing him on earth.  
 Love, who on the gentle heart at once attends,  
 Allured this other with the comely form  
 Reft from me, -- and the manner still offends.  
 Love, who none loved not loving will allow,  
 Allured me with delight in him so strong  
 That, as thou seest, it leaves me not e'en now.  
 Love both of us delivered to one death.  
 Caina waits for him who quenched our life.'  
 These were the words borne to us on her breath.  
 When I had heard those spirits sore-betrayed,  
 I bowed my face, and kept it lowered so,  
 Until -- 'What ponderest thou?' -- the Poet said.  
 When I made answer, I began: 'Alas!  
 How many a sweet thought, what great desire  
 Led on these spirits to their woeful pass!  
 And then to them I turned, and spoke again;  
 And I began: 'Francesca, thine afflictions  
 Move me to tears of pity and of pain.  
 But tell me, in the season of sweet sighing,  
 By what and how might love empower you  
 To know the longings dimly underplying?'  
 And she to me: 'There is not greater woe  
 Than recollection of the happy time  
 In wretchedness; and this thy Sage doth know.  
 But if in thee so great affection seeks  
 To see laid bare the first root of our love,  
 I can but do as one who weeps and speaks.'

For pleasure on a day of Lancelot  
 We two were reading, how love mastered him.  
 We were alone; misgiving had we not.  
 And oftentimes that which we read would call  
 Our eyes to meeting, and make pale our faces;  
 But one part only brought us to our fall.  
 When we had read there how the longed-for smile  
 Was kissed by such a lover, this one then,  
 Who parts not from me this eternal while,  
 Kissed me upon my mouth all tremblingly.  
 A Gallehaut was the book, and he who wrote it.  
 That day we read no further, I and he.<sup>1</sup>  
 While to me thus one spirit was replying,  
 The other wept so, that for pitying dread  
 Faintness came over me as I were dying;  
 I fell, as falls the body of one dead."<sup>3</sup>

As can be seen from the quoted passage, Dante gives few of the external details of the story. The historical and fictitious facts and details of the story he has left for his commentators and imitators to supply. Vossler says concerning this:

Now inasmuch as the poet could take for granted his reader's knowledge of these events [the historical background], he could pass over the external facts and was free to throw the whole force of his poetry into the psychological interpretation of the incident. But even this concentration does not satisfy him. Instead of turning the current of his poesy through the inner life of his three chief characters, Paolo, Francesca, and Gianciotto, he concentrates the tragedy upon the central figures, omits action and counter-action, and imparts the quality of profound destiny to that play of chance, which, through weakness, passion, adultery, and betrayal, drives its victim to destruction.<sup>4</sup>

After greeting Dante with an expression of gratitude for his taking notice of Paolo and her, Francesca tells the reason of their downfall:

Love, who on the gentle heart attends  
 . . .  
 Love, who none loved not loving will allow  
 . . .

<sup>3</sup>Inferno, v. 73-142

<sup>4</sup>Op. Cit., p. 240

Love both of us delivered to one death.<sup>5</sup>

After Dante has asked her for more details of her tragic story, Francesca utters those famous lines, which have since been paraphrased by so many authors from Chaucer to Tennyson:

There is not greater woe  
Than recollection of the happy time  
In wretchedness. <sup>6</sup>

It is in continuing this speech that Francesca tells of the revelation of their love when Paolo and she were reading an old romance together. She closes her speech briefly, quietly, but very effectively:

That day we read no further, he and I.<sup>7</sup>

Carlyle says of the Francesca passage:

. . . . There are many of his [Dante's] greatest qualities in the celebrated passage about Francesca, whom he finds in the circle of the Inferno appropriated to those who had erred in love. I many times say I know nowhere a more striking passage; if anyone would select a passage characteristic of a great man, let him study that. It is as tender as the voice of mothers, full of the gentlest pity, though there is much stern tragedy about it. . . . It contains beautiful touches of human weakness . . . . The whole is beautiful like a clear, piping voice heard in the middle of a whirlwind. <sup>8</sup>

Dante, of course, has the background of the "Inferno" upon which to paint his picture. However, this point necessarily does not enter into this study, for the other versions deal

<sup>5</sup>Inferno v, 100, 103, 106

<sup>6</sup>Inferno v, 121-123

<sup>7</sup>Inferno v, 138

<sup>8</sup>Paget Toynbee, Dante in English Literature From Chaucer to Cary (1380-1844), London: Methuen & Co., Vol. 2, pp. 489-490, 1909.

entirely with the incidents in the lives of Paolo and Francesca leading up to their death, and consequently there is no basis for comparison on this point.

With this introduction to the original story as told by Dante, the various plays and poems in which later authors have attempted to tell the same story will be studied and compared in the chapters to follow.

## CHAPTER TWO

PELLICO'S FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

The first version of the Francesca theme to be studied is that of the Italian poet and playwright, Silvio Pellico. Pellico, who lived from 1789 to 1854, wrote twelve tragedies. Francesca da Rimini, one of his early works, was first published in 1814, but it was not put on the stage until 1818, the date usually given for the play. The play first appeared with the celebrated actress, Carlotta Marchionni, as Francesca. In 1820 Felice Romani, a famous libretto-poet of Italy, made Pellico's tragedy into an opera.<sup>1</sup>

The play is a tragedy in five acts. Constructed with the utmost simplicity, it has only four speaking characters -- Lanciotto, Lord of Rimini; Paolo, his brother; Francesca, Lanciotto's wife; and Guido, her father. There is only one setting for the entire play, and that is the royal palace at Rimini. The action of the play occupies less than twenty-four hours, the events of the first four acts taking place on one day and those of the fifth act on the next morning before day-break. There is no counterplot to complicate the main story. From these facts it will be observed that Pellico follows the classical unities. Joel Foote Bingham's translation in blank verse will be used in this study.

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<sup>1</sup>Silvio Pellico, Francesca da Rimini, translated by Joel Foote Bingham, Henry Frowde, London, 1905, Introduction, p. xxvii.

The play opens with Guido, Francesca's father, arriving in Rimini in answer to a message from Lanciotto. The Lord of Rimini tells Guido that he has sent for him because Francesca has fallen into a strange spell of melancholy and desires to return to her home in Ravenna. Guido suggests that she is mourning the loss of her brother, who was killed in war by Paolo, Lanciotto's brother. Lanciotto admits this, telling how Francesca seems to hate Paolo bitterly and wishes to go to Ravenna when she hears that he is returning to Rimini. Guido then meets Francesca, and she re-affirms her desire not to see Paolo.

Paolo arrives at the court and is received by Lanciotto. After an affectionate greeting Paolo tells of his experiences in war and utters those sentiments that make the play a great patriotic work:

For whom was stained my brand with slaughter? For  
 The stranger. And no father-land have I  
 To which the blood of her own citizens  
 Is sacred? O my Italy, for thee,  
 Who valiant citizens dost rear, for thee  
 I will combat, when envy shall arouse  
 Outrage 'gainst thee. And art thou not of all  
 The lands the sun doth warm the gentlest still?  
 Of every fine art, O my Italy,  
 The mother art thou not, my Italy?  
 What is thy dust but heroes pulverized?<sup>2</sup>

Lanciotto then tells Paolo that he has married in the time that Paolo has been absent. Paolo says that he is also in love and asks Lanciotto who his bride is. Lanciotto tells him who she is and her attitude toward Paolo. On hearing this Paolo is greatly surprised and agitated. He says that he will depart within a short time.

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<sup>2</sup>Act I, Scene V, lines 22-32



Francesca has just succeeded in convincing her father and Lanciotto that she should go to Ravenna when Paolo appears. Francesca throws herself into her husband's arms and refuses to look at Paolo. He begs her to forgive him, explaining that he killed her brother involuntarily. She still refuses to recognize him. He suddenly utters a farewell and leaves. Francesca turns her face and involuntarily calls his name.

Francesca is next seen walking in the garden soliloquizing of her love for Paolo and constantly reminding herself that she is Lanciotto's wife. Paolo, happening into the garden, sees her and begins to tell her of his love for her. Although she begs him to leave her, he pays no attention, and finally he forces her to confess that she loves him too. He recalls to her their first meeting in Ravenna when she was still unmarried. He tells of their reading together the old romance of Lancelot, and he shows her the book which he has since carried with him.

Guido and Lanciotto appear, and Paolo bids farewell to his brother and then to Francesca. She, seeing that he is going, cries, "He goes . . . . I die," and faints in Guido's arms. Lanciotto, outraged by what he believes Francesca's involuntary exclamation reveals, quarrels with Paolo and finally orders his brother placed in confinement.

In the next act Lanciotto requests that Paolo and Francesca be brought before. Guido appears and tells Lanciotto that he has made Francesca kneel before a holy image and has demanded the truth from her and that she has sworn her innocence. He

finally obtains Lanciotto's permission to take her to Ravenna and departs to prepare for the journey. Paolo appears, and the brothers again quarrel. They have drawn their swords when Francesca and Guido appear. Guido separates the two brothers. Lanciotto then turns his rage upon Francesca, who protests her innocence of his accusations. Paolo again angers Lanciotto, and he calls his guardsmen to disarm and imprison his brother.

The next act takes place the following morning before daybreak. Guido tells Francesca that he has just persuaded Lanciotto to allow her to go to Ravenna, and that he says he has forgiven her. But this is not enough for Francesca. She says that she must see Lanciotto again and hear him say that he forgives her, for without his pardon she feels that she is lost. Guido goes to bring Lanciotto to her, and in the meantime Paolo appears, having overpowered his jailer. He is half-crazed from a vision he has had of Lanciotto's harming Francesca and has come to protect her. She tries in vain to get him to leave. Then Guido and Lanciotto return, and Lanciotto, seeing them together, loses all control of his rage and flies at Paolo with his sword. Francesca throws herself between them saying she is the criminal. Lanciotto says, "Then die!" and deliberately stabs her. He then kills Paolo and is about to turn his sword upon himself when Guido, drawing back the curtains to let in the light of early dawn, stops him with:

Hold, hold; the blood shed there is thine;  
 And 't is enough to make yon coming ray<sup>3</sup>  
 Quiver in lifting on't the eye of day.

<sup>3</sup>Act V, Scene IV, lines 25-27

Bingham believes that Pellicco admits no guilt on the part of Francesca, and he attributes this treatment to Pellicco's "almost mystical sentiment of moral purity".<sup>4</sup> However, would an innocent Francesca be the true Francesca -- the one Dante found in the second circle of the 'Inferno'? Pellicco has Francesca constantly struggling against her love, and she protests her innocence again and again. As Moses says, the play has:

. . . . a purity of tone that struggled most nobly against an inevitable, passionate end. Paolo is the one who, after some scruples succumbs; Francesca is infinitely conscious that she is a wife. . . . The dramatist would avoid the indelicacy he finds in the reading incident, recounting it only in a situation during which Francesca holds aloof in a wild effort to stifle her love. Through-out the play, there is this ruthless twisting, in a desire to conceal wrong and unpardonable sin.<sup>5</sup>

Probably the best part of the play is the constant struggle in each character between two conflicting emotions. With so few characters Pellicco can concentrate on these and portray this conflict effectively. Lanciotto's love for Francesca and his sense of outraged honor conflict, and the latter finally conquers him when in his rage he murders the two lovers. Guido is torn between his affection for Francesca and his parental duty. When he believes Francesca has been unfaithful, he forces her to kneel before a holy image and, holding a sword over her head, demands the truth. Yet in telling Lanciotto of the scene he says:

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<sup>4</sup>Op. Cit., Preface, p. xx

<sup>5</sup>Montrose J. Moses, editor, Representative Plays by American Dramatists, (1856-1911), E. P. Dutton & Company, 1925, p. 91.

Her weeping takes away my breath. . . . She is  
 My child. . . . .  
 . . . . . Of necessity my heart  
 Was touched. To escape the sight of her  
 I turned my face away. . . . .  
 . . . . . Casting away  
 The steel, I raised her; pressed her on my breast. .  
 Unlucky father am I and offended,  
 But father still. <sup>6</sup>

Paolo's passion for Francesca finally overcomes his loyalty to his brother. Shocked by the news that Lanciotto has married the woman he loves, he resolves to leave. But when he learns that Francesca loves him, he forgets everything but his passion for her. Francesca's struggle between her love for Paolo and her sense of duty as Lanciotto's wife has already been mentioned. Bingham characterizes the various emotions in the following manner:

. . . . a husband's tender yet maddening grief; an aged father's heartbreaking shame and agony; the unspeakable anguish of filial love enforced by conscientious conjugal duty and unbending religious scruple, battling to the death against a passion innocently conceived in early maidenhood and become invincible with growing years; heroic struggles to quench the flame which is ever more rekindled by unexpected, unsought, persistent contacts with the torch itself through inevitable destiny.<sup>7</sup>

It will be seen that these conflicts are similar in that they are all struggles between natural feelings and obligations to the laws of society. It is the clash of these emotions which leads to the great catastrophe of the play.

Pellico loses the feeling of inevitability when he does not bring the situation in the last scene of Act IV to a climax. Lanciotto, having summoned Paolo before him accuses him.

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<sup>6</sup>Act IV, Scene II, lines 28-29, 33-35, 40-43.

<sup>7</sup>Op. Cit., Preface p xxi.

Paolo admits his love but protests Lanciotto's use of the term 'vile' to describe it. Just as the two brothers become so enraged that they draw their swords, Guido and Francesca appear, and Guido separates the brothers. Lanciotto then turns his rage upon Francesca and will not listen to her protests of innocence. He accuses her of planning to meet Paolo in Ravenna. Paolo is enraged at such a suggestion, and the feelings of all are at such a pitch that the situation might have been brought to a climax at this time. But Lanciotto is pacified, and the climax fails to materialize. The dramatist is forced to invent the excuse of Paolo's vision in order to bring the situation to a climax again. In this way the tragedy comes not inevitably through the development of the situation but through the trick of fortune which brings Paolo on the scene at an unpropitious moment.

Pellico uses Dante's incident of the lovers reading together, and in fact quotes briefly from Dante. But as has already been stated, he merely has Paolo recount the incident rather than presenting the scene itself as do Boker, Phillips, and d'Annunzio. In comparison with Dante's passage, Pellico's lacks strength and power. He has not compressed into his few lines the dramatic force which Dante's passage has.

The secret of the lovers is betrayed to Lanciotto through their behavior rather than through the agency of some person as is the case in Boker's, Phillips's, and d'Annunzio's plays. Pellico's device is consistent with his conception of Francesca's character. Only her involuntary expressions and actions could

betray her. It is a dramatic moment when as Paolo is leaving, her cry of "He goes. . . . I die" reveals to Lanciotto her secret.

The play in general is dramatically effective in its characterizations, in the struggles between the conflicting emotions, but its tragic power is weakened by the failure to bring the situation in Act IV to a climax. The passage concerning the reading of the romance is weak when compared to Dante's. The dramatist is not true to the original story in his conception of an innocent Francesca. Pellico's Francesca da Rimini has dramatically effective scenes but fails, through the faults mentioned, to rise to high tragedy.

## CHAPTER THREE

LEIGH HUNT'S STORY OF RIMINI

Leigh Hunt began The Story of Rimini in 1812, but it was not completed until 1816. During its writing, Monkhouse says, it formed a subject of correspondence and conversation with his friends, some of whom, like Brougham and Byron, had supplied him with part of his material. The poem attracted considerable attention when it first appeared. It was violently attacked by Hunt's enemies. In the 1844 edition it was altered, the ending being rewritten, making the poem end with the more authentic murder rather than the duel. The first version reappeared in 1855. The text of the 1816 version will be used in this study.

The poem of 1705 lines is divided into four cantos. The first two cantos are short, 334 lines and 243 lines respectively; the last two are about twice as long, having 608 lines and 520 lines. The poem is important historically for its versification. In The Story of Rimini Hunt is the first in the nineteenth century to revive the rhyming ten-syllable couplet in an essentially new form. The changes as Winchester describes them are that the rimes are run on, the pauses are varied, and the rigidity of the couplet is entirely broken up.<sup>1</sup> Monkhouse acclaims this new form as a successful attack upon the serried ranks of the heroic couplet, which was becoming dull and mechanical.

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<sup>1</sup>C. T. Winchester, A Group of English Essayists of the Early Nineteenth Century. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910, p. 238

He believes that Hunt showed Keats and Shelley the way to a freer treatment of the heroic couplet.<sup>2</sup>

Hunt, unlike Pellico, begins his story before the marriage of Giovanni and Francesca. The city of Ravenna is awaiting the arrival of the train of the Prince from Rimini, who is coming to claim his bride. Almost the entire first canto is spent in describing the city and the royal procession as it arrives at Guido's court. Francesca, although feeling that she is being forced into the marriage, is favorably impressed by her first sight of the handsome, young Prince. He, also, is struck by her beauty and grace.

Francesca is then informed that this prince is not Giovanni, her betrothed, but Paolo, his brother, who has been sent as an envoy to bring the bride to Rimini. Guido tells Francesca that Giovanni is very much like his brother, Paolo, a statement which was partly true and partly false. Although in looks and knightly attainments they are somewhat alike, their interests are very different, and Giovanni has a stern pride, which hardens his nature. After the necessary formalities Francesca departs for Rimini, and Hunt describes the natural scenes along the road as they journey, especially mentioning the great pine forest.

Francesca in Rimini soon learns Giovanni's faults, but she tries to be a good wife. However, Giovanni takes so little interest in the things she likes and is away from home in wars

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<sup>2</sup>Cosmo Monkhouse, Life of Leigh Hunt, Walter Scott, Ltd., London, 1893, p. 112.



so much that Francesca turns to Paolo for companionship. It is as they are reading together of Lancelot, that they realize their friendship has become love. After that they try to avoid each other, each feeling his duty toward Giovanni, but they are unable to do so. Hunt says then:

But Prince Giovanni, whom her wan distress  
Had touched of late, with a new tenderness,  
Which to his fresh surprise did but appear  
To wound her more than when he was severe,  
Began, with other helps perhaps, to see  
Strange things, and missed his brother's company.<sup>3</sup>

When Francesca speaks of Paolo in her sleep his suspicions are confirmed. In the early morning he summons Paolo to meet him at the tilting ground. Giovanni accuses him, and Paolo does not deny his guilt. Giovanni draws his sword, and the two fight. Hunt says:

Yet as the fight grew warm, 'twas evident  
One fought to wound, the other to prevent.<sup>4</sup>

Finally Paolo falls upon Giovanni's sword and dies, bidding his squire to give Francesca the message that:

His noble brother was no fraticide,  
Yet in that fight, and on his sword, -- he died.<sup>5</sup>

The squire delivers this message, and Francesca dies of a broken heart. The two lovers are sent to Ravenna to be buried.

This poem preserves little of the tragic effect of the original story. The story itself is so smothered in Hunt's many lines of description -- description that is good but does not

<sup>3</sup>H. S. Milford, editor, The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt, Oxford University Press, London, 1923, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 32

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 34

advance the story --, that it is weak and ineffective. The scene of the lovers reading together is handled very poorly. The ending with the suicide of Paolo and Francesca's death from a broken heart has none of the tragic force that is so necessary to an effective recital of the story. Pellico has done much better in his play even though it has its defects. Furthermore, the duel is not faithful either to history or to Dante, for Dante has Francesca say:

Caina waits for him who quenched our life.<sup>6</sup>

Caina was the lowest circle of Hell, where fratricides, those who had sinned as Cain had, were punished. Naturally since there is little of the poem devoted to the actual story, there is little worthwhile characterization. None of the characters stand out clearly and realistically.

The fact of the deception of Francesca concerning Giovanni is taken from Boccaccio's Commentary on The Divine Comedy. But even this is not used effectively. There is too little difference drawn between the two brothers. Boker used the idea much more dramatically in his play when he made Lanciotto a deformed hunchback.

Winchester says of the poem:

As to his poetry there is little need to say much. He was unable to portray or to appreciate genuine passion; he had little sympathy with the more strenuous forms of action and suffering. All the higher reaches of poetry were therefore inaccessible to him. That is the cause of his failure in the most ambitious of his poems, 'The Story of Rimini'. To retell that story of Paolo and Francesca, told once for all with the simplicity and the reticence of extremest pathos, is a daring venture for any poet; but for Leigh Hunt to attempt it was the sheerest folly.

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<sup>6</sup>Inferno, v, l. 107

He tried to give that most poignant of tragedies a certain gentle tenderness and grace; the results at the supreme points of the narrative are nothing less than astounding.<sup>7</sup>

Winchester goes on to give the example of Hunt's version of the scene where the lovers read together of Lancelot. He says:

It is one of the most incredible lapses into pure banality in English verse. And there are other passages almost as bad. Wherever the feeling should be intense and concentrated, he dilutes it into sentimental commonplace . . . . The only parts of the poem, therefore, that have any merit are the unessential parts, descriptive and decorative -- gardens and processions, and that sort of thing.<sup>8</sup>

Cosmo Monkhouse, biographer of Hunt, also has little praise for this poem. He says that the object of the poem was to prove the tragic effects of deceit, Francesca being a victim of her father's duplicity. He says;

It is possible that in other hands this false direction of the maiden's imagination might have been used with powerful effect as a cause of the tragedy. But in 'The Story of Rimini' it tells only, if it tells at all, as a very weak apology. The husband is not represented as a brute or ill-favored, but only somewhat stern and careless, reposing too much confidence in his brother and wife. . . . The poem as a whole curiously marks the limits of Leigh Hunt's capacity not only as a poet, but also as an appreciator of poetry. It shows much ingenuity and a good deal of fancy, but it fails utterly in higher qualities.<sup>9</sup>

Although in this poem Leigh Hunt paved the way for a new verse form, and although he has some nature descriptions of great beauty, "The Story of Rimini" cannot rank high as a treatment of the Francesca theme. It is weak, ineffective, and commonplace.

<sup>7</sup>Op. cit., p. 236

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 237

<sup>9</sup>Op. cit., pp 111-112

## CHAPTER FOUR

BOKER'S FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

George Henry Boker (1823-1890), a Philadelphia poet and dramatist, wrote his play Francesca da Rimini in 1855. It was first performed at the Broadway Theater in New York, September 26, 1855, with E. L. Davenport as Lanciotto, Madame Ponisi as Francesca, and James W. Lanergan as Paolo. In Philadelphia Mrs. John Drew played Francesca. The play proved very successful upon the stage and was revived by Lawrence Barrett in 1882. In 1901 Otis Skinner again revived it. The versions for the stage were all changed somewhat from Boker's first version.

The play of five acts is written in blank verse of an Elizabethan style. Knight<sup>1</sup> sees a Shakespearean influence in the opening scene of Act II in Francesca's description of Dante which he compares with Ophelia's account of Hamlet's mad behavior. The passage follows:

. . . . . As I passed the hall,  
 I met your solemn Dante, with huge strides  
 Pacing in measure to his stately verse.  
 The sweeping sleeves of his broad, scarlet robe  
 Blew out behind like wide-expanded wings,  
 And seemed to buoy him in his level flight.  
 Thinking to pass without disturbing him,  
 I stole on tip-toe; but the poet paused,  
 Subsiding into man, and steadily  
 Bent on my face the lustre of his eyes,  
 Then taking both my trembling hands in his --  
 You know how his God-troubled forehead awes --  
 He looked into my eyes and shook his head,  
 As if he dared not speak of what he saw;  
 Then muttered, sighed, and slowly turned away  
 The weight of his intolerable brow.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Grant C. Knight, American Literature and Culture. New York: Ray Long & Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1932, pp. 147-149.

<sup>2</sup>Act II, Scene I, lines 41-56

Boker introduces two new characters: Malatesta, Lord of Rimini and father of Lanciotto and Paolo, and Pepé, Malatesta's jester.

The play opens at Rimini just at the close of a campaign in the war between the Guelfs and Ghibellines in which Guido of Ravenna has been seriously defeated by the Malatestas. The Lord of Rimini in making peace terms with Guido arranges a marriage between his son, Lanciotto, and Guido's daughter, Francesca. Lanciotto, a deformed hunchback, is a very courageous warrior but an extremely sensitive man, and he is much disturbed at the idea of the match. He believes no woman could love him because of his deformities. He persuades his father to send his young and handsome brother, Paolo, to Ravenna as an envoy to make the betrothal and bring Francesca to Rimini.

Guido has not told Francesca of Lanciotto's ugly appearance, and when he learns that Paolo is coming as the envoy, he goes on with the deception. Francesca sees Paolo arrive and is well pleased with his appearance. It is only through her maid that she learns that he is not Lanciotto. But she is still deceived as to Lanciotto's appearance, because Guido and Paolo, who admires his brother too much to speak against him, lead her to believe that he is much like Paolo.

Francesca goes to Rimini and receives a severe shock when she first sees the man who is to be her husband. Lanciotto, keenly sensitive, sees her surprise and distress and gives her a chance to refuse to go through with the marriage. With Guido

urging her to go on with the marriage for political reasons, Francesca says that she will marry Lanciotto. They have just been married when Lanciotto is called away to war.

While Lanciotto is away, Paolo and Francesca spend much time together. It is while they are reading the story of Lancelot and Guenevra, that their love for each other overcomes them. Pepé, the fool, who hates both Lanciotto and Paolo for the insults they have given him, witnesses this scene and immediately goes to Lanciotto's camp and tells him what he has seen. Lanciotto stabs the fool for bringing the story to him, and then he hastens to Rimini.

Meanwhile at Rimini Paolo is determined to go away, but Francesca pleads with him to stay. It is at this moment that Lanciotto returns. He begs Paolo and Francesca to deny their guilt, but they say that they cannot. Lanciotto stabs Francesca and then Paolo. Guido and Malatesta appear, and he shows them the bloody sight, saying:

Be satisfied with what you see. You two  
Began this tragedy, I finished it.<sup>3</sup>

Then, realizing the full significance of his act, he falls on the dead body of Paolo with the words:

Oh God! I cannot cheat myself with words!  
I loved him more than honour -- more than life --  
This man Paolo -- this stark, bleeding corpse!  
Here let me rest till God wake us all.<sup>4</sup>

Boker has written a tragedy which is very effective dramatically. He has real, living characters moving in dramatic

<sup>3</sup>Act V, Scene III, lines 195-198

<sup>4</sup>Act V, Scene III, lines 211-214

situations to an inevitable catastrophe. The background of the play is essentially Italian. Boker has woven superstition into the background in such a manner as to heighten effects. He has emphasized Lanciotto's character without allowing the characters of Francesca and Paolo to suffer. His addition of Pepé as the betrayer of the lovers is a fine dramatic touch.

Lanciotto is the outstanding character of the tragedy. As Quinn states, Boker is able to make him the central figure without lessening the interest in the lovers. Quinn continues, telling how this was done:

To do this he had of course to modify the actual historical facts; but more important he had to create by the power of imagination what Francesca called the noblest heart in Rimini. . . . but there can be no question that in English at least it is surpassed by no other version. . . . The character of Paolo, young, handsome, lovable, but a bit of a coxcomb, is contrasted through his own actions and words with Lanciotto, a warrior, misshapen in body but sensitive to a degree, and with a love for his brother that embodies not only natural affection but also admiration for that physical perfection that has been denied him. Delicately, too, does Boker depict that craving for affection on the part of a man no longer young which when made concrete by being centered upon a young and beautiful woman becomes one of the most real motives of life and art.<sup>5</sup>

Francesca is not a mere pawn to be manipulated by the two crafty lords, Malatesta and Guido, but as Henderson points out, is given the ultimate choice of refusal in the matter of the marriage. She has been deceived, but it is when she adds her own deception to the others by leading Lanciotto to believe that she accepts because she loves him, that the final

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<sup>5</sup>Arthur Hobson Quinn, "The Dramas of George Henry Boker"; PUBLICATIONS OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, Vol. 32 n. s. Vol. 25, No. 2, 1917, pp. 250.

catastrophe is changed from the workings of blind fate to the inevitable punishment of retributive justice.<sup>6</sup> Quinn points out that Boker's Francesca is not a mere receptive character as in Phillips's and Leigh Hunt's versions, but is alive and has a great capacity for love. Ready to love Lanciotto and unknowingly mistaking Paolo for him, she gives her heart to Paolo. Quinn says that her girlish attempt to conceal her pain when she discovers how she has been deceived, is of the essence of drama for her words seem wrung out of her soul:<sup>7</sup>

O! heaven!  
Is that my husband, Count Paolo? You,  
You then, among the rest, have played me false!<sup>8</sup>

Boker's use of Pepé as the agent to betray the lovers is probably the best handling of this detail. Certainly it is more effective dramatically than the methods used by Pellico or Hunt. Pepé is also better than Lucrezia in Phillips's play and equals at least Malatestino of d'Annunzio. Pepé's pointed, satirical remarks upon every situation of the drama are forceful in their constant suggestion of impending tragedy. His malicious joy after he has witnessed the love scene between Paolo and Francesca lends a feeling of horror to the play -- a feeling which foreshadows the dreadful deeds to come.

Quinn<sup>9</sup> regards this play as the greatest play written in

<sup>6</sup>Archibald Henderson, "The Rimini Story in Modern Drama"; THE ARENA, Vol. 39, pp. 142-148.

<sup>7</sup>Arthur Hobson Quinn, "George Henry Boker, Playwright and Patriot"; SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE, Vol. 73, June 1923, p. 706.

<sup>8</sup>Act III, Scene II, lines 163-165.

<sup>9</sup>Arthur Hobson Quinn, "George Henry Boker, Playwright and Patriot"; SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE, Vol. 73, June 1923, p. 706.



English during the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century. The Dictionary of American Biography has this to say concerning the play:

... so skillfully did Boker blend history and tradition, so powerful was his interpretation of the Italian spirit of the thirteenth century in terms of passion, pride, and brotherly affection, that he produced the greatest piece of dramatic poetry written in the English language and presented on the professional stage during the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Certainly the play is dramatically effective as it moves inevitably toward its tragic conclusion. It is an outstanding version of the Francesca da Rimini story.

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<sup>10</sup> Allen Johnson, editor, Dictionary of American Biography, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929, Vol. 2, p. 416.

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CHAPTER FIVEHARDY'S FRANCESCA OF RIMINI

Arthur Sherburn Hardy (1847-1930) was a mathematician, diplomat, and novelist as well as a poet. He traveled a great deal. He attended schools in Switzerland and in Paris as well as in this country. He was professor of civil engineering at Grinnell and of civil engineering and later mathematics at Dartmouth. For two years he was editor of the Cosmopolitan Magazine. Like Boker he was an ambassador, having served as minister to Persia, Greece, Roumania, Servia, Switzerland, and Spain. His Francesca of Rimini was written in 1872.

Francesca of Rimini is not a long poem, having a few over five hundred lines; it is divided into seven parts. The poem is written in rhyme royal. The verse is good, and there are many quotable lines.

Hardy begins his poem with a description of the modern Ravenna comparing its dullness with its former glory. He says:

And save that shrine of him, the bard divine,  
No good thing tempts the pilgrim's wandering way  
Within her narrow streets; no longer shine  
The lights of midnight revel, -- all the gay  
And happy songs are dead upon her gray  
Still lips, that fortune, fickle lover, oft  
In other days had thrilled with kisses soft.

Nor aught is heard of music in her streets,  
Save here perchance a maiden singing o'er  
Her work: the pulse of life responsive beats  
No more to stirring sounds of peace or war,  
For this the peace that dwells within her door  
Is that which hovers o'er the chilling clay  
Ere yet the spirit passeth quite away.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Sherburn Hardy, Francesca of Rimini. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1878, pp. 5-6.

With this introduction the author turns back to those days when Guido and Francesca dwelt in Ravenna. He describes the beauty of Francesca. Throughout the poem there are forebodings of tragedy. He says Francesca has not yet been touched by sorrow or tragedy:

For in her heart each image fair was born,  
As flowers, standing in the doors of morn,  
Ere yet the lurking shadows, one by one,  
Gather and deepen in the noontide sun.<sup>2</sup>

And he feels that it must be so:

. . . . . for if to him who first  
The toilsome way begun, were told the sin,  
The pain, the shame, the hunger, and the thirst,  
How should he dare the journey to begin.<sup>3</sup>

Wars were dividing the land in that day. Guido, wishing to strengthen the recent truce, arranges a marriage between his daughter and Malatesta. His counselor warns him that if Francesca learns of the ugly appearance of Malatesta, she cannot be persuaded to marry him. Therefore he suggests that the handsome brother, Paolo, should come as an envoy:

That thus a maiden's fancies may not set  
At naught thy pleasure and new perils yet  
The state assail.<sup>4</sup>

Thus is the plot laid for the deception, and Paolo, ignorant of the plot, comes to Ravenna. Francesca gives him her heart when first she sees him, little dreaming of the sorrow that is to result.

Francesca becomes Malatesta's bride and learns how she has

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 11

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-12

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14

been deceived. After a while Malatesta goes away to govern a distant province. Francesca cannot forget her love for Paolo.

Hardy says:

For though an angel, pleading, to her lips  
 Had borne a draught so peaceful and so deep  
 That all her pain had found therein eclipse,  
 Yet she had deemed it still more sweet to keep  
 The memories that stirred her troubled sleep  
 As with the tremor of a kiss, whose thrill  
 She had not known till lips and heart were still.  
 For so, scarce conscious of our joy, we wait  
 Expectant, looking for some better guest,  
 As he who sees the moving clouds too late,  
 Alas! too late, turn golden in the west;  
 Or sudden feels the odorous breath, when pressed  
 Beneath his feet, the flower yields at last  
 The fragrance round his life it fain had cast.<sup>5</sup>

As Francesca wanders through the wood near the river one day, she meets Paolo returning from the chase. Paolo sees the sudden light of yearning in her eyes and feels the pulsing pain of his own love. Only a path lies between them, but he does not cross it,

. . . . . for e'en such fear passed o'er  
 Her troubled face as love alone may know, --  
 As shrinking back, yet with sad step and slow,  
 Pleading yet mute, in the dim shuddering light  
 She moved, a fading vision, from his sight.<sup>6</sup>

Paolo realizes then that his love will be the measure of her woe, the wound from which she cannot flee.

The next scene is within the castle. Francesca sits and seaves her silken braids as she listens to Paolo read of the wrong in King Arthur's court. Francesca reflects that Guinevere had a happiness which she had never known. Malatesta had never

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 29-30

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 36

had for her the love and trust that Arthur had given Guinevere. For her there had been only treachery, hate, pity, and scorn. Paolo reading of the Queen's smile is conscious of her gaze and, lifting his eyes, beholds her radiant face. Hardy says:

So moving down that vale, whose end they knew,  
Of sweetest flowers and sharpest thorns, came they  
At last thereto; and waiting Rumor through  
The air took wing upon her doleful way.  
So, clothed in scorn or pity, shall men say  
On thee the blight of Eden too must cling,  
O Love! thou Jester, that wast born a King!<sup>7</sup>

And with this veiled intimation of their transgression, the poem is brought to a close on a note of philosophy -- that life may be a web of exquisite design or may all unravel -- that it may be a discordant wail or a sweet melody.

Hardy adds an original touch to his poem in the scene in which Francesca and Paolo meet in the woods. Otherwise he uses most of the usual details of the story -- the background of war, the deception, the reading incident -- until he comes to the betrayal and the death. These he leaves for the reader's imagination. The scenes are too violent to enter into his poem. Possibly some chances for dramatic effectiveness are lost by this treatment, but he has the essence of the story -- the love of Paolo and Francesca which leads them into sin.

This poem is comparatively short, less than one-third as long as Hunt's, yet a very small part of the poem is narrative. The rest is devoted to the development of spiritual atmosphere. Instead of detracting from the story, this treatment heightens

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 45

the effect. The few narrative lines are prepared for in such a way by this spiritual background that when they do come, they have an intense poignancy.

After Malatesta has departed to govern a distant province, Francesca's despairing sadness is described. Hardy poignantly describes her troubled memories of a love realized too late. She seeks the solitude of the woods in an effort to find peace. Then one day, while wandering in the woods, she meets Paolo, and Hardy tells of the meeting in the following manner:

Face unto face awhile in the dim wood,  
So near that he might see the white pearls rise  
And tremble in her loosened gown, they stood, --  
And sudden light within her yearning eyes,  
As made those joyless days in some sweet wise  
As dreams of a long-ending night and drear,  
That sudden fails from dusk to dawn, appear.<sup>8</sup>

The poem impresses one with its quietness and gentleness; here is none of the violence and stress of life. Beside Boker's play, pulsing and crowded with life, Francesca of Rimini seems almost unreal. Yet in his attitude toward the tragedy Hardy is similar to Dante. The great Italian poet has in his passage no violence, only a quiet sadness. He is overwhelmed with pity for the lovers.

Francesca of Rimini with its spiritual atmosphere, its gentle sadness, its poignant lines, stands as a remarkable version of the story. It possesses characteristics of the Dante passage in that it has the same attitude toward the tragedy-- the lovers were guilty of a mortal sin, but they were urged by love, and the poet feels overwhelmed with pity for them -- but it falls short of the original passage in tragic intensity.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

## CHAPTER SIX

PHILLIPS'S PAOLO AND FRANCESCA

Stephen Phillips, (1868-1915), was an English actor, poet, and dramatist. Phillips, who made several worthwhile contributions to poetic drama, wrote the tragedy, Paolo and Francesca in 1899. This play, his Herod (1900) and Ulysses (1902) are examples of his dramatizations of great stories of the past. Paolo and Francesca is usually regarded as his best play.

The play, written in blank verse, which has much beauty and poetic charm, is divided into four acts. The scenes are varied -- the Malatesta castle, a wayside inn, an apothecary's shop, the castle garden. The action occupies nine days.

The play opens with Giovanni Malatesta welcoming to Rimini his bride, Francesca of Ravenna, and his brother, Paolo, who has escorted Francesca to Rimini. Francesca is very young, has just come from the convent, and Giovanni entrusts her to the care of his cousin, Lucrezia, who has been at the court many years. Lucrezia is somewhat jealous of Francesca who usurps the position she has had. Blind Angela, Giovanni's old nurse, tells him that she feels that some tragedy is going to touch him soon. He asks her to tell him more. She says that she sees someone wooing Francesca. When Giovanni demands to know who it is, she says:

He shall be  
Not far to seek; yet perilous to find.  
Unwilling he comes a wooing; she  
Unwillingly is wooed; yet they shall woo.  
His kiss was on her lips before she was born.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen Phillips, Paolo and Francesca, New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1922. p. 30

As the next act opens, Paolo is preparing to leave Rimini. Giovanni has tried in vain to get him to stay. Paolo says that he must go, but will not tell Giovanni why. Francesca, too, pleads with Paolo to stay, but he is more determined than ever to go. After he has departed, Francesca tells her maid that Paolo trembled and grew pale when he looked upon her, suffered when she smiled. She exults for a moment in her power and then says:

And yet, Nita, and yet -- can any tell  
 How sorrow first doth come? Is there a step,  
 A light step, or a dreamy drip of oars?  
 Is there a stirring of leaves, or ruffle of wings?  
 For it seems to me that softly, without hand,  
 Surely she touches me.<sup>2</sup>

She then wonders how far Paolo has gone. She says surely it is natural to desire him back. Her maid says that he is her husband's brother. Then Francesca realizes and says,

O, I had not thought!  
 I had not thought! I have sinned, and I am stained!<sup>3</sup>

Giovanni tells Lucrezia of Angela's warning. Lucrezia suggests that Paolo might be the one. He is deeply shocked by such a suggestion, but he sees that it might be true.

Paolo is next seen at a wayside inn near Rimini where he and his companions have stopped on their journey. He cannot enter into the others' jollity but sits and gazes back on the road toward Rimini. He cannot drive the thought of Francesca from his mind and finally resolves to take poison.

The next scene is in an apothecary's shop. It is after

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 42

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 43



closing hours. Giovanni comes to get a love potion for Francesca. As he is ready to leave, a knock sounds on the barred door, and Giovanni, not wishing to meet anyone, hides behind an arras. It is Paolo who enters. He explains that he wishes to take poison and gives the reason. After he has left the shop, Giovanni starts to go after him to stop him and then decides that perhaps this way is best. Just as Giovanni reaches his castle, he receives a message which compels him to leave immediately for the war.

Meanwhile Paolo has come back to the castle to see Francesca once more before he dies. Just at daybreak Francesca walks in the garden for she has been unable to sleep. She brings with her an old romance to read. Paolo comes to her, and together they read of Lancelot and Guinevere. When Paolo reads of Lancelot's kiss, he kisses Francesca.

Two days later Giovanni returns expecting to receive word of Paolo's death. When Lucrezia, instead, tells him that Paolo has been at the castle and with Francesca much of the time, he is enraged. He desires to find the lovers together and kill them. Lucrezia suggests that he pretend to depart to the war again but actually remain at Rimini. He seizes upon the plan. Francesca appears, and he tells her he has to leave again immediately and urges her to seek Paolo's companionship.

Francesca, troubled in her heart, turns to Lucrezia and begs her to be a mother to her. This touches Lucrezia's heart, and she resolves to help Francesca. She goes to find Giovanni and persuade him not to carry out his plan. Paolo comes and

begs to see Francesca, and she admits him. She finally yields to his passionate pleading.

Lucrezia returns to Francesca's chamber after having hunted in vain for Giovanni. She does not know where Francesca has gone and is greatly disturbed when the maid tells her that Paolo has come to see her. Just then Giovanni appears from the inner room, and there is blood on his hand. He arouses the household. Then when the servants bring out the bodies, he stoops and kisses them. He says:

She takes away my strength.  
I did not know the dead could have such hair.  
Hide them. They look like children fast asleep!<sup>4</sup>

Phillips, like Pellico, does not use the idea of the deception. However, the play does not suffer through this. One of the unusual things about the play is that the seed of suspicion is sowed in Giovanni's mind much earlier than in either Pellico's play or Boker's. It is a motive force from almost the beginning of the play. Edith Wharton believes that this weakens the play by removing the important element of suspense and making the rest of the play a mere episodic progress toward an anticipated catastrophe.<sup>5</sup> But, on the other hand, as Halleck suggests, this device has a dramatic value in that it creates and sustains a sense of something definitely progressing toward a certain point. With this suspicion introduced early in the play, Phillips drives steadily toward the tragic climax, thus centering interest on a concrete dramatic situation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 120

<sup>5</sup>Edith Wharton, "The Three Francescas;" THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, Vol. 175, July, 1902, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup>Reuben Post Halleck, Halleck's New English Literature. New York: American Book Company, 1913, p. 613

Phillips differs from the other three dramatists also in having the murder take place offstage. Whether this treatment is more effective than that of the other dramatists is a debatable question. Both Boker and d'Annunzio have tragically powerful climaxes for their dramas -- climaxes which seem to be consistent with their treatment throughout the plays. But by this same standard Phillips' conclusion is effective, for it seems in accord with the poetic and romantic treatment of the rest of the play. Certainly the scene in which Giovanni comes from the inner room and when Lucrezia sees blood on his hand, he says that it is not his own, has a quiet but intensive force. Lawrence Gilman describes the final tragedy as having "the incomparably powerful effect of drama consummated behind closed doors."<sup>7</sup>

Phillips has used superstition as did Boker, but he brings his superstition to forefront having the warning of the old nurse play an active part in the development of the play. Boker, on the other hand, has only woven it into the background. This handling is probably more effective than Phillips's.

Phillips has made no attempt to give Italian color to his play. Moses says,

Stephen Phillips. . . . ignores altogether Italian temperament; save for the fact that he occasionally mentions the Tyrant of Rimini, Pesaro, and Florence, and that he adheres to historic names, but there is more of the English hamlet romance in the piece, than Italian passion.<sup>8</sup>

Probably this final statement designating the play as an

<sup>7</sup>Lawrence Gilman, "An Operatic Paolo and Francesca;" THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW, Vol. 205, February, 1917, p. 296.

<sup>8</sup>Montrose J. Moses, Representative Plays by American Dramatists (1856-1911). New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1925. p. 92.

English hamlet romance is an unjustified assertion, for the play does rise much above a simple romance. But this does not alter the fact that, other than a few names, there is nothing to mark the play as Italian.

The characters are real, yet they do not stand out as do Boker's. They do not have the same strength. Williams says of them:

The characters of the drama are living, they are far from being mere puppets, but they are subsumed to the general lyrical atmosphere of the play rather than strongly delineated. Paolo and Francesca are embodiments of youth and pure passion, Giovanni Malatesta is a brooding and sinister pattern of the dramatic type to which he belongs, and Lucrezia, the best drawn character of the play, is the middle-aged woman of the world in whom the sympathies of motherly tenderness are awakened by the helplessness and innocent purity of Francesca. The dramatis personae are well known types. . . . but Paolo and Francesca contains no strong, original or creative character-drawing.<sup>9</sup>

Lucrezia cannot rank dramatically with Boker's Pepe and d'Annunzio's Malatestino. These characters have a dramatic strength which Lucrezia lacks although her character is well-drawn.

The poetry of this play is no doubt one of its outstanding features. There are many lines of great beauty. For instance, the description of the quietness of early dawn is beautiful:

It is the first, the faint stir of dawn.  
So still it is that we might almost hear  
The sigh of all the sleepers in the world.  
And all the rivers running to the sea.<sup>10</sup>

Halleck cites the beauty of atmosphere and the charm of the lines

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<sup>9</sup>Harold Williams, Modern English Writers: Being a Study of Imaginative Literature, 1890-1914, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Limited, 1918. p. 78.

<sup>10</sup>Op. cit., p. 85

as its poetic elements.<sup>11</sup>

Mr. Phillips has a beautiful poetic drama which has certain scenes of quiet dramatic force. The play may lack in Italian color, in delineation of character, in vividness of action, but it has a charming simplicity which ranks it as an effective version of the Rimini theme.

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<sup>11</sup>Op. Cit., p. 613.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

D'ANNUNZIO'S FRANCESCA DA RIMINI

The last play to be studied is that of the Italian poet and playwright, Gabriele d'Annunzio. His Francesca da Rimini was written in 1901 and was first acted in Rome by Eleonor Duse and her company on December 9, 1901. The first performance lasted five hours. After that the play was cut freely and was acted successfully.

The play of five acts is written in blank verse, but a blank verse so varied that it is almost free verse. By this means d'Annunzio has made his verse fit the speaker's mood and the speech. It adds to the flexibility and naturalness. Arthur Symons uses this same verse form in his translation of the play.

Francesca, through the crafty plotting of her brother, Ostasio, has been pledged to the ugly Gianciotto. Ostasio, however, has arranged for Paolo, Gianciotto's handsome brother, to come as the envoy in order to trick Francesca into the marriage, which he desires for political reasons. Francesca speaks to her sister, Samaritana, of their coming separation. Her speech of tender feeling is one of the loveliest ones of the play:

Peace, peace, dear soul,  
My little dove. Why are you troubled? Peace,  
You also and ere long,  
Shall see your day of days,  
And leave our nest as I have left it; then  
Your little bed shall stand  
Empty beside my bed; and I no more  
Shall hear through dreams at dawn

Your little naked feet run to the window,  
 And no more see you, white and barefooted,  
 Run to the window, O my little dove,  
 And no more hear you say to me: 'Francesca,  
 Francesca, now the morning-star is born,  
 And it has chased away the Pleiades.'<sup>1</sup>

Word is brought that Paolo has arrived, and Francesca starts to leave, but as she is going meets Paolo. In a sarcophagus nearby there is growing a crimson rosebush. Francesca plucks a rose and gives it to Paolo.

The next act is in Rimini on the battlements of the Malatesta's castle where the archers are preparing for an attack. Francesca comes to the battlements and is fascinated with the "Greek fire" which the archers are preparing for their assailants. Soon Paolo comes and attempts to persuade Francesca to leave because of the danger, but she refuses to do so. Then as Paolo and Francesca talk, they speak of their love, and Francesca rebukes Paolo for bringing her to Rimini. He asks how he is to die. Just then the signal is given for the battle, and Paolo, giving Francesca his helmet, seizes his bow and rushes to the portcullis. Francesca goes and stands beside him and raises the portcullis as he shoots his arrows, lowering it again after each shot to protect them from the enemy's arrows. Francesca suddenly has the desire to know concerning Paolo:

If the Lord of Mercy  
 Have you in his keeping!<sup>2</sup>

She leaves the portcullis open and allows all the arrows to come in. She kneels and prays while this is going on. When the

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<sup>1</sup>Gabriele d'Annunzio, *Francesca da Rimini*, translated by Arthur Symons, New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1902, p. 49

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 92

battle ends, and Paolo is still unharmed, she takes this as an omen that he is pardoned and cleansed of guilt.

In this battle, Malatestino, the younger brother of Gianciotto and Paolo but crueller than they, loses an eye. Francesca cares for him while he is wounded. When he attempts to make love to her, she repulses him. He is angered by this and betrays the lovers' secret to Gianciotto. It is his crafty, malicious brain which plans the feigned departure of Gianciotto in order to trap the lovers.

When the lovers hear Gianciotto's knock, Paolo thinks to escape by the trap-door, but his coat is caught on the rung of the door, and he is trapped. Gianciotto lunges at him with his sword. Francesca throws herself between them and receives the blow intended for Paolo. He had drawn his dagger, but lets it fall when Francesca is stabbed and catches her in his arms. Gianciotto then pierces his side, and the two lovers die together. Gianciotto then slowly takes his sword across his knee and breaks it.

If Phillips's play lacked Italian color, this play has it in abundance. The settings, the characters, everything about the play is Italian, thirteenth century Italian. Henderson says of it:

Of all the plays ever written upon the theme of the Rimini story, none approaches d'Annunzio's tragedy in the suggesting of an act that is centuries old, in the imaging of an epoch long past, in the reconstruction. . . . of the bloodiest, darkest, and at the same time one of the most beauty loving ages of all history. . . . D'Annunzio. . . . has surpassed all dramatists in the most terribly graphic delineation of the thirteenth century when Dante wrote. . . . the thirteenth century with all its tears and terror, its poetry and passion, its madness and blood. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Archibald Henderson, "The Rimini Story in Modern Drama"; THE ARENA, Vol. 39, February, 1908, pp. 144-145



In the character of Malatestino, d'Annunzio created a character who ranks beside Boker's Pepe. Malatestino is not more cruel than Pepe, but he is more horrible in his cruelty. He cuts off a prisoner's head and then carries the head about with him as a trophy. As with Pepe it is a sense of injury which leads him to betray the lovers. However, there is a subtle difference in the injuries. Pepe had been abused by Gianciotto as well as Paolo but not by Francesca as had Malatestino. The scene in which he tells Gianciotto of the love of Paolo and Francesca is remarkable for its dramatic intensity.

In handling the reading incident, d'Annunzio has his lovers read from the actual old French romance, "Lancelot du Lac." D'Annunzio uses the idea of the deception of Francesca, although in this case it is her brother rather than her father who tricks her. His Francesca is very different from Pellico's. She has no scruples about her love. She feels her husband has won her unfairly and is unconscious of treachery to him. Her only fear is that the love will come to some unhappy end. Thus is lost any chance for the dramatist to portray an emotional conflict in her nature, thereby arousing pity for her. In this play Paolo is already married, a fact which is historically accurate. But his wife is merely mentioned; she does not come upon the stage at any time, and the fact of his marriage has little if any effect on the action of the play. However, this treatment lessens the nobility of Paolo's character. D'Annunzio gives these two details treatments that would be unconventional from the American or English viewpoint. Through both

these changes the feeling of pity for the lovers is largely lost.

D'Annunzio has crowded his stage with actors, and on account of this the action sometimes moves slowly, yet it does not drag. These characters add their bits of color to the rich tapestry of the play. The Americana says of these characters:

The women who make up Francesca's attendants are suggestive especially by their singing of the Greek chorus, contributing to the understanding of the period and to the events which occur in the play, as do also the slave, the merchant, the doctor, the court jester, the astrologer, and other supernumeraries, all of these accessories differentiating notably this version of the play from the literary treatment of the subject by other authors.<sup>4</sup>

Gertrude Gardner Brainerd remarks on d'Annunzio's dramatic technique:

. . . His action is never hurried. . . Fate, like a 'loud rushing river', sweeps through the drama. From the very beginning there is an atmosphere of foreboding and a premonition of fear. . . the interest in the story does carry us along and the characters are handled dramatically with a more or less marked development in each of them. Even the brutality and the blood-shed, culminating in the butchery at the end, seems not to detract from the deeper, more fundamental tragedy of inevitable Fate. The most realistic parts are poetically conceived.<sup>5</sup>

Six centuries after Dante first wrote his seventy lines about Francesca, another Italian wrote a play on that theme which is worth serious consideration. It has certain faults, the action is slow at times, but it is dramatic and moves to its intense, passionate, and brutal conclusion effectively. Here again thirteenth century Italy lives and moves.

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<sup>4</sup>The Americana, Vol. 11, p. 751

<sup>5</sup>Gertrude Gardner Brainerd, "The Paolo and Francesca Theme in Modern Drama", POET LORE, Vol. 27, July, 1916, pp. 399-401.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to study and compare six treatments of the Francesca da Rimini theme since Dante's. The period of time covered by this study extends from the second decade of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. The comparison was begun by a consideration of an Italian version -- that of Silvio Pellico -- and concluded with the study of work of another Italian dramatist -- Gabriele d'Annunzio. The first two works studied were published only two years apart as were also the last two.

Dante told his story in epic verse. Hunt and Hardy have used narrative verse, and dramatic verse has been the medium of Pellico, Boker, Phillips, and d'Annunzio. Blank verse has been used by the four dramatists although d'Annunzio so varies his blank verse that it is almost free verse. Hunt used the rhyming couplet, and Hardy the rhyme royal. Although all the poets have lines that are beautiful, Phillips is most distinguished for his poetry.

The actual historical facts have not been followed closely by any author. Henderson says that d'Annunzio has probably followed Boccaccio's Commentary the closest.<sup>1</sup> The idea of the deception, which was first related by Boccaccio in his Commentary, has been used by Hunt, Boker, Hardy, and d'Annunzio. They all use political advantage usually in war as the reason for the

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<sup>1</sup>Archibald Henderson, "The Rimini Story in Modern Drama"; THE ARENA, Vol. 39, February, 1908. p. 145

deception. D'Annunzio varies the usual method by having Francesca's brother plot the trickery rather than her father.

The war between the Guelfs and Ghibellines is used as a background in all the versions except Leigh Hunt's, but all the others do not agree as to their treatment of the war. In Boker's play and in Hardy's poem, Guido and the Malatestas are enemies. One is led to believe that this is also true in Pellico's play through a speech of Lanciotto's in which he says that his father requested his marriage to Francesca in order to make a lasting peace, but Guido and Lanciotto certainly do not appear to be traditional enemies in the play. In Phillips's and d'Annunzio's plays the Polenta and Malatesta families are allies.

The incident of the lovers reading together, original presumably with Dante, is related by all the dramatists and poets. Pellico simply relates an account of the incident, but the other three dramatists have the lovers actually read from an old romance, although they do not all use the same book. Leigh Hunt handles the incident very poorly, and it is one of the weakest points of his poem. Hardy, on the other hand, uses it effectively as the climax of his poem.

A variety of treatment is shown in the handling of the betrayal of the lovers. Pellico has the lovers betray themselves through their own involuntary expressions and actions. Hunt has Francesca reveal her love for Paolo through her troubled murmurs in her sleep, although Giovanni's suspicions had already been aroused by his observation of the two lovers. Boker creates the character of Pepé, the fool, whose hatred of Lanciotto and Paolo

leads him to gain a malicious joy in betraying the lovers. Although he loses his own life, he has the satisfaction of knowing that he has destroyed the happiness of those whom he hates. Hardy does not tell of either the betrayal nor the death of the lovers. Phillips uses as the betrayer Lucrezia, the middle-aged woman of the court whose jealousy of Francesca leads her to awaken Giovanni's suspicion regarding Paolo and Francesca and to suggest the plot whereby Giovanni may trap the lovers. Later when her motherly feeling is touched by Francesca's plea for sympathy and guidance, she repents her plotting, but it is too late for her to undo the wrong. D'Annunzio draws a character almost fiendish in his cruelty in Malatestino, the younger brother, who when spurned by Francesca, informs Gianciotto of the love of Paolo and Francesca. He craftily plans a scheme whereby Gianciotto may find the lovers together and slay them. Probably Pepé and Malatestino stand out most effectively in the treatment of this plot detail, although Pellico's treatment is ineffective in view of the way in which he has developed his characters.

Neither do all the writers handle the death of the lovers in the same manner. Pellico has Lanciotto deliberately stab Francesca when she <sup>h</sup>trusts herself between the two brothers and then kills Paolo. Hunt departs entirely from the usual tradition by having Paolo fall on his brother's sword in a duel and Francesca die of a broken heart. Boker has Lanciotto wound Francesca first in hopes to arouse Paolo to draw his sword, but when Paolo still stands awaiting his blow, Lanciotto kills him too.

As has already been stated, Hardy does not relate the death of the lovers. Phillips has the murders take place offstage. D'Annunzio has Francesca throw herself between the two brothers and receive the blow intended for Paolo. When Paolo catches the dying Francesca in his arms and kisses her, Gianciotto pierces his side. Phillips's handling of the death is very effective, and Boker's also has good qualities.

The supernatural element is introduced by Boker, Phillips, and d'Annunzio in their plays. In Boker's play the supernatural is kept in the background. Lanciotto mentions an old nurse's prophecy in the early part of the play. He says that when he was a child in his nurse's arms, they saw her husband killed by the Ghibellines. The nurse dipping her hand in her husband's blood made the sign of the cross on the child's forehead and prayed that the mark would not disappear until Guido's blood was mixed with his own. Then Lanciotto tells Paolo of an unnatural event which happened as he passed his armor in the hall. He paused before it and half uttered Francesca's name, and instantly the sword fell from its scabbard and pierced the floor. As he gazed at it, blood oozed from the floor and spread in ever widening circles until it reached his feet. After he has slain the lovers, Lanciotto recalls the nurse's prophecy. Phillips bring the supernatural more to the forefront in his play. Again there is the prophecy of an old nurse. She warns Giovanni that someone will come to woo Francesca, that he will come unwillingly, and that Francesca will be wooed unwillingly, but nevertheless he will come. However, she does not reveal

who the wooer is. This suggestion is a motivating force for the succeeding action of the play. D'Annunzio introduces the supernatural through the character of Francesca's Cyprian slave. This slave, Samaragdi, is a strange character who apparently has the power of foreseeing the future. When Francesca tells her of a dream she has had -- a dream in which a woman was pursued by a knight and his hounds and slain by them -- Samaragdi trembles with fear, but another incident intervenes before she can tell Francesca the meaning of her dream. And again just before the events leading to the final catastrophe Francesca calls for Samaragdi, and she cannot be found. This absence of the slave frightens Francesca, for she feels that something is wrong. D'Annunzio thus by subtle suggestion gives the feeling of the supernatural, of the tragic unknown to his drama in a very effective manner.

The characterization in the various versions has been varied. Pellico portrays effectively the struggle between conflicting emotions in each character, but he has distorted the Rimini story by making Francesca guiltless. Hunt's characters are poorly drawn. Boker's play is remarkable for its treatment of the character of Lanciotto, making him the central figure without losing interest in the lovers. Boker's Pepé has already been mentioned. All of Boker's characters stand out clearly and well delineated. Hardy spends not so much time on characterization as on the establishment of spiritual atmosphere. Phillips's play is not remarkable for his character delineation, although Lucrezia is well-drawn. D'Annunzio creates a Francesca who has no scruples about her love. Paolo is probably less well

developed than *Gianciotto*. The character of *Malatestino* has already been discussed. In addition to the main characters *d'Annunzio* has numerous minor characters who add color to the Italian background which he gives his drama. *Boker's* play is probably outstanding for characterization.

As to the question of tragic power the dramas and poems also vary considerably. *Hunt's* poem, although it has many good lines of nature description, has poorly delineated characters and is weak and ineffective in its treatment of the dramatic scenes. *Pellico's* play has some good characterization but through the conception of *Francesca's* character lacks the inevitability of great tragedy. *D'Annunzio* has a drama which through its unusual setting, its treatment of the lovers, its variety of minor characters, its picture of cruelty, its incisive action in the dramatic scenes, is distinctly Italian. It pictures the thirteenth century accurately and picturesquely. In a very effective way *Hardy* has built up a spiritual atmosphere which lends poignancy to the dramatic moments of his poem. It has an attitude of gentle sadness much as *Dante* had in his passage, but the poem lacks the tragic intensity of *Dante's* passage. *Phillips's* drama, although lacking somewhat in characterization and local color, is remarkable for its beautiful poetic elements and its dramatic effect in focusing the action early in the play on one center of interest and proceeding steadily to the tragic conclusion. *Boker's* drama has excellent characterization especially in the characters of *Lanciotto* and *Pepé*, good poetry, and scenes of real dramatic effectiveness.



These six versions of the Rimini theme, produced within less than one hundred years, have lived and have been worthy of study.

Poets and dramatists will no doubt continue to turn to this famous tragedy of love to interpret it in their own way. But it is doubtful if any will ever replace the fifth canto of the "Inferno". It can be safely said that none of the works studied has surpassed Dante's seventy lines. The remarkable characteristics of Dante's passage are its stark simplicity, its lack of external details, and yet its powerful effect. All these other writers have felt that they must fill in the details and the background of the portrait. The results are good pictures, but Dante's Francesca still lives and towers over the creations of all other writers.

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