

l'Inferno è una « tappa di trasferimento », allora a me pare che dia la più chiara dimostrazione che della ispirazione e della poesia della *Commedia* egli non ha nemmeno il sospetto.

Irma Brandeis and the Literary Property

In her book *The Ladder of Vision* (Garden City, 1962, now in a paperback edition) Irma Brandeis analyzes the episode of Francesca da Rimini in the *Divina Commedia* and states first of all these three points:

« *First*, that the hero of the poem has just emerged from a dark « wood of spiritual error. Everything he does and says is characterized « by his as yet unimproved weakness. If the reader confuses him with « the Dante who writes the story at the completion of his educative « journey, he misreads the texts and loses the sense of the encounters in « Hell ...

« *Second*, that the members of Dante's Hell, having died impenitent ... « bear their sinfulness with them and are, as we see them, exemplary « of it ...

« *Third*, that the members of Hell do not know that they are sinful ... « If ... we find the soul in Inferno we must assume that it is ignorant of « the real cause, and therefore incapable of expounding it. »

From these premises the author goes on and establishes that the pilgrim himself « is smitten with the infection of this circle, » that « compliancy is the very nature of the soul. that goes by [Francesca] name, and the root of her sin, » that Dante the personage « is like her in amorous weakness... is identified with Francesca in the overwhelming tenderness of their feelings so dearly expressed in this canto, in their thoughts centered on love, in the suavely laden language of love which both employ. »

These very same concepts, with almost the same expressions, I had used in a long essay « Il folle volo di Ulisse » (*Delta. Nuova Serie*, Agosto 1952) and then in numerous other essays and books on Dante eventually amalgamated into the monograph *Storia della poesia di Dante* first published in serial issues in *Delta* (1958-59) and then in two volumes (now L. S. Olschki, Firenze). In these essays, reversing the general trend of Dante criticism according to which Dante the character of the *Commedia* was identified with the poet, and the personages in Hell, despite their condemnation by God, were noble souls, admired by the same Dante, the pilgrim and the poet as well, I showed that the poet portrays « himself as still profoundly absorbed in the atmosphere and the mist of evil; » that « a solidarity in sin... a contamination exists from which he cannot escape; » that Francesca, Farinata are « petrified for the eternity » in their sinful earthly inclination and that the « evil which has devoured the soul and was already on earth their destiny, has become eternal, absolute; » that « Dante cannot be untainted. He has been close to the second death and makes the journey to restore his soul oppressed by sin; » that what is said by the personages in Hell is always « the manifestation of the sin in which they have lost themselves; » that Francesca's gentleness and

courtesy is « the characteristic itself of her sin; » that the pilgrim « feels the subtle and hidden contamination from sin... relives in her world. »

I could go on and find even closer expressions to those used by Dr. Brandeis. And I must add that nothing of such a way of reading this and other episodes of the *Commedia* existed before my essay and that for many years even after the publication of my essays this interpretation of Francesca's episode could not be found elsewhere. Dante criticism has refused it for long time. But it was mentioned. In *La Fiera letteraria*, the most popular Italian literary magazine, there was a very favorable review of my book *Suggerimenti per una lettura di Dante* (Napoli, 1955) including my previous essays on Dante. An extensive review of this book by Prof. J. A. Mazzeo was published in *Comparative Literature* (1975). In *Convivium*, one of the most known Italian literary reviews, I published a long essay in which I repeated expressions such as the ones quoted above. Miss Brandeis was in Italy a long time. However, her book does not contain any mention of my interpretation which is so similar to hers. I do not know whether one should charge Dr. Brandeis of being scarcely informed or of a weak memory or of a scarce sense of literary property. I do not have elements to solve the question. But perhaps I should feel satisfied that my interpretation of the Francesca episode and the orientation I have given to the whole reading of the *Inferno* is accepted, knowingly or not, by a well known Dantist.

Still about Irma Brandeis.

In her chapter devoted to the episode of Farinata, the same Dr. Brandeis takes issue with Dante criticism according to which Farinata is a

« noble patriot who... rises strongly above the pain of Hell to talk of
« his fatherland and father-city... and that [Dante] sets him in relief
« against the pathetic Cavalcante whose wounded paternal love cuts
« him off early from the encounter. »

« This approach » — we are also told — « (matched by the standard
« treatment of other scenes in the *Comedy*) assumes in Dante, the author
« of the poem a romantic preoccupation with individual character and
« emotion... This is in part perhaps the result of confusing the clear-
« sighted, educated, obedient, diffident, and pitiful protagonist of the
« fiction... Deviation into pity — and, even more, into admiration for
« resistance to pains of Hell — should be totally foreign to such a mind. »

Going on the critic asks herself if there is any connection between Cavalcante's fatherly love and his position in Hell together with Farinata. The answer is *yes*, that « the scenes in Hell are the true demonstrations of the nature of error. They are "experience;"... » Farinata's heresy is his « blindness or shortsightedness... and isolation. »

All this, point by point, was in my essay published in August 1952 and then republished in my book *Suggerimenti*. Irma Brandeis' essay on Farinata was published in *Hudson Review* (Winter 1953). I do not want to insist on the coincidence that led the American critic to put forth an interpretation of Dante's episode thoroughly conflicting with all accepted

views on the subject and so close to the interpretation I had given a year before. Probably one would find it strange that Miss Brandeis in republishing her essay ten years later has remained unaware of that first essay of mine and of the books in which meanwhile I have clarified my interpretation. I wish only to make clear that Farinata's heresy according to me is not exactly, as Dr. Brandeis tends to assert, in his « partisanship » or in a spirit of faction which « divides the city of man. » According to me Farinata's « Epicureism », unmistakably expressed in all his words and gestures, is in the fact that he lives completely absorbed in the earthly city and ignores the supernatural values. He lives « as if the soul were not immortal. » The meaning of the tomb in which he is buried is exactly this: that he is unable to look on high.

Similarly Miss Brandeis has failed to recognize that Cavalcante too acts and speaks as Epicurean. He does not know either of supernatural values; he believes that his son Guido should have been admitted to the miraculous journey « because of the strength of his mind, » and when he misunderstands that Guido is no longer among the living, he shows clearly that nothing else exists to him. He does not know of another life. He is together with Farinata, in the same tomb, because his blindness (the blindness characteristic of the Ghibellines) amounts to the same as Farinata's. They are both absorbed only in the values of this world.

Miss Brandeis does not speak of this latter question. The impression one gets is that she has not understood well my explanations.

Ulysses' sin

In a study published in the 82nd *Annual Report of Dante Society* (1964) entitled « The Characterization of Ulysses in Homer, Virgil and Dante, » Terence P. Logan shows that Dante's treatment « is largely due to Virgil's treatment of Homer's hero in the *Aeneid*. » The demonstration is persuasive. But we are first of all glad to see that the critic agrees with our view that Dante's episode does not express the poet's admiration for Ulysses and his magnanimous aspiration to know, as current Dante criticism maintains, but there is a condemnation. In accordance with what we have many times demonstrated, the critic shows that Dante rejects Ulysses' pursuit of a « false and transitory knowledge » and his « failure to respect and fulfill his familial obligations. » Ulysses, we are also told, « is the personification of the sin of *curiositas*. » It is not the poet who admires him, but Dante, the pilgrim, who « leans toward the flame » because « he too, at this point of his journey had not yet attained the *Summa Sapientia*. »

These are, precisely, some of the elements of the interpretation that, rejecting the romantic view of the « hero » still universally accepted, I had given of the episode. It is this condemnation of Ulysses that Logan traces in Virgil. His research brings another point to my interpretation and, as I have said, is valid. Only, I wonder why Logan, who has worked at Harvard, where, after my lecturing there, my ideas are well known, has avoided making any mention of my studies.