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«Tante voci [. . .] tra quei bronchi1»: Authorial Agency and Textual Borrowing in Inferno XIII

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«Tante voci [. . .] tra quei bronchi[1]»: Authorial Agency and Textual Borrowing in *Inferno* XIII

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In *Inferno* XIII, Virgil and Dante-the pilgrim speak with two souls guilty of suicide: an anonymous Florentine and Pier delle Vigne, the chancellor of Frederick II and a gifted rhetorician, who, accused of betraying his master, killed himself.[2] The suicides in Hell endure a strange combination of punishments. Instead of radiating aerial bodies that resemble human forms, as do most of the other souls in Dante's Hell,[3] the suicides' souls are trapped in the form of trees, or, to use Leo Spitzer's useful expression, they radiate 'arboreal bodies'.[4] The Harpies wound the suicides by feeding on their leaves, thereby enabling them to speak, albeit through bloody words. While scholarship has normally addressed the suicides' difficulty of expression and the strange nature of their physical forms as separate issues, I maintain in the first part of this essay that these two aspects of their *contrapasso* are interrelated – in other words, that the crime of suicide in Dante's Hell has linguistic implications. The second part goes on to argue that the text's portrayal of the interaction between the characters of Virgil and Dante in the canto thematizes issues of textual borrowing and authorial agency: to what extent may a poet be said to have expressive autonomy while borrowing material from other poems? The third and fourth subsections of the essay explore how Dante develops these issues of authorial agency and textual borrowing through references to classical and Biblical texts, throughout the canto. Poets communicate messages that come from beyond themselves whose sources are in other texts, just as prophets communicate messages that come from God. In this way, the poet defies categorization as either a passive vessel of meaning or an autonomous authorial agent.

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[1] «Cred' ïo ch'ei credette ch'io credesse / che tante voci uscisser tra quei bronchi» (*Inf.*XIII, 25-26). I cite the *Commedia* from Petrocchi's critical edition.

[2] For biographical information about Pier as a historical figure, see EMILIO BIGI, *Pietro delle Vigna*, in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, IV, a cura di Giorgio Petrocchi, Roma, Treccani, 1970-1979 (1973), pp. 511-516. See also ANTONINO DE STEFANO, *La cultura alla corte di Federico II imperatore*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1950, especially pp. 178-189 and 203-211; ERNST KANTOROWICZ, *Frederick the Second. 1194-1250*, trans. By E. O. Lorimer, New York, Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1957, especially pp. 298-307; pp. 664-667 (on Pier as a figure of Judas); p. 447 (on Pier's relationship with Frederick). For an article on the figure of Frederick the II in the *Comedy*, see Donatella Stocchi-Perucchio, *Federico II e l'ambivalenza del sacro nella Commedia*, «MLN», CXXVII, 1, Baltimore, MD, January 2012 (Italian Issue Supplement).

[3] Unlike most other souls in Hell, the suicides lack human aerial bodies. The same is true of Ulysses and Diomedes who are in the shape of flames, and the thieves in *Inferno* XXIV-XXV. (Yet even the thieves initially have human forms that subsequently merge with animal ones.)

[4] See LEO SPITZER, *Il canto XIII dell'Inferno*, in *Letture dantesche*, Florence, Sansoni, 1962, pp. 222-248 (p. 224).

I. The Suicides' *Contrapasso*: Metaphysical and Linguistic Perversion

The difficulty with which the suicides express themselves is an explicit concern in the canto.[5] In order to speak, or to express pain, the souls must be wounded. Upon entering the wood, Virgil urges the pilgrim to pluck a branch from a tree, an act which causes blood and words to pour forth from its trunk: «de la scheggia rotta usciva insieme / parole e sangue» (*Inf.*XIII, 43-44).[6] Pier later describes how the Harpies give the suicides an outlet for expressing their pain by eating their leaves: «l'Arpie, pascendo poi delle sue foglie / fanno dolore, ed al dolor fenestra» (*Inf.*XIII, 101-02), presumably through speech or through the moaning heard by the pilgrim upon entering the wood («io sentia d'ogne parte trarre guai» *Inf.*XIII, 22). Thus, the suicides endure a problematized agency as regards their powers of verbal and emotive expression: they are not entirely in control of their own acts of signifying. Indeed, Virgil appears to think that the souls need to be coaxed to speak even after being wounded.[7]

In addition to representing the suicides' expressive difficulties as part of their punishment, the text emphasizes the over-abundance, yet ultimate futility, of the suicides' speech. For instance, scholars have noted the force with which the words pour out of the suicides' trunks,[8] which might indicate their eagerness to speak. Pier's speech oozes and sputters, like wind escaping from a burning log:

> Come d'un stizzo verde ch'arso sia
> da l'un de' capi', che da l'altro geme
> e cigola come vento che va via. (*Inf.*XIII, 40-42)

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[5] Many scholars have argued that linguistic concerns play a central role in the canto. See for instance FRANCESCO D'OVIDIO, *Il canto di Pier delle Vigne*, in *Nuovi studi danteschi. Ugolino, Pier della Vigna, i simonaici e discussioni varie*, Milano, Ulrico Hoepli, 1907, pp. 143-333; LEO SPITZER, *Speech and Language in Inferno XIII*, «Italica», XIX, 3, Menasha, WI, 1942, pp. 81-104; idem, *Il canto XIII dell'Inferno*, cit., pp.222-248; FRANCESCO DE SANCTIS, *Pier delle Vigne*, in *Saggi critici*, I, a cura di Luigi Russo, Bari, Gius. Laterza & figli, 1952, pp. 104-119; GEORGES GÜNTERT, *Pier delle Vigne e l'unità del canto. Inferno XIII,* «Lettere italiane», XXIII, 4, Firenze, 1971, pp.548-555.

[6] Blood and words pour out of the branch together, and are also combined elsewhere in the canto: «Allor porsi la mano un poco avante / e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno; / e 'l tronco suo gridò: "Perché mi schiante?" / Da che fatto fu poi di sangue bruno, / ricominciò a dir: "Perché mi scerpi? / non hai tu spirto di pietade alcuno?"» (*Inf.*XIII, 31-36).

[7] Twice, Virgil invites Pier to speak: «Ma dilli chi tu fosti, si che 'n vece / d'alcun' ammenda tua fama rinfreschi / nel mondo sù, dove tornar li lece» (*Inf.*XIII, 52-54); «Perciò ricominciò: "Se l'om ti faccia / liberamente ciò che 'l tuo dir priega, / spirito incarcerato, ancor ti piaccia / di dirne come l'anima si lega / in questi nocchi; e dinne, se tu puoi, / s'alcuna mai di tai membra si spiega."» (*Inf.*XIII, 85-90). See also *Inferno* XIII, in *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, I, notes by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 211; and WILLIAM A. STEPHANY, *Pier della Vigna's Self-Fulfilling Prophecies. The "Eulogy" of Frederick II and Inferno 13*, «Traditio», XXXVIII, New York, 1982, pp. 193-212 (p. 201).

[8] See FRANCESCO D'OVIDIO, *art.cit.*, pp. 288-290. Benvenuto da Imola also notes the strength of Pier's breath in his commentary to *Inf.*XIII, 91-93.

While normal speech requires breath, Pier's is described as a powerful wind: «Allor soffiò il tronco forte, e poi / si convertì quel vento in cotal voce» (*Inf.*XIII, 91-92). Furthermore, an over-abundance of mediums of emotive expression – breath, tears, words, and blood – pour out of the trees all at once. Indeed, Dante and other medieval and classical thinkers saw blood as a medium of emotion.[9] Thus, the bleeding, speaking, sighing and crying trees are images of over-abundant expression. One might say that they are images of superfluity in the etymological sense of the word: from *super fluere*, to overflow. Indeed, blood in the Middle Ages and in Dante's works is described, both literally and metaphorically, in terms of superfluity.[10]

However, superfluity connotes not only over-abundance but also redundancy and wasted potential; and in this sense of the word as well we may characterize the suicides' modes of expression. While an abundance of expressive mediums spill out of Pier's arboreal body, it is unclear what the suicides gain by expressing themselves. All the substances that pour out of the trees in the wood of suicides were considered in the Middle Ages to be literal mediums of purgation. Any number of health problems attributed to 'imbalances' in one's blood were treated through phlebotomy.[11] The besotted lover would try to vent excessive passions through sighing, crying, and reciting

[9] For instance, anger was described as heated up blood around the heart, see HEATHER WEBB, *The Medieval Heart*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2010, p. 102; and ANNE LEONE, *Sangue perfetto. Scientific, Sacrificial and Semiotic Implications of Blood in Dante*, unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2010, p. 52.

[10] In *Purgatorio* XXV, Dante draws heavily on Aristotelian thought to describe blood's role in the processes of conception and digestion. Aristotle holds that food is digested in the blood of the parent and distributed as nutrients to the limbs and organs of the body; the leftover nutrients are further digested as the blood goes through stages of refinement into either fat or reproductive seed. Since this seed (semen in men and *menstruum* in women) is the final product of the stage of *digestio* by which blood is refined, Aristotle refers to it as the 'residue of nutriment': «sperma enim superfluum permutati alimenti est» (*Gen. anim.* II, iii, 2 [736b 25-30]); «dico autem superfluitatem alimenti residuum» (I, xviii, 17 [724b 25-30]); «utilis igitur superfluitatis pars aliqua est sperma» (I, xviii, 18 [725a 10-15]). ARISTOTLE, *De Generatione animalium*, ed. by H. J. Drossaart Lulofs, trans. by Guillelmi de Moerbeka, Bruges-Paris, Desclee de Brouwer, 1966 («Aristoteles Latinus», 17). Dante turns Aristotle's theories into a metaphor: «sangue perfetto, che mai non si beve / dall'assetate vene e si rimane / quasi alimento che di mensa leve» (*Pg*.XXV, 37-39).

[11] On purging the body of an imbalance of the four humors in the blood, see JOAN CADDEN, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 186 and 273-275. On menstruation as a way to purge the body of excess, see p. 19, where Cadden paraphrases Hippocrates' opinions on the issue, referring to *Des maladies des femmes*, in *Oeuvres complètes d'Hippocrate*, VIII, ed. by Emile Littré, Paris, J. B. Baillière, 1839-1861, pp. 10-407 (pp. 32-35) and *Des maladies des jeunes filles*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, VIII, pp. 466-471. On bloodletting as purgative, see BETTINA BILDHAUER, *Medieval Blood*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2006, pp. 23-25, 28 and 67, especially the useful note on p. 26 listing studies on bloodletting together with all the passages in Ortolf von Baierland's *Arzneibuch* that describe the procedure as a way to cure diseases, p. 174.

poetry.[12] Yet the suicides' acts of apparent purgation do not seem to give them any lasting respite from their pain: each bite of the Harpies wounds and relieves them.[13]

Furthermore, the image of blood dripping down the wood of Pier's trunk recalls the most important purgative moment of Christian faith: Christ's blood pouring down the wood of the cross, which purged humanity from Original Sin.[14] Yet the suicides' blood – in contrast with Christ's purifying blood – might remind the reader of the potential for forgiveness that the souls squandered by committing suicide. No matter how many purgative substances pour forth from the trees, God will never forgive the sins of the suicides because they can never repent. It is ironic that, despite the desperation, eagerness and abundance of purgative substances with which the suicides express themselves, their efforts are futile.[15] As if to emphasize this point, Dante uses a superfluous poetic device to describe the nature of the suicides' speech: the structure of lines 40-44 suggests a simile («Come d'un stizzo verde ch'arso sia / da l'un de' capi', che da l'altro geme / e cigola come vento che va via / sì de la scheggia rotta usciva insieme / parole e sangue»); yet, air rushing out of a branch is what is happening literally. In this tercet, the image itself is self-consciously superfluous.

The *contrapasso* of *Inferno* XIII may be characterized therefore as linguistic on several levels. At a textual level, the suicides experience their own punishment linguistically – through the difficulties they face in expressing themselves, their perverted mediums of expression, and their lack of control over their own expressive acts. At a metatextual level, the reader may perceive an ironic aspect of the suicides' situation: they will never be able to purge themselves of their sin despite the abundance of purgative mediums flowing out of them. In this sense, we may characterize the tree-souls in the wood of suicides as figures of problematized and superfluous expression.

Yet the question of why the *contrapasso* should emphasize linguistic elements remains. What has the act of expression to do specifically with the sin of suicide? Some scholars have addressed this question with recourse to Pier delle Vigne's status as an historical figure. For instance, William A. Stephany argues that Dante may have considered Pier's misuse of Scripture in his writings for his own gain as part of his crime, a hypothesis that may certainly hold true.[16] Yet, if this were the only explanation for the association between suicide and language, why would the anonymous Florentine and the

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[12] See ANNE LEONE, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-62 on sighing and crying as forms of literal purgation; see also HEATHER WEBB, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-123 for literal and metaphorical implications of Dante's treatment of the heart and the spirits in the *Vita nova*.

[13] «L'Arpie, pascendo poi delle sue foglie/ fanno dolore, ed al dolor fenestra» (*Inf.*XIII, 101-102).

[14] On Christ's blood as cleansing, see John 15:3; for Christ's blood as salvific, see for instance, Matthew 26.28: «hic est enim sanguis meus novi testamenti qui pro multis effunditur in remissionem peccatorum.» I cite the Vulgate Bible from the Swift Edgar edition, Harvard University Press, 2010.

[15] For the theme of futility in the canto, see GEORGES GÜNTERT, *op. cit.*, p. 552, who argues that the canto begins and ends with the theme of futility: «Il canto XIII si apre infatti su una desolata visione di sofferenze *inutili* e si chiude confermando l'inutilità di ogni tentativo di liberazione, di ogni gesto, di ogni parola [. . .] e lo stesso sentimento di inutilità impregna l'ultimo episodio dell'anonimo suicida fiorentino.»

[16] See WILLIAM A. STEPHANY, *art. cit.*, which argues that the canto alludes to passages in Pier's works that misuse passages of Scripture.

other suicides in the wood suffer linguistic punishments as well? The answer I think lies in Dante's conception of the linguistic implications of suicide.

Pier defines the act of suicide as the soul violently separating itself from the body:

> Quando si parte l'anima feroce
> dal corpo ond' ella stessa s'è disvelta,
> Minòs la manda a la settima foce. (*Inf.*XIII, 94-96)

In this sense, we might understand the sin of suicide as an undoing of the process of conception, during which the soul and the body of an individual are joined together.[17] In *Purgatorio* XXV, Statius describes how the soul informs the body when «sangue perfetto» (37), (or the father's 'seed' as Dante refers to it in *Convivio*[18]), descends into the womb and 'oozes' onto the mother's blood («geme / sovr'altrui sangue in natural vasello» 42-43). The male seed, by virtue of its formative capacities, acts upon the female blood, instigating a process of physical and spiritual development in the fetus that 'unfolds' in stages (58).[19] First, the capacity for growth develops, causing the clot of blood to assume the shape of limbs, organs and flesh; then the capacity for sensation develops, and finally the fetus receives the capacity for speech through the breath of God, which unifies all three of the spiritual capacities into «un'alma sola» (*Pg.*XXV, 74). These three capacities of the soul are also sometimes referred to as the vegetative, animal and human/rational souls, since their classification served as a model for medieval thinkers to distinguish three different forms of living beings: plants can only grow; animals can grow and feel; humans can grow, feel and think. In sum, *Purgatorio* XXV characterizes human conception as the process whereby the soul and the body are unified, becoming a synolon which in turn facilitates the capacities of the soul, namely the abilities of the human person to grow, to feel, to think and to speak.

Suicide ruptures the union between the soul and the body. Thus, the suicides' punishment in Hell fittingly involves a distortion of their spiritual capacities, and a perversion of their use of language. Indeed, the souls in *Inferno* XIII, as we have seen, suffer from a confusion of their faculties of expression. (In addition to the breath required for speaking, they speak through blood, and they weep profusely.) In this sense, the emotive and verbal capacities that they developed in the womb (by virtue of the animal and rational souls) are perverted. In addition, Pier emphasizes the three faculties of the soul (vegetative, animal and human), when Dante first plucks his branch: «Perché mi scerpi? / non hai tu spirto di pietade alcuno? / Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi: / ben dovrebb' esser la tua man più pia / se state fossimo anime di serpi» (*Inf.*XIII, 35-39), demonstrating his awareness of the importance of the three categories of being and

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[17] Leo Spitzer, in *Speech and Language*, cit., makes a related point when he describes the suicide's crime as «breaking [. . .] the God-willed connection between body and soul» (p. 85).
[18] DANTE, *Convivio*, IV, xxi, 4.
[19] For a discussion of the debates concerning the passage's treatment of the question of the soul's plurality or unicity of form, see MANUELE GRAGNOLATI, *Chapter 2. Embryology and Aerial Bodies in Dante's Comedy*, in *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2005, pp. 53-87. See also ZYGMUNT G. BARAŃSKI, *Canto XXV*, in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Purgatorio*, a cura di Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone, Firenze, F. Cesati, 2001, pp. 389-406.

possibly also of their implications for his punishment in Hell. Pier's words thus emphasize the irony that a soul guilty of suicide should have such an acute sense of life.

Furthermore, the suicides' twisted wooden forms[20] point to how they had deprived themselves of the gift that God had breathed into them at their conception (the unification of their souls with their bodies and the organization of all three of their spiritual capacities into one «alma sola»). Pier describes how the souls sprout into their arboreal bodies:

> Quando si parte l'anima feroce
> dal corpo ond' ella stessa s'è disvelta,
> Minòs la manda a la settima foce.
> Cade in la selva, e non l'è parte scelta;
> ma là dove fortuna la balestra,
> quivi germoglia come gran di spelta.
> Surge in vermena e in pianta silvestra:
> l'Arpie, pascendo poi de le sue foglie,
> fanno dolore, e al dolor fenestra. (*Inf.*XIII, 94-102)

Pier compares the suicide's soul to a seed («quivi germoglia come gran di spelta» *Inf.*XIII, 99) that falls into the wood in Hell («cade in la selva» *Inf.*XIII, *Inf.*XIII, 96), and sprouts into a plant in a way that has prompted Patrick Boyde to characterize the description as a «grim parody of the processes of gestation, which will be described at length in *Purgatorio* XXV».[21] Indeed, the process of human conception also begins with a seed – the father's semen, which «descends» into the womb where it mixes with the mother's blood (*Pg*.XXV, 43-45). Yet, instead of developing the three capacities of the soul (as would the seed of human life during natural conception), the suicide's soul sprouts into a materialization of the lowest capacity of the soul – the vegetative –, ironically and perversely maintaining, in distorted form, its capacities for speech and sensation. In this sense, Dante's views on the process of conception shed light on the nature of the suicides' *contrapasso*. If the act of suicide consists in the rupturing of the relationship between form and matter which is established during conception, then the punishment of suicide in Hell would, fittingly, involve a distortion between form and matter – hence their perverted bodies and distorted speech.

Further contrastive parallels between Statius's description of natural conception in *Purgatorio* XXV and Pier's description of the formation of the suicides' arboreal bodies in *Inferno* XIII would seem to support Boyde's suggestion. Dante uses the verbs «gemere» and «spiegare» in both passages, yet to different ends. While «spiegare» in *Purgatorio* XXV describes the formative power through which the fetus grows and develops the spiritual capacities («or si spiega, figliuolo, or si distende / la virtù ch'è dal cor del generante / dove natura a tutte membra intende» 58-60), the word in *Inferno* XIII refers to the impossibility of disentangling the suicides' souls from their knotted wooden forms: «dinne, se tu puoi, / s'alcuna mai di tai membra si spiega» (89-90). «Gemere» in *Purgatorio* XXV refers to the action whereby the male seed acts upon the female blood

[20] Virgil asks Pier to explain «come l'anima si lega/ in questi nocchi» (*Inf.*XIII, 88-89); and Virgil refers to Pier as a «spirito incarcerato» (*Inf.*XIII, 87).

[21] PATRICK BOYDE, *Inferno XIII* in *Cambridge Readings in Dante's Comedy*, ed. by Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 1-23 (p.15).

in the womb (43-43), whereas, in *Inferno* XIII, the word refers to Pier's perverted act of expression and the sound of speech exiting his branch: «Come d'un stizzo verde ch'arso sia / da l'un de' capi', che da l'altro geme / e cigola come vento che va via» 40-42). In both examples, the terms in *Purgatorio* XXV that are used to describe natural conception describe, in *Inferno* XIII, symptoms of the two elements of the suicides' *contrapasso* that are of central concern to this article's argument: the sinners' difficulty of expression and the distortion of their visible forms.

In sum, the trees suffer linguistic punishments in *Inferno* XIII because of the linguistic implications of suicide. Having torn apart the synolon of soul and body forged by God's breath that gave them life and the capacity for language and that defined their very humanity, they suffer from expressive difficulties, and from a perversion of the order of the spiritual capacities. Their bleeding vegetal 'bodies' reveal to the reader, and to the pilgrim and Virgil as well, with horrifying clarity, the value of what they had wasted.

However, what is sinful about suicide is not simply the fact that it involves the separation of the soul from the body, given that Dante also describes natural death in the same way.[22] The sinfulness of suicide, as implied by *Inferno* XIII, is predicated on the agency of its perpetrator – the individual separating his soul from his body instead of waiting for God or nature to separate them. By so doing, the suicide deprives himself of the divine gifts of life and linguistic capacity. As a result, Dante places significant emphasis in the canto on the issue of individual, and specifically authorial, agency. The linguistic ramifications of Dante's portrayal of suicide will have inevitable metaliterary consequences in the canto.

II. Authorship and Textual Borrowing

In *Inferno* XIII, the crimes and the punishments of the suicides also take on symbolic dimensions. For Dante, exploiting a trope of Aristotle's, the relationship between form and matter is a model for art: the content (*matera*) of a text is shaped by its form, just as the body is informed by the soul.[23] Thus, the suicide's sin, of tearing apart

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[22] See for instance, *Pg.*XXV, 79-81: «Quando Làchesis non ha più del lino, / solvesi da la carne, e in virtute / ne porta seco e l'umano e 'l divino.»

[23] It was a medieval commonplace to associate *matera* with text, and Dante associated the artistic creative process with literal human conception. See for instance JOHN FRECCERO, *The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff, Cambridge, MA-London, Harvard University Press, 1986, which argues that: «Statius's discussion about conception and reproduction in Canto XXV [. . .] seems to suggest strongly an analogy between the act of writing and the act of procreation» (p. 202). By extension, Dante not only associates content with *matera*, but also style with form (see ANNE LEONE, *Chapter 3.* «*Uscivan insieme parole e sangue»: The Poetics of Blood*, in *Sangue perfetto*, op. cit., pp. 122-169). For a related idea of the association between integument and content, see DURLING, *Additional Note 12. The Body Analogy, Part 2. The Metaphorics of Fraud (After Canto 30*), in *Inferno*, op. cit., pp.576-577 (p. 577). For associations between the body and text, wounds and writing, see KEVIN MARTI, *Body, Heart and Text in the Pearl-Poet*, Lewiston, NY, Edwin Mellen Press, 1991, which argues that: «the equation of text and body finds its most explicit exposition in patristic exegesis; the Bible, especially, is often compared to the body of Christ» (p. 52). As a corollary to the association between body and text, wounds (specifically Christ's) were often associated with manuscript rubrication in various works,

the soul from the body, may be seen as a figure of the defacement of a work of art. The soul's punishment of being trapped in a perverted form is a figure for a work of art gone wrong; and the suicide's punishment of enduring expressive difficulties might be interpreted as a figure of failed or problematized authorship. This would be particularly fitting in Pier's case since, as we saw above, Dante may have thought that Pier had actually misused Scriptural language in his rhetorical writings.

Indeed, the issue of authorial or expressive difficulty is emphasized repeatedly throughout the canto. Not only in the case of the suicides, but also in the actions of the pilgrim, who repeatedly fails to speak, despite Virgil's prompting.[24] Instead, the pilgrim manages to provoke others to speak: he induces Pier to speak by wounding him («Allor porsi la mano un poco avante / e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno» 31-32). And, in a sense, Dante-the-poet even stimulates Virgil's poetry, at a metatextual level, to speak through Pier's wounds. Virgil apologizes to Pier for making Dante pluck his branch:

> «S'elli avesse potuto creder prima,»
> rispuose 'l savio mio, «anima lesa,
> ciò c'ha veduto pur con la mia rima,
> non avrebbe in te la man distesa;
> ma la cosa incredibile mi fece
> indurlo ad ovra ch'a me stesso pesa» (*Inf.*XIII, 46-51)

In these tercets, Virgil encourages Dante to pluck Pier's branch in order to prove something about his own rhymes. Indeed, the pilgrim's plucking of the branch is an allusion to the *Aeneid* in which Aeneas plucks a myrtle bush, which starts to bleed, from beneath which the soul of Polydorus begins to speak.[25] In this way, the character of Virgil in Dante's text makes the *Aeneid* speak again: through the wound or mouth not only of Pier delle Vigne, but also through the text of the *Commedia*.[26]

The pilgrim and Pier delle Vigne are not quite symbols of failed authorship, but rather, of authors who borrow from each other, or allude to each others' works. The

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including those of Richard Rolle, Prudentius, Peter the Venerable, John of Hanville, and the Bible. See for instance II Corinthians 3:3, where God's word is written «in tabulis cordis carnalibus» (MARTI, *op.cit*., p. 53). On the subject of Christ's wounds, see MARK BALFOUR, «*Orribil furon li peccati miei*». *Manfred's wounds in Purgatorio III*, «Italian Studies» XLVIII, London, 1993, pp. 4-17.

[24] Virgil tells the pilgrim: «non perder l'ora /; ma parla, e chiedi a lui, se più ti piace» (80-81). But Dante responds: «Dimandal tu ancora / di quel che credi ch'a me satisfaccia; / ch'i' non potrei, tanta pietà m'accora» (*Inf.*XIII, 82-84).

[25] VIRGIL, *Aeneid*, Book III, 13-65 in *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid I-IV*, I, ed. by G. P. Goold with an English translation by H. Rusthon Fairclough, Cambridge, MA-London, Harvard University Press, 1999 («Loeb Classical Library»).

[26] See DOUGLAS BIOW, *From Ignorance to Knowledge: The Marvelous in Inferno 13*, in *The Poetry of Allusion. Virgil and Ovid in Dante's Commedia*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey Schnapp, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991, pp. 45-61, which argues that there is a «radically different subtextual patterning» to be found in the canto: «here, for the first time in the *Commedia*, Virgil openly calls attention to his own text [. . .] the opening of canto 13 stages a comparison between Dante's and Virgil's art. Like the pointing hands that appear from time to time in the margins of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, Virgil boldly indicates his text within Dante's» (p. 46).

characters are involved in each other's acts of signification, at both textual and metatextual levels. Pier is the speaker of his own words, but Dante and Virgil elicit his speech. Pier's words themselves might, in his mind, help to 'refresh his fame' in the world above (as Virgil puts it when encouraging him to speak, 52-54). Yet, Pier's words, in Virgil's mind, will also prove the truth of the *Aeneid*'s rhymes to the pilgrim; thus, Pier's words speak for Virgil's text. When the pilgrim fails to speak, he asks Virgil to speak for him (82-84). In these interactions between Dante, Virgil and Pier, no one speaker is the sole agent in his act of signifying. In particular, Pier's bloody speech has a plurality of authors and alludes to a plurality of sources.

A tension between word and author, text and source, permeates the canto, as its opening demonstrates. Dante describes a feeling of disorientation upon entering the wood:

> Io sentia d'ogne parte trarre guai
> e non vedea persona che 'l facesse,
> per ch'io tutto smarrito m'arrestai. (*Inf.*XIII, 22-24)

The pilgrim's disorientation arises from hearing a voice and not seeing the body from which it comes; his anxiety arises from perceiving words but not their source. Dante feels the need to identify the bodies from which these voices come. In other words, the canto implies a lesson about the role of the author: he must be a listener as well as a writer. By writing a text, he elicits and reshapes meaning from other texts. Pier's gushing wound symbolizes the plurality of meaning that a text may signify, and the multiplicity of sources that may inform it. *Inferno* XIII thematizes its own use of abundant textual sources, and by so doing invites the reader to explore them.

III. *Inferno* XIII's Classical Intertextualities

Inferno XIII's classical allusions abound, as many critics have demonstrated. Particularly well established in the criticism are the canto's allusions to the *Aeneid*;[27] and some scholars have explored its Ovidian references as well.[28] Francesco D'Ovidio in particular examines how the canto brings Ovidian and Virgilian sources into dialogue with each other.[29] I wish to employ this intertextual approach in my analysis of the canto's references not only to the *Metamorphoses* and the *Aeneid*, but also to Virgil's *Georgics*.

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[27] See for instance PETER S. HAWKINS, *For the Record: Rewriting Virgil in the Commedia*, in «Studies in the Literary Imagination», XXXVI, 1, Atlanta, 2003, pp. 75-97. See also the notes to most editions of *Inferno*, including those written by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez, *op.cit.*, pp. 208-217; Robert Hollander, New York, Doubleday, 2000, pp. 230-234; and Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi, Milano, Mondadori, 1991, pp. 387-420. For the canto's references to the *Aeneid* in the commentary tradition, see Pietro Alighieri, Giovan Battista Gelli, Niccolò Tommaseo, Longfellow, Grandgent, Singleton, among others.

[28] See FRANCESCO D'OVIDIO, *op.cit.*, pp. 154-160; THOMAS E. PETERSON, *Ovid and Parody in Dante's Inferno*, «Annali d'Italianistica», XXV, Chapel Hill, NC, 2007, pp. 203-216; JANIS VANACKER, *«Why Do You Break Me?» Talking to a Human Tree in Dante's Inferno,* «Neophilologus», XCV, Dordrecht, 2011, pp. 431-434.

[29] FRANCESCO D'OVIDIO, *op.cit.*, pp. 219-220.

As established above, *Inferno* XIII alludes to the *Aeneid*'s portrayal of the bleeding bush above the mound where Polydorus is buried in Thrace, and in so doing the canto characterizes the wounds of the suicides' tree-forms as expressive. Dante's Pier and Virgil's Polydorus speak through their wounds (and, indeed one might say that Virgil's Polydorus speaks through the wound of Dante's Pier as well). Yet, Virgil's Orpheus in the *Georgics* also speaks through a wound.[30] The bard, overcome with despair at having lost Eurydice for a second time, incurs the wrath of the Thracian women by failing to show interest in them. They tear him apart limb from limb:

> solus Hyperboreas glacies Tanaimque nivalem
> arvaque Rhiphaeis numquam viduata pruinis
> lustrabat, raptam Eurydicen atque inrita Ditis
> dona querens. spretae Ciconum quo munere matres
> inter sacra deum nocturnique orgia Bacchi
> discerptum latos iuvenem sparsere per agros.
> tum quoque marmorea caput a cervice revulsum
> gurgite cum medio portans Oeagrius Hebrus
> volveret, Eurydicen vox ipsa et frigida lingua,
> ah miseram Eurydicen! anima fugiente vocabat:
> Eurydicen toto referebant flumine ripae. (*Georgics* IV.517-527)

Orpheus's voice speaks Eurydice's name with his dying breath, the same breath with which his soul is leaving his body (*Georgics* IV.526).[31] His voice speaks through and beyond the disintegration of his body, resonating beyond death. The passage may have informed Dante's description of the suicides' speech, which, like Orpheus's final breath, also pours out through a plurality of wounds, as we see when Virgil-*personaggio* asks the anonymous Florentine to identify himself: «Chi fosti, che per tante punte / soffi con sangue doloroso sermo?» (*Inf.*XIII, 137-138). In fact, Virgil asks this question in *Inferno* XIII just after the two poets have witnessed the dismemberment of the spendthrift Jacopo da Sant'Andrea by ravenous dogs[32] in a scene that might also recall Orpheus's dismemberment in the *Georgics,* especially given the fact that it takes places in Thrace – the same place where Aeneas encounters Polydorus's bleeding portent in the *Aeneid*. Thus, the wounds of the tree-souls in Dante's *Inferno* XIII can be interpreted as references to Virgilian descriptions of expressive wounds not only in the *Aeneid* but also in the *Georgics*.

In addition, the suicides' wounds in *Inferno* XIII may also allude to Ovidian sources, as D'Ovidio and more recently Janis Vanacker have argued, both of whom identify references in the canto to the *Metamorphoses*' tales of Daphne, the Heliads,

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[30] For Dante's treatment of the Orpheus myth, see ZYGMUNT G. BARAŃSKI, *Notes on Dante and the Myth of Orpheus*, in *Dante: mito e poesia*. *Atti del secondo Seminario dantesco internazionale*. *Monte Verità Ascona. 23-27 giugno 1997*, Michelangelo Picone, Tatiana Crivelli ed.(s.), Firenze, F. Cesati, 1999, pp. 133-154.

[31] VIRGIL, *Georgics* in *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid,* cit., pp. 97-260.

[32] Scholars have traditionally traced the description of Jacopo's fate to Ovid's tale of Actaeon (*Metamorphoses* III, 138-252), the hunter who is transformed into a stag and then torn apart by his own dogs: «dilacerant falsi dominum sub imagine cervi» (250), but I see no reason why the scene might not also refer to the figure of Orpheus in Virgil's *Georgics*.

Dryope and Eryshichthon, since these portray human-to-tree transformations, and/or bloody speaking trees.[33] In addition to these figures, D'Ovidio mentions Myrrha in a list of contrastive examples of how Dante's tree-souls differ from Ovid's descriptions of human-to-plant transformations.[34] On closer inspection, however, I believe that the figure of Myrrha resonates more fully throughout *Inferno* XIII and deserves more systematic investigation.

Ovid's Myrrha falls in love with her own father. Envious of animals since they can mate with their kin, she tries to kill herself but is stopped by her nurse, who comes up with a plan for tricking Myrrha's father into sleeping with her by effectively disguising her identity. Discovering she is pregnant, she flees, whereupon she is turned into a myrrh-tree that weeps tears of myrrh.[35] During labor, Lucina tears asunder Myrrha's bark, helping her give birth to Adonis (*Met*.X.510-513). Allusions to the figure of Myrrha in *Inferno* XIII may have been overlooked in scholarship due to the image of myrrh instead of blood dripping down her trunk. However, the sap of Myrrha's tree is directly associated with her blood. In describing her transformation into a tree, Ovid explicitly describes the moment when her blood transforms into sap: «mediaque manente medulla / sanguis it in sucos» (*Met*.X.492-493). It is useful to remember at this juncture that various scholars have associated the suicides' bloody tears with sap.[36]

Many other parallels between the two passages abound. Both Myrrha and the suicides are trapped in vegetal bodies, and there is ample evidence in *Inferno* XIII to suggest that Pier's tree resembles myrrh. Like myrrh, it is thorny (*Inf*.XIII, 6) and is twice described as a thornbush (32 and 108). If indeed the figure of Pier alludes to Virgil's Polydorus, we might remember that, in the *Aeneid*, Polydorus speaks through a myrtle bush, a word that is etymologically related to myrrh.[37] Myrrha tries to commit suicide in despair and shame for her unnatural love for her father – a situation that has many parallels with Pier's suicide, which he committed, as he tells the pilgrim, in an attempt to flee from the disdain of others (70-72), who believed that he had betrayed the Emperor, with whom, he maintains, he had the most intimate relationship (61), and whom he never betrayed (73-75). In other words, both Myrrha and Pier turn suicidal on account of the shame they are made to feel (by others in their community) for having become too intimate with authority figures. After Myrrha discovers she is pregnant and flees, she prays to the gods to 'change' her and to refuse her both life and death,[38] which prompts the gods to turn her into a tree. This supplication might well have informed Dante's

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[33] JANIS VANACKER, *art. cit.*, pp. 431-434. Vanacker suggests that previous scholars had argued over which classical source «has been a model for Canto 13» (p. 443), claiming persuasively that a plurality of classical sources informs the passage instead, p. 444.

[34] FRANCESCO D'OVIDIO, *op.cit.*, pp. 157 and 159.

[35] «Est honor et lacrimis, stillataque cortice murra / nomen erile tenet nulloque tacebitur aevo» (*Met*.X.501-502). OVID, *Metamorphoses*, II, ed. by G. P. Goold with an English translation by Frank Justus Miller, Cambridge, MA-London, Harvard University Press, 1984 («Loeb Classical Library»).

[36] See LEO SPITZER, *Speech and Language,* art. cit., pp. 88-89.

[37] See *Dizionario Etimologico Online*: http://etimo.it/?term=mirto&find=Cerca.

[38] «O siqua patetis / numina confessis, merui nec triste recuso / supplicium, sed ne violem vivosque superstes / mortuaque exstinctos, ambobus pellite regnis / mutataeque mihi vitamque necemque negate!» (Ovid, *Met*.X.483-487).

portrayal of the suicides' fate – unique among all the souls in Hell[39] – that their souls will be separated from their bodies even after the Resurrection, their corpses hanging from their branches for eternity (103-108). Finally, just as Myrrha's bark must be ripped open in order for her to give birth to Adonis, so too must the suicides' trunks be splintered in order for their words to spill out.[40]

In perhaps the most significant parallel between the two passages, Ovid's Myrrha suffers from distortions of the order of living beings (plant-animal-human) that also inform Pier's fate. She envies animals their ability to mate with relatives without social consequences. The love she feels for her father was inspired in her by one of the three Fates with their 'Stygian firebrands and swollen snakes',[41] and she is turned into a tree. Dante's Pier also emphasizes the distortion of the three orders of being from which he suffers by mentioning snakes and referencing the wooden form of his body («Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi: / ben dovrebb' esser la tua man più pia / se state fossimo anime di serpi» *Inf.*XIII, 37-39). Myrrha's labor further emphasizes the distortion of the states of being. It is made more difficult and more painful due to the fact that her body is in tree-form and her baby is human. Her labor also represents a perversion of the processes of human reproduction, itself the result of a perverted act of conception. Likewise, as seen in section I, Pier delle Vigne's crime of distorting the relationship between the soul and the body results in a punishment that figures an act of perverted conception.

Another important connection between the episodes is signaled by the fact that Ovid describes Myrrha's improper love for her father as wicked («scelus est odisse parentem, / hic amor est odio maius scelus» *Met.*X.314-315) – a word that Dante borrows to describe Myrrha in *Inferno* XXX: «Quell'è l'anima antica / di Mirra scellerata, che divenne / al padre, fuor del dritto amore, amica. / Questa a peccar con esso così venne,/ falsificando sé in altrui forma» (*Inf.*XXX, 37-41). Just a few tercets before the encounter with Myrrha in the same canto, Dante makes explicit mention of Ovid's account of Hecuba discovering her son Polydorus's body, which causes her to go mad with grief and

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[39] Here Dante deviates from Christian doctrine, which maintains that all souls will regain their flesh after the Last Judgment. See CESARE ANGELINI, *Il canto XIII dell'Inferno*, in *Lectura Dantis Scaligera. Inferno*, Firenze, F. Le Monnier, 1971, pp. 425-446 (pp.445); Manuele Gragnolati, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-68. For the poet's treatment of the issue of resurrection more generally, see VINCENT B. MOLETA, *Dante's Heretics and the Resurrection*, «Medioevo Romanzo» VII, 2, Napoli, 1980, pp. 247-284.

[40] Other parallels between Ovid's tale of Myrrha and Dante's suicides include both passages' emphasis on the themes of birds and fire. Dante's Harpies make strange sounds on the trees in Hell, while Ovid's Myrrha is warned not to commit suicide by the cry of an owl. Myrrha's love is kindled by one of the Fates, with their 'Stygian firebrands' (*Met.*X.313-314), and the Fates' ability to see her guilt is like a flame; while Pier's twig smokes in an effort to speak; and he describes the people envious of his relationship with Frederick as inflamed against him (*Inf.*XIII, 67).

[41] «Ipse negat nocuisse tibi sua tela Cupido, / Myrrha, facesque suas a crimine vindicat isto; / stipite te Stygio tumidisque adflavit echidnis / e tribus una soror: scelus est odisse parentem, / hic amor est odio maius scelus» (*Met.*X.311-315).

to bark like a dog, or in some accounts,[42] to turn into one.[43] Thus, in cantos XIII and XXX of *Inferno*, Dante associates the figures of Myrrha and Polydorus with each other, drawing on both Virgilian and Ovidian accounts, by emphasizing those parts of their stories which involve transitions between human, animal and vegetative categories of living beings.

Inferno XIII's allusions to Ovid's Myrrha may also have political implications.[44] The anonymous Florentine describes «lo strazio disonesto / c'ha le mie fronde sì da me disgiunte» (140-141) as part of his punishment, causing commentators and critics to interpret the suicide as a symbol of Florence itself – he separates his own soul from his body, just as the city is divided by civil war.[45] Myrrha in Dante's *Epistle* VII is also a symbol of Florence.[46] Again, Dante associates Myrrha with vipers[47] and with the word «scelus», accusing the city of seducing the Pope instead of staying faithful to her 'true husband' the Emperor, just as Myrrha had seduced her father. As we saw above, the shame of the accusation of betraying his Emperor was exactly what caused Pier to take his own life. In addition, Dante's indictment of Florence in *Epistle* VII emphasizes Myrrha's sexual impropriety, just as Pier delle Vigne in *Inferno* XIII attributes his downfall to envy, which he describes as a whore with slutty eyes (64-65). Thus, the figure of Myrrha, while providing insight into the nature of the suicides' crime, also sheds light on some of *Inferno* XIII's political and ethical implications.

In sum, *Inferno* XIII's allusions to the figure of Myrrha stimulate interpretations that take into account a plurality of potential classical sources. Given the canto's imagery of abundant expressiveness and its thematization of the issue of textual superfluity explored in the first section of this article, I think it is reasonable to assert that the text self-consciously alerts the reader to this interpretive task. But it is a difficult task – one that requires the reader to distinguish between multiple sources that speak to – and often through – each other. In this sense, the reader of *Inferno* XIII might strongly identify with the pilgrim's «smarrimento» (24) upon entering the wood: hearing a plurality of voices –

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[42] In Ovid (*Met*.XIII.567–571) and in Dante (*Inf*.XXX, 19), Hecuba turns into a dog. In Euripides' *Hecuba*, Polymnestor prophesizes that she will turn into a dog (1265–1273). Seneca also makes reference to Hecuba's bestial form and her barking (*Agamemnon*, 705-709).

[43] Hecuba goes mad with grief and barks like a dog in *Met*.XIII.567-569 and in *Inf*.XXX, 19.

[44] For a discussion of the political implications of Dante's figure of Myrrha in *Inferno* XXX, see MARGHERITA PAMPINELLA-CROPPER, *Myrrha. Incestuous Passion and Political Transgression (Inferno 30),* «Forum Italicum» XLVI, Stony Brook, NY, 2012, pp. 82-109.

[45] See DURLING/MARTINEZ, *op. cit.*, p. 216; PATRICIA L. MACKINNON, *The Analogy of the Body Politic in Saint Augustine, Dante, Petrarch and Ariosto*, PhD Dissertation, University of California at Santa Cruz, Ann Arbor, University Mircofilms [1988] 1989.

[46] «Quippe nec Pado precipiti, nec Tiberi tuo criminosa potatur, verum Sarni fluenta torrentis adhuc rictus eius inficiunt, et Florentia, forte nescis?, dira hec pernicies nuncupatar. / Hec est vipera versa in viscera genitricis; hec est languida pecus gregem domini sui sua contagione commaculans; hec Myrrha scelestis et impia in Cinyre patris amplexus exestuans» (DANTE, *Letter to Emperor Henry VII*, 17 April 1311, paragraph 7, 23-24). For discussion of the association between Myrrha and the city, see CLAIRE HONESS, notes 46-49 in her commentary, *Dante Alighieri: Four Political Letters*, London, Modern Humanities Research Association, 2007 («MHRA Critical Texts», 6), pp. 78-79.

[47] «Hec est vipera versa in viscera genitricis [. . .] Vere matrem viperea feritate dilaniare contendit» (DANTE, *Epistle*,VII, 24-25).

«tante voci» – coming from among the branches (26), he is at first unable to decipher from whence they come.

Indeed, the canto emphasizes both the challenge and the necessity of intertextual interpretation. Pier's wounds in *Inferno* XIII allude to Orpheus's dying words, which are spoken through his wounds in the *Georgics*; Pier's wounds in *Inferno* XIII also allude to the figure of Myrrha in Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* whose story is told through the mouth of Orpheus-the-poet. In this way, *Inferno* XIII dramatizes the act of textual borrowing – alluding not only to a variety of textual sources, but also to a plurality of acts of telling, and to a plurality of authors, at both the textual and the metatextual level. In this way, *Inferno* XIII not only self-consciously acknowledges a wealth of sources, but it also embodies and figures the process of textual borrowing itself – by characterizing the plurality of poets alluded to in the canto as mouthpieces – or vessels out of which other people's words may flow.

While the pilgrim hears a multitude of voices speaking through the trees in this canto, and while the reader might recognize a plurality of source-texts that inform the canto's depiction of the suicides, Virgil's awareness of this rich textual multiplicity is questionable. When apologizing to Pier delle Vigne for having induced Dante to pluck his branch, Virgil implies a singularity of meaning that he expects the bleeding branch to demonstrate – proof of his own text's veracity.[48] Of course, Virgil could not have known the other source text that we have suggested also informs the sign of Pier's bleeding branch; the *Metamorphoses* was completed in 8AD, decades after Virgil's death. Nor can any author predict or control the way in which his own rhymes signify through allusions in other texts. However, Virgil's apology to Pier for inducing Dante to inflict his wound also admits the necessity for multiple authors and for intertextual borrowing. If Virgil's text had been able to convince Dante of its own veracity, then Virgil-*personaggio* would not have induced Dante to pluck the branch. In other words, Virgil admits that his texts need to be referenced by other texts, and to be revealed through other signs, even without knowledge of all the sources to which the sign might allude.

IV. *Inferno* XIII's Scriptural Allusions

It is thus fitting that the image of Pier's bleeding tree in *Inferno* XIII alludes not only to classical sources, but also to many Christian and Biblical sources as well,[49] the implications of which we might assume would be interpreted in different ways by the characters of Pier, Virgil, and Dante, and by the *Commedia*'s readers. For instance, scholars have identified Christological allusions in the figure of Pier delle Vigne. His name and his vegetal body invite comparison with 'Christ the Vine' an image evoked in John's Gospel, where Christ says: «ego sum vitis vera et Pater meus agricola est» (John

[48] «S'elli avesse potuto creder prima, / rispuose 'l savio mio, 'anima lesa, / ciò c'ha veduto pur con la mia rima, / non avrebbe in te la man distesa; / ma la cosa incredibile mi fece / indurlo ad ovra ch'a me stesso pesa» (*Inf.*XIII, 46-51).

[49] For theological implications in *Inferno* XIII, see CLAUDIA VILLA, *Canto XIII*, in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis. Inferno,* a cura di Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone, Florence, F. Cesati, 2000, pp. 183-191; and eadem, *«Per le nove radici d'esto legno» Pier della Vigna, Nicola della Rocca (e Dante): anamorfosi e riconversione di una metafora*, «Strumenti critici», XV, Bologna, 1991, pp. 131-144.

15.1); and «ego sum vitis vos palmites qui manet in me et ego in eo hic fert fructum multum quia sine me nihil potestis facere» (John 15.5). In the other three gospels, Christ refers to His blood as the fruit of the vine,[50] (while, in *Inferno* XIII by contrast, Pier's vine lacks fruit).[51] In addition, the image of blood flowing down Pier's bark has prompted comparison with the image of blood flowing down the wood of the cross during Christ's Crucifixion.[52] Scholars have also identified allusions to the Eucharist in the canto,[53] based on its thematization of the image of breaking.[54] Like Christ, Pier is a vine; like the Eucharistic host, he is broken open and he bleeds.

However, *Inferno* XIII's Christological allusions emphasize contrasts rather than similarities between Pier and Christ. By committing suicide, Pier cuts himself off from the vine that Christ invited him to abide in. When Pier's blood pours out of his trunk with words, the reader and Dante-*personaggio* might observe a tension between Christ's salvific blood, which is the fruit of the vine, and human blood, spilled in an act of suicide, that wastes the salvific agency of God's blood. Instead of the blood that saves humanity as it pours out of Christ, who is the Word, Pier delle Vigne bleeds words that save no one. The purgative power of Christ's blood, which involves being part of Him through language,[55] is also wasted on (and by) Pier, despite being himself the very image of literal purgation,[56] and despite his effusion of bloody words. Pier is a perverted figure of Christ, and his suicide is represented as the dark shadow of Christian martyrdom. The canto

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[50] See Matthew 26.28-29; Mark 14.24-25; and Luke 22.17-18.

[51] «Non pomi v'eran, ma stecchi con tòsco» (*Inf*.XIII, 6).

[52] The image of blood pouring down the trunk of a tree might be the closest Dante comes to representing a dramatization of the Crucifixion in the *Commedia* – albeit a perverted one. Christ provides the possibility of forgiveness with his blood in an act of martyrdom, while Pier wasted that very gift by killing himself. We are presented with an image of suicide as the dark shadow of martyrdom. In a related vein, Beatrice Priest has suggested in conversation that the episode in *Inferno* XIII might benefit from comparison with the Legend of the True Cross; see *Chapter 64. De inuentione sancte cruces*, in *Legenda Aurea*, I, a cura di Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, Firenze, Sismel, 1998, pp. 459-470. In *Inferno XIII* (in *Cambridge Readings*, cit.), PATRICK BOYDE obliquely compares Pier's bleeding side to Christ's by relating the episode to the story of the doubting Thomas in John 20.27; the pilgrim, like Thomas, refuses to believe until he has stretched out his hand and touched the blood (p. 8).

[53] On the Eucharistic implications of the passage, see DURLING/MARTINEZ, *op. cit*., notes to *Inf*. XIII, 46-51 (p. 211) and *Inf*. XIII, 97-100 (p. 214), respectively.

[54] The anonymous Florentine emphasizes how his punishment involves the separation of his tree-soul from its parts when he begs the pilgrim and Virgil to gather up his leaves: «o anime che giunte / siete a veder lo strazio disonesto / c'ha le mie fronde sì da me disgiunte/ raccoglietele al piè del tristo cesto» (139-42). Other images of breaking include: Dante breaking Pier's branch (32); the «scheggia rotta» (43); the soul being 'uprooted' from its body (94-95); the word «tronco» (91 and 109), from the Latin «truncus», meaning «cut off», which implies breakage (see http://etimo.it/?term=tronco&find=Cerca; and http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=trunk&searchmode=none); the breaking branches (114, 117) that the pilgrim hears when the prodigals run through the wood pursued by hounds; Lano's body, which the bitches tear apart limb by limb (127-129).

[55] In John, Christ's word purges sin: «iam vos mundi estis propter sermonem quem locutus sum vobis» (John 15.3); and salvation involves being a part of Christ through language: «si manseritis in me et verba mea in vobis manserint quodcumque volueritis petetis et fiet vobis» (John 15.7).

[56] On phlebotomy as purgative, see note 2 on p. 113 above.

warns readers of the danger of wasting God's gift to humanity of the potential for salvation through Christ.

Yet Virgil and Pier appear to interpret the bleeding branch differently from the way in which a Christian might do so. Pier seems more concerned with defending himself from what he insists are false accusations that he betrayed Frederick II than with regretting his rejection of Christ's redemptive gift. For Virgil, redemption through Christ is not an option. As we saw above, he thinks of Pier's bleeding branch as a sign of the veracity of his own rhymes. Ironically, however, as we will learn later in *Purgatorio*, Dante thinks that one of Virgil's own texts prefigured the coming of Christ and led to Statius' conversion, despite Virgil's lack of direct knowledge of Christ. The bleeding branch is like the *Eclogues* – it bleeds at Virgil's instigation, but its blood cannot save; instead, it implicates, or figures in a perverted way, the true, salvific blood of Christ. Thus, the image of the bleeding branch, by making reference to Christological allusions (in contrastive ways), highlights the different perspectives from which each character in the canto could interpret its meanings. Pier wasted his opportunity for salvation, while Virgil was never granted one. The *Commedia*'s readers, like the pilgrim, have a chance to save themselves by breaking Christ's body and drinking His blood through the Eucharistic ritual.

The image of the bleeding branch may also serve to warn readers about the dangers of misinterpretation. For instance, several scholars have noted parallels between *Inferno* XIII and the Book of Isaiah, arguing that Dante's references to the Biblical passage implicate Pier's misuse of Scripture.[57] I agree that *Inferno* XIII alludes to Isaiah, and also that many of these allusions relate to linguistic issues. However, I notice further parallels between the texts, hitherto not mentioned, which again corroborate the claim that *Inferno* XIII thematizes the issues of textual borrowing and authorial agency.

Isaiah is a text which, like Virgil's *Eclogues*, was considered to prophesy the coming of Christ, and which, in common with John's Gospel, features a parable relating to vines.[58] *Inferno* XIII and Isaiah 5 both describe barren uncultivated places.[59] While part of the souls' punishment in *Inferno* XIII is their incarceration in trees, the sinners in Isaiah are compared to vegetation.[60] Both texts emphasize outstretched hands as agents of

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[57] My attention was first drawn to *Inferno* XIII's allusions to Isaiah by William A. Stephany's article, *op. cit*., which argues that Dante reveals, in this canto, his disapproval of Pier's *Eulogy* partly because of its misuse of Scripture, including passages from Isaiah, for his own ends or for the cause of the Empire. By way of example, Stephany cites the *Eulogy*'s allusion to Isaiah 45.8, which he claims implies that the «Messianic prophecy [. . .] is fulfilled in Frederick»; Dante uses similar «agricultural imagery» (*Inf.*XIII, 99) to demonstrate, in Stephany's words, «the vanity of faith in Frederick as Savior» (p. 205).

[58] «Cantabo dilecto meo canticum patruelis mei vineae suae. Vinea facta est dilecto meo in cornu filio olei» (Is.5.1).

[59] Dante's wood of suicides is full of poisonous thorns (6) and brambles (7), where the leaves are not green but dark (4) – a savage, uncultivated place. In Isaiah, God decides to punish Israel («vinea enim Domini» Is.5.7) by «lay[ing] it waste». God says: «et ponam eam desertam; non putabitur, et non fodietur et ascendent vepres et spinae, et nubibus mandabo ne pluant super eam imbrem» (Is.5.6).

[60] «Propter hoc sicut devorat stipulam lingua ignis et calor flammae exurit sic radix eorum quasi favilla erit et germen eorum ut pulvis ascendet abiecerunt enim legem Domini exercituum et eloquium Sancti Israhel blasphemaverunt» (Is.5.24).

punishment.[61] While God's punishment in Isaiah is described as the 'flame consuming the chaff' (Is.5.24), Dante describes the spluttering speech of Pier (which is part of his punishment) as a burning smoking log (*Inf.*XIII, 40-42). As Pier's speech hisses words out of his trunk in *Inferno* XIII («soffiò» 91), God vows to 'hiss' («sibilabit») unto the sinners 'from the end of the earth' (Is.5.26). While Hell opens its mouth in Isaiah 5.14,[62] Minos, in *Inferno* XIII, sends the soul to its place in Hell, described as «la settima foce» (96).

Particularly striking as regards the parallels between Isaiah and Dante's wood of suicides is their shared emphasis on semiotic sins and linguistic punishments. As we saw in the first part of this essay, Dante considers suicide a linguistic sin in that it severs the bond between the body and the soul that facilitates speech. In Isaiah, God's anger at the people of Israel is inflamed by their disobedience of his law and his word: «propter hoc sicut devorat stipulam lingua ignis et calor flammae exurit sic radix eorum quasi favilla erit et germen eorum ut pulvis ascendet abiecerunt enim legem Domini exercituum et eloquium Sancti Israhel blasphemaverunt» (Is.5.24). In addition, in *Inferno* XIII, the suicides suffer linguistic punishments (difficult strange forms of speech), while God, in Isaiah 29, punishes sinners by cursing their speech so that their voices will have to 'whisper . . . out of the ground'.[63]

Another Book of the Old Testament which has particular resonance in *Inferno* XIII, especially as regards linguistic concerns, but which scholars have hitherto not noted, is Genesis. Parallels between Genesis and *Inferno* XIII are numerous, although often contrastive.[64] While scholars have seen the opening of *Inferno* XIII as a kind of anti-*locus amoenus*[65] («non fronda verde, ma di color fosco [. . .] non pomi v'eran, ma

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[61] In Isaiah, God's punishment of the people of Israel is described in terms of his outstretched hand: «Ideo iratus est furor Domini in populo suo et extendit manum suam super eum et percussit eum, et conturbati sunt montes et facta sunt morticina eorum quasi stercus in medio platearum in omnibus his non est aversus furor eius sed adhuc manus eius extent» (Is.5.25). In the wood of suicides, the pilgrim reaches out to pluck Pier's branch: «Allor porsi la mano un poco avante / e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno; / e 'l tronco suo gridò: "Perché mi schiante?» (*Inf.*XIII, 31-33). A few tercets later we learn that Dante's hand had been outstretched during the whole of the beginning of Pier's speech: «sì de la scheggia rotta usciva insieme/ parole e sangue; ond'io lasciai la cima/ cadere e stetti come l'uom che teme» (43-45). When Virgil tries to excuse Dante's behavior to Pier, he claims that Dante «non averebbe in te la man distesa» (49). Thus, the pilgrim helps to facilitate the process of *contrapasso*: by stretching out his hand against Pier, he wounds the tree-soul, giving him pain and an outlet («fenestra», *Inf.*XIII, 102) for it, as the Harpies do, in a way that might recall the punishment of the people of Israel by a wrathful God in Isaiah. Further emphasis on outstretched hands occurs a few tercets later in *Inferno* XIII when Virgil pulls Dante-*personaggio* by the hand away from the sight of Lano's dismemberment to see the anonymous Florentine's weeping wounds: «In quel che s'appiattò miser li denti, / e quel dilaceraro a brano a brano; / poi sen portar quelle membra dolente» (127-130). In Isaiah, the wrath of God – represented by his outstretched hand – causes bodies to be torn open in the streets (5.25).

[62] «Propterea dilatavit infernos animam suam et aperuit os suum absque ullo termino» (Is.5.14).

[63] «Humiliaberis de terra loqueris et de humo audietur eloquium tuum et erit quasi pythonis de terra vox tua et de humo eloquium tuum mussitabi » (Is.29.4).

[64] The possibility of Genesis as a source for *Inferno* XIII was suggested to me by Beatrice Priest in conversation.

[65] See JANIS VANACKER, *art. cit.*, p. 432.

stecchi con tòsco [. . .] »), the wood can also represent an anti-Eden.[66] Indeed, the wood of suicides is the site in Hell where the crime of wasting human life is punished, while Eden is the site where the first human life was created and nurtured. The trees in the wood of suicides lack «pomi», while the fruit of the trees in Eden provides Adam and Eve with sustenance, and the apple of the tree of knowledge leads to humanity's downfall. Dante and Virgil follow a river of blood (one of the four rivers in Hell) into the infernal wood; while a river flows out of Eden to water the garden, parting into four streams.[67] Pier delle Vigne – a human in the form of a tree – compares himself and the other suicides to serpents;[68] while the serpent in the Garden tempts a human into thinking herself and her partner capable of becoming 'as gods' by inducing her to pluck a fruit from a tree.[69]

The linguistic parallels between *Inferno* XIII and Genesis are striking. After sinning, Adam and Eve hide from God's voice that can be heard from amongst the trees, as God comes to find and punish them,[70] while the pilgrim struggles to identify voices that are emerging from eternally damned souls who seem to be hiding amongst the trees (*Inf.*XIII, 22-27). In addition, the act of plucking something from a tree in both *Inferno* XIII and Genesis plays a significant role in the narrative; and in both texts, the perpetrator of the plucking is induced to act by others. The snake tempts Eve to pluck the apple from the branch, and she in turn tempts Adam to bite the apple. In *Inferno* XIII, Virgil induces Dante to pluck the branch. The differences between the actions taken by Dante on the one hand, and by Adam and Eve on the other, however, come down to their motivations. Eve was driven by curiosity, and she was induced to sin by the serpent. Dante acts out of obedience to and trust in Virgil, who has been sent to guide him thanks to a divinely sanctioned chain of command: by the Virgin Mary, via Lucia, via Beatrice (*Inf.*II, 94-117). In addition, Eve steals the apple from the tree of knowledge, while Dante borrows textual material from other authors by plucking Pier's branch. Thus, *Inferno* XIII's references to Genesis establish significant contrasts between Eve and Dante, between

[66] Genesis's description of God's creation of the Garden is described mainly in terms of planting trees: «Plantaverat autem Dominus Deus paradisum voluptatis a principio, in quo posuit hominem quem formaverat. Produxitque Dominus Deus de humo omne lignum, pulchrum visu et ad vescendum suave, lignum etiam vitae in medio paradisi lignumque scientiae boni et mali» (Gen.2.8-9).

[67] «Et fluvius egrediebatur de loco voluptatis ad irrigandum paradisum, qui inde dividitur in quattuor capita» (Gen.2.10).

[68] «Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi:/ ben dovrebb' esser la tua man più pia/ se state fossimo anime di serpi» (*Inf.*XIII, 37-39).

[69] «Scit enim Deus quod in quocumque die comederitis ex eo, aperientur oculi vestri, et eritis sicut dii, scientes bonum et malum» (Gen.3.5).

[70] «Et cum audissent vocem Domini Dei deambulantis in paradiso ad auram post meridiem, abscondit se Adam et uxor eius a facie Domini Dei in medio ligni paradisi» (Gen.3.8).

theft[71] and borrowing.[72] While Eve's action was a form of theft, Dante acts as a *scriba Dei*, revealing messages that come from God.

Indeed, a final set of Biblical passages present in *Inferno* XIII characterizes the good poet as a vessel for a divine message. While scholars have explored the figure of Moses in the *Commedia*, I am unaware of a systematic investigation of *Inferno* XIII's allusions to Exodus, despite the fact that several parallels between the texts abound. To begin with, both texts involve images of burning bushes. When Pier's bloody speech is figured as smoke spluttering out of a burning log («come d'un stizzo verde ch'arso sia / da l'un de' capi, che da l'altro geme / e cigola per vento che va via», *Inf.*XIII, 40-42), the reader (and/or the pilgrim) might be reminded of another burning bush that conveys a divine message. When God calls Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt into the promised land, He sends an angel to appear as a sign to the prophet;[73] and God's voice, commanding Moses to lead his people to freedom, issues from the bush.[74]

In addition, both texts emphasize the issue of linguistic self-doubt. As noted earlier, Virgil doubts his text's ability to convince Dante of its veracity. Virgil thinks that what Dante sees in the canto will make him doubt his guide's words: «Però riguarda ben; sì vederai / cose che torrien fede al mio sermone» (20-21); and Dante's linguistic abilities actually do fail him: «Dimandal tu ancora / di quel che credi ch'a me satisfaccia; / ch'i' non potrei, tanta pietà m'accora» (*Inf.*XIII, 82-84). Similarly, Moses doubts his linguistic abilities to convince his people to believe him that the task of leading them to freedom is a divinely-ordained mission:[75] «quid dicam eis?» (Ex.3.13). And again later: «Non credent mihi, neque audient vocem meam, sed dicent: "Non apparuit tibi Dominus" » (Ex.4.1).

Finally, in both texts, signs elicited by outstretched hands are offered in reassurance of linguistic doubt. In *Inferno* XIII, Virgil hopes to remedy Dante's lack of belief in his poetry by inducing the pilgrim to reach out his hand and break a branch off a tree, thereby causing it to bleed and speak at the same time. In Exodus, God reassures Moses by saying He will 'strike Egypt with his wonders' with His outstretched hand.[76] When Moses's doubts persist, God causes three miracles to be revealed through Moses'

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[71] For issues of greed and theft in this canto, see ANTHONY CASSEL, *Dante's Fearful Art of Justice*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1984, which argues that *Inferno* XIII associates Pier delle Vigne with Judas in order to emphasize the avaricious practices of Pier as a historical figure.

[72] See JOAN M. FERRANTE, *Good Thieves and Bad Thieves: A Reading of Inferno XXIV*, «Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society», CIV, Albany, NY, 1986, pp. 83-98, which argues that Dante «glorifes» his own «theft» of textual material (p. 83) while denigrating that of others, justifying his actions because they are meant «for the greater good of all» (p. 97). That may well be the case, but I think that, in a related yet fundamentally different way, *Inferno* XIII distinguishes between the theft of knowledge from God and the borrowing of source material, in which latter practice a good author is guided by God.

[73] «Apparuitque ei Dominus in flamma ignis de medio rubi, et videbat quod rubus arderet et non conbureretur» (Exodus 3.2).

[74] «Cernens autem Dominus quod pergeret ad videndum, vocavit eum de medio rubi et ait: "Moses, Moses." Qui respondit, "Adsum" » (Exodus 3.4).

[75] «Quis ego sum ut vadam ad Pharaonem et educam filios Israhel de Aegypto?» (Exodus 3.11).

[76] «Extendam enim manum meam et percutiam Aegyptum in cunctis mirabilibus meis quae facturus sum in medio eorum» (Exodus 3.20).

hand – all of which resonate with the imagery and language used to describe the sign of Pier delle Vigne's bleeding branch. For the first sign, God, through Moses's hand, causes a rod to turn into a snake and then back into a rod again;[77] for the second sign, God changes the flesh of Moses's hand itself from healthy to leprous and back again to a state of wellbeing.[78] Similarly, the portrayal of Pier's bleeding branch involves outstretched hands, serpents and branches: «Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi: / ben dovrebb' esser la tua man più pia, / se state fossimo anime di serpi» (*Inf.*XIII, 37-39). Thus, in both *Inferno* XIII and Exodus IV, images of branches/rods, serpents, and outstretched hands inform descriptions of signs that induce (or seek to induce) belief.

The third miracle that God promises to reveal to Moses also has much in common with the sign that Pier's branch reveals:

> Quod si nec duobus quidem his signis crediderint neque audierint vocem tuam, sume aquam fluminis, et effunde eam super aridam, et quicquid hauseris de fluvio vertetur in sanguinem. (Exodus 4.9)

The transformation of water to blood is a sign of Moses's divinely bestowed authority; while Virgil, in *Inferno* XIII, hopes that the miraculous sign[79] of spilled blood will confer authority on his own texts. In both texts, language as blood reveals,[80] and blood acts as a substitute for the language[81] that can inspire faith. Perhaps most importantly, both Exodus and *Inferno* XIII emphasize the complicated agency of the actions of Dante and Moses: their own hands elicit signs, revealing miracles, but miracles are, of course, acts of God.

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[77] «Dixitque Dominus, "Extende manum tuam, et adprehende caudam eius." Extendit, et tenuit, versaque est in virgam. "Ut credant," inquit, "quod apparuerit tibi Dominus, Deus patrum suorum, Deus Abraham, Deus Isaac et Deus Iacob» (Exodus 4.4-5).

[78] «Quam cum misisset in sinum, protulit leprosam instar nivis [. . .] Retraxit et protulit iterum, et erat similis carni reliquae» (Exodus 4.6-7).

[79] DOUGLAS BIOW, *Mirabile Dictu: Representations of the Marvelous in Medieval and Renaissance Epic*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1996 argues that Dante represents Pier delle Vigne's bleeding speaking tree in *Inferno* XIII as a miraculous sign, pp. 37-64.

[80] See BETTINA BILDHAUER, *op.cit.* for a useful discussion of what she calls blood's «truth value» in medieval culture. Bildhauer argues that because blood is normally inside the body and is often linked with the body's inner and sometimes secret workings, when the skin is broken and blood flows out, the act of bleeding is often imbued with a kind of revelatory significance (pp. 21-22). In a related manner, blood was treated as evidence in legal proceedings (pp. 41-50). On blood as proof of Christ's presence in medieval Northern German miracles, see CAROLINE WALKER BYNUM, *Part I (Chapters 2 and 3). Cults in Northern Germany* in *Wonderful Blood.* in *Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007, pp. 23-81. For psychoanalytic theories on blood's inner presence as opposed to its expression outside the body, see JULIA KRISTEVA, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982, p. 59 and 70-71.

[81] LEO SPITZER, *Speech and Language,* art. cit., points out the association between language and blood (p. 88). See also ANNE LEONE, *Chapter III*, in *op. cit*., which locates Dante's conflation of language and blood (in *Inferno* XIII and in other passages as well) within a wider cultural context where text is associated with body, ink with blood, and argues that Dante develops these associations into an intricate conception of God's role in artistic inspiration and poetic creation (pp. 122-169).

A further parallel between the two passages concerns the issue of authorship. Even after God has revealed the three signs to him, Moses persists in doubting his ability to convince his people to follow him to freedom.[82] The Lord replies by reassuring Moses that he is His mouthpiece:

> Quis fecit os hominis? [. . .] Nonne ego?
> Perge igitur, et ego ero in ore tuo; doceboque te quid loquaris. (Ex.4.11-12)

Moses persists in his doubts, so God entrusts the responsibility of delivering His message to Aaron: «Loquere ad eum, et pone verba mea in ore eius, et ego ero in ore tuo, et in ore illius, et ostendam vobis quid agere debeatis» (4.15). In this way, Moses and Aaron both become God's mouthpieces, and Aaron becomes the mouthpiece both of Moses and of God.[83] In other words, being a prophet involves acting – delivering God's message –, but also allowing oneself to be acted through; it involves becoming a vessel for divine truth, and also recognizing that there are many divinely-ordained vessels.

The tripartite division of authorship involving Aaron, Moses and God, plays a central role in *Inferno* XIII as well, as we have seen, since the characters and texts of Virgil, Dante and Pier delle Vigne speak through one another. Just as God spoke through Moses's and Aaron's mouths, and caused Moses's outstretched hand to reveal signs to his people that inspired faith in his divinely sanctioned authority, so even the pagan Virgil might reveal divine signs to guide people, poetically, towards Christ.

In conclusion, I hope to have shown, the first section of this article, that two aspects of the suicides' punishment – the problematization of their expressive capacities, and the perversion of the relationship between their souls and their bodies – are related. The suicides are distorted vessels of God's breath (the gift of the rational soul infused into every foetus during conception), and that very distortion disrupts their ability to express themselves. In the second section of the article, I argue that the actions of the pilgrim and Virgil towards the character of Pier delle Vigne thematize the issue of textual borrowing. Dante-*personaggio* plucks Pier's branch, thereby revealing something about Virgil's rhymes within the text of the *Commedia*. In this sense, the poets speak through each other's texts, using Pier's broken speech as their mouthpiece. The third and fourth sections of the article demonstrate how the canto alludes to several passages in the Biblical and Classical traditions which themselves thematize issues of textual borrowing, and figure the author or prophet as vessels for expressing divine truth.

The suicides in *Inferno* XIII and their punishment of expressive difficulties thus point beyond themselves and speak to larger issues – the relationship of the human to the divine, the author to his sources, and the text to its meanings. *Inferno* XIII reminds the reader that a text is a mouthpiece through which many other texts speak. It is informed by *tante voci* – by sources that come from beyond itself. The challenge for potential believers is one of interpretation – how to know which author is a prophet, a true vessel of God's message. The challenge for authors is to recognize one's influences – to make sure one is being motivated by God instead of the serpent, to be aware of the plurality of voices with which one speaks. And perhaps, Dante's works challenge his readers to

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[82] «Non sum eloquens ab heri et nudius tertius, et ex quo locutus es ad servum tuum, inpeditioris et tardioris linguae sum» (Exodus 4.10).

[83] God assures Moses that Aaron shall be his mouth: «erit os tuum» (Exodus 4.16).

recognize, to imagine, and to believe that we are all signs of God, through whom He speaks.