

Adapting Dante's Francesca: Change within the Poetic Reworkings of Bolaño and Neruda



Harrison Betz, Florida State University

Dr. Elizabeth Coggeshall, Assistant Professor of Italian, Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics, College of Arts and Sciences

Introduction

In the centuries since its initial publication, Dante Alighieri's epic poem, the *Divine Comedy*, has undergone repeated cycles of adaptation by authors from around the world. While the adaptive efforts of many Western authors have been examined in countless iterations, subaltern works that reference Dante have not received equal critical treatment. This project works in conjunction with recent scholarship in attempt to rectify this epistemological gap in relation to Latin American works by focusing on two Chilean authors and their poetic adaptations of the semi-historical, semi-fictional character of Francesca da Rimini. Both "La Francesa" by Roberto Bolaño and "Ivresse" by Pablo Neruda reimagine Francesca and her narrative, processing the unique psychological and emotive aspects of her sin and situation to create distinct-yet-overlapping adaptations of the infernal episode. Through in-depth analysis of these texts and their contexts, insight may be provided into not only these authors' understanding of Francesca but also the broader themes which underscore Latin American interpretations of Dante's *Inferno* as a text of European (and hence colonial) origin, which has managed to become deeply rooted in that region's cultural background.



Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta appraised by Dante and Virgil (Scheffer)

Background

Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*:

- An Italian epic poem written in the 14th-century. Recounts a journey through the Christian afterlife in three parts (*Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*).

Francesca da Rimini:

- Character in the *Inferno* based on a historical figure. Punished along with her lover, Paolo Malatesta, in the circle of the lustful for adultery.
- Extensively referenced within European art and literature.

Pablo Neruda:

- Chilean diplomat and poet born in 1904. Awarded the 1971 Nobel Prize in Literature for his collected works. Most recognized for his love poems.
- "Ivresse" first published in *The Book of Twilight* in 1923.

Roberto Bolaño:

- Chilean author born in 1953. Wrote novels throughout his life focusing on the violent nature of life in Latin America, the ephemeral nature of youth and love, and death.
- "La Francesa" posthumously published in a collection titled *The Romantic Dogs*.



HOY QUE DANZA
EN MI CUERPO LA
P A S I Ó N ...
¡OH FRANCESCA,
HACIA DÓNDE TE
LLEVARÁN MIS
A L A S !



A M O R , C H ' A
N U L L O A M A T O
A M A R P E R D O N A ,
M I P R E S E D E L
C O S T U I P I A C E R
S Ì F O R T E , C H E
C O M E V E D I ,
A N C O R N O N
M ' A B B A N D O N A .



L A B E L L E Z A
A B S O L U T A , L A Q U E
C O N T I E N E T O D A
L A G R A N D E Z A Y L A
M I S E R I A D E L
M U N D O Y Q U E
S Ó L O E S V I S I B L E
P A R A Q U I E N E S
A M A N .

Discussion

- What themes unite Bolaño and Neruda in this portrayal of Francesca?
- Absolution – both authors appear to feel as though they (or those around them) have committed the same "sins" as Francesca and that neither they nor her deserve *eternal* punishment as a result
- Sensuality – both poems focus on female sensuality and its relationship with power and emotion; how does gender impact adaptation?
- Analyzing these adaptations highlights the ideas with which contemporary Latin American authors resonate. Focusing on Francesca's character, they hint at unique interpretations of immorality and love that are partially the product of the cultural circumstances from which they write.



Francesca and Paolo as Portrayed by Latin American Artists - Serrano, Achilli, and Ceballos (clockwise)



Future Directions

- Presenting work at South Atlantic Modern Language Association (SAMLA) Conference in November
- Expanding analysis outside of Chile; working with sources originating from other Latin American countries (Argentina and Cuba)
- Developing larger argument about the nature of adaptation and its relationship with literary and historical themes

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