

Roberto Fedi

Noble Tales for the Most Noble of Lovers.
From Francesca to Giulietta*

1. Here we are, in a scene set in Hell, but it is not Dante's *Hell*. Instead, it is the setting chosen by Cecco d'Ascoli—a poet, a heretic, an alchemist, and an astrologer, who was also suspected of being a sorcerer and committing irreverent acts against the Catholic faith, for which he was sent to the stake in 1327. Born in 1269, Cecco d'Ascoli was almost the same age as Dante, yet also an implacable enemy.) In his poemetto in sextets *Acerba* (*Acerba* or Latin "*acervus*", meaning 'medley, jumble') Cecco sets out to oppose what he considered to be the false science of the *Commedia*, and to reveal the mistakes allegedly made by the Divine Poet. Indeed, in book IV, chapter 12, Cecco makes a clear statement, a kind of poetic manifesto:

*Qui non si canta al modo delle rane,
Qui non si canta al modo del poeta
Che finge, immaginando, cose vane;
Ma qui risplende e luce ogni natura
Che a chi intende fa la mente lieta.
Qui non si gira per la selva oscura.*

*Qui non veggio né Paolo né Francesca,
Delli Manfredi non veggio Alberico
Che amari frutti colse di dolce esca.*

It is not our intention to dwell on Alberico Manfredi in this excerpt, but rather to point out the reference—clearly sarcastic—to the fifth Canto of Dante's *Inferno*. The *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia* (Explanations about the Comedy) by Boccaccio trace back to 1373-1374,

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