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Anne C. Leone

Syracuse University

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Communal and Economic Implications of Blood in Dante

Abstract: The article investigates two of the varied and diverse implications of blood in Dante's works where the term and its derivations appear (*Fiore, Rime, Vita nova, Convivio, Commedia, Monarchia, Epistles, and Egloghe*): the 'communal' and the 'economic'. By 'communal', I mean that Dante emphasises the generative, formative, nourishing and charitable implications of blood: as the parts of a body are joined together through the blood they share, members of various communities – the city, the Church, the Roman Empire, the family, humankind – are joined together through blood. By 'economic', I understand that Dante compares blood to money and highlights its ability to balance members of a group or elements of a body, enabling him to use the substance to delimit a series of poetic and ethical economies: of vice and virtue, waste and value, sensation and cognition, sin and punishment, original sin and Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

Keywords: blood, Dante, community, economy, *caritas*, Incarnation

Despite blood's not infrequent appearance¹ – and wide-ranging implications – in nearly all Dante's works, the issue has escaped systematic investigation.² Instead, studies have tended to focus on blood's roles in the vernacular works,³ particularly the

¹ The terms 'sanguis' and 'sanguis' and their derivations (*sanguigno, sanguinare, sanguinente, sanguinitade, sanguinoso*) appear in all Dante's works except for the *Questio, De vulgari eloquentia* and the *Detto d'Amore*. References to *sanguis* occur most frequently in the *Comedy* (twenty-four times in *Inferno*; eighteen times in *Purgatorio*; eleven times in *Paradiso*). For the other works, see *Convivio* IV.xxviii.16, IV.iv.10, IV.vi.12 and III.ix.13; *Fiore* II.2 and XCVII.5; *Rime*, ed. by Contini (Milano-Napoli: Mondadori, 1995) CII.32, CIII.45-47, CIV.63-64, LXXVII.12-14 (and in Cino's poem CXII.4); *Vita nova* II.3, III.4, XXXIX.1, XXIII.12 and XXXII.1, *Egloghe* IV.1 and IV.4; *Epistole* V.11, VI.11, XI.3 and XI.15; *Monarchia* II.iii.17, II.vii.5, II.viii.11, II.ix.1, II.ix.8-10, II.xi.3 and III.i.27. Though 'sanguis' does not occur in *De vulgari eloquentia*, its treatment of language, especially its generative connotations, informs my conclusions about blood's central role in Dante's works, as my forthcoming book, *Blood in Dante and Medieval Culture*, demonstrates. The book also addresses the use of other terms, including 'omere', 'seme', 'vena', and 'polsi' that are used as synonyms for blood in Dante, as well as images that evoke blood but in which the word itself is elided.

² However, my Doctoral dissertation, currently being made into a monograph, begins this attempt; see Anne Leone, '*Sanguis perfetto*': *Scientific, Sacrificial and Semiotic Implications of Blood in Dante*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2010 (made available in the Cambridge University Library in 2011).

³ Alessandro Niccoli's entries in the *Enciclopedia dantesca*, V, Roma, Istituto dell'enciclopedia italiana, 1970-1979 (1976), pp.3-6) on *sanguis, sanguigno, sanguinare, sanguinitade, sanguinoso* and *sanguis*, focus solely on the terms' appearances in the vernacular works.

Comedy,⁴ or on specific scientific implications of the substance;⁵ and much more attention has been focused on issues closely-related, but not exclusive to, blood – for instance on the heart.⁶ Substantial philological, theological and metaliterary questions remain to be addressed; and the task of situating Dante’s treatment of blood within his cultural context deserves consideration – especially in light of the wide-ranging and interdisciplinary scholarship treating the substance’s varied roles in medieval culture more generally.⁷

Recognizing, however, that all of blood’s implications in Dante’s works can only be dealt with in monographic form, this article limits itself to exploring two particular and overlapping dimensions: what I am calling the ‘communal’ and ‘economic’ dimensions of blood, which Dante consistently highlights throughout his works. By ‘communal’, I mean that blood is often shared, either among parts of a

⁴ Marco Casubolo addresses blood’s roles in the *Comedy* in ‘Linguistica e antropologia del sangue nella *Divina Commedia*’, in *Sangue e antropologia nella teologia*, ed. by Francesco Vattioni, 3 vols (Rome: Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, 1989), III, pp.1523-1622.

⁵ Several articles focus on blood’s role in *Purgatorio* XXV; see Anna Cerbo, ‘“Sangue perfetto” e “virtute informativa”: Il canto XXV del *Purgatorio*’, in *Poesia e scienza del corpo nella Divina Commedia: dicer del sangue e de le piaghe* (Naples: Libreria Dante & Descartes, 2001), pp. 25-42; and Paola Ureni and Vittorio Bartoli: ‘La dottrina di Galeno in “sangue perfetto” (*Purgatorio* XXV, 37)’, *Studi danteschi*, 70 (2005), 335-43; and ‘Controversie medico-biologiche in tema di generazione umana nel XXV del *Purgatorio*’, *Studi danteschi*, 68 (2003), 83-111. For medical implications of blood in *Purgatorio* V, see Vittorio Bartoli and Paola Ureni, ‘La morte cruenta di Jacopo del Cassero e di Bonconte da Montefeltro (*Purg.* V, 73-102): una nuova lettura fondata sulla scienza medica medievale’, *Studi danteschi*, 71 (2006), 9-26.

⁶ Numerous studies of the issue of the heart in Dante’s works exist; important recent contributions include Sonia Gentili, ‘Due definizioni di “cuore” nel *Convivio* di Dante: “secreto dentro”, “parte dell’anima e del corpo” (II, 6, 2)’, *Lettere italiane*, 54:1 (2002), 3-36; and Heather Webb, *The Medieval Heart* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2010).

⁷ On blood’s diverse roles in medieval culture, see Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006); Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2007); Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). On medieval conceptions of the body including the issue of blood, see for instance Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992); Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Kevin Marti, *Body, Heart and Text in the Pearl-Poet* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991); Sarah Alison Miller, *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2010); Piers D. Mitchell, *Medicine in the Crusades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (New York: Zone Books, 2006); Marie-Christine Pouchelle, *The Body and Surgery in the Middle Ages* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

body or between members of a community. As the parts of a body are joined together through the blood they share, so too members of various communities – the city, the Church, the Roman Empire, the family, humankind – are joined together in shared blood. In a related manner, Dante calls attention to what I term the ‘charitable’ implications of blood (in the sense of relating to *caritas*) in three main ways: in a physiological sense, blood plays a role in the experience of the passions, including love and feelings of affection; in a political sense, it links individuals to each other through communities; and in a theological sense, it links humanity with God through Christ’s blood which was shed at the Crucifixion and is shared through the Eucharist.

By ‘economic’, I mean that Dante often compares blood to money and to other means of exchange and consumption in a way that calls attention to blood’s ability to balance members of a group or elements of a body. Blood helps to regulate and facilitate various processes within the body; and Dante uses blood to delimit a series of poetic and ethical economies: of vice and virtue, waste and value, sensation and cognition, sin and punishment, original sin and Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Interestingly, the ‘communal’ and ‘economic’ implications often overlap in Dante’s treatment of blood, as this article will demonstrate.

The ‘communal’ and ‘economic’ dimensions of blood’s implications are not entirely original to Dante, but the poet’s emphasis on these connotations stands in contrast to the way in which many recent works of scholarship have tended to characterise blood in medieval culture, particularly in terms of defining – and articulating fears about – otherness. Fears about the female other were often expressed in medieval medical writings with recourse to the porosity of the female body – its propensity to bleed during menstruation, childbirth, etc. – in contrast with the male body, which was considered more bounded and controlled.⁸ Blood was used as a tool

⁸ Sarah Allison Miller’s argument in *Medieval Monstrosity* centers on pseudo-Albert the Great, *De secretis mulierum*. Mary Douglas’s work on taboos, in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966), while not limited to the Middle Ages, investigates how societies police the body’s boundaries: blood and other body fluids, when they spill beyond the boundary of skin, are deemed to threaten the order of societies unless they are regulated properly, p.122. Following the lead of Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), Bettina Bildhauer, in *Medieval Blood*, investigates blood’s power to reveal secrets, previously concealed within the body, once it spills out – a notion that relies on the assumption that skin is a boundary between the outer world and the inner body, pp.21, 41 and 43. Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, compares various ways in which ancient and medieval philosophers emphasised sex difference, focusing on (among other things) the process of reproduction, in which blood plays a central role, pp.21-26 and 30-37. Numerous

for defining otherness and societal exclusion in the early modern period, particularly in witchcraft trials and representations of monstrosity.⁹ In addition, a large body of work investigates the blood libel, in which Jews were accused of killing Christian babies to steal their blood – a narrative that reveals not only fear of the other, but also the deeply unsettling idea, which had horrific consequences in the twentieth century, that the value of a person’s life can be decided according to their race.¹⁰

Dante, however, does not use blood to express fears about women or prejudice against groups with ethnic or religious backgrounds different from his own. (Although of course this is not to say that he never expresses fear of women or prejudice against other religious groups.¹¹) Rather, the poet uses the substance in a way that acknowledges blood’s potential both to connote difference and to bring people together. In *Inferno* VII, in as much as Fortuna ‘permutasse a tempo li ben vani/ di gente in gente e d’uno in altro sangue/ oltre la difension d’i senni umani’ (79-81), Dante implies that groups of people can be distinguished from each other by virtue of their blood. Yet, the full sense of the passage is to emphasise Fortuna’s ability to level the playing field: however different we think we are from another person or from a different community, we are all caught in the wheel of chance. We are all human, and we all have blood.

Two additional ways in which the poet’s treatment of blood diverges from his cultural context deserve mention (and may help to explain the issue’s relative neglect in Dante scholarship). First, while blood in the late Middle Ages played an increasingly conspicuous role in religious iconography (representations of the Crucifixion, depictions of Hell) and practices of devotion (the Eucharistic ritual,

works explore medieval taboos around menstruation, including Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference* (pp. 42, 175, and 268); Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (pp.131-32, 96-103, and 111-123); Francesca Canadé Sautman, *La religion du quotidien: Rites et croyances populaires de la fin du moyen âge* (Florence: Olschki, 1995), p.85; and McCracken, *Curse of Eve*.

⁹ See Francesca Matteoni, *Blood Beliefs in Early Modern Europe*, PhD dissertation (University of Hertfordshire, 2009), <https://uhra.herts.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/2299/4523/WHOLE_THESIS_blood_beliefs_early_modern_europe_francesca_matteoni.pdf?sequence=1>.

¹⁰ On uses of the blood libel to strengthen the communal identity of European Christians through exclusion of Jewish and other religious or ethnic groups, see Francesca Matteoni, ‘The Jew, the Blood and the Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe’, *Folklore*, 119 (August 2008), 182-200.

¹¹ On what she terms Dante’s ‘multiculturalism’, see Teodolinda Barolini, ‘Medieval Multiculturalism and Dante’s Theology of Hell’, in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), pp.102-22.

miracles, mystics' visions, etc.),¹² Dante neglects to dramatise the Crucifixion, discuss the Eucharist explicitly, or mention miracles.¹³ Second, in allusions to the classical epics, Dante often elides mention of the violence, which frequently includes blood, that is present in his source-texts.¹⁴ However, despite these elisions, Dante does not neglect to associate blood with violence, nor to exploit blood's soteriological and Eucharistic implications. In fact, it is particularly the investigation of communal, charitable and economic implications of blood that provides us with a useful perspective from which to approach soteriological and other issues in Dante's works – hence, the tenor of this article.

Five sections inform the structure of my argument. In the first section, I explore examples, mainly from the *Commedia*, in which Dante characterises blood as 'communal' – in so much as it joins parents to their children literally through the process of reproduction –, and 'economic' – in so much as it regulates the balance of various elements within the body (including those responsible for governing emotions). As an extension of the idea that blood from each parent is mixed together to form the foetus, Dante conceives of families as literally joined together through shared blood – examples of which I discuss in the second section. One of the implications of this idea is the question of what is transmitted through blood to the child. Dante's opinion on this issue is slightly ambiguous and highly nuanced, as I demonstrate. There is some indication that the stain of original sin, as well as propensities for vices and for certain emotions and behaviours might be transmitted through blood; at the very least, vice and sin are strongly associated with blood in the *Commedia*. Nobility, however, in Dante's treatment of it in *Convivio*, may not be inherited.

¹² Dante – in sharp contrast to contemporary (and near-contemporary) iconography – avoids a bloody dramatisation of the Crucifixion. One reason for this might have to do with a distinction posited by Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007): that Christian iconography in northern Germany in the late Middle Ages became increasingly bloody in comparison with the iconography of southern Europe, which maintained a more 'symbolic' attitude towards blood, p.135.

¹³ Writing less than a century after the Fourth Lateran Council had used the term 'transubstantiated' in the profession of faith (1215), it might seem strange that Dante's works fail to address explicitly any issues relating to the change in the Eucharistic blood, or to the Eucharist generally, despite widespread Eucharistic echoes throughout (e.g. in *Inf.*XXXIII-IV and *Purg.*XXIII-IV).

¹⁴ Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Reading the *Commedia*'s IXs "Vertically": From Addresses to the Reader to the *Crucesignati* and the *Ecloga Theoduli*', *L'Alighieri*, 43 (2014), pp.5-35.

While blood joins people together literally through reproduction and through family ties (as demonstrated in the first and second sections of the article, respectively), it also joins people together figuratively through membership in communities – the city, the Church, and the empire – as demonstrated in the third section, via examples from the *Monarchia*, the *Epistles*, *Convivio* and the *Commedia*. In passages concerning the formation and sustenance of the Church (particularly in *Paradiso* XIII, XXVII and XXIX), Dante associates blood with money (further exploiting its ‘economic’ associations), at that same time that he emphasises blood’s ‘charitable’ dimensions. In so doing, it becomes apparent that – despite elision of explicit discussion of the Eucharist or dramatisation of the Crucifixion – the poet does not shy away from soteriological issues. In addition, by emphasising blood’s violent and generative implications, the poet articulates a political point: blood may literally help to form communities, but it also represents the potential for the violence that might tear a community apart, or indeed, upon which many communities are founded.

The fourth section takes the *via negativa*. While blood’s communal and economic capacities play constructive roles in the formation of families and of political and religious communities (detailed in the previous sections, respectively), the converse also holds true. In *Inferno*, Dante exploits blood’s communal and economic implications to demonstrate what happens when blood is wasted, or when bodies or communities (religious, political or familial) are torn apart. In this way, blood plays a key role in the parodic use of ideas about community that we see throughout *Inferno*.

In addition to associating blood with economic concerns (as demonstrated in the first four sections of the article), Dante also uses blood with rhetorical economy, as the concluding section argues. Using blood to implicate contrasting elements – original sin and Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, human fallibility and the potential for reunion with God –, Dante balances and highlights the very tensions that exist between these polarities.

I. Regulation and Reproduction

In Dante’s representation, blood joins people together through the process of reproduction, and it also unites the various members of an individual body. In *Purgatorio* XXV, Statius explains to the pilgrim how blood from the father and the

mother mix together in the womb to form the foetus and to create new life, the father's blood 'oozing' over the mother's (44):

Sangue perfetto che poi non si beve
 da l'assetate vene e si rimane
 quasi alimento che di mensa leve
 prende nel core a tutte membra umane
 virtute informativa, come quello
 ch'a farsi quelle per le vene vane.
 Ancor digesto, scende ov' è più bello
 tacer che dire; e quindi poscia geme
 sovr' altrui sangue in natural vasello.
 Ivi s'accoglie l'uno e l'altro insieme,
 l'un disposto a patire, e l'altro a fare
 per lo perfetto loco onde si preme;
 e, giunto lui, comincia ad operare
 coagulando prima, e poi avviva
 ciò che per sua matera fé constare. (*Purg.XXV 37-51*)

Dante suggests in this passage that the 'matter' (the foetus's flesh, limbs, bones and organs) develops from the mixture of blood from both parents (51) in a way that seems to gloss over what was a tremendously complex issue in medieval discourse: the question of which parts of the foetus come from which parent's blood, which was accompanied by a wide range of philosophical positions on the interrelations between matter and non-matter, male and female, and the role and generated features of the foetus.¹⁵ I do not mean to suggest that Dante did not have an opinion on this thorny question. In fact, by referring to female blood as that which is disposed to 'patire' and male blood as that which is disposed to 'fare' (47), one might argue that Dante

¹⁵ According to Aristotle, the female secretion provides only the material being acted upon (*Gen.anim.*I.xix.8 [727b 30-35]), and the capacities of the soul (nutritive, sensitive and rational) in their potential form (*Gen.anim.*II.iii.5 [737a 20-25]; II, iv, 12 [740b 15-25]). The male seed provides the form of the foetus (*Gen.anim.*I.xxi.1; and xxii.2 [730b 15-25]), and two parts of the soul in potential form (nutritive and sensitive) which it converts into actual forms during the process of conception (*Gen.anim.*II.iii.1-2 [especially 736b 10-15], and II.iii.5 [737a 15-20]). For this reason, the semen is characterised as active and the female secretion as passive (*Gen.anim.*II.iv.12 [740b 20-25]). Others posited that the male seed did have a material substance and contributed to forming the white parts of the foetus (such as nerves and bones); see for instance, Christiana Purdy Moudarres, in 'Legends of the Fall: Generation and Corruption in *Inferno 27*', *Dante Studies*, 131 (2013), pp.171-95 (p.172); and Francesco da Buti's commentary on *Inf.XXVII 67-84*. Albertus Magnus concedes that it might be possible that sperm could contribute the material from which the primary parts of the foetus are generated, while the female seed generated the secondary 'fluid' parts; see *De quaestiones super animalibus*, ed. by Ephrem Filthaut, O. P. in *Opera omnia* (1955), vol. 12, pp. 77-309, bk.XV, q.20, p. 273. For a summary of various theories about the material and/or spiritual contributions of the male and female reproductive fluid, see Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, pp.117-30 (especially pp.128-29).

ascribed to the Aristotelian notion that female blood provides the material for the foetus, while male blood provides its form.¹⁶ Furthermore, Dante acknowledges differences between the two forms of *sangue* by using the word ‘altrui’ in line 45, and by distinguishing between their composition (43) and function (47). Nonetheless, Dante uses the same word – *sangue* – to refer to both the female and the male forms of reproductive fluid. This he does in contrast with many of his contemporaries who use different words to describe them: ‘menstruum’ for female reproductive fluid; ‘sperma’ or ‘semen’ for male blood.¹⁷ Whether intentionally or as the result of terminological imprecision, Dante appears to emphasise what the two types of blood have in common in addition to how they might differ. In the space of a few lines, Dante uses four verbs to describe the process whereby the female and the male fluids join together: *gemere* (44), *accogliere* (46), *giungere* (49), and *coagulare* (50). Thus, while acknowledging differences between male and female generative fluids, Dante’s special emphasis is on how they interact with each other.

While male and female forms of blood unify to produce a new human being, male blood is also characterised as the product of a spiritual unity inherent in the father’s body: ‘sangue perfetto [. . .] prende nel core a tutte membra umane/ virtute informativa’ (*Purg.*XXV 37-41). The male blood also facilitates the process whereby the foetus’s body develops its own integrity: ‘Or si spiega, figliuolo, or si distende/ la virtù ch’è dal core del generante,/ dove natura a tutte membra intende’ (58-60). Statius then explains how the three capacities of the soul (vegetative, sensitive and rational) are united into ‘un’alma sola’ (74), through the animating breath of God. Although, as scholars have shown, Statius’s *lectio* raises a range of complex issues,¹⁸

¹⁶ In accordance with Aristotelian natural philosophy, Statius’s explanation of conception points to the fact that female and male blood carry out different functions, in particular when he describes how female blood is disposed to endure, receive or be acted upon (‘patire’), while male blood is disposed to act (‘fare’). Dante’s Statius also adheres to Aristotelian ideas about how male and female forms of blood differ in composition, when he claims that male blood is ‘ancor digesto’ (43) in the heart. Aristotelian ideas posit that male blood undergoes an extra step in the process of *digestio*, and is therefore more refined than female blood, *Gen.anim.*I.xx.3 (728a 20-25). Dante, rather than stressing these supposed aspects of difference between male and female reproductive fluid, simply assumes them.

¹⁷ See *Gen.anim.*II.iii.2 (736b 25-30): ‘sperma enim superfluum permutati alimenti est’; I.xviii.17 (724b 25-30): ‘dico autem superfluitatem alimenti residuum’; I.xviii.18 (725a 10-15): ‘utilis igitur superfluitatis pars aliqua est sperma’; I.xviii.19 (725a 25-30).

¹⁸ For a helpful discussion of Dante’s Galenic and Aristotelian sources in Statius’s *lectio* on the formation of the human body, see Simon A. Gilson, ‘The Anatomy and Physiology of the Human Body in Dante’s *Commedia*’, in *Dante and the Human Body: Eight Essays*, ed. by John C. Barnes and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), pp.11-42 (pp.38-42).

my point here is that Dante attributes to blood a range of unifying qualities, including how the various parts of the body relate to one another, the integrity of the parent's body, and the formation of the child's body.

Indeed, once the foetus develops into a fully formed human being, blood serves as an agent within the body for the interaction between various physical processes, and herein is another example of blood's 'economic' and regulatory capacities. In addition to nourishing the body, as we have seen, the substance's composition – specifically the balance of the four humors within the blood – affects the health of the body. For instance, Maestro Adamo's punishment for falsifying coins is to suffer from dropsy – an imbalance of blood – due to 'l'omor che mal converte' (*Inf.XXX* 53). In other words, Dante implies that blood plays a balancing role within the body. In addition, since an imbalance of blood is represented as punishment for the crime of falsifying currency, we can also intuit blood's associations with money and economic concerns to which I shall return.

Blood is also a key substance in facilitating various emotional and cognitive processes within the body, and thereby may be said to affect an individual's emotional and mental balance. Fear consists in the trembling of one's veins: at the beginning of the *Comedy*, Dante seeks Virgil's help against the she-wolf, 'ch'ella mi fa tremar le vene e i polsi' (*Inf.I* 90).¹⁹ Even the memory of fear or disgust can curdle the poet's blood. For instance, when Dante recounts seeing the snakes in the canto of the thieves, he claims that the memory of the experience still haunts him: 'e vidivi entro terribile stipa/ di serpenti, e di sì diversa mena/ che la memoria il sangue ancor mi scipa' (*Inf.XXIV* 82-84).²⁰ Excitement or the feeling of being overwhelmed by the sight of one's lover is described as blood fleeing away from the limbs towards the heart (*Rime* CIII.45-47). Lust stains the world with blood: Francesca refers to her companions in Hell as 'noi che tignemmo il mondo di sanguigno' (*Inf.V* 90). Shame, often described with recourse to the reddening of a person's cheeks, is associated with blood several times (*Purg.XX* 61-63; *Par.XXVII* 28-36 and 54). In addition, Dante

¹⁹ See Enrico Rebuffat, 'Effetti della paura sul sangue: *Inf.I* 19-21 e *Inf.XXIV* 82-84', *Studi danteschi*, 78 (2013), 15-44. For 'medical' analyses of *Inf.I* 90, see Boccaccio, Benvenuto da Imola, Francesco da Buti, and Filippo Villani. For Dante's associations between fear and a cold heart, see Heather Webb, 'Dante's Stone Cold Rhymes', *Dante Studies*, 121 (2003), 149-68 (p.153).

²⁰ For an analysis of classical, scriptural and medical sources of Dante's bloody descriptions of fear in these two passages from the *Comedy*, see Rebuffat, 'Effetti della paura sul sangue'.

describes the experience of feeling love and recognition in terms of the trembling of his blood. For instance, when he sees Beatrice in *Purgatorio* for the first time since her death, he tells Virgil: ‘men che dramma/ di sangue m’è rimaso che non tremi:/ conosco i segni de l’antica fiamma’ (*Purg.*XXX 46-48). What registers in the pilgrim’s blood is cognitive at the same time that it is also emotional: Dante’s blood trembles as he recognises Beatrice, and as he remembers his love for her;²¹ thus, we see evidence of what I am calling blood’s ‘charitable’ implications. Imbalances of temperament or emotion can also be blamed on blood. Indeed, medieval philosophers recommended various ways of venting excess emotions, or regulating one’s passions, through phlebotomy.²²

In sum, Dante attributes to blood a key function in maintaining physical, cognitive and emotional balance within the individual – an example of what I am calling the substance’s ‘economic’ implications. In addition, in so much as blood is involved in the functioning of emotions, including love, we might say that it plays a central role in how humans respond to the world and interact with others, and in this sense we see further evidence of blood’s ‘communal’ and specifically ‘charitable’ implications.

II. Family Ties

While blood helps to facilitate how individuals communicate with and respond to one another, it also physically connects individuals to each another. As we have seen above, the foetus’s body shares the blood of both its parents, and constitutes the evidence and expression of the parents’ union. Thus, not only is the child connected to her parents physically through their shared blood, but also the parents are connected to each other through their child. In this way, blood facilitates the formation of the family. Indeed, blood regularly serves as a synonym for familial relations in Dante’s works.²³ When the pilgrim thinks he sees one of his relatives in

²¹ Aristotle associates memory specifically with blood when he claims that a person trying to remember something (and failing) is more prone to feeling discomfort afterwards if he is melancholic and has ‘moisture’ around his heart (*De mem.* II [453a]).

²² On purging the body of temperamental imbalances or an imbalance of the four humours in the blood, see Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, p.23; and Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, pp.186, 274-75. For blood-letting as a way to help purge the body of imbalances, see Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (pp.23-25, 28 and 67), and note 26 on p.174. On menstruation as a way to purge the body of excess, see Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, p.19.

²³ See Casubolo, ‘Linguistica e antropologia del sangue’, pp.1549-58.

Hell, he says to Virgil: ‘credo che un spirto del mio sangue pianga’ (*Inf.*XXIX 20). Dante’s ancestor Cacciaguida addresses the pilgrim in the Heaven of the Sun as ‘sanguis meus’ (*Par.*XV 28), and as ‘mio seme’.²⁴ In *Epistle* V.11, Dante refers to familial relations in terms of blood and seed: ‘Pone, sanguis Longobardorum, coaductam barbariem; et si quid de Troyanorum Latinorumque semine superest, illi cede’.²⁵ By extension, various traits could also be passed down through blood. Indeed, we find among many of Dante’s sources several types of traits considered inheritable through blood, including propensities for vices, emotions²⁶ and behaviours, as well as the stain of original sin and nobility (although the nature of the transmission of these last two was contested). Dante’s own position on which of these traits were transmittable through blood is nuanced, at times ambiguous, and in some cases less explicit than his sources, as I shall briefly demonstrate.

In a general sense, Dante implies that certain traits can be inherited through blood. For instance, in the *Rime*, he uses *sangue* not only as a metonym for the family ties of the Bicci clan, but also to refer to the characteristics they share:

Di Bicci e de’ fratei posso contare
che, per lo sangue lor, del male acquisto
sanno a lor donne buon cognati stare. (*Rime* LXXVII.12-14)

More specifically, Dante associates the vices, which are tendencies towards sinful behaviour (and often include emotions), with blood, and in several instances, he implies that they can be inherited. For instance, on the terrace of pride, Omberto takes pride in the blood of his ancestors: ‘l’antico sangue e l’opere leggiadre/ d’i miei maggior mi fer sì arrogante/ che, non pensando a la comune madre,/ ogn’ uomo ebbero in despetto tanto avante,/ ch’io ne mori’ (*Purg.*XI 61-65). Here, ironically, it is blood that makes Omberto forget what all humans share: ‘la comune madre’.²⁷ While Omberto’s words might suggest that he believes that he has literally inherited the vice of pride from his ancestors through blood, he might alternatively be suggesting a

²⁴ ‘ “Benedetto sia tu”, fu, “trino e uno,/ che nel mio seme se’ tanto cortese!” ’ (*Par.*XV 47-78). In *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante also refers to lineage as seed (‘fuit de semine Sem’, I.vii.8), as well as in the *Epistles* (‘semine Semele’, III[4].7.).

²⁵ For blood as a metonym for lineage, see *Purg.*VI 99-101; *Purg.*XI 61-65; *Purg.*XIX 100-102.

²⁶ See for instance, Aristotle, *Part. anim.* II, iv (650b 14 - 651a 20); Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, p.23; and Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, pp.186, 274-75.

²⁷ Dante also associates blood with pride and lineage in others works; for instance in *Ep.*VI.11.

more metaphorical association between pride and blood. As Dante tell us in the *Convivio* (and as we will discuss in more detail below), some people subscribe to the notion (false, in Dante's opinion) that nobility can be inherited through blood; thus, Umberto's pride might stem from a mistaken belief that his ancestors have imparted their nobility to him, rather than from a belief that pride itself can be inherited.

Indeed, nowhere else in Dante's works have I been able to find an explicit discussion of vices being transmitted literally through blood. However, blood is mentioned in connection with nearly all of the vices in *Purgatorio*,²⁸ with the exception of those in which we find souls doing penance for sloth and anger (although anger is elsewhere associated with blood²⁹); thus, the possibility of an implicit suggestion about vice and transmission should not be entirely ruled out. On the terrace of envy, blood is mentioned twice – the first time to connote violence ('Sanguinoso esce de la trista selva', *Purg.*XIV 64) and the second to describe the vice of envy itself: 'fu il sangue mio d'invidia sì riarso/ che, veduto avesse uom farsi lieto,/ visto m'avresti di livore sparso' (*Purg.*XIV 82-84). Avarice is repeatedly associated with blood. On the terrace of avarice, Dante figures the vice as a she-wolf (in *Purg.*XX 10-12) – an animal which he specifically associates with greed and blood³⁰ in the *Fiore* (XCVII, 5).³¹ More explicitly, blood is associated with greed in *Purgatorio* XX: 'O avarizia, che puoi tu più farne,/ poscia c'ha' il mio sangue a te sì tratto,/ che non si cura de la propria carne?' (82-84); and Dante mentions how Judas's greed for money led him to 'sell' the blood of Christ (*Purg.*XXI 84). While still on the terrace of avarice, Dante also associates blood with familial pride (*Purg.*XIX

²⁸ Dante's systematic association of blood with (almost each of) the vices is neither entirely unique nor entirely conventional, as an article I am currently writing will suggest. His treatment would seem to fall somewhere between the two positions: while Aquinas only rarely mentions blood in connection with the vices (although a few times he mentions the nearly synonymous 'humours', for instance in *Summa theologiae*, I^a-II^ae q. 73 a. 3 co.; and I^a-II^ae q. 80 a. 2 co.), Peraldus's *Summa de vitiis* mentions blood in connection with many of the vices, and in some cases with more frequency than Dante. (For instance, in the section on pride, Peraldus mentions blood twenty-eight times.) See Guilelmus Peraldus, c. 1190-1271 (1497), *Summa aurea de virtutibus [et] vitijs*, In Alma ciuitate Venetiarum: Imprimi fecit his pulcher rimis litteraus characterib[us], Paganinus de Paganinis Brixensis.

²⁹ See note 48.

³⁰ In *Paradiso* XXVII Dante again associates avarice with wolves by presenting the greedy clergy as 'lupi rapaci' (55). Avarice and money are also linked to blood when the usurers are described as wearing bags around their necks which are the colour of blood (*Inf.*XVII 61-63).

³¹ 'Chi della pelle del monton fasciasse/ Il lupo, e tra le pecore il mettesse,/ Credete voi, perché monton paresse,/ Che de le pecore e' non divorasse?/ Già men lor sangue non desiderasse,/ Ma vie più tosto inganar le potesse' (*Il Fiore*, XCVII, 5).

101); and, on the terrace of pride itself, blood is associated with thirst or greed for violence (as Tamiri said to Ciro: ‘Sangue sitisti, e io di sangue d’empio’, *Purg.*XII 57).

On the terrace of gluttony, Statius explains blood’s role in human conception. Indeed, his speech is elicited by a question posed by the pilgrim regarding the need for nourishment in the afterlife: ‘Come si può far magro/ là dove l’uopo di nodrir non tocca?’ (*Purg.*XXV 20-21). Since blood both forms the flesh of the body during conception and nourishes the fully formed individual (*Purg.*XXV 37-60), it is fitting that Dante should characterise the veins as thirsty for blood (‘sangue perfetto che poi non si beve/ da l’assetate vene’, *Purg.*XXV 37-38). However, the line between appetite and excess is a thin one: one must learn to balance between the antipodes of greed (exemplified by the wolf in the *Fiore*, XCVII 5) and need (as exemplified by the veins in *Purg.*XXV 37). On the terrace of lust, blood is mentioned in association with vitality rather than with lust itself (*Purg.*XXVI 52-57).³² Yet, the sin of lust in *Inferno* is explicitly associated with the spilling of blood as we saw above in Francesca’s characterisation of the sinners in her circle (‘noi che tignemmo il mondo di sanguigno’, *Inf.*V 90).

Thus, while Dante’s precise position on the issues of a literal transmission of vice through reproductive blood is difficult to establish, it is clear that Dante associates the vices with blood. I would posit three potential explanations for the association. First, as noted above, since medieval philosophers believed that the process of bleeding helped the body purge itself of (spiritual, emotional, temperamental and physical) imbalances, it makes sense that Dante should consistently remind the reader of the role of blood throughout the journey through *Purgatory*: the vices can be purged, just as blood can be purged, making the body balanced and healthy again. Second, it is well established that Dante categorises the vices in terms of disordered love,³³ and, as I have argued above, Dante consistently characterises blood in terms of its charitable implications. Thus, reminding the reader

³² ‘Io, che due volte avea visto lor grato,/ incominciai: “O anime sicure/ d’aver, quando che sia, di pace stato,/ non son rimase acerbe né mature/ le membra mie di là, ma son qui meco/ col sangue suo e con le sue giunture” ’ (*Purg.*XXVI 52-57).

³³ See George Corbett, ‘The Christian Ethics of Dante’s Purgatory’, *Medium Aevum*, 83:2 (2014), 266-87 (p.274). Siegfried Wenzel, in ‘Dante’s Rationale for the Seven Deadly Sins (*Purgatorio* XVII)’, *The Modern Language Review*, 60:4 (1965), 529-33, identifies Peraldus’s *Summa de vitiis* as a possible source for Dante’s classification of the vices, based on similarities in the way in which both texts treat the issue of disordered love.

of blood throughout the terraces of *Purgatory* might reinforce the overarching salvific principle of the canticle: the vices, caused by disordered love, can be corrected, just as impurities within the blood can be balanced. Third, Dante associates blood with an individual's propensity for doing good when he refers to the virtues and their provenance: 'Larghezza e Temperanza e l'altre nate/ del nostro sangue mendicando vanno' (*Rime* CIV.63-64). Thus, the poet again emphasises blood's balancing capacities, and thereby what I am calling its 'economic' implications: on the one hand, blood can transmit a tendency towards a particular vice, but on the other hand, it gives birth to the capacity for certain virtues.

A related question pertaining to what can be transmitted through blood concerns the issue of original sin.³⁴ By referring to humanity as 'il mal seme d'Adamo' (*Inf.*III 115), Dante seems to suggest that the stain of original sin is passed down literally through seminal fluid. Indeed, Christiana Purdy Moudarres has argued in a recent article that Dante's treatment of Guido da Montefeltro adheres to what she calls the 'bio-theological' notion that it is possible to inherit a 'generally sinful disposition from Adam,' as well as a more specific weakness to succumb to particular sins passed down from one's more immediate forebears.³⁵ The issue of Dante's precise views on the transmission of original sin is of the utmost complexity (of which Dante is acutely aware), which nonetheless reveals blood's communal implications. Regardless of how exactly original sin is transmitted, and regardless of whether Dante's characterisation of humanity as 'il male seme d'Adamo' is figurative or literal, it is clear that blood is a defining characteristic of what it means to be human – of what we all have in common: sin and a debt to God.

For this reason, it ought not come as a surprise that Dante should associate blood with punishments or repayment for particular sins. Indeed, the neutrals' punishment involves weeping bloody tears which are eaten by worms (*Inf.*III 67); the lustful describe themselves as staining the world with blood (*Inf.*V 90); the violent against others boil in a river of blood (*Inf.*XII 47-48); the violent against themselves vent bloody words when they are wounded (*Inf.*XIII 31-45); some of the usurers wear blood-colored bags around their necks (*Inf.*XVII 61-63). Violence is also connoted through reference to blood in the lower regions of Hell: Vanni Fucci, who is being

³⁴ Purdy Moudarres, in 'Generation and Corruption', gives a concise account of some of the theories regarding the transmission of original sin, pp.174-78.

³⁵ Purdy Moudarres, 'Generation and Corruption', pp.181-82.

punished for fraud, is also ‘[un] omo di sangue e di crucci’ (*Inf.*XXIV 129); Cacus formed a lake of blood (*Inf.*XXV 27); Maestro Adamo (*Inferno* XXX) is punished for falsifying coins by enduring dropsy, which is a perversion of the process of *digestio* that takes place in the humors; ‘[i] seminatore di scisma’ in *Inf.*XXVIII display bloody wounds and endure bodily fragmentation as punishment for having torn apart communities or relationships. Bloody drool drips from Lucifer’s mouths in the pit of Hell: ‘per tre menti/ gocciava ’l pianto e sanguinosa bava’ (*Inf.*XXIV 53-54).

Although some of these references to blood are brief, their frequency is noteworthy. While some of Dante’s sources mention blood in their representations of Hell and Purgatory (and in some cases contain a significantly higher number of references to blood and in greater concentration³⁶), the poet’s representations of the otherworld treat blood systematically. Not only does Dante associate the substance with almost each of the sins and each of the vices, he also does so within the context of a widespread thematic characterisation of blood as a balancing device.³⁷ Thus, we again note a strong emphasis on blood’s ‘economic’ implications: not only is it associated with vices and virtues, but also with sins and their punishments.

A final question pertaining to what can be transmitted through blood concerns the quality of human nobility.³⁸ Dante appears somewhat to contradict himself on this issue. In the *Monarchia*, Pyrrhus is referred to as ‘noble of blood’ (*Mon.*II.ix.8), perhaps suggesting that one can inherit nobility through ancestry. However, in the *Convivio*, Dante devotes most of Book IV to discrediting such an idea: ‘l’errore dell’umana bontade in quanto in noi è dalla natura seminata e che “nobiltade”

³⁶ For instance, Bonvesin de la Riva’s *Red Scripture* describes in much the salvific power of Christ’s blood shed at the Crucifixion, while Dante’s *Comedy* avoids dramatising the Crucifixion, as Manuele Gagnolati points out in *Experiencing the Afterlife*, pp.92-109.

³⁷ Morgan, in *Dante and the Medieval Other World*, argues that the immersion motif exists in many of Dante’s sources, but only in the *Vision of Paul* and the *Comedy* are sinners immersed in rivers of blood, p.32.

³⁸ For the issue of nobility in Dante, see Maria Simonelli, ‘Il tema della nobiltà in Andrea Cappellano e in Dante’, *Dante Studies*, 84 [1966], 51-64; Adriana Diomedi, ‘L’ideale dantesco della nobiltà: L’errore di Federico’, *Spunti e Ricerche: Rivista d’Italianistica*, 19: Supplement [2004], 25-41); Domenico Consoli’s entry on ‘nobiltà’ in the *Enciclopedia dantesca*, IV (1973), pp.58-62; Mario Trovato, ‘Dante’s Stand against “l’errore de l’umana bontade”’: Bonum, Nobility and Rational Soul in the Fourth Treatise of the *Convivio*’, *Dante Studies*, 108 [1990], 79-96; and Andrea A. Robiglio, ‘Nobiltà e riconoscimento in Dante: In margine ad una recente edizione del IV libro del *Convivio*’, *Alighieri: Rassegna Bibliografica Dantesca*, 48:30 [2007] 83-102.

chiamare si dee' (IV.i.7).³⁹ Instead, the capacity for developing nobility is a gift from God which descends from the heavens into the rational soul like a seed falling into soil (Cv.IV.xx.6); it is the responsibility of the individual to develop the capacity for nobility into nobility itself – a process figured as a seed being nurtured to develop into a healthy shoot (Cv.IV.xx.9). In this way, Dante suggests that it is the responsibility of the individual to make the right choices despite any weaknesses he or she may inherit through blood.

While much has been (and remains to be) said about Dante's treatment of nobility, I would like to highlight, for the purposes of this study, that Dante relies both on the nuanced distinctions between blood and seed, as well as on their similarities, to make his argument about free will. When 'seed' refers to blood that has been refined into reproductive fluid, it is synonymous with blood, and Dante implies that it may literally transmit propensities toward sinful behaviour from a parent to his child. However, when Dante uses 'seme' metaphorically to figure the divine gift of the capacity for developing virtue, *sangue* and *seme* are not synonyms. Rather, Dante's point hinges precisely on the highly nuanced yet crucial difference between literal blood and figurative seed.

Similarly, Dante exploits tensions between blood and seed imagery in his treatment of sin and redemption. As we have seen above, Dante refers to the stain of original sin with recourse to the image of the seed (humans are the 'mal seme d'Adamo'). Yet, the possibility of redemption from sin is also figured with recourse to seed and blood-related imagery. When discussing the human capacity for nobility, which descends, divinely-infused, into the human soul as a seed descends into soil, Dante describes Christ descending to earth to re-unite God with humanity:

Volendo la 'nmensurabile bontà divina l'umana creatura a sé riconformare, che per lo peccato della prevaricazione del primo uomo da Dio era partita e disformata, eletto fu in quello altissimo e congiuntissimo consistorio della Trinitade che 'l Figliuolo di Dio in terra discendesse a fare questa concordia. E però che nella sua venuta lo mondo, non solamente lo cielo ma la terra, convenia essere in ottima disposizione; e la ottima disposizione della terra sia quando ella è monarchia, cioè tutta ad uno principe, come detto è di sopra; ordinate fu per lo divino provvedimento quello popolo e quella cittade che ciò dovea compiere, cioè la gloriosa Roma. (Cv.IV.v.3-4)

³⁹ While not directly contradicting himself, Dante also somewhat muddies the clarity of his argument against the idea that nobility can be passed down through blood in the *Convivio* itself: 'nobile romano, disceso del sangue del glorioso Torquato' (IV.6.12).

The language that Dante uses to describe Christ's presence in the world echoes the language he uses to describe the divine gift of the capacity for nobility: both are figured as seeds descending into the earth, which varies in terms of how well-disposed it is to receive such a gift. But if Christ's presence on earth, figured as a seed, gives humanity the capacity for redemption, it is Christ's blood that truly frees us:

E non pur una volta, questo spazzo
 girando, si rinfresca nostra pena:
 io dico pena, e dovria dir sollazzo
 ché quella voglia a li alberi ci mena
 che menò Cristo lieto a dire 'Eli,'
 quando ne liberò con la sua vena. (*Purg.*XXIII 70-75)

Thus, Dante uses a number of seed and blood related images to describe the polarities of the human condition: original sin and the potential for redemption; inherited traits that might dispose us toward vices, and the capacity for virtues which we must nurture ourselves; biological weaknesses and personal responsibility; particular sins and their punishments in Hell. In addition, in so much as Christ's presence (associated with the image of a seed in *Convivio*) and His sacrifice (described in terms of His liberating veins in *Purgatorio*) make possible the re-establishment of 'concordia' between humanity and God, we see further evidence of the harmonising capacities that Dante attributes to blood throughout his works.

In sum, if the traits relating to the vices may be passed down through blood, then blood helps to connect the parent to the child not only physically, cognitively, temperamentally and emotionally, but also in ways that transcend even temporal boundaries, in the sense that after a parent has died, one might still feel inclined to act in ways determined by the blood that one inherited from him or her. Yet, while blood's transmission of personality traits results from a connection between two individuals, nobility, according to Dante's view in the *Convivio*, does not. Rather, it results from each person's connection with God, and is a sign of the fact that we are made in the likeness of God. Blood therefore plays an important role not only in the way Dante conceives of and represents an individual's proper relationship with other people, but also with God. With recourse to the image of blood, Dante reminds his readers of what lies beyond their control – of what they inherit, of what is determined by physical limitations or by external circumstances. With recourse to the image of

the seed, which is sometimes but not always a synonym for blood, Dante insists upon the idea of free will and personal responsibility.

III. Membership and Modes of Exchange in Communities: City, Church, Empire

While reference to families sharing blood is for the most part literal, Dante also implies membership in other types of communities by referring to shared blood in ways that are essentially figurative. For example, he uses blood as a metonym to indicate people that come from the same city. At the opening of *Inferno* XXX, Dante begins to recount the tale of Athamas's murder of his own children with reference to Juno's anger against the Theban people: 'Nel tempo che Iunone era crucciata/ per Semele contra, 'l sangue tebano,/ come mostro; una e altra fiata' (*Inf.*XXX 1-3). And, in the Heaven of Venus Cunizza utters her third prophecy:

Troppo larga sarebbe la bigoncia
che ricevesse il sangue ferrarese,
e stanco chi 'l pesasse a oncia a oncia.
che donerà questo prete cortese
per mostrarsi di parte; e cotai doni
conformi fieno al viver del paese. (*Par.*IX 55-60)

The passage mentions not only blood's ability to define a group (in this case, the citizens of Ferrara), but also its value (it can be weighed or measured, 57 and given, 58); thus it highlights both of the main qualities of blood – the 'communal' and the 'economic' – on which this article focuses. More generally, when Dante refers to 'sangue troiano', he implies not only membership in the city of Troy, but also membership in the Latin race, which he considered divinely-ordained to establish the Roman Empire: in the *Convivio*, Dante claims that God chose the Latin race ('l'alto sangue troiano') for the exercise of rule (IV.iv.10). When Dante describes the consecration of the Roman Empire through the sprinkling of the blood of Peter and Paul, he uses the image of blood to endow his political convictions with theological authority:

Nos quoque eundem Patrem et Filium, eundem Deum et hominem, nec non eandem Matrem et Virginem profitentes, propter quos et propter quorum salutem ter de caritate interrogatum et dictum est: Petre, pasce sacrosanctum ovile; Romam – cui, post tot triumphorum pompas, et verbo et opere Christus orbis confirmavit imperium, quam etiam ille Petrus, et Paulus gentium predicator, in apostolicam sedem aspergine proprii sanguinis consecravit –, cum Ieremia, non lugenda prevenientes, sed post ipsa dolentes, viduam et desertam lugere compellimur. (*Ep.*XI[2].3)

In the Old and New Testament, the sprinkling of blood is required for legitimising rituals: for the sealing of covenants, and for acts of consecration.⁴⁰ Perhaps partly for this reason, Dante suggests in *Epistle XI* that the Roman Empire was established through blood: literally, through the blood which is shed in the act of war, and ritually, through the consecration of its soil with the blood of the Apostles. Similarly, in the *Monarchia*, Dante justifies the legitimacy of Aeneas as the founder of the Roman Empire with recourse to what he calls the ‘double confluence of blood’ that flowed into the hero from two sources: his lineage, and his marriage to Lavinia (*Mon.II.iii.17*). Thus, Aeneas’s marriage to Lavinia constituted an exchange that brought about the sharing of their blood, which had significant political consequences for the Roman Empire.

Dante also associates marriage with the sharing of blood in his treatment of several ecclesiastical issues. For instance, in the Heaven of the Sun, when Thomas describes how Dominic and Francis were ordained by Providence to guide the Church, he characterises the marriage of Christ to the Church as bloody:

La provedenza, che governò il mondo
 con quel consiglio nel quale ogni aspetto
 creato è vinto pria che vada al fondo,
 però che andasse ver’ lo sui diletto
 la sposa di colui ch’ad alte grida
 disposò lei col sangue benedetto,
 in sé sicura e anche a lui più fida,
 due principe ordinò in suo favore,
 che quince e quindi le fosser per guida. (*Par.XI 28-36*)

If a marriage results in procreation, the man and the woman are joined physically to their offspring through shared blood. But the association between marriage and blood goes further: it was common in medieval exegesis of Genesis to describe marriage as the joining of man and wife into one flesh, and to use this association as a metaphor for the Church’s marriage to Christ, as Augustine claims in *Contra Faustum*: ‘Fit viro dormienti conjux de latere: fit Christo mirenti Ecclesia de sacramento sanguinis, qui de latere mortui profluxit’ (Book XII.viii, 1-5).⁴¹ Augustine goes on to explain that all of Genesis is a prophecy of Christ and the Church, and that Christ’s relationship to the

⁴⁰ See Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Surrey: Tyndale, 1965), pp.67-69; Alan M. Stibbs, *The Meaning of the Word ‘Blood’ in Scripture* (London: Tyndale Press, 1947); and the entries on ‘Blood’ and ‘Covenant’ in the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), pp.402-04 and 419-29.

⁴¹ *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, in *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum*, vol.25 (sect. 6, part 1), ed. by Josephus Zycha (Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1891/92).

Church is a marriage because man and wife are of one flesh, as are the Church and Christ. Thus, marriage unites the couple in flesh even before they procreate (and even if a marriage fails to produce children).

In addition, by having recourse to bloody imagery, as well as alluding to Christ's last words on the cross,⁴² Dante's Thomas superimposes a reference to the Crucifixion upon his description of the marriage of Christ to the Church – a juxtaposition which was a medieval commonplace.⁴³ Thus, the passage exploits the sacrificial and generative implications of Christ's blood, and in so doing emphasises blood's collaborative capacities: through an act of violence perpetrated against Christ, humanity is reunited with God. Furthermore, Paola Nasti, glossing this passage along with several other references to the Church as the Bride of Christ in the Heaven of the Sun,⁴⁴ demonstrates that *caritas* is central to Dante's conception of the Church. Not only does *caritas* 'bind the ecclesiastical community to God' (in Bonaventure's formulation,⁴⁵ an idea with which Dante concurs), but *caritas* also joins members of the Church to each other, thus forming a community. While Nasti's argument does not focus particularly on blood, it relies on the passage cited above in which Thomas describes the Church's marriage to Christ, the central image of which is bloody. Thus, we see further evidence of blood's 'charitable' implications: along with *caritas*, blood joins people together within the community of the Church, as well as joining the Church to Christ.

Later in *Paradiso*, Dante describes the marriage between the 'santa milizia' and Christ as bloody: 'In forma dunque di candida rosa/ mi si mostrava la milizia santa/ che nel suo sangue Cristo fece sposa', *Par.XXXI* 1-3), exploiting a commonplace of medieval theological thought which represents the Church as the body of Christ, and members of the Church as the parts of Christ's body. By extension, it would make sense that the faithful should share in Christ's blood – not

⁴² From the time of the earliest commentators, Christ's cry has been read as a reference to the Crucifixion, in light of Matthew's description of the event (Matt.27:46 and 50).

⁴³ See Paola Nasti, 'Caritas-Ecclesiology in Dante's *Paradiso*', *The Italianist*, 27 (2007), 206-32, who glosses the lines (*Par.XI* 32-33) with reference to the tradition depicting the Church being born from Christ's side on the cross, p.216. For primary sources, see Bede, *Hexameron*, PL 91, col.51; and Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones super canticum canticorum*, sermo LXVIII, 4. For iconography, see for example five images from the *Bible moralisée*, which may be found in Gertrud Schiller's *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst*, vol.4, pt.1, plates 217-21. (The images in plates 217-19 are bloody, whereas plates 220-21 are not.)

⁴⁴ Nasti, 'Caritas-ecclesiology', p.207.

⁴⁵ Nasti, 'Caritas-ecclesiology', p.213.

only by drinking it through the Eucharistic ritual, but also because they are members of His body. Indeed, on several occasions, Dante represents the community of the Church as sharing in and drinking the blood either of Christ or of the early Christian martyrs. For instance, in *Par.XXVII*, Peter characterises the Church as raised and nourished by the blood of the first martyred Popes:

Non fu la sposa di Cristo allevata
del sangue mio, di Lin, di quel di Cleto,
per essere ad acquisto d'oro usata;
ma per acquisto d'esto viver lieto
e Sisto e Pio e Calisto e Urbano
sparser lo sangue dopo molto fleto. (*Par.XXVII* 40-45)

The tension here between money and sacrificial blood is of central importance: while Christ's blood pays the ultimate price, blood itself should not be bought or sold. Peter continues to emphasise this distinction throughout the rest of his speech:

Non fu nostra intenzion ch'a destra mano
d'i nostri successor parte sedesse,
parte da l'altra del popol cristiano;
né che le chiavi che mi fuor concesse,
divenisser signaculo in vessillo
che contra battezzati combattesse;
né ch'io fossi figura di sigillo
a privilegi venduti e mendaci,
ond' io sovente arrosso e disfavillo.
In vesta di pastor lupi rapaci
si veggion di qua sù per tutti i paschi:
o difesa di Dio, perché pur giaci?
Del sangue nostro Caorsini e Guaschi
s'apparecchian di bere: o buon principio,
a che vil fine convien che tu caschi!
Ma l'alta provedenza, che con Scipio
difese a Roma la gloria del mondo,
soccorrà tosto, sì com' io concipio;
e tu, figliuol, che per lo mortal pondo
ancor giù tornerai, apri la bocca,
e non asconder quell ch'io non ascondo. (*Par.XXVII* 45-66)

It was not Peter's intention to become the image imprinted on a seal to be sold (52-53). Nor does he approve of the avarice of the clergy (figured as 'lupi rapaci', 55); nor of the two French Popes (the Caorsini and Guaschi) who are thirsty to 'drink' the blood of the martyrs on which the Church was founded. In addition to the frequency with which Dante mentions blood explicitly in this canto ('sangue' occurs four times – the highest number of times in a canto; *Inferno* XII and XIII also mention blood four times each), he refers to blood implicitly: the bloodthirsty wolf is associated with avarice here and elsewhere in Dante, as we have seen. Blood, like money, can be

desired inappropriately, but, despite its literal and physical associations with waste, it should not be wasted on a greedy few: it is of communal value, and should be shared. When Peter denounces Pope Boniface VIII, he does so by accusing him of having made his tomb into a bloody and filthy sewer: ‘Quelli ch’usurpa in terra il luogo mio [. . .] fatt’ ha del cimitero mio cloaca/ del sangue e de la puzza’ (*Par.XXVII* 22-26). His words reveal an awareness of contemporary medical opinion which considered blood the vehicle for the distribution of nutrients throughout the body, and hence also the vehicle for transporting out of the body its waste products. Thus, by referring to the physiological roles that blood plays within the body, Dante emphasises a fundamental theological value of blood: it has the potential to nourish the body of the Church and its members; yet it can all too easily become waste if not used properly. Just as the veins of a body ‘drink’ blood for nourishment (as we saw above in *Purg.XXV* 37-38), so too do the members of the Church drink Christ’s blood. Because Christ’s blood is shared and of great value to the whole community, it is imperative that the amount of blood remains measured and balanced within the body of the Church. Thus, despite a seeming lack of explicit reference in Dante’s works to the sacrament of communion or a vivid dramatisation of the Crucifixion, the poet’s treatment of blood certainly does not shy away from its soteriological or Eucharistic implications.

While blood has the capacity to join together parts of the body, and individuals to each other within communities (political, familial, religious), Christ’s blood has the capacity to re-unite humanity with God. The tension between blood and money that Dante emphasises in *Par.XXVII* is part of a larger theological tradition, which on the one hand characterises Christ’s blood as the ‘price’ of redemption,⁴⁶ and on the other, condemns the selling of Christ’s blood by Judas for money.⁴⁷ Dante

⁴⁶ Augustine refers to Christ as a ‘mercator’ who bought our freedom at the price of His own blood (see for instance, sermo 130.2 in *Sermones*, and psalmus 21.28 in *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, from the *Library of Latin Texts* database.) See also Brian Daley, SJ, “‘He Himself is Our Peace’” (Ephesians 2:14): Early Christian Views of Redemption in Christ’, in *The Redemption: an Interdisciplinary Symposium on Christ as Redeemer*, ed. by Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) (2004), pp. 149–76 (pp. 152–53 and 158–61); and Joseph Henry Rohling, *The Blood of Christ in Christian Latin Literature Before the Year 1000* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1932), pp.59-61.

⁴⁷ See Anthony Cassell, *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 emphasise the avaricious practices of Pier as a historical figure, pp.43-56. Dante argues that money should not be a motive for fighting in *Mon.II.ix.9*.

again associates Christ's sacrifice with monetary value in *Paradiso* XIII, where Eve's 'palate' is described as costing the world a debt, which Christ repays by sacrificing himself:

Tu credi che nel petto onde la costa
 si trasse per formar la bella guancia
 il cui palato a tutto 'l mondo costa,
 e in quel che, forato da la lancia,
 e prima e poscia tanto sodisfece,
 che d'ogne colpa vince la bilancia,
 quantunque a la natura umana lece
 aver di lume, tutto fosse infuso
 da quel valor che l'uno e l'altro fece. (*Par.XIII* 37-45)

By suggesting that Christ's sacrifice 'balances' humanity's relationship with God, Dante associates Christ's blood with the economy of salvation. Blood helps to reunite humanity with God. Interestingly, the cause of humanity's estrangement from God – original sin – is also referred to through a synonym for blood: the sinners waiting to cross the Styx in Hell are the 'mal seme d'Adamo' (*Inf.III* 115). Thus, Dante represents God's redemptive justice with recourse to what we might term a 'bloody symmetry': on the one hand, Dante represents sin, as seed, which is repeatedly transmitted from human to human through reproduction; on the other hand, there is Christ's blood, a death that is also a moment of rebirth, and the re-union of humanity with God.

Blood is again associated with monetary value in *Paradiso* XXIX, where Beatrice warns against distorting the Scriptures and philosophising in vain:

E ancor questo qua sù si comporta
 con men disdegno che quando è posposta
 la divina Scrittura o quando è torta.
 Non vi si pensa quanto sangue costa
 seminarla nel mondo e quanto piace
 chi umilmente con essa s'accosta. (*Par.XXXIX* 88-93)

By figuring the process whereby the truth of the gospels is spread as a kind of bloody sowing, Dante again exploits the tension and the associations between seeds and blood. Blood shed in sacrifice may become the generative seed that will grow into the Church. In sum, Dante's treatment of blood emphasises its capacities to join together various members of a community into a whole, and to sustain and nourish that community. Just as one's limbs and organs are distinct yet at the same time parts of one body, so too are the members of Christ's body – which is the Church – one flesh. While the parts of the body share blood physiologically, the members of the Church

share Christ's blood through the Eucharist. By partaking in the community of the Church, by sharing in the body of Christ, humanity is able to balance its relationship with God; and in this regard, we may see further evidence of how the economic and communal implications of blood in Dante's works are interrelated.

V. Violence, Rupture and Waste in Hell

Conversely, in *Inferno* we find examples in which Dante uses blood's communal and generative implications to demonstrate what happens when bodies or communities (religious, political or familial) are torn apart. In *Inferno* XII, souls guilty of committing violent acts against others are punished by immersion in a river of boiling blood:⁴⁸

Ma ficca li occhi a valle, ché s'approccia
la riviera del sangue in la qual bolle
qual che per violenza in altrui nocchia. (*Inf.*XII 46-48)

The *contrapasso* is clear: the substance of the river Phlegethon symbolises (or perhaps even literally constitutes) the blood spilled by the tyrants' victims.⁴⁹ As in *Purg.*XXV 45, here too Dante uses the word 'altrui', calling attention to the issue of otherness (*Inf.*XII 48). And indeed, the perpetrator may well have been blinded by a similar kind of reductive and dualistic thinking, objectifying his victim and thinking of her as different from himself. Yet, the sinners are immersed in a river of the shared blood of their victims; thus, we as readers are reminded – through the image of blood – that all humankind is part of a community in God. Not only did Christ shed His blood to save us all, but also we are all part of the same body: the body of Christ. To harm another, outside of the context of Christian sacrificial economy, is to harm oneself and everyone else. In addition, the river of blood is one of four rivers that run through Hell and define its geography – the structure of which Durling suggests

⁴⁸ Dante bases his river on Virgil's Phlegethon (*Aen.*VI, 498-501). However, in the *Aeneid*, the river is one of fire. Since the river is meant to punish violence, its mechanism of punishment fits the crime: those who shed blood in anger are punished by boiling blood – the biological state of anger according to medieval scientific opinion. For Aristotle's association of anger with blood, see *Part.anim.* II, iv (650b 14) and *De anima*, trans. by Iacobus Veneticus, *Aristoteles Latinus* database, I, 1 (403b 1–3) On Thomistic associations of anger with blood, see *Summa theologiae*, Ia 2ae. 22–30, XIX.

⁴⁹ See Jeremy Tambling, 'Monstrous Tyranny, Men of Blood: Dante and *Inferno* XII', *Modern Language Review*, 98 (2003), 881-97.

resembles a body, specifically Lucifer's.⁵⁰ In this sense, the river Phlegethon may be seen as a vein that runs through Satan's body, which is a parody of Christ's body. Thus, even when describing sinners that have cut themselves off from God's community and the possibility of redemption, Dante places them in a pool of shared blood that flows through the veins of a communal body. We might say that blood for Dante always connotes the potential for union or communion, even when it provides the evidence of an actual failed union. In this sense, it could be said to form part of the schema of the parodic use of ideas about community that we see throughout *Inferno* (for example particularly in cantos XXXII-III).

In *Inferno* XXVIII, Dante again uses the image of wasted or spilled blood to connote the failure of individuals and of groups (political and religious) to stay together. Here, the pilgrim and Virgil encounter the 'seminator di scandalo e di scisma' (35) – souls guilty of separating groups or individuals with their words. As punishment for dividing individuals or groups, souls endure various forms of bodily fragmentation⁵¹ – speaking through vermilion wounds to explain their punishment.⁵² Dante uses the association between seeds and blood to emphasise the irony of the sinners' punishment in this canto. As we have seen above, *seme* is a form of generative blood – that which joins together the parents of a child and forms new life. But these sinners have used language – figured as a seed (35) – to divide individuals, or groups of people, from each other. Thus, their bloodied fragmented bodies highlight the effects of their sin: blood is the evidence of a father's physical connection to his child, yet here it also signifies the violent rupture of that relationship.

A third example from *Inferno* serves to illustrate how Dante uses blood to emphasise the value of what is wasted when two entities – joined together by God – are separated. In *Inferno* XIII, sinners guilty of suicide suffer one of the bloodier punishments in the poem: the pilgrim, goaded by Virgil, breaks off a branch of a tree,

⁵⁰ See Robert M. Durling, 'Deceit and Digestion in the Belly of Hell', *Allegory and Representation, Selected Papers from the English Institute*, 1979-80 (New Series, No. 5), ed. by Stephen J. Greenblatt (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1981), 61-93; and the Durling/Martinez commentary on *Inferno* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.194 and 552-55.

⁵¹ For a comparison of sundered bodies in Dante and Bertran de Born, see Hayden Boyers, 'Cleavage in Bertran de Born and Dante', *Modern Philology*, 24 (1926), pp.1-3.

⁵² 'Un altro [Pier da Medicina] [. . .] apri la canna,/ ch'era di fuor d'ogne parte vermiglia,/ e disse:' (*Inf.*XXVIII 64-70).

causing words and blood to gush forth from the wound – an image that has been characterised as the closest the *Comedy* comes to dramatising the Crucifixion (with the exception perhaps of the parodic image of Lucifer’s body at the bottom of Hell).⁵³ The image of blood here serves parodic and ironic purposes. The soul and body of the suicide were joined together by God through blood during conception; by committing suicide, the sinner tore apart the synolon of body and soul that not only made whole his own person, but also connected him to God. Indeed, the suicides are the only sinners in the entire poem that – Dante, breaking with theological doctrine,⁵⁴ asserts – will be refused their bodies at the Resurrection. Just as blood represents both waste and generative potential within the human body, so too does blood in *Inferno XIII* represent the enormity of what the suicides wasted: their lives, their connection with God, the opportunity to be reunited with their bodies after the Last Judgment.

In sum, Dante demonstrates blood’s communal and charitable values through positive and negative examples. Using blood to define personal as well as civic and religious ties, the poet implies that each type of community has the potential for acting as one body, for the harmonious exchange and the sharing of blood between its various members. But not all communities succeed. Cutting oneself off from one’s community, or tearing apart the unity of one’s own body, is a way of cutting oneself off from God, from the community of humanity born (again) from Christ’s redemptive blood. Dante uses blood both to demonstrate evidence of violence – that a community or a body has been torn apart –, but also to emphasise the enormity of what is wasted when blood is spilled: the potential for new life, for reunion, for the formation of communities.

V. Blood That Speaks

⁵³ See 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); Leone, *Sacrificial and Semiotic Blood in Dante*, pp.68-121; and Leone, ‘“Tante voci tra quei bronchi”’: Textual Borrowing and Authorial Agency in *Inferno XIII*’, in *Le tre corone* 2 (2015), 111-30. For biblical themes in this canto, see Claudia Villa, ‘Canto XIII’, in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis (Inferno)*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Franco Cesati, 2000), pp.183-91; and Villa, ‘‘Per le nove radici d’esto legno’’: Pier delle Vigna, Nicola della Rocca (e Dante): anamorfoosi e riconversione di una metafora’, in *Strumenti critici*, 15 (1991), 131-44.

⁵⁴ See Zygmunt G. Barański, ‘(Un)Orthodox Dante’, in *Reviewing Dante’s Theology*, vol.2, ed. by Claire Honess and Matthew Treherne (Oxford-Berlin: Peter Lang, 2013), pp.253-330 (pp.268-71).

In both examples of blood's wasted communal potential in *Inferno* XIII and *Inferno* XXVIII, blood is also associated with language. Wounds speak in each of the cantos (as well as in several other instances⁵⁵): Pier da Medicina speaks through his wound (*Inf.* XXVIII 64-70); and Pier delle Vigne can only speak when he is wounded – either by the Harpies who gnaw on his leaves, giving him a ‘window for his pain’ or by Dante-*personaggio*, who breaks his branch, thereby enabling a conflation of words and blood to issue forth together down his wooden frame (‘usciva insieme/ parole e sangue’, *Inf.*XIII 43-44). In addition, *Inferno* XXVIII opens with an inexpressibility *topos*:

Chi poria mai pur con parole sciolte
dicer del sangue e de le piaghe a pieno
ch' i' ora vidi, per narrar più volte?
Ogne lingua per certo verria meno
per lo nostro sermone e per la mente,
c'hanno a tanto comprender poco seno. (*Inf.*XXVIII 1-6)

As Dante suggests in these verses, there is something indescribable about blood. The horror it signifies in this canto eludes the power of language and comprehension. However, in this canto it is precisely blood that the poet employs in order to express the horrors of war. Blood's vividness – as a striking image and as a richly connotative concept with deep roots in medieval culture – is an apt device for catching the reader's attention, animating the reader's imagination, and doing just what the poet claims he cannot do: ‘dicer a pieno’ that which he sees. In this passage, blood is doubly ambivalent. It is both unsignifiable and an agent of signification; indeed, the very premise of this sentence – that blood signifies the unsignifiable – is itself a contradiction. Perhaps these ambiguous qualities of blood are precisely what made the substance so suitable for Dante's poetic purposes. While scholars in other disciplines have often debated which of blood's often contrasting implications are dominant – theologians for instance argue about whether blood in the Old and New Testament implicates life or death⁵⁶ –, Dante is a poet, and his treatment of blood can implicate both life and death, peace and violence, generosity and greed, while highlighting the very tensions that exist between those polarities. In this sense, the investigation of

⁵⁵ For further examples of wounds that speak, see Leone, *Scientific, Sacrificial and Semiotic Blood*, pp.122-69.

⁵⁶ See Stibbs, *Meaning of the Word 'Blood'*, for a discussion of the debate.

blood offers an especially rich (and neglected) field of associations which reveals the complexity of Dante's polysemous expression.

Dante uses blood, rhetorically, to establish poetic economies between contrasting elements within his works. It is possible for one to waste blood, but one should not do so. Blood should be shed only for the right reasons – shed willingly in acts of sacrifice, in imitation of Christ and the martyrs. Sacrificial blood has the capacity to become the generative seeds of a divine message – as Beatrice says of 'la divina Scrittura' in *Par.* XXIX 90-92: 'Non vi si pensa quanto sangue costa/ seminarla nel mondo'. And it seems that Dante is trying to nourish this seed and disseminate its message. Perhaps this is part of the reason why Dante uses blood with such rhetorical economy. If there is in fact less explicit representation of violence and blood in Dante's works than in the classical epics, as Barański maintains,⁵⁷ then it is fitting that the poet's salvific message – written in words figured as blood –, must use both blood and language in a measured way.

In conclusion, while Dante uses blood to implicate tensions between contrasting elements, many of them relate to issues of community and economy. Blood is pollution, yet it can have expiatory or purgative functions. It constitutes life and signifies death. It consecrates rituals and communities whereby people are joined together: marriage, the Eucharist, the Church, families, cities, race; and it is one of the few elements that all humans share. Yet, Dante sometimes also uses blood to distinguish between groups. While blood helps to define the sensitive capacity of the soul, it also implicates the cognitive faculty of memory. Blood is what makes us human by connecting us with fellow humans, including our parents and broader communities and also with God/Christ. It nourishes not only the body of the individual, but also the community of the Church, figured as Christ's body. Yet, a perversion of the process of digestion in the individual leads to illnesses such as dropsy, which distort the body's form; and the corruption of the Church is figured as pollution in its blood. Part of Judas's sin was that he sold Christ's blood, and Dante often associates the substance with avarice; yet, he also characterises Christ's blood as the price of redemption, and as that which balances humanity's debt for original sin with God. Blood is associated with each of the vices in Purgatory, and most of the sins in Hell, yet Christ's blood redeems mankind. Throughout Dante's works, blood is

⁵⁷ See note 14.

associated with language, and made to speak; yet, it also, impossibly, points to something beyond itself which is inexpressible.

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