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Stornei, Gru, Colombe: The Bird Images in *Inferno* v

LAWRENCE V. RYAN

Not often does modern criticism of Canto v of the *Inferno* sentimentalize the episode of Paolo and Francesca, after the fashion of Foscolo or De Sanctis, as the tale of a beautiful passion that transcends moral judgment and ends pitiably in violent death. As Renato Poggioli wrote two decades ago, Dante, though he frames his account of the lovers within the context of an old romance of Lancelot and Guenevere, uses "that framework . . . not to re-evolve romantic love, but to exorcise it."¹ Several recent studies, moreover, have avoided the critical error of concentrating on the incident of Francesca at the expense of the rest of the canto. Lanfranco Caretti, for example, has analyzed *Inferno* v as a masterfully integrated unit, of which the affair of Rimini is not an isolated jewel of pathetic narrative, but is rather a powerful climax to the journeying Dante's confrontation with the eternal images of the sin of *lussuria*.² In two essays devoted to the subject Mark Musa has shown how the latter half of the canto must be read in the light of all that has preceded it. He has also tried to lay to rest the phantom of a gentle, still infatuated Francesca enjoying the sweet company of her beloved Paolo even in the "bufera infernal" of the Second Circle.³

Such critical efforts have rendered even clearer the superb artistry of Canto v; curiously, however, one of the basic features of Dante's craft has scarcely been touched upon. No critic, though Musa has

paid some attention to the matter, has commented adequately on the symbolical meaning and artistic function of the triad of bird images—the swarming flock of *stornei*, the “lunga riga” of lamenting *gru*, the pair of alighting *colombe*. Yet it is the sequence of these three comparisons that signifies Dante’s growing comprehension of, along with his increasingly intense emotional response to, what is being unfolded to him about the essential nature of lust. Early in the canto the similes of the starlings and the cranes are presented:

E come li stornei ne portan l’ali
nel freddo tempo, a schiera larga e piena,
Così quel fiato li spiriti mali
di qua, di là, di giù, di sù li mena;
nulla speranza li conforta mai,
non che di posa, ma di minor pena.
E come i gru van cantando lor lai,
faccendo in aere di sé lunga riga,
così, vid’ io venir, traendo guai,
ombre portate da la detta briga;
(vv. 40-49)

then, in the latter half occurs the passage likening the approach of Francesca and Paolo to the gliding descent of doves homing toward their nest:

Quali colombe dal disio chiamate
con l’ali alzate e ferme al dolce nido
vegnon per l’aere, dal voler portate;
Cotali uscir de la schiera ov’è Dido,
a noi venendo per l’aere maligno,
sì forte fu l’affettüoso grido.
(vv. 82-87)

Critics of a romantic temper have tended to forget the first two images upon coming to this third one, even as they have sometimes tried to dissociate the gracious Francesca and her weeping partner from the mass of carnal sinners and from the “lunga riga” of individuals “ch’amor di nostra vita dipartille.” But if the new figure does introduce a note of tenderness, a momentary calming of the tempest, Dante completes the statement with a *terzina* that quickly re-evokes the two earlier comparisons. The phrase “l’aere maligno” recalls the “fiato” of the “bufera infernal” upon which, like *stornei*,

the "spiriti mali" are borne relentlessly hither and yon, while the mention of "la schiera ov'è Dido" from which the lovers are permitted to detach themselves associates them with those who follow Semiramis in single file, plaintively crying like the migrating *gru*.

Not only does this passage, then, link the final episode to all the rest of the canto, but also, as Caretti (p. 30) and Musa have demonstrated, the progression is carefully plotted to bring understanding step by step to the pilgrim and the reader.⁴ Still, neither critic accounts further for the choice and sequence of the three particular bird images, which in their signification to the medieval mind were richly complex and also, in some respects, ambivalent.

From ancient Christian times, the properties of these birds had been charged with moral and spiritual meaning, since all creatures were meant to be taken as signs written by the divine hand in the Book of Nature.⁵ This fact is evident from the lore about starlings, cranes, and doves that was available to Dante in classical and patristic sources, in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, in numerous *Bestiaries* and encyclopedic compendia, such as the *Speculum majus* of Vincent of Beauvais and the *De animalibus* of Albertus Magnus, and most immediately, in the *Tresor* of his own acknowledged master, Brunetto Latini.

Among the earliest writers in the Latin tradition to draw upon details of animal behavior in the natural histories for moral and spiritual examples was St. Ambrose in his *Hexameron*, an influential series of homilies on the creation. In one sermon dealing with the fifth day Ambrose distinguishes between birds of a solitary life, such as eagles and hawks, and flocking species such as "Palumbes, grues, sturni, corviateque cornices, etiam turdi."⁶ This is apparently the sole literary instance before the *Commedia* in which the three kinds of birds named in *Inferno V* are mentioned together (though Ambrose presents them in an order exactly the reverse of their occurrence as images in Dante's poem). Yet if they are not so grouped for treatment by later authors, from Isidore to Brunetto one may find descriptions of their characteristics, real or imaginary, which help to explain why Dante chose these particular species as symbols of "i peccator carnali" and their everlasting "pena." Ambrose himself went for his moralizations about doves to the Christianized *Physiologus*, while, for details about the behavior of cranes and starlings,

since neither of these birds appears in the Greek prototypes of the Latin *Physiologus*, he probably drew upon such sources as the *Historia animalium* of Aristotle and Pliny's *Historia naturalis*.

In the *Etymologies*, Isidore too affords many items of animal lore, taken from the same kinds of authorities, which he typically uses to account for the names given in Latin to the various species. Hence, his derivation of the word for cranes (*grues*) from the murmuring sound of their voices, and of that for the dove (*columba*) from the changeable appearance of the colors on its neck (*collum*).⁷ Such details eventually found their way into influential works like the *Aviarium* (Book One of the *De bestiis et aliis rebus*, attributed to Hugh of St. Victor), the *Bestiaries*, the writings of Albertus, Vincent, and Dante's "ser Brunetto."

As a poet keenly aware of his surroundings, Dante could have developed his images in Canto v, as he often did elsewhere in the *Commedia*, from personal observation. All three similes and their evident significations, however, are literary in origin, though less written material was available to him about starlings than about cranes and doves. Aristotle, for example, comments only upon the disappearance of starlings during the winter and upon their speckled color (*Historia animalium*, VIII. xvii. 600a; IX. xxiii. 617b). They are not mentioned in the *Physiologus*, and only their habit of flying in flocks is noted in the *Bestiaries*. Pliny, on the other hand, affords several details about their behavior which are picked up and expanded by authorities such as Albertus Magnus, and by commentators on Dante like Guido da Pisa and Benvenuto da Imola. Chief among their characteristics are the starlings' gregariousness, their capacity for imitating speech, their destructiveness to crops. "Sturnorum generi proprium," notes Pliny, "catervatim volare et quodam pilae orbe circumagi omnibus in medium agmen tendentibus."⁸ He records an instance of a starling trained by Nero and Britannicus to talk Latin and Greek (x. lix. 120) but also mentions that swarms of these birds or of sparrows can be a plague to fields of millet ("pestem a milio atque panico, sturnorum passerumve agmina," XVIII. xlv. 160). Albertus speaks of starlings as intelligent birds given to chattering ("multae garrulitatis") and to flying bunched toward the center of their swooping formation out of fear of the hawk, against which they defend themselves by aerobatics

and by defecating on the outmaneuvered predator.⁹ Their clamor reaches a peak at the time of coitus (IV. ii. 95), and they are filthy birds that gather with the herds of cattle in order to feed upon their droppings.¹⁰ That starlings are a nuisance is obvious to anyone who has encountered them in large flocks, wheeling and swooping while making a frightful din at evening. Besides, observes a modern author who deplores their importation from Europe into America, they befoul everything they light upon, are given to appropriating "the nests of other species," and are inclined to harass and attack birds not of their own kind.¹¹

All of this lore indicates the fitness of Dante's choice of the *stornei* as his first image for carnal sinners. The innumerable flock of "spiriti mali" are heard approaching with "le strida, il compianto, il lamento," anticipating the analogy of their lamentations with the shrill shrieks of the starlings, followed by the complaining voices of the cranes, the moaning of the doves. And as the *stornei* chatter most *tempore coitus*, the suggestion of their kind of stridency in the blasphemies of the lustful is highly appropriate. The same is true of the buffeting of the spirits by the infernal tempest ("di qua, di là, di giù, di sù") in the manner of the seemingly aimless flutterings of the starling flock. Having subjugated reason to their carnal appetites, they are blown pitilessly, as Benvenuto da Imola notes, everywhere by "the wind of their desire."¹² Although Dante does not mention such details, the filth upon which starlings feed, their unclean habits, their preempting other birds' nests (as adulterers steal into the "nests" of their neighbors), their attacks on other species—all suggest the offensiveness of *luxuria*. Even a love like that of Paolo and Francesca can lead to more heinous sins, and succumbing to lechery is the first slip toward Cocytus and the anti-city of Dis. As an Elizabethan text sums up the perils of carnality,

Plato therefore not without good cause said, that pleasure was the bait which allured men to all evil. And *Architas* the Tarentine was of the opinion, that the pestilence was a lesser evil among men then pleasure of the bodie: from whence came trecheries, and betraying of countries, destructions of common-weales, murders, rapes, adulteries, and all other evils, even as from a spring or fountain. The cause whereof *Pythagoras* desiring to find out, said, that delight first crept into cities, then satietie, next violence, and lastly the ruine and overthrow of the Commonwealth.¹³

In her translation of the *Inferno*, Dorothy Sayers has argued that the inseparable pairing of Paolo and Francesca is later deliberately paralleled in the cannibalistic embrace of Archbishop Ruggieri by Count Ugolino. "This," she believes, "is Dante's way of indicating that here in the ice of Cocytus we have the last state of the corruption of love; that every devouring passion, sexual or otherwise, that sets itself against the order of God and the City, bears in itself the seeds of treachery and a devouring passion of destruction."¹⁴ Unrestrained sexual appetite, as suggested by the image of the *stornei*, begins the disintegration of the human community and the corruption of all good things in the process. Again the commentary of Benvenuto da Imola is instructive:

Et non videatur tibi inconueniens ista comparatio sturnorum; primo, quia sturni sunt animalia gregalia, et ita amantes semper incedunt sociati. Sturni sunt luxuriosi, sicut naturaliter aves; sturni sunt leves, et tales sunt amorosi; sturni transeunt ad partes calidas quo calor libidinis vocat eos, et fugiunt frigidas, ubi non sunt mulieres pulcrae, et si inveniunt vineam plenam dulcibus uvis sine custode, male populantur eam.¹⁵

Before proceeding to the images of cranes and doves, one may cite a final illuminating comment about the ill-repute of starlings, made three centuries after Dante. Answering an opponent who attacked his astronomical writings, Galileo in *Il saggiatore* scornfully observes:

Forse crede il Sarsi, che de' buoni filosofi se ne trovino le squadre intere dentro ogni ricinto di mura? Io, Sig. Sarsi, credo che volino come l'aquile, e non come gli storni. È ben vero che quelle, perchè son rare, poco si veggono e meno si sentono, e questi, che volano a stormi, dovunque si posano, empiendo il ciel di strida e di rumori, metton sozzopra il mondo.¹⁶

According to the *Physiologus* and the *Bestiaries*, the solitary flight of the eagle, unlike the aimless whirling and swooping of the flock of starlings, is pointed directly at the sun. For Philippe de Thaün, twelfth-century composer of an Anglo-Norman *Bestiaire* in verse, the eagle flying toward the sun is a figure of Christ, who can gaze directly on the Father, the source of all light and understanding:

ÇO QUE LI AIGLE veit
Le soleil itant dreit,

Quant il plus clers serat
Que ja n'en cillerat,
Signefië itant,
Seiez i atendant,
Que Crist veit ensement
Sun pere apertement;

and who bears his offspring (Christians) upward with him to fix
their gaze also upon their Maker:

IÇO QUE L'AIGLE prent
Ses oisels belement
E porte les en halt
Al soleil, quant est chalt,
Nus dune entendement
Que li angele ensement
Deivent anmes porter
Devant Dé presenter;
La digne recevrat,
La nun digne larat.¹⁷

For a much later thinker like Galileo, the soaring of the solitary king of birds heavenward figures the movement of the philosopher toward the intellect's object, truth. But in the prose commentary to the widely used Latin verse *Physiologus Theobaldi*, apparently contemporary with Philippe's *Bestiaire*, the author agrees with the traditional allegorical interpretation and writes that "sicut aquila ceteris volatilibus altius volat, ita sapientia est altior omni philosophia."¹⁸ The important point, however, is that the eagle fixes its gaze upon and directs its flight toward the highest and purest object of truth and desire, whereas starlings in their clamorous, apparently random flight symbolize the lost carnal souls who do not soar to the Beatific Vision and who, like the birds with whom they are compared, "wherever they settle, befoul the earth beneath them."

Without the first image of the obnoxious *stornei*, those of the *gru* and the *colombe* might not be apprehended by the reader as Dante evidently intended them to be. For in the natural histories and the *Bestiaries*, both species are treated in a rather complex manner. Starlings, except for the brief reference to them by St. Ambrose, do not appear at all in the allegorical writings and receive but slight mention in the scientific treatises. Cranes and doves, in contrast, are

both extolled for the virtuous examples they provide human beings and cited for their objectionable characteristics as well. In their behavior and governance they are often models for Christians to emulate, and yet they are symbols of carnality, not only in the general sense that many species of birds were so regarded, but each kind in its own distinctive way.

The appearance of the lamenting spirits passing before Virgil and Dante in orderly procession like migrating cranes, and “cantando lor lai” instead of twittering confusedly like starlings, begins the instruction of the pilgrim through clearer appeal to his senses, his sympathies, and his understanding. If the *stornei* suggest a company of indistinguishable figures in complete disarray, a society in which no one can be identified to whose plight one may respond either emotionally or intellectually, at first glance the “gru . . . faccendo in aere di sé lunga riga” would seem to conjure up the picture of a disciplined community of recognizable individuals who follow their leader in purposeful flight. Admiration, indeed, for these birds goes back as far as Aristotle, who comments:

Many indications of high intelligence are given by cranes. They fly to a great distance and high up in the air, to command an extensive view; if they see clouds and signs of bad weather they fly down again and remain still. They, furthermore, have a leader in their flight, and patrols that scream on the confines of the flock so as to be heard by all. When they settle down, the main body go to sleep with their heads under their wing, standing first on one leg and then on the other, while their leader, with his head uncovered, keeps a sharp look out, and when he sees anything of importance signals it with a cry.¹⁹

Pliny expands upon Aristotle's description and adds such details about the prudent behavior of the cranes as their having “excubias . . . nocturnis temporibus lapillum pede sustinentes, qui laxatus somno et decidens indiligentiam coarguat,” and their ballasting themselves with sand and pebbles on their transmarine migrations.²⁰ In his *Hexameron*, St. Ambrose seizes upon such manifestations of animal wisdom to argue that these birds enjoy a natural polity and military organization (“politia quaedam et militia naturalis”) which it would behoove human beings to emulate. Unlike men, who accept the assignment reluctantly, “Quam injusso et voluntario usu grues in nocte sollicitam exercent custodiam! . . . Ideo nulla desertio, quia

devotio naturalis; ideo tuta custodia, quia voluntas libera.” In contrast with human society, in which lust for dominion has led to usurpation of and unwillingness to relinquish authority, Ambrose also finds remarkable the continuing alternation of leadership among cranes in flight: “Quid hoc pulchrius, et laborem omnibus et honorem esse communem, nec paucis arrogari potentiam, sed quadam in omnes voluntaria sorte transcribi?”²¹

Still, if the *gru* are praised by Ambrose, and later in the expanded *Bestiaries* derived from Pseudo-Hugh of St. Victor, for their wonderful discipline in flight and on night watch, they have also a further significance for Dante. Not only in *Inferno* v do they stand for carnal sinners, but in the *Purgatorio* he also introduces the simile, again in the circle where the lustful are purged:

Poi, come grue ch’a le montagne Rife
volasser parte, e parte inver l’arene,
queste del gel, quelle del sole schife,
l’una gente sen va, l’altra sen vene;
e tornan, lagrimando, a’ primi canti
e al gridar che più lor si convene;
(xxvi, 43-48)

Like flocks of cranes, the two groups—heterosexuals and homosexuals repenting their past enslavement to fleshly desires—go weeping and lamenting in opposite directions. A remark by Benvenuto da Imola explains the suitability of the allusion:

Et sic vide quod autor multiplicat comparationes avium, quia amor est volatilis sicut avis, unde pingitur et fingitur alatus. Et grues sunt etiam animalia gregalia, et faciunt transitum ad partes calidas, imo etiam multum conveniunt inter se, unde tractum est istud verbum, *congruo*: ita amantes solent convenire inter se vel ratione constellationis, vel complexionis, vel similitudines morum et vitae, et ita de aliis.²²

Still another moralized detail indicates the appropriateness of the crane image for the *lussuriosi* in both *cantiche* of the *Commedia*. From Aristotle’s *De generatione animalium* comes the observation that the *gru* darkens in color as it ages (v. v. 758a). Ignoring, or unaware of, the scientific explanation offered by Aristotle, the author of the *De bestiis et aliis rebus* comments that the reason for this change is that in old age the bird bemoans loudly its past sins:

Cum enim quae male gessit, senex commemorat, in senectute colorem mutat. Mutat enim amorem pristinae delectationis in dolorem contritionis. Ecce qualiter per naturam volucrum doceri potest via religiosorum.²³

It is, however, the unrepentant flock of carnal sinners, "traendo guai" over their unending punishment, rather than the contrite souls in the *Purgatorio*, that is of concern here. In spite of other sources which may have reinforced for him the symbolical meaning of the comparison, Dante's simile in *Inferno* v appears to come primarily from Brunetto Latini, who, while simply repeating much of the conventional lore about the *gru*, opens his chapter on them as follows:

Grues sont oisiau qui volent à eschieles, en maniere de chevaliers qui vont en bataille; et tozjors va li uns devant l'autre aussi comme confanoniers et guierres des autres, et les maine et conduit et chastie de sa voiz, et trestuit li autre ensuient et obeissent à sa loi.²⁴

Whereas earlier authorities, partly for allegorical reasons, had remarked that cranes fly "ordine litterato,"²⁵ Ser Brunetto in his comparison of their proceeding à *eschieles* (*a schiera*) with mounted horsemen riding to war *li uns devant l'autre* is closer to Dante's "lunga riga." Again, the word *chevaliers* (*cavalieri*) in this passage may have impressed itself on the mind of the poet, who is overcome at the end of Virgil's enumeration by pity for all the "donne antiche e' cavalieri" who died because of love. And the cranes in Brunetto's account fly in tandem behind their *confanoniers* (*confaloniere*) who *chastie* (*gastiga*) them even as the "aura nera sì gastiga" the spirits who pass in review before the pilgrim's vision.²⁶

Of Dante's *schiera*, however, the *gonfaloniere* is neither an example of good political leadership nor a *cavaliere*. It is, rather, Semiramis, the archetype, the very image of unbridled sensuality. *Cavalieri*, as Poggioli remarks, are less important than *donne* in the romance tradition; Achilles, Paris, Tristan appear almost as afterthoughts, only when four notorious royal women have already gone by.²⁷ The seven characters are named, perhaps not by accident, in descending order of rank or prestige and of the harm their appetites caused to human society: Semiramis, empress of Babylon; Dido, queen of Carthage; Cleopatra, queen of Egypt; Helen, queen consort of Sparta; Achilles, ruler of a minor Greek state; Paris, a Trojan prince; the knight Tristan, nephew to the king of Cornwall.

Dido had tried to impede the founding of Rome, the city divinely ordained, in Dante's view, to provide for the temporal welfare of all humanity. Cleopatra's lust entangled Roman Caesar and ruined Marc Antony. Helen's rape by Paris led to the downfall of Troy, the proto-Rome of which the most formidable besieger was Achilles, while Tristan's passion for Iseult threatened the kingdom of his uncle Mark, as that of Lancelot and Guenevere did precipitate the destruction of King Arthur's Table Round.

Semiramis, however, is the ideal leader of all these, for her immoral behavior undermined all good order in her realm. As is well known, Dante took the sense of his *terzina* about her lawlessness from Paulus Orosius's phrase "quod cuique libitum esset licitum fieret":

A vizio di lussuria fu sì rotta
che libito fé licito in sua legge,
per tòrre il biasmo in che era condotta.²⁸

So monstrously evil was this woman that she even tried to commit incest with her own son, whereupon he slew her and ended her long, wicked reign.²⁹ In no other personage could the destructiveness of unrestrained lust be better exemplified. Further, not only in her personal life but as ruler of Babylon is she morally significant. The scriptural Babylon from patristic times had been interpreted allegorically as the place of the human soul's exile from its true spiritual home. "Terra aliena est Babylonia, terra nostra Jerusalem" had written the Pseudo-Hugh of St. Victor; "Babylonia *confusio*, Jerusalem *visio pacis* interpretatur." Jerusalem is our land in which the voice of the turtle-dove is heard when we are devoted to love of God and our neighbor; in Babylon we are enslaved by our own selfish desires.³⁰ "Therefore, in a larger sense," concludes Musa, "Dante conceived the Assyrian empress not only as the representative of libidinous passion in all its forms, but also as the motivating force of the degenerate society that ultimately opposes God's order."³¹

Ironically, Semiramis is compared to the leader of the *gru*, the species of bird which, according to St. Ambrose, has a model society. But the band of carnal sinners who fly by like cranes lamenting their past evil represents, and follows forever the arch-

example of, the force that breaks the bonds of community and hence leads downward to the other circles of the infernal city ruled by passion, violence, and fraud. The pilgrim does not yet grasp the full meaning of the lesson. He has seen the image of the evil of *luxuria*, has heard named a thousand and more whom this appetite has destroyed, and should possess the historical knowledge to recognize the ruinous effects that lust can have on society. Yet the canto comes to its midpoint with Dante overcome by compassion ("pietà") for and dismayed ("smarrito") by the fate of so many celebrated lovers.

After the account of the sinners from antiquity, the naming of the *cavaliere* Tristan prepares for the transition to the modern lovers Paolo and Francesca. Yet the apparent tenderness of this final episode in the canto, introduced by the image of the alighting doves, should not obscure the links between Francesca and the leader whom she follows. Like Semiramis, not only is she a slave to her "disio," an adulteress, but she too is guilty of incest, which threatens to destroy the family, to undermine the very foundations of society. As Poggioli has noted, the complete text in Paulus Orosius on the licentiousness of Semiramis reads: "Praecipit enim ut inter parentes ac filios, nulla delata reverentia naturae, de coniugis adpetendis, quod cuique libitum esset licitum fieret."³² Francesca, however beguiling she may be in her attempt at self-justification ("Amor, ch'a nullo amato amar perdona"), strains to render *licito* in Dante's eyes what to her was *libito*. With such considerations in mind, the reader is prepared for the last of the three similes and for the latter, and more famous, half of the Fifth Canto.

In classical times, while the turtle-dove (*turtur*) was considered an example of chastity, ordinary doves, or pigeons (*columbae*), were associated with the goddess of love and were often cited as examples of lechery. "Quas antiqui," notes Isidore, "Venerias nuncupabant, eo quod nidas frequentant, et osculo amorem concipiant."³³ Aristotle also comments more than once on the sensuality of these birds: "they kiss one another just when the male is on the point of mounting the female, and without this preliminary the male would decline to perform his function Another singularity in these birds is that the hens tread one another when a cock is not forthcoming, after kissing one another just as takes place in the normal pairing";

and, although the partners are usually faithful to each other, "occasionally a female will cohabit with other than her mate."³⁴ From such notions of the characteristics of the species, later authors often derived the word *columba* from the phrase *colens lumbos*; doves, in other words, devote themselves assiduously to the work of the loins.³⁵

Thus the image of doves does not simply introduce a note of softening, a momentary suspension of turbulence as the two lovers of Rimini detach themselves from Semiramis's flock and glide smoothly toward Virgil and Dante. It is meant to accomplish that, as its famous source in the *Aeneid* (v, 213-217) implies, but at the same time it identifies the relationship between Paolo and Francesca for what it truly is, since Dante does not associate them with the chaste *tortora*, but with the ardent *colombe*. Even the way their love caught fire, and the manner of their sweet sighing after it had begun, as the lady describes their involvement in the course of her sad tale, seem to echo the lore about doves as much as the parallel with Lancelot and Arthur's queen. "Et esmuevent luxure par baisier, e plorent en leu de chant," Brunetto Latini had written of the *colons*, who "vont grant torbe ensemble."³⁶ Francesca, having been allowed to detach herself and her paramour from the "grant torbe" in which they fly without hope of rest, speaks "come colui che piange e dice" while Paolo ceaselessly "piangea" beside her. In answer to Dante's query about how their "dubbiosi disiri" began "al tempo d'i dolci sospiri," she concludes her story by mentioning the kiss after which on that day "non vi leggemmo avante." In the economy of Dante's poetry, no mention is made of the adultery that followed. It may have been a sense of delicacy that caused Francesca to break off at this point, but because of the dove simile, no further explanation is needed: the kiss was enough to fan the flames of lechery.

The significance of the image, nevertheless, is complicated. "La similitudine," Pagliaro notes, "è tolta da Virgilio; ma nell'immagine dantesca risuona certo l'eco della tradizione che fa della colomba ora un simbolo di purezza, ora un simbolo d'amore."³⁷ In the Christian tradition, the signification of the dove is overwhelmingly on the side of moral and spiritual excellence. As a bird that appears figuratively in both the Old and New Testaments, it receives in patristic writings and in the *Bestiaries* far more attention than does

the crane. It is the only one of the three species mentioned in *Inferno* V to be treated in the *Physiologus*, the crane not appearing in works derived from it until the *De Bestiis et aliis rebus* was composed in the twelfth century. In the Greek versions of the *Physiologus* separate chapters are devoted to the common dove and the turtle-dove; another chapter deals with the peridixion, a mythical tree in which the dove takes refuge from the dragon. The *columba* is most familiar iconographically as a symbol of the third person of the Trinity; in the allegory of the peridixion tree it stands for the faithful, whom the Savior and the Holy Spirit shelter from the wiles of Satan. In the *Bestiaries*, this bird in its ascent represents the soul rising on wings of contemplation and often becomes itself a figure of Christ. The turtle-dove, because she chooses widowhood and barren places after the death of her mate, is regarded as a symbol of the Christian church whose members after the immolation of the bridegroom Christ turn away from all other loves and await his coming again to judge the world.³⁸ Allegorization of the physical characteristics of the *columba* is often exceptionally ingenious and strained. Thus, since Isidore had explained that the bird is so named because of the changing colors of its neck (*collum*), each of these iridescent hues was assigned symbolical value as referring to a figure in Scripture (grey-blue, for instance, stood for Jonah because of his voyage on the sea; white for John the Baptist, who performed the sacrament of cleansing; purple, for the Lord himself, because of the royal-colored garment that the soldiers placed over his shoulders while mocking him during his passion).³⁹

Given the rich tradition of moral and spiritual symbolism concerning the *columba*, "Why," asks Musa, "did the poet allow the Pilgrim to apply this 'Christian metaphor' to these lovers condemned by God? Was it to suggest a contrast between the sublime connotations of which this image was capable, and the trivial use the Pilgrim made of it, being at this stage unaware of such connotations, unaccustomed to thinking in terms of the soul's ascent to God? And incapable, at this point, of learning from Virgil, from Reason?"⁴⁰ Musa's surmise is basically correct: the diminuendo of the doves' earthward glide is the reverse of the soul's natural heavenward ascent. What is questionable is whether the pilgrim, in spite of the swoon of apparent sympathy for the plight of Francesca and Paolo

which prostrates him at the end of their narrative, is "unaware" of the meaning of the symbol and "incapable" of exercising his reason upon its implications.

The irony of Dante's choice of the *columba* simile for his two lost lovers is suggested in a passage from the *De bestiis et aliis rebus*, in which the eleven opening chapters are an extended treatment of the significance of the bird's properties. Here the dove is again an ambivalent figure. It remains an example of lechery and, in fact, the author takes its dominant color of dusky blue not as representing the prophet Jonah, but rather as signifying the turbulence, like the disturbing of the seas, of the flesh roused by sexual desire.⁴¹ The long discussion of the doves, however, reaches its climax with a passage that emphasizes the positive significance of its main characteristics:

In diversis locis diversas columbae proprietates reperi, quas inserens huic operi, tibi, frater, annotare curavi. Prima vero columbae proprietas est quod pro cantu gemitum profert; secunda, quod felle caret; tertia, quod osculis instat; quarta, quod gregatim volat; quinta, quod ex raptu non vivit; sexta, quod grana meliora colligit; septima, quod non vescitur cadavere; octava, quod nidificat in petrae foraminibus; nona, quod super fluentia aquarum residet, ut visa accipitris umbra, venientem citius devitet; decima, quod geminos nutrit pullos. Columba pro cantu utitur gemitu, quia quod libens fecit, plangendo gemit. Caret felle, id est irascibilitatis amaritudine. Instat osculus quia delectatur in multitudine pacis. Gregatim volat, quia conventus amat. Non vivit ex raptu, quia non detrahit proximo. Colligit grana meliora, id est meliora dicta. Non vescitur cadaveribus, id est desideriis carnalibus. Nidificat in foraminibus petrae, quia spem ponit in Christi passione. Super fluentia aquarum residet, ut visa accipitris umbra, venientem citius devitet, quia in Scripturis studet ut supervenientis diaboli fraudem declinet. Geminos nutrit pullos, id est amorem Dei et amorem proximi. Qui igitur has naturas habet, assumat sibi contemplationis alas, quibus ad coelum volet.⁴²

The example can be ironically applied to Francesca and her paramour. They ought to have imitated the dove by soaring heavenward on the "wings of contemplation." But instead of the joyous song they might then have sung among the heavenly choirs, they go weeping with sighs for the eternal plight brought on by the lust inflamed by their zeal for kisses. They did plunder from their *proximo* (not merely their neighbor but their nearest of kin) by their

incest. Instead of gathering the good grain from Sacred Scripture, they reaped damnation from the Arthurian romance that was their "Galeotto." They did not place their hope in the passion of Christ, but fed upon the carrion of sensual appetite. On that day when they were reading "soli . . . e senza alcun sospetto," they were blind to the snare that Satan had laid for them and hence chose to give in to their erotic passion rather than to love God and neighbor according to true *caritas*.⁴³

The comparison with the *colombe* is indeed highly charged with signification. It is no mere evocation, despite the admittedly charming manners of the pliant Francesca, that dispels at least temporarily, as some readers would have it, the sounds of anguished wailing and the murky air of the Second Circle.⁴⁴ Along with its fellow images of the starlings and the cranes, it is an example from the Book of Nature introduced for the enlightenment of Dante and the reader. And, as has already been said, the order in which the similes occur reflects the pilgrim's progress toward comprehension of the real nature of evil choice.⁴⁵

The starling, a nasty bird that befouls and ravages everything it settles upon, its shrieks and random movements befuddling the senses and defying the mind's comprehension, is a creature for which one can have little sympathy. The confusion one feels before a flock of *stornei* is like Dante's first bewilderment in the dark and clamorous *cerchio* of the lustful. The *gru*, on the other hand, are, as Ambrose had preached, birds capable of great animal wisdom and exemplary social behavior, though some had said that they go lamenting past evil they have done. The thousand and more knights and fair ladies, princes and queens, whose spirits pass in review before Virgil and Dante ought to have lived intelligently as guardians of society after the manner of the cranes, but they had subjugated their reason to their fleshly appetites. Thus they trail behind the arch-example of their kind, Semiramis, bewailing the sorry pass to which their illicit desires have brought them. Dante is confused and filled with pity for the famous individuals who are described for him; the emotion of sympathy aroused within him, however, is at war with the response of his understanding to the threat posed to human society and to the person by the *luxuria* epitomized in the Babylonian queen and her immediate cohorts.

The dove is the most attractive and yet the most ambivalent of the three images, a symbol at once of the Christian soul's natural aspiration toward God and of the lechery which countervails that ascent. It signifies that Francesca and her Paolo ought to have risen above earthly longings toward heavenly things but sought their heaven instead in adulterous embraces. Such a union can never lead to the stilling of the soul's desires but only to the "bufera infernal" in which, though they have each other for eternity, they will never find the "pace" that the lady graciously hopes will be the lot of Dante. Although he is overcome by their tragic story, it is not because he is as yet unprepared to learn. It is, rather, because from this episode, the climax to the lesson developed throughout the entire canto, he has gained the first inkling of what he will at last perceive more clearly on the mount of purgation:

Quinci comprender puoi ch'esser convene
amor sementa in voi d'ogne virtute
e d'ogne operazion che merta pene.

(*Purg.* xvii, 103-105)

The pilgrim, prostrated "come corpo morto" by his first encounter with damnation, is at this point but dimly aware of the full significance of what he has heard and seen. As a living man of body and soul conjoined, he must plumb all the emotional and intellectual experience of evil as it actually is, not as it appears in its delusive shape of good, in order to reject it. Step by step he has begun to learn through the experience, including the analogies made by his imaginative mind with the three different societies of birds, that all sin, even the sweet delights of wrongful physical love, dissolves the bonds which link human beings in a community that can only be perfected in the heavenly city figured by the Multifoliate Rose.

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NOTES

1. "Tragedy or Romance? A Reading of the Paolo and Francesca Episode in Dante's *Inferno*," in *PMLA*, LXXII (1957), p. 347.
2. *Il canto V dell' 'Inferno'* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1967), pp. 5-6, 29-30.

3. "A Lesson in Lust," and "Behold Francesca Who Speaks So Well," Chapters II and III in Musa's *Advent at the Gates: Dante's Comedy* (Bloomington; London: Indiana University Press, 1974). In an amusing passage on "Pre-Raphaelite Love," Ford Madox Ford pokes fun at the idea that Paolo and Francesca may derive any pleasure from their eternal partnership: "And no doubt what D.G. Rossetti and his school thought was that, although guilty lovers have to go to hell for the sake of the story, they will find hell pleasant enough because the aroma of their passion, the wings of the great god of love and the swooning intensity of it all will render them insensible to the inconveniences of their lodgings. As much as to say that you do not mind the bad cooking of the Brighton hotel if you are otherwise having a good time of it" (*Table Talk*, ed. Graham Greene, The Bodley Head Ford Madox Ford [London: Bodley Head, 1962], Vol. I, p. 352).

4. Musa's remarks on the impact of the three images are worth repeating: "That of the starlings offers to our imagination (for we are not allowed to see them) a vivid picture of the totality of sinners caught up in tumultuous movement; in that of the cranes, who are presented on stage within our range of vision, the totality of souls is reduced to that of a single band of sinners (those of noble or royal lineage, and who were brought to death by Love), and the movement has subsided to become linear. Finally, in the image of the doves, the number of the Lustful has been reduced to two (to an inseparable pair); they are not only within our range of vision, they are directly before our eyes, caught by the spotlight which has suddenly illuminated a narrow stage; and the movement is the diminuendo of a gentle gliding" (*Advent at the Gates*, pp. 16-17).

5. In a letter to Desiderius, Abbot of Monte Cassino, St. Peter Damian had written about the value of learning from the behavior of the animals: "The creator of all things, since he created the whole world for the advantage of man, was careful to instruct man for his salvation by means of the natural movements and the instincts which he planted in the brutes. So man can learn from the brutes what to imitate, and what to shun, what to copy and what to reject; thus he will return to his Creator by the way of wisdom after he has become estranged by his ignorance" (quoted in Appendix A to *Physiologus: A Metrical Bestiary of Twelve Chapters by Bishop Theobald Printed in Cologne 1492*, trans. Alan Wood Rendell [London: J. & E. Bumpus, 1928], p. 56).

6. "Ring-doves, cranes, starlings, crows and also ravens, even thrushes" (*Opera omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina, XIV [Paris, 1882], V. xiv. 47, col. 240).

7. "Crues nomen de propria voce sumpserunt; tali enim sono sussurant . . . Columbae dictae, quod earum colla ad singulas conversiones colores mutant . . ." (*Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W.M. Lindsay [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941], XII. vii. 14, 61).

8. "It is a peculiarity of the starling kind that they fly in flocks and wheel round in a sort of circular ball, all making toward the center of the flock" (*Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library [London: W. Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1940], X. xxxv. 73, p. 338).

9. "Gregarim volat et compresse qualibet ad aciei centrum propter timorem accipitris contendente: accipitrem enim superius vel a latere accendentem alis eventant et subitus volantem stercorebus opprimunt" (*De animalibus libri XXVI*, ed. Hermann Stadler Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters, XVI [Münster: Aschendorff, 1920], XXIII, xxiv. 104, p. 1511).

10. "In harenis et paludibus sedent et cum armentis vaccarum assidue sunt propter pascua quae de stercorebus colligunt" (*ibid.*).

11. Robert Cantwell, "A Plague of Starlings," in *Sports Illustrated*, XLI (September 9, 1974), pp. 108, 114.

12. "Et declarat discursum istorum luxuriosorum dicens: di qua, di là, di su, di giù li mena, scilicet ille ventus libidinis, quia amor trahit procum post vagam suam ad templum, ad hortum, ad nuptias, ad funera, ad montem, ad fontem, et quocumque illa pergit, infelix sequitur eam" (Benvenuti de Rambaldis de Imola, *Comentum super Dantis Alighierij Comediam*, ed. Jacobo Philippo Lacaita [Florentiae: G. Barbèra, 1887], Vol. I, p. 193). Michele

Barbi likewise considers the "volubilità improvvisa" of the starlings as the main reason for Dante's having chosen the image to represent "il furioso travolgimento delle anime per ogni parte" ("Per due similitudini dell'*Inferno*," *Studi danteschi*, XI [1927], p. 128).

13. Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civill Life* (London: Edward Blount, 1606), p. 198.

14. *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri the Florentine: Hell*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1949), p. 282. C.H. Grandgent had already made a similar point about the link between these two great episodes in his edition of *La Divina Commedia* (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1933), p. 294. Francesco Pagliaro, on the other hand, objects to efforts to establish such a connection: "Per questo motivo, alle notazioni del MOMIGLIANO (Comm. *Inf.* XXXIII, 70), che pongono sullo stesso piano poetico il rapporto tra Francesca e Paolo e quello fra Ugolino e Ruggieri, è da osservare che il pianto di Paolo è di gran lunga più 'centrale' che non la presenza, passiva seppure indispensabile, come di cosa, dell' arcivescovo Ruggieri" ("Il canto di Francesca," *Ulisse: Ricerche semantiche sulla Divina Commedia* [Messina; Firenze: G. D'Anna, 1967], Vol. I, p. 159).

15. "And let not this comparison with starlings seem unfitting to you; first, because starlings are gregarious creatures, and lovers in such wise go in groups. Starlings are lecherous, as birds are naturally; starlings are lightminded, and so are lovers; starlings migrate to warm regions to which the heat of lust calls them and they flee the cold ones, where there are no beautiful females, and if they come upon an unguarded vineyard full of sweet grapes, they foully plunder it" (*loc. cit.*).

16. *Le opere di Galileo Galilei*, ed. Antonio Garbasso and Giorgio Abetti (Firenze: G. Barbèra, 1929-1939), Vol. VI, p. 236.

17. *Le Bestiaire de Philippe de Thaün*, ed. Emmanuel Walberg (Lund; Paris: H. Möller, 1900), pp. 76-77.

18. "As the Eagle flies to a greater height than other birds, so wisdom is higher than all philosophy" (*Physiologus . . . by Bishop Theobald*, fol. A₂^h [English translation, p. 12]).

19. *Historia animalium*, trans. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, Vol. IV of *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. J.A. Smith and W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), IX. ix. 614b.

20. "Sentries who hold a stone in their claws, which if drowsiness makes them drop it falls and convicts them of slackness" (*Natural History*, X. xxx. 59-60, pp. 323-330). Pliny also includes the detail about cranes using stones as ballast in flight even though Aristotle had already called it "untrue" (*Historia animalium* VIII. xii. 597b).

21. "How well do the cranes perform their watch at night without orders and voluntarily! . . . Therefore there is no neglectfulness because of their natural loyalty. Hence their guarding is completely secure, because they will to do it freely . . . What is more admirable than this, that both toil and leadership are common to all, nor is power arrogated by the few, but it is distributed voluntarily to all?" (*Hexameron*, V. xv. 50-51, cols. 241-242).

22. "And thus see how the author multiplies the comparisons with birds, because Love is flighty like a bird, whence he is portrayed and described as winged. And cranes are also gregarious creatures, and migrate to warm regions. Yea, more, they often gather together among themselves, whence is derived that word, *congruo*: similarly lovers are wont to assemble together either by reason of the confluence of their stars, or for purposes of embracing, or likeness of manners and life, and likewise in other respects" (*Commentum super . . . Comoediam*, Vol. I, p. 194).

23. "For when the old one remembers those things which it did evilly, it changes color in its later years. Indeed it alters its love of former pleasure into the sorrow of contrition. Behold how the way of religious persons can be taught through the behavior of the birds" (*Opera omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina, CLXXVII [Paris, 1879], col. 41).

24. *Li livres dou tresor*, ed. P. Chabaille, Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France, No. 5 (Paris: Imprimerie Imperiale, 1863), I. v. 165, p. 215.

25. In one tradition, the crane is called the bird of Palamedes, because it is said to form letters in flight in honor of the son of King Nauplius who was put to death through the treachery of Ulysses, and who was reputed to be the inventor of part of the Greek alphabet.

Hence the late twelfth-century distich: "Grus, Palamedis avis, quem Graecia fraude peremptum/ Deflet, Ulyxaea callidate viget" (*De laudibus divinae sapientiae*, lines 317-318, in Alexander Neckam, *De naturis rerum libri duo*, ed. Thomas Wright, Rolls Series 24 [London: Longman, Green, 1863], p. 380).

26. Although Paolo di Malatesta is obviously not the *gonfaloniere* of this unhappy band, is it possibly noteworthy that in 1282-83 this sinner who died through love had served as *capitano del popolo* of the Florentine republic? (See *La Divina Commedia*, ed. C.H. Grandgent, p. 48). The terms in parentheses are from *Il tesoro*, trans. Bono Giamboni, Biblioteca classica italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti, II: 1 (Venezia: Gondoliere, 1839), Vol. I, p. 230, an early Italian version with which Dante may have been familiar.

27. "Tragedy or Romance?," p. 342.

28. V. 55-57. Paulus Orosius's point about Semiramis occurs in his *Historiarum adversum paganos libri VII*, I. iv. 8.

29. Pagliaro ("Il canto di Francesca," p. 129) observes that while Paulus Orosius does not mention the circumstances of Semiramis's death, Dante could have found it in Justin's compendium: "Ad postremum quum concubitus filii petisset, ab eodem interfecta est, duo et XXX annos post Ninum regno potita" (*Historia Philippica ex Trogo Pompeo*, I. 2).

30. *De bestiis et aliis rebus*, Migne, PL, CLXXVII, col. 25.

31. *Dante's Inferno*, trans. Mark Musa (Bloomington; London: Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 44.

32. "Tragedy or Romance?," p. 343, n. 15.

33. "Which the ancients called *Venerias*, in that they nest frequently, and incite love by kissing" (*Etymologiarum . . . libri XX*, XII. vii. 61). Benvenuto da Imola is more emphatic: "est notandum quod columbae sunt dedicatae Veneri, quae est mater amoris, et Dea luxuria, quoniam sunt aves luxuriosissimae" (*Comentum super . . . Comoediam*, Vol. I, p. 206).

34. *Historia animalium*, VI. ii. 560b; IX. vii. 613a. Pliny also remarks that "Columbae proprio ritu osculantur ante coitum" (*Natural History*, X. lxxix. 158, p. 392).

35. "Columba sic dicitur quia lumbos colit multa generatione de quarum varietate multa diximus in antehabitis" (Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, XXIII. 39, p. 1450).

36. *Li livres dou Tresor*, I. v. 167, p. 209.

37. "Il canto di Francesca," p. 133.

38. Thus Guillaume, a Norman ecclesiast of the thirteenth century, asserts that the domesticated *columps*, which attracts wild doves to its *colombier*, "nos segnefie/ Jhesu qui tot a en baillie" and who converts infidels to "la fei commune," while the *torte* "Si senefie sainte yglise" and "Toz jorz se tient a son parel,/ Jhesu Crist, son leal feel" (Guillaume, Clerc de Normandie, *Le Bestiaire divin*, ed. C. Hippeau [Geneva: Slatkine, 1970], pp. 283, 276). Although such venerable authorities as Aristotle, Pliny, Tertullian, and St. Ambrose affirm the chaste widowhood of the *turtur*, Albertus Magnus says that this "is neither likely nor according to experience" (non est probabile neque est expertum) (*De animalibus*, VIII. ii. e. 56, p. 593).

39. Alexander Neckam has a pair of distichs in *De laudibus divinae sapientiae* (lines 733-736, pp. 389-390) concerning the conflicting etymologies of the word columba:

Lumborum cultum praecedunt oscula multa,
Hunc cultum causam nominis esse putant.
Sed tamen a collo tociens mutantes colores
Isidorus volucrem nomen habere docet.

For the allegorical interpretations of the various colors of the dove, see *Le Bestiaire de Philippe de Thaün*, pp. 88-90; Guillaume, *Le Bestiaire divin*, pp. 289-290.

40. *Advent at the Gates*, p. 17.

41. "Color reliqui corporis imitatur colorem turbati maris. Mare motu fluctuum saeviens ebullit. Caro motu sensuum ebulliens saevit . . . Marinus igitur color in pectore columbae tribulationem designat in humana mente" (Ch. X, col. 19).

42. "In various places are found the properties of the dove, which introducing them into this work, brother, I have taken trouble to comment upon for you. But the first property is that instead of singing it utters a sigh; the second, that it lacks gall; the third, that it is zealous for kisses; the fourth, that it flies in flocks; the fifth, that it does not live by plundering; the sixth, that it gathers the best of the grain; the seventh, that it does not feed on carrion; the eighth, that it nests in the hollows of a rock; the ninth, that it sits on the running waters, so that having seen the shadow of the approaching hawk, it may the more quickly evade it; the tenth, that it brings up twin chicks. The dove sighs instead of singing because weeping it laments those things which it did through desire. It lacks gall, that is, the bitterness of anger. It is zealous for kisses because it delights in a great deal of amity. It flies in flocks because it loves company. It does not live by plundering because it takes nothing away from its neighbor. It gathers the best of the grain, that is, the best precepts. It does not feed on corpses, that is, on carnal desires. It nests in the hollows of a rock, because it places its hope in the passion of Christ. It sits on the running waters, so that, having seen the shadow of the approaching hawk, it may more quickly evade it, because it studies the Scriptures in order that it may avoid the deception of the devil coming upon it. It brings up twin chicks, that is, love of God and love of neighbor. Therefore, whoever possesses these qualities, takes unto himself the wings of contemplation, with which he may fly to heaven" (*De bestiis et aliis rebus*, Ch. XI, col. 19).

43. In the *Purgatorio*, the image of the *colombe* recurs, significantly again in connection with love poetry, to enlighten Dante further about the need to fix steadfastly on the true object of the soul's desire. When Casella's singing the *canzone* from Book III of the *Convivio* enthralls the band of newly disembarked souls, Cato sternly reminds them that by pausing to enjoy the sweet music, they are delaying their ascent to the vision of God for which they were created. For a discussion of this episode, see John Freccero, "Casella's Song (*Purg.* II, 112)," in *Dante Studies*, XCI (1973), 73-80.

44. Edward Moore, not without support from Guido da Pisa, would take "dal disio chiamate" as a lovely image of parent doves returning to the nest at the call of their young brood and "would strongly protest the lower sense given to *disio* by so many early and late commentators" (*Studies in Dante*, First Series, [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896], p. 185, n. 1). Grandgent writes similarly that Dante "infuses an entirely new spirit into the figure by his conception of love as the sole power that sustains the motherbird in her flight" (*La Divina Commedia*, p. 54n). More surprising is the comment of Irma Brandeis in *A Ladder of Vision* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960) that not only the doves, but also the images of the starlings and cranes "suggest innocence and lightness; they flood the harsh atmosphere with softness, and lure the reader's memory away from the curse against the divine power uttered by those same powerless shadows" (p. 25). For such a misinterpretation of the first two similes Musa takes her to task (*Advent at the Gates*, p. 133, n. 15), though he fails to consider how the dove image reinforces, as well as contrasts with, the other two figures for the flocks of lechery.

45. An ingenious rendering of the three images appears in the woodcut that illustrates a sixteenth-century edition of Cristoforo Landino's commentary on *Inferno V*. As the flock of the lustful whirls counterclockwise through a dense cloud in a closely compacted formation, Semiramis and her "lunga riga" of followers begin to emerge, looking toward Dante and Virgil while circling back to the seat of Minos; Francesca and Paolo, detached from the "schiera ov'è Dido" but with their own limbs confusedly entangled, float downward on a cloud toward the two poets (*Dante con l'espositione di Christoforo Landino . . . sopra sua Comedia*, etc. [Venice, 1564], fol. +₃^r). The illustration effectively encapsulates the entire canto and clearly suggests the progression within it from the simile of the starlings, through that of the cranes, to the final one of the pair of doves.