Manto into Mantua:
Dante's Corrections of Vergil

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Manto in the *Inferno* is a *locus classicus* of authorial correction. As a prophetess and the eponym of Mantua, Dante's Manto is drawn principally from Vergil's *Aeneid*. Dante's character Vergil, however, rewrites the Aeneid story by excising Manto from Mantua's community. This transformation is prompted by Vergil's complex reputation in medieval Europe. Throughout the middle ages, Vergil, like Manto, was associated with occult knowledge, which both advanced and hindered his role in the *Commedia*. Dante thus uses authorial correction to distance Vergil from Manto and her occult associations, and as a result, Dante's Manto more closely resembles the *Aeneid*'s Circe: Dante's Manto and Vergil's Circe are both conceptualized as a looming threat that could destroy the hero's endeavour.

The Theban seeress Manto is a well-known mythological character who frequently appears in classical literature. As the daughter of the seer Tiresias, she is usually depicted in a religious capacity, either aiding her father in rituals or conducting rituals herself. She is also a character in Dante's *Commedia*, in which Dante's protagonist and his guide Vergil encounter her in the *Inferno* and pause to narrate her life story at some length—and in the process, substantially reinterpret her character. Though Manto's status as an influential practitioner of pagan religion generally works to her credit in Greek and Roman culture, through the Christian lens of Dante's *Inferno,* it earns her damnation in the fourth bolgia among the soothsayers and fortune-tellers. The character that classical authors built up as pious and community-oriented is re-interpreted by Dante as dangerous and sinful. Overall, Manto's character in the *Inferno* has been drastically rewritten from her conventional identity in classical literature, and ultimately she

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resembles the Circe of the *Aeneid* more than the Manto of any classical work.[1]

One can begin by examining the character established for Manto in classical literature with which Dante may have been familiar. While it is unlikely that Dante read every work of classical literature that was available in his time, the influence of some classical works can be plainly seen in Dante's writing. First of all, it is clear that Dante was familiar with Manto from Statius' *Thebaid*, an epic story of an attack on the city of Thebes, in which Manto has a notable role. While Dante seldom references the *Thebaid* in his works, his admiration for Statius as a poet is evident when his protagonist meets Statius in Purgatory and journeys with him to Paradise.[2] Dante's *Purgatorio* claims that Statius, who lived in the first century CE, was secretly a Christian who hid his beliefs to escape persecution (a claim probably of Dante's own invention[3]). The fact that Dante's Statius is depicted as a Christian and allowed to progress to Paradise represents an extraordinary honour for Statius, and illustrates Dante's reverence for him and his works.[4]

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[1] References to Manto in Latin literature that may have influenced Dante are addressed in the text below. In ancient Greek literature, Manto is mentioned in the following *loci*: pseudo-Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 3.7.4, 3.7.7 and *Epitome* 6.3-4; Pausanias 7.3.1–2, 9.10.3, and 9.33.2; Strabo 9.5.22, 14.1.27 and 14.5.16; Euripides, *Phoenissae* 834–40; Hesiod *Melampodia* 1; *Epigoni* 3; Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 7.51; schol. Apollonius Rhodius 1.308; and Diodorus Siculus 4.66.5-6 (here Manto is called Daphne, but the story of a daughter of Tiresias captured in the sack of Thebes and sold to Apollo's temple at Delphi corresponds to the stories of Manto in Pausanias and pseudo-Apollodorus).

Most of these Greek passages represent her as the daughter of Tiresias and a prominent priestess and community member in Thebes during the saga of the Seven Against Thebes/Epigoni. Several of the passages discuss her role in founding a Greek colony (in Asia minor rather than northern Italy). While the Greek texts that discuss Manto may have influenced her characterization in the Latin texts discussed below, they are unlikely to have influenced Dante directly.

In classical literature Manto is often depicted as an adjunct to Tiresias, or is mentioned as the mother of foundation figures Mopsus or Ocnus; since she is construed in relation to her male relatives, little scholarly attention is given to Manto *per se*. The article 'Manto' in Brill's New Pauly gives an overview of her appearances in classical literature. On Manto as a character in individual works of classical literature, see Alison Keith, 'Ovidian Personae in Statius's *Thebaid*', *Arethusa* 35 (2002): 381–402, and T. G. Rosenmeyer, 'Seneca's *Oedipus* and Performance: The Manto Scene', In Ruth Scodel (ed.), *Theater and Society in the Classical World* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1996), 235-44. The 'Manto scene' in Seneca's Oedipus has attracted a certain amount of attention in scholarship, although this is focused on the difficulties of staging rather than the character of Manto; see Eric Dodson-Robinson, 'Performing the "Unperformable" Extispicy Scene in Seneca's *Oedipus Rex*', *Didaskalia* 8.27 (2011). On Manto as foundation figure of Mantua and her reception as such in later Mantua, see Wolfgang Liebenwein, '*Princeps Poetarum*. Die mittelalterlichen Vergil-Bilder in Mantua', in Viktor Pöschl (ed.), *2000 Jahre Vergil: Ein Symposion* (Wiesbaden, 1993), 109–52; on Dante's reception of the classical Manto, see Teodolinda Barolini, 'Canto XX: True and False See-ers', in Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn and Charles Ross (eds), *Lectura Dantis: Inferno* (Berkeley, CA, 1998), 275–86 and Robert Hollander, 'Dante's Misreadings of the *Aeneid* in *Inferno* 20', in Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey T. Schnapp (eds), *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's 'Commedia'* (Stanford, CA, 1991), 77–93. Cf. also the bibliography in Padoan's entry 'Manto' in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, ed. Umberto Bosco, 2nd rev. edn, 6 vols (Rome, 1984), in which he sketches the character of Manto in classical literature as context for her depiction in the *Commedia*.

Within these revered works, namely the *Thebaid*, Manto is prominent among the defenders of Thebes. She is primarily depicted as a helpful and competent aid to her father Tiresias in rituals in service of the city.[5] Furthermore, she is presented as someone who deserves respect and protection: when one of the city's attackers attempts to rape her, she is saved by the divine intervention of Apollo, and her attacker is killed by the same god.[6] The *Thebaid* also presents her as someone whose advice is valuable and worthwhile: the goddess Virtus disguises herself as Manto to advise one of the defenders in how to save the city, implying that the defenders typically accepted Manto's counsel and took it seriously.[7] In the *Thebaid*, though the story is gruesome, and Manto's role (particularly during the necromancy ritual in book 4) is often grim, Manto appears as a reliable, positive force for Thebes.[8]

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[2] For Dante's references to and depiction of Statius, and relevant bibliography, see Paratore's entry 'Stazio, Publio Papinio' in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca.*

[3] For an overview of critical discussion on why Dante represented Statius as a Christian, see Christopher Kleinhenz, 'Virgil and Statius Discourse', in Mandelbaum, Oldcorn and Ross, *Lectura Dantis: Purgatorio*, 236–51 (pp. 244–45); the same article provides a thorough bibliography on the history of the question (pp. 250–51). Paratore has a similar bibliography of the discussion, including more detail on Dante's possible sources. See also Charles S. Singleton (trans. and ed.), *The Divine Comedy*, 3 vols in 6 (Princeton, NJ, 1970–1975), *ad Purg.* 21.67.

[4] The other classical Roman that Dante's protagonist encounters outside of Hell is Cato Uticensis, who appears at the entrance to Purgatory (*Purg.* 1.31–108). Although Cato seems to be stationed at the base of the mountain and unable to progress to Paradise, Singleton states that 'Virgil's words leave no doubt about the ultimate salvation of Cato … Apparently he is appointed to serve as custodian of Purgatory until Judgment Day, after which there will no longer be a Purgatory. At that time apparently he will be admitted to Heaven as one of the blessed' *(ad Purg.* 1.75). Nevertheless, Fubini's entry 'Catone l'Uticense' in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* is less confident about Cato's fate; it summarizes a number of critical interpretations of Cato's role in the *Commedia*, especially regarding the question of to what extent he represents the historical person, and to what extent he is a personification of abstract ideals.

[5] *Theb.* 4.463–585, 10.597–603, 724–25.

[6] *Theb.* 7.758–59.

Dante also must have known Manto from Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* In this poem she is mentioned only briefly, when she leads the women of Thebes in a religious rite.[9] The event occurs between two celebrated narratives of divine punishment, the transformation of Arachne and the slaughter of Niobe's children, so Manto's role in protecting the city from divine wrath is stressed; it is noteworthy also that here she is shown acting independently of her father. Insofar as Dante was a great reader of Ovid and frequently refers to the *Metamorphoses* in the *Commedia*,[10] it is reasonable to look for Ovidian influence in Dante's Manto, although the paucity of references to Manto in Ovidian works leaves little scope for this.

There is the further possibility, though unlikely, that Dante knew Manto from Seneca's plays. In the *Oedipus*, Manto appears in a role similar to that which she plays in the *Thebaid*, aiding her blind father in a sacrifice and describing events for him to interpret.[11] She also appears in the capacity of a priestess in Seneca's *Agamemnon,* instructing the Thebans in the worship of Apollo.[12] Although Dante was familiar with Seneca's writing to some degree, it is questionable whether he had read Seneca's dramas; in Dante's time, Seneca's plays were not very well known or widely circulated, and he was chiefly known as a moralist.[13] For this reason, Seneca's Manto is unlikely to have significantly influenced Dante's Manto.

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[7] *Theb.* 10.628–85.

[8] Given the violent and grisly nature of the *Thebaid*, it may be debatable whether any character is depicted in a truly positive light. The question is particularly pertinent to Manto in the necromancy scene, necromancy being a practice more associated with disreputable witches than legitimate priests of the state. Even so, Manto here exemplifies devotion to her homeland and family by performing necromancy on behalf of the state, and aiding her father in doing so. Moreover, she engages the literary tradition by evoking *Odyssey* 11, in which Odysseus summons and interviews the dead.

[9] *Met*. 6.157.

[10] For Ovid's influence on Dante, see Paratore's entry 'Ovidio Nasone, Publio' in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca.* Although Ovid as a character in the *Commedia* is primarily presented in light of his amatory poetry, Dante was familiar with the *Metamorphoses* as well. Cf. Edward Moore, *Studies in Dante: Scripture and Classical Authors in Dante* (Oxford, 1896): 'For mythology indeed Ovid is [Dante's] main authority' (p. 206).

[11] *Oed.* 288–383.

A final Latin source is Pomponius Mela, who briefly mentions Manto as the daughter of Tiresias and mother of Mopsus, identified as the founder of Colophon in Asia Minor.[14] Although Mela (like the Greek authors mentioned in note 1) places her city in Asia Minor rather than Italy, he associates her with a foundational role in this community. She is not only the mother of the founder Mopsus, but is also herself the founder of a shrine to Apollo. Mela's work remained in circulation throughout the Middle Ages in Europe, and may have been known to Dante; certainly it was used by Petrarch and Boccaccio.[15]

Throughout these classical works, Manto is generally depicted as helpful, upstanding, and community-oriented, performing rituals for the benefit of the Theban populace and aiding her father when he does the same. Still, just as Vergil is the most influential classical author in Dante and his work, Vergil's Manto is the most influential of all the Mantos in classical literature on Dante's character of the same name. Although Vergil only mentions Manto once, and briefly, in that one brief reference she is presented in the role that will be crucial to her reception in Dante's *Inferno*: as a founding figure for Vergil's home of Mantua.[16] This role in the foundation of Mantua is not ascribed to her in Greek or Roman sources prior to Vergil,[17] but it is the primary role in which she appears in Vergil's *Aeneid;* it resurfaces much later in post-classical academic works of Servius and Isidore.[18] When Manto is described in the *Inferno*, she is cast primarily as the eponymous founding figure of Mantua,[19] and Dante's character Vergil devotes a lengthy excursus—48 lines of a 130-line canto—to how, exactly, she figured in the city's foundation, and how the *Inferno* narrative must take precedence over previous narratives. In this episode, Dante as author refers to Vergil's work while simultaneously rebuking and correcting it.[20]

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[12] *Ag.* 322-5.

[13] For a synopsis of Seneca's reception in late medieval/early renaissance Europe, see Roland Mayer, 'Seneca Redivivus: Seneca in the Medieval and Renaissance World', in Shadi Bartsch and Alessandro Schiesaro (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Seneca* (Cambridge, 2015), 277–87 (pp. 278–79). Seneca appears in the *Inferno*, although in a much smaller role than Statius or Vergil: there is a brief reference to *Seneca morale* as one of the inhabitants of Limbo (*Inf.* 4.141). In the late middle ages Seneca was also sometimes purported to be a secret Christian, as Dante depicts Statius (Mayer, 'Seneca Redivivus', 282–83), although Dante's placement of Seneca in Limbo suggests that he was either unaware of this speculation or unconvinced by it. Cf. the spurious correspondence between Paul and Seneca, in which Seneca expresses sympathy for Christians. This correspondence was widely thought to be genuine throughout the middle ages, even cited by Jerome in *de Viris Illustribus* 12; it may well have influenced Dante's depiction of Seneca as not Christian, but not deserving of punishment in Hell.

[14] *Chorographia* 1.88. Her depiction here mostly corresponds to her depiction in Pausanias (see note 1).

[15] Frank E. Romer (introd.), *Pomponius Mela's Description of the World* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1998), pp. 27–29.

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[16] *Aen*. 10.198-203. Although the authenticity of 'Vergil's epitaph' ('*Mantua me genuit* …') is doubtful, Vergil was certainly believed to have come from Mantua by Romans as far back as Ovid (see, for instance, Ovid *Amores* 3.15.7, Statius *Silvae* 4.2.9, Martial 1.61.2). This point is disputed by Donatus *VSD* 2 and Jerome *VT* 199. Vergil himself in *Georgics* 3.12 speaks of the opulent 'Temple of Poetry' he intends to build for Octavian in Mantua, which he defines as *patriam*, 'the fatherland' (3.10).

[17] The most famous Manto from legend was the daughter of Tiresias, a Theban by birth. Servius and Isidore clearly state that the daughter of Tiresias was also the founder of Mantua. I am in agreement with S. J. Harrison's conclusion, in his edition of *Vergil: Aeneid 10* (Oxford, 1991), p. 123, that Vergil's Manto must be the daughter of Tiresias. I also agree with Padoan's conclusion (*Enciclopedia Dantesca*, *sub* 'Manto') that Dante's Manto, the origin of Mantua who is attacked in *Inf*. 20, must be the Theban daughter of Tiresias.

Even so, the possibility that there were once two distinct characters named Manto (the other being a daughter of Hercules), who were sometimes conflated into a single character, is mentioned in Servius; see Georgius Thilo and Hermannus Hagen (eds), *Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentarii*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1881–1902), *ad Aen.* 10.198. Moore, *Studies in Dante*, 174, endorses the idea that there were originally two Mantos who were conflated. If there was a second Manto in classical myth, her mythology is practically nonexistent, and there is no reason to assume that Dante was thinking of her rather than Tiresias' daughter when he wrote about the false prophets in the fourth bolgia. Dante's familiarity with Servius is studied by Edward Kennard Rand, 'Dante and Servius', *Annual Reports of the Dante Society* 33 (1914): 1–11.

[18] Isidore provides a straightforward précis of Manto's life at Etymologiae 15.1.59: *Manto Tiresiae filia post interitum Thebanorum dicitur delata in Italiam Mantuam condidisse: est autem in Venetia, quae Gallia Cisalpina dicitur: et dicta Mantua quod manes tuetur*. It is unclear whether Dante was familiar with this passage of Isidore. As a final Latin source, Hyginus' Fabulae 128 includes Manto's name in a list of seers with no further information about her provided.

[19] In my examination of Dante's correction of Vergil on Manto's life, I will leave aside the other well-known problem surrounding Dante's Manto, that is the seeming conflict between her placement in the fourth bolgia and the mention of '*la figlia di Tiresia*'(Manto again?) in Limbo at Purg. 22.113. For a summary of the critical discussion and bibliography, see Kleinhenz, 'Virgil and Statius Discourse',

The excursus on the founding of Mantua is related by Dante's character Vergil, who has a personal interest in the story. Because he claims Mantua as his birthplace, his reputation is bound up with that of the city and its founding figure. Even so, while he is quick to assert his association with the city, he attempts to distance himself (and the city) from its eponym. He emphasizes Manto's lack of involvement in the founding of Mantua: having been adopted from Vergil's *Aeneid*, Manto is excised from her own story. Moreover, she is distanced even further because this story is narrated not by Manto, the person who experienced it firsthand—as is typical of the sinners in Dante's Hell—but through the filter of Dante's character Vergil. When Dante's Vergil denies Manto the opportunity to relate the events herself, he takes the opportunity to alter and greatly expand the account of Mantua's founding from the account in *Aeneid* 10. This story of Mantua overshadows through effusive detail and attention every other story in the canto. Moreover, the two interlocutors self-consciously frame the story: Dante's character Vergil begs permission to elaborate, and Dante the protagonist avers its truthful and convincing nature.

Before delving into the central issue of this paper, one must establish what authority Dante's character Vergil carries in the Dantean afterlife, and how this authority is used, because Dante's (the poet's) presentation of Vergil, and of the writings of Vergil, is fairly complex.[21] To judge superficially by the poem's dialogue, Dante the

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246–47, 251. Padoan provides a more abbreviated summary of the same subject; cf. C. H. Grandgent, *Companion to the Divine Comedy*, ed. Chares S. Singleton (Cambridge, MA, 1975), p. 78.

[20] Manto also appears in several post-Dantean Renaissance works, including Boccaccio's *de Mulieribus Claris*, Leonardo Bruni's *de Origine Mantuae*, Bonamente Aliprandi's *Aliprandina, o Cronica di Mantua*, Angelo Poliziano's *Sylva, cui Titulus Manto*, and Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*.

[21] Guy P. Raffa, 'Dante's Beloved Yet Damned Virgil', in Mark Musa (ed.), *Dante's Inferno: The Indiana Critical Edition* (Bloomington, IND, 1995), 266–85, Christopher Kleinhenz, 'Virgil in Dante's *Divine Comedy*', in Paul Franssen and Ton Hoenselaars (eds), *The Author as Character: Representing Historical Writers in Western Literature*

character is wholly devoted to Vergil and venerates his authority as unassailable, from their first meeting. Dante the protagonist greets the character Vergil as '*degli altri poeti onore e lume*',[22] and throughout the *Inferno* turns to him for guidance, his questions loaded with effusive honorifics. However, narrative complications undermine this simple reading. As the *Commedia* goes on, the narrator's references to the *Aeneid* give way to references to scripture, and Vergil's role as guide is eclipsed by the influence of Statius and Beatrice.[23] Robert Hollander sees a certain playful didacticism in the way that Dante the poet corrects the *maestro* whom the protagonist addresses with such great esteem.[24] The authorial corrections that overwrite the works of Vergil create an evolving vision of Vergil as the pair progresses from Hell to Paradise.

Therefore, it should be clear from the start that, as represented by Dante the poet, Vergil's knowledge is not perfect. As a non-Christian, Dante's Vergil is shut out of Paradise and denied understanding of the divine. Though Vergil carries authority as an enlightened poet, whose fourth *Eclogue* is read in the *Commedia* as a revelation of the birth of Christ,[25] he does not have access to the full measure of truth as embodied, in Dante's world, by the Christian God.[26] His lack of enlightenment connects him to others in Hell, and his role as a potential source of misinformation connects him particularly to the diviners in the fourth bolgia, including Manto. As depicted by Dante, Manto is someone who spent her life deceiving others and peddling

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(Madison, WI, 1999), 52–67, and Robert Hollander, *Il Virgilio Dantesco: Tragedia nella 'Commedia'* (Florence, 1983), delve into the complexity of Dante's presentation of Vergil.

[22] 'Honour and light of the other poets' (*Inf.* 1.82).

[23] Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the 'Comedy'* (Princeton, NJ, 1984), pp. 201–02.

[24] Hollander, 'Dante's Misreadings of the *Aeneid* in *Inferno* 20'.

[25] See Kleinhenz, 'Virgil and Statius Discourse', 240–43, Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1927), p. 106. Dante's Statius at *Purg.* 22.64–72 invokes this interpretation.

[26] Kevin Brownlee, 'Dante and the Classical Poets', in Rachel Jacoff (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2007), 141–60 (p. 142), notes the 'profound (and ultimately unresolvable) ambivalence on the part of Dante-author towards his four classical model authors'.

fictions, and Dante's Vergil must exert himself to avoid being tarred by the same brush.[27] Because of the inherent limitations of Dante's Vergil in a Christian afterlife, Vergil's authority perceptibly declines as he guides Dante closer to Paradise.

Authorial correction in Dante—particularly of Vergil—is a phenomenon that has been extensively studied, and Manto's story has attracted attention particularly from Hollander.[28] The central issue of the correction is as follows: in the *Aeneid,* the narrator briefly mentions the founding of Mantua in the muster of the Italian forces:

> *Ille etiam patriis agmen ciet Ocnus ab oris,*
> *fatidicae Mantus et Tusci filius amnis,*
> *qui muros matrisque dedit tibi, Mantua, nomen,*
> *Mantua dives avis, sed non genus omnibus unum:*
> *gens illi triplex, populi sub gente quaterni,*
> *ipsa caput populis, Tusco de sanguine vires.*
> (*Aen*. 10.198–203)
>
> And Ocnus drives his band from his homeland shores, Ocnus the son of the seeress Manto and the Etruscan river, who gave to you, Mantua, your walls and the name of his mother, Mantua, rich from its ancestors, but not all of one origin: its people are threefold, under each people is a fourfold population. The city itself has its rulers from the people, and draws its strength from its Tuscan blood.[29]

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[27] Dante's condemnation of fortune-telling was unusual among Christians in the medieval period; Dante's stance against fortune-telling was supported by Thomas Aquinas; likewise, Augustine in the *Confessions* (4.3.4–7, 6.8–10) discusses his initial acceptance, and later rejection, of astrology. Cf. John D. Sinclair (trans.), *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri* (London, 1939), p. 257. Even so, Anna Maria Leonardi (ed.), *La Divina Commedia*, 3 vols in 4 (Milan, 1991), I, 594, stresses the fact that fortune-telling was common and respected in Dante's milieu, and many saw no conflict between fortune-telling and Christianity; consequently, she emphasizes the historical importance of Dante's rejection of fortune-telling. Barolini, 'Canto XX: True and False See-ers', 276, also notes the image in antiquity of diviners as 'tellers of truth' and marks the importance of Dante's reversal of their reputation in ancient literature.

[28] See particularly Hollander, 'Dante's Misreadings of the *Aeneid* in *Inferno* 20', Hollander, *Il Virgilio Dantesco*, and Teodolinda Barolini, '*Inferno* 20: Determinism and Astrology Manqué', *Commento Baroliniano, Digital Dante* (New York, 2018), *ad Inf.* 20, paragraph 35.

[29] Quotations from R. A. B. Mynors (ed.), *P. Vergili Maronis Opera* (Oxford, 1969). Spelling has been regularized to include j and v. Translations are my own.

In this quotation, Manto is carefully embedded in the founding of Mantua; her significance as the mother of the city's founder is explicit, while her service to the city (as *fatidica*) is implied.[30] Nevertheless, this connection between Manto and Mantua is unequivocally severed in Dante's treatment. In his lengthy description of the founding of Mantua, Dante admits that the Theban Manto settled in Mantua and gave her name to the city, but emphasizes the fact that she was shunned by the other inhabitants of the area, and, by excising her son from the story, denies any further connection between the woman and the city:

> *Quindi passando la vergine cruda*
> *vide terra, nel mezzo del pantano,*
> *sanza coltura e d'abitanti nuda.*
> *Lì, per fuggire ogne consorzio umano,*
> *ristette coi suoi servi a far sue arti,*
> *e visse, e vi lasciò suo corpo vano.*
> *Li uomini poi che 'ntorno erano sparti*
> *s'accolsero a quel loco …*
> *Fer la città sovra quell'ossa morte;*
> *e per colei che 'l loco prima elesse,*
> *Mantua l'appellar sanz' altra sorte.*
> (*Inf.* 20.82–93)

> So the savage virgin [Manto], passing through, saw this uncultivated and uninhabited land in the middle of the swamp. There, to escape all human contact, she settled with her servants to practise her arts, and lived there, and there left behind her useless body. Afterwards the people who before were spread out gathered at that place … they built the city over those dead bones, and they named the city Mantua after the woman who first selected that site, without further augury.[31]

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[30] For instances of *fatidicus/a* used in Latin works to identify a prophetic figure who divines the future as a service to a community, see, Vergil *Aeneid* 8.340 (the prophetess Carmentis foretells the future greatness of Aeneas' descendants), Ovid *Metamorphoses* 3.348 (a nameless seer warns of Narcissus' tragic future) and 1.321 (the goddess Themis, in her role as oracle, tells Deucalion and Pyrrha how to rebuild their community after a disastrous flood).

[31] *Inf.* 20.87–89, 91–93. Quotations from the *Divina Commedia* come from Leonardi's edition. Translations are my own.

When Dante, through the character Vergil, describes Manto, Manto is no longer tied to Mantua by either blood or service. After Dante has his character Vergil correct the story from the *Aeneid*, his two characters append a self-conscious affirmation of the corrected story's veracity:

> [Vergil]: '… *Pero t'assenno che se tu mai odi*
> *originar la mia terra altrimenti,*
> *la verità nulla menzogna frodi.'*
> *Ed io: 'Maestro, i tuoi ragionamenti*
> *mi son sì certi e prendon sì mia fede*
> *che li altri mi sarien carboni spenti.'*
> (*Inf.* 20.97–102)
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> 'But I adjure you [Vergil says to Dante] that if ever you hear that my homeland arose otherwise, let no falsehood deceive you from the truth.' And I [Dante] said, 'Master, your words are so certain to me and so have my faith that other explanations to me would be like dead ashes.'

In this case, the *altri ragionamenti* to which Dante refers must be Vergil's version.[32] This fact is underscored, as Guy Raffa points out, when later in Canto 20 the character Vergil calls attention to how well Dante knows Vergil's work.[33]

Dante's correction of Vergil is grounded in the legendary origins of Vergil's home and its influence on his reputation. Domenico Comparetti has extensively documented Vergil's reputation in the middle ages, both in the ecclesiastical/scholastic world that revered his status as poet, and in the popular tradition where various feats of sorcery were attributed to him.[34] The associations of Mantua with

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[32] As Barolini, 'Canto XX: True and False See-ers', 277, asks, 'In what source could Dante find the story of *mia terra* told *altrimenti* if not in the *Aeneid*?'

[33] Raffa, 'Dante's Beloved Yet Damned Virgil', 277; *Inf.* 20.114.

[34] Domenico Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, trans. E. F. M.Benecke, 2nd edn (London, 1908); see pp. 239–302 for magical phenomena attributed to Vergil in medieval legend, and pp. 195–231 on Dante's treatment of Vergil, which Comparetti sees as the cumulation of an ecclesiastical/scholastic tradition. Comparetti also states that Dante conscientiously keeps his Vergil aloof from the popular legends that make Vergil a practitioner of black magic (pp. 217–19).

Manto and the powers of Manto as a prophetess were contributing factors to Vergil's reputation as a *vates*, that is, a poet with mystic and prophetic associations.[35] While Dante makes Manto a virgin who died without offspring or community, the Manto of the *Aeneid* has a son, and to this end Hollander suggests a probable motive behind Vergil's narrative (and Dante's correction): 'If Manto had progeny, as she did according to Virgil, then her mantic ability might have been passed on to others—the claim that Virgil was evidently himself bent upon making in his poem, only to be forced to recant it here in Dante's.'[36] Even Dante makes use of Vergil's mantic reputation by making him into his guide, the initiator to the afterlife who, having written about Aeneas' journey through the Underworld, can lead the pilgrim safely through Hell.

While Dante the poet certainly leans on Vergil's mantic reputation, this reputation was nevertheless inconvenient for him, since he condemned magic, fortunetelling and witchcraft, and could not take for his guide to Paradise a pagan mystic and magician who implied an association between himself and the sorceress Manto.[37] In Dante's narrative, Vergil is worthy of credence only after his words have been transmuted by the poet Dante via knowledge of Christianity. If Vergil were to be a model for Dante to follow, worthy of eternity in Limbo and excluded from the torments of the fourth bolgia, it was necessary for Dante the poet to have his character Vergil repudiate his own characterization of Manto from the *Aeneid*, and thus amend his own inconvenient reputation.

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[35] The suggestion of mystic knowledge is strengthened by the fact that Manto's name itself (and, since she is the eponym of the city, Mantua's name as well) is derived from the Greek word μάντις, meaning 'seer'. Harrison, *Vergil: Aeneid 10*, 123, notes that Vergil's phrase '*fatidicae Mantus*' in *Aen.* 10.199 makes the connection between Manto and μάντις explicit. See also Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, 107: 'It is precisely in the twelfth century that we first hear of [Vergil] as a magician in the stories of his miraculous tomb and other wondrous works at Naples which are widely diffused throughout Europe in the succeeding period. The fame of the mediaeval Virgil, poet, prophet, magician, master of the black art, Dante's model and guide through the realm of shades, would fill many books.' The existence of the *sortes Virgilianae* as a practice attests the fact that the works of Vergil during the medieval period were well-known, commonly accessible, and loaded with supernatural mystique. For more on the *nachleben* of Vergil in medieval Mantua, see Liebenwein, '*Princeps Poetarum*'.

[36] Robert Hollander (ed.), *Inferno*, trans. Robert and Jean Hollander (New York, 2000), p. 344.

[37] As Barolini, 'Canto XX: True and False See-ers', 279, 285, notes, though Dante describes Vergil as a *vates* in *De Monarchia*, in the *Commedia* he scales back to the more neutral term *poeta*. Dante himself incurred a similar danger by presenting his own vision of the afterlife and making himself a source of information that would not be available to humans.

While it is well-established that Dante the poet is correcting Vergil's account of how Mantua was founded, what is more striking is how Dante corrects Vergil's description of Manto herself. In the *Aeneid*, Manto is clearly a part of her community; she is the mother of the city's founder and apparently influential enough for the city to be named after her. In other classical texts, Manto generally works for the benefit of her community, seeking the favour of the gods and contributing to city-building efforts. Dante has completely overwritten her socially engaged personality to make her an ominous misanthrope. In this way she recalls a passage at the beginning of *Aeneid* 7, which describes the home of Circe:[38]

> *at pius exsequiis Aeneas rite solutis,*
> *aggere composito tumuli, postquam alta quierunt*
> *aequora, tendit iter velis portumque relinquit.*
> *aspirant aurae in noctem nec candida cursus*
> *luna negat, splendet tremulo sub lumine pontus.*
> *proxima Circaeae raduntur litora terrae,*
> *dives inaccessos ubi Solis filia lucos*
> *adsiduo resonat cantu, tectisque superbis*
> *urit odoratam nocturna in lumina cedrum*
> *arguto tenuis percurrens pectine telas.*
> *hinc exaudiri gemitus iraeque leonum*
> *vincla recusantum et sera sub nocte rudentum,*
> *saetigerique sues atque in praesepibus ursi*
> *saevire ac formae magnorum ululare luporum,*

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[38] Circe as a character in classical literature (and archetypal witch) has attracted much critical attention; see Judith Yarnall, *The Transformation of Circe: History of an Enchantress* (Urbana, IL, 1994), Charles Segal, 'Circean Temptations: Homer, Vergil, Ovid', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 99 (1968): 419–442, Bernhard Paetz, *Kirke und Odysseus: Überlieferung und Deutung von Homer bis Calderon* (Berlin, 1970), G. Beck, 'Beobachtungen zur Kirkeepisode in der *Odyssee*', *Philologus* 109 (1965): 1–29, and G. Karsai, 'La Magie dans *l'Odyssée*: Circe', in A. Moreau and J.-C. Turpin (eds), *La Magie*, 2 vols (Montpellier, 2000) II, 185–98.

. *quos hominum ex facie dea saeva potentibus herbis*
induerat Circe in vultus ac terga ferarum.
quae ne monstra pii paterentur talia Troes
delati in portus neu litora dira subirent,
Neptunus ventis implevit vela secundis,
atque fugam dedit et praeter vada fervida vexit.
(*Aen.* 7.5–24)

> But dutiful Aeneas—after the funeral [of Caieta] was completed according to custom, after the mound of the grave was heaped up, after the high seas calmed—directs his path with the sails and leaves behind the port. The winds blow throughout the night, and the shining moon reveals the course; the sea shines beneath the wavering light. The nearby shores of the Circean land are approached, the land where the rich daughter of the Sun [Circe] fills the inaccessible groves with her continuous incantation, and in her lofty house she burns scented cedar for nighttime light, weaving delicate webs with a lively shuttle. From this place are heard wails and roars of lions and bonds of complaining ropes in the dead of night. Grizzled hogs rage, as do bears in their pens, and the bodies of tremendous wolves howl, whom the cruel goddess Circe, using powerful drugs, changed out of human form into the shape and appearance of beasts. So lest the dutiful Trojans, having been brought into Circe's port, should suffer such monstrosities, and lest they should enter her terrible shores, Neptune fills the sails with favourable winds, and gives them an escape and ferries them beyond the dangerous shoals.

Throughout his Odyssean travels on the way to Italy, Aeneas visits many exotic locations. The places where he makes landfall are generally described in detail, though these locations may be less fantastic than those visited by Odysseus. What is surprising here is that the isle of Circe is so carefully described despite the fact that Aeneas *does not* land there. Since the *Aeneid* is for the most part filtered through Aeneas' perspective, it is unusual to find such a careful description of a place that he does not personally experience.[39] Vergil's Circe, like

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[39] In Aeneas' travels to Italy, the only other place that is mentioned despite the fact that the Trojans do not land there is Ithaca, which they assiduously avoid because of their aversion to Odysseus. In that case, however, Ithaca is not itself described, and the episode is passed over in a matter of two lines (*Aen.* 3.272–73). Vergil's Circe

Dante's Manto, is a character strongly associated with a particular location, which is described both in great detail and as a place to be avoided at all costs.

In fact, the description of Circe's island is only a small part of a summary of Italy's history at the beginning of *Aeneid* 7.[40] This type of digression has antecedents in the poetic tradition, notably in *Odyssey* 6, in which the narrator steps away from the story of Odysseus and delves into the history of Scheria, the Phaeacians, and Nausicaa's family.[41] Vergil's history of Italy is presented in the same vein. Though up until this point in the *Aeneid*, most of the action has either been viewed through Aeneas' eyes or narrated to Aeneas by other characters (excluding short episodes that take place in the realm of the gods), here the narrator stands back from his primary subject—the events of the journey of Aeneas—and examines the history of the location that will become so important to Aeneas and his descendants. The narrator describes several of the ancient kings of Latium, their position in society and religious function, and, notably, their relations with Circe. Likewise, in the Manto episode, Dante the poet steps back from his primary narrative—the journey from Hell to Paradise—and describes (by means of his mouthpiece Vergil) the history of a location that is entirely removed from his own life, but which has important implications in the extended history of his narrative.

Here an important consideration is Vergil's reception of Homer. Circe was famous from her role as a powerful figure in Homer's *Odyssey*. Throughout the *Aeneid*, there is a consistent absence of the figures that were most famous from the Homeric epics: Odysseus is mentioned occasionally by characters but never appears himself. Aeneas' avoidance of Circe's island, and Vergil's discussion of Circe in distant and oblique terms, effectively evokes the essence of Homeric

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encounter as a reference to the *Odyssey* has often been studied in the past: see Nicholas Horsfall, *Vergil, Aeneid 7: A Commentary* (Leiden, 2000) *ad loc.*, R. D. Williams (ed.), *Virgil: Aeneid VII–XII* (London, 1973), *ad loc.* Ronald Basto, 'The Grazing of Circe's Shore: a Note on "Aeneid 7.10"', *The Classical World* 76.1 (1982): 42–43, in particular notes that 'the literal grazing of Circe's shore by Aeneas and his men is an indication to the reader that, symbolically, the Odyssean half of the *Aeneid* has been finished and is now being bypassed' (p. 43).

[40] *Aen.* 7.45–106, 170–91.

[41] *Od.* 6.4–12.

epics while not directly retelling them. Circe is thus a hazard not only for the hero, but for the poet as well.[42]

Beyond Vergil's initial presentation of Circe as a geographical hazard, Circe also has further importance in *Aeneid* 7, and reappears in a variety of contexts, usually signalling the intrusion of some magical and dangerous element into the narrative. She figures in another tale of the early history of Latium, in which she turns the legendary Italian king Picus into a woodpecker in retaliation for rejecting her advances.[43] In this case, Circe has removed herself from her personal island and has come to the mainland to menace its inhabitants. She is an aggressor. Not only is she threatening as a romantically-forward, independent woman, but even worse, she is a witch wielding magic powers. She reappears still later in *Aeneid* 7, after the Trojan embassy has been favourably received by the current king Latinus and has exchanged gifts with him. The gift given to the Trojans is a set of divine horses that Circe bred by sneaking Latinus' mare into the stables of her father the Sun. The horses that are born as a result are supernaturally powerful and stand as a monument to Circe's meddlesome attentions to the royal house of Latinus.[44] In short, she is clever and deceptive, full of her own designs and equipped with the power to carry them out, everything that Roman men might fear in a woman. Likewise, Dante describes Manto in the *Inferno* as a solitary magician in the style of Circe, with vague but fearsome *arti* that intimidate others and cause them to avoid her.

Circe is not herself present in Aeneas' adventures, and never appears as a direct threat to Aeneas, although the fact that Odysseus and his men fell victim to her cannot be far from the reader's mind. She remains offstage, a menace in the shadows but not an active player in Aeneas' story. This recalls another unique aspect of Manto's story, which is that, unlike most of the sinners whose transgressions are narrated to Dante the protagonist throughout the *Inferno*, Manto does not tell her own story. On the contrary, she is seen from a distance while Dante's character Vergil gestures toward her and tells her story himself. Barolini has noted the character Vergil's unusual domination of the discourse in this canto,[45] where more usually the dialogue would consist of the protagonist's conversations with the sinners themselves. In this way, the most important aspect of both Circe in the *Aeneid* and Manto in the *Inferno* is their present absence, their appearance in and simultaneous removal from the narrative.

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[42] It is noteworthy that Aeneas is aware that he must assiduously avoid Circe's island, having been warned of the danger by the prophecy of Helenus at 3.386.

[43] *Aen.* 7.189–91. Although Circe is identified as a *conjunx*, that is a wife, of Picus, the text seems to indicate that Picus spurned Circe entirely. Servius explains this by saying '*conjunx vero non quae erat sed quae esse cupiebat*'. Horsfall *ad loc.* identifies the usage of *conjunx* as proleptic, whereas Williams *ad loc.* offers 'would-be bride' as translation. This tale seems to be taken by Vergil from an Italian etiological legend, to which Circe perhaps was added from Greek myth as a stock witch. This legend does not cohere precisely with the other stories of Picus that Vergil has presented in his history of Italy, and creates a dissonance left to be resolved by the reader.

[44] *Aen.* 7.274–83.

Nor is the structure of these two passages to be overlooked. The *Inferno's* Canto 20 begins with a new proem, as if Dante were embarking upon a new segment of the *Inferno* at this point in the narrative:

> *Di nova pena mi conven far versi*
> *e dar matera al ventesimo canto*
> *della prima canzon, ch'è de' sommersi.*
> (*Inf.* 20.1–3)

> It falls to me to write verses about new punishments, and to give material to the twentieth canto of my first canticle, which is of those in Hell.

He speaks self-consciously about the '*nova pena*' that he must describe, despite the fact that he is not entering even a new circle of Hell, only a new bolgia of Malebolge (no other bolgia is introduced with such circumstance). One may compare the new proem of the *Aeneid* 6, when Vergil asks for divine permission before recounting the extraordinary and dire things in the Underworld:

> *Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbraeque silentes*
> *et Chaos et Phlegethon, loca nocte tacentia late,*
> *sit mihi fas audita loqui, sit numine vestro*
> *pandere res alta terra et caligine mersas.*
> (*Aen.* 6.264–67)

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[45] Barolini, 'Canto XX: True and False See-ers', 275.

> O gods who hold power over the spirits, and silent shades, and Chaos and Phlegethon, the places silent across their span at night, let it be permitted for me to say the things I have heard, and to reveal with your power the things buried underground and beneath deep darkness.[46]

Vergil is inclined to approach delicate subjects that have such great potential for divine offence with due caution. The opening lines of *Aeneid* 7 also signal a new beginning, inasmuch as they mark the beginning of the "Iliadic" half of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas' arrival in Italy, and his conflict with the Italians, particularly Turnus. Many new characters here are introduced for the first time, and much is made of Aeneas' first landing in his new home. *Aeneid* 7 also has its own proem in which the author declares his renewed commitment to and zeal for his material:

> *nunc age, qui reges, Erato, quae tempora rerum,*
> *quis Latio antiquo fuerit status, advena classem*
> *cum primum Ausoniis exercitus appulit oris,*
> *expediam, et primae revocabo exordia pugnae.*
> *tu vatem, tu, diva, mone. dicam horrida bella,*
> *dicam acies actosque animis in funera reges,*
> *Tyrrhenamque manum totamque sub arma coactam*
> *Hesperiam. major rerum mihi nascitur ordo,*
> *majus opus moveo.*
> (*Aen.* 7.37–44)

> Now to work, Erato; I will describe which kings, which events, what civilization was in ancient Latium, when for the first time the traveller drove his fleet to the Ausonian shores, and I will recall the events of the first combat. You, goddess, advise your vates. I will describe horrible wars, I will tell of the battle lines and the valiant kings driven to death and the Tyrrhenian force, and I will tell how all Hesperia was driven to arms. Now a new order of events is arising for me; I undertake a greater work.

These proems have a refreshing effect after extensive attention has been given to other matters and establish the idea that with this episode the author begins something altogether different from what has gone before. While Dante's proem in *Inferno* 20 is quieter and less specific than Vergil's in *Aeneid* 7, the sense of newness and commencement is just as strong. The new proem also self-consciously calls attention to the narrator's voice by use of the first person, which is used by the *Aeneid's* narrator very rarely. In fact, these episodes are both highly self-conscious. The *Aeneid* 7 proem contains in quick succession four of the rare first-person statements of the narrator. Dante's twentieth canto contains, in addition to the proem, the self-conscious remarks of Dante's character Vergil in which he begs the protagonist for some time to relate his excursus on Mantua, as well as his insistence on its veracity. One great difference, however, between these two proems is that, while Dante's appears just as the protagonist and Vergil are entering the fourth bolgia, and thus embraces Manto among the *nova pena*, Vergil's proem appears when Aeneas' fleet has already passed the threat of Circe's island and thus excludes Circe from the new material requiring Erato's help. Even so, the close correspondence between these passages (combined with the later references to Circe) strongly connects the portrayal of Dante's Manto with Vergil's Circe.

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[46] For the connection between *mersas* and *sommersi*, see Marino Barchiesi, 'Il Testo e il Tempo', *Il Verri*, ser. V, no. 4 (1973): 76–95 (p. 85).

In the *Inferno*, Circe is just as absent as she is in the *Aeneid*, though her absence is not so dramatically spotlighted.[47] The only mention of her is at 26.91, where Odysseus, narrating the adventures that brought him to Hell, makes a brief reference to his departure from Circe (*'Quando mi diparti' da Circe, che sottrasse me più d'un anno là presso a Gaeta …*'[48]). As in the *Aeneid,* Circe is only described as a hazard, and the characters in question define her in terms of their desire to avoid or escape from her. Once again, her absence is striking. Additionally, although in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* Circe is a goddess, in the *Inferno* her nature is unspecified, which raises questions about her place in Dante's universe.[49] In effect, Dante's Circe is presented as a more shadowy and mysterious character than the Circe of the *Aeneid*, which reconnects with the oblique presence, and studied absence, of Vergil's Circe and Dante's Manto.

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[47] Antonio Martina's entry 'Circe' in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca* outlines the literary history of Circe, particularly in the context of renaissance Italy. Martina calls attention to the fact that Dante was unfamiliar with Homer's *Odyssey*, the *locus classicus* for information on Circe, in which she is an influential character who is extensively described.

[48] *Inf.* 26.90–92.

[49] Assuming that Dante does not intend her to be understood as a goddess, as Homer describes her, he may intend her to be an ordinary woman, or a demon, or a woman with some magical ability, or something else.

Manto and Circe are further linked in Dante's work insofar as his brief reference to Circe introduces another locus of authorial correction, concerning Odysseus' adventures and return home. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is able to turn back from the edge of the world when he leaves Circe's island and, after some further perils and difficulties, returns to Ithaca to avenge his honour and reclaim his place in Greek society. In the *Inferno*, on the other hand, Odysseus' taste for adventure is too great, and he decides, upon setting out from Circe's island, that he would rather explore the far side of the world than return home. This curiosity proves to be his downfall, however, resulting in his transportation to Hell at sight of the Mountain of Purgatory. Although Dante almost certainly had no direct knowledge of the *Odyssey*—ancient Greek literature was scarce in Italy during Dante's lifetime—the plot of the *Odyssey* as Odysseus' homecoming could have been known in thirteenth-century Italy because it is reported in Hyginus' *Fabulae*.[50] Alternatively, if Dante had no familiarity, direct or indirect, with Hyginus' works, Odysseus' adventures after the Trojan War are described in scattered episodes in the works of Vergil and Ovid.[51] Dante's divergence from the established story turns a long-delayed but ultimately successful homecoming into a morality tale about the dangers of excessive curiosity. In the case of Odysseus, as in that of Manto, Dante adopts a character from classical literature who is noteworthy for some extraordinary achievements and turns them into an exemplar of the consequences of behaviour that Dante defines as sinful. The reference to Circe in Odysseus' story suggests Circe's connection to other episodes of authorial correction.

Just as Dante attaches elaborate authorial corrections to his character Manto, so too is the character Circe in Vergil's *Aeneid* tied to her own issues of revision and correction, engaging the well-known account of Odysseus' encounter with Circe in the *Odyssey*. In Vergil's description of Aeneas' knowledge, and studied avoidance, of Circe's island, it is implied that Aeneas has read the *Odyssey* and learned, via Odysseus' mistakes, the importance of avoiding mysterious enchantresses. Aeneas, the text insinuates, will not take the risk of meeting Circe, coming under the influence of her magic, or losing his men, because he knows all the dangers to which Odysseus was subject. The correction conveys moral or intellectual superiority on the part of Aeneas, whose prudence in avoiding the island underscores the foolishness of Odysseus in landing there. In the *Inferno*, Dante's character Vergil is imbued with the same quality of wisdom for successfully avoiding the hazard represented by Manto. Strangely, though, Dante's Vergil is not drawing on wisdom received from any previous narrative; there is no earlier work of literature in which he could have seen Manto depicted as a hazard. Nevertheless, he paints her as such, reporting information that is unknown from other sources. This dissonance between information presented by Dante's Vergil and information to which his audience might independently have access builds up the character Vergil as equipped with knowledge inaccessible to living people.

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[50] *Fab.* 125. Manuscripts of Hyg. *Fab.* were admittedly scarce in medieval Europe: a single manuscript edition from approximately 900 survives in a few fragments, from which the first printed edition in 1535 was created. Dante could have been familiar with the story of the *Od.* through knowledge (direct or indirect) of this manuscript, obscure though it was. The question of whether Dante's knowledge of the *Od.* could have been informed by Hyg. is further muddied insofar as Hyg. *Fab.* has a complicated history of authorship, and has been revised and reorganized many times over a span of centuries. On the history of the text, see R. Scott Smith and Stephen M. Trzaskoma (introd.), *Apollodorus' 'Library' and Hyginus' 'Fabulae': Two Handbooks of Greek Mythology* (Indianapolis, IN, 2007), pp. xlix-li.

[51] Verg. *Aen.* 3.613-38, Ov. *Her.* 1, *Met.* 14.158-311.

Even so, when Dante diverges from Vergil's account of Manto, he forces the audience to make a choice regarding whether they believe the description of Manto provided by Vergil in the *Aeneid*, or the one provided by the character Vergil in the *Inferno*. Dante does his best to make his account the more credible one, but if the audience finds the description of Manto from the classical authorities more convincing, the long revisionist excursus that Dante has put in Vergil's mouth ultimately works to his disadvantage and undermines his authority on other subjects. As described above, Dante's character Vergil is not intended to be a perfectly reliable source—in that role he has to be superseded by Statius and Beatrice—but he needs to reach a minimum level of credibility to fulfil his role as Dante the protagonist's guide through the terrors of Hell, and he may fail to reach that level if he fights his predecessors too much.

Finally, the question should be raised whether Dante's Manto and Vergil's Circe can be connected as magicians. Circe is famous for her magical abilities to transform people into animals; Manto can interpret messages from the gods. Overall, I would argue that their powers clearly distinguish them from each other and put them in separate categories, both in a classical context and a Renaissance context, but the possibility of conflation between these categories persists.[52] Classical literature attests many famous seers of legend, both male and female, who obtained knowledge by divine inspiration and reported this knowledge for the benefit of others,[53] notably Tiresias, Calchas, Carmentis, and the Sibyl of Cumae. These characters are generally depicted as working for the benefit of their community (although the information they provide may be disadvantageous to powerful individuals within their communities and thus lead to conflict; e.g. the dispute between Tiresias and Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*). In classical myth, Manto is a seer like these characters. By contrast, historical people who claimed divining abilities were much more suspect. There was well-documented suspicion of charlatans who claimed to divine the future, cast magic spells, and perform other supernatural feats; Daniel Ogden has provided an overview of such charlatans in the classical world, comparing their claims with stories of witches and other supernatural phenomena.[54] While classical myth tends to separate divinely-inspired, community-oriented seers from dangerous, self-interested witches, the distinction was less clear for historical figures. For this reason it is possible that Manto's characterization by Dante as a threat is influenced by classical witches such as Circe and Erichtho.[55] Even so, the fact that Dante has set aside a bolgia for fortune-tellers, populated not by witches like Circe but only by diviners, is strong evidence that for Dante, diviners are distinct from witches and this is not a point of comparison between Circe and Manto.

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[52] For instance, the supernatural powers attributed to Vergil in the middle ages (outlined by Comparetti, *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, 239–302) encompass both prophetic and magical abilities.

[53] On the powers and social roles of classical seers and oracles, see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, trans. John Raffan (Oxford, 1985), II 8.2–3 (pp. 111–18).

[54] Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds: A Sourcebook*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 2009), chapters 2 ('Greek Sorcerers'), 3 ('Alien Sorcerers'), and 4 ('The Rivals of Jesus').

[55] Barolini, '*Inferno* 20: Determinism and Astrology Manqué', is quick to draw a parallel between Manto in *Inf.* 20 and Erichtho in *Inf.* 9 ('the first classical sorceress named in the *Inferno*'), glossing over any distinction between a 'sorceress' and a 'prophetess': she applies both terms to Manto; she describes Erichtho as both a 'sorceress' and a 'witch'. Barolini also notes that Dante's Manto is degraded in sexualized terms; she links Manto's heavy gendering with the condemnation of Erichtho in *Inf.* 9 and these women's shared status as users of magic. For more on female characters and gendering in Dante, see Joan M. Ferrante, *Women as Image in Medieval Literature from the Twelfth Century to Dante* (New York, 1975), and Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante*

As an echo of Circe, Manto is an influential atmospheric factor. Aeneas travels in a dangerous world, where, in the course of reaching Italy and settling his new civilization, he must overcome interminable dangers and disasters. But even though he overcomes great obstacles, he avoids even greater ones. Circe is representative of the greater danger lurking just out of sight: the slightest deviation from the prescribed course will bring Aeneas under her influence and cause even greater problems for him. As Vergil's Circe suggests the great supernatural dangers that threaten Aeneas from just out of reach, so Dante's Manto works to the same purpose. Dante the protagonist is in constant danger when he is in Hell, with the perpetual threat hanging over his head that some failure of the universe will occur and he will be trapped in Hell for eternity.[56] Like Aeneas, Dante the protagonist must follow a prescribed path under the careful tutelage of a guide in order to minimize the dangers that threaten him. Manto in this case is evocative of the greater danger that the slightest deviation from this prescribed path may present.[57]

As is shown above, the connection between Vergil's Circe and Dante's Manto is no casual allusion. Dante's use of a menacing yet absent seeress evokes the menacing yet absent sorceress who lurks in the background of Vergil's epic. He does so not only to strengthen his villainous portrayal of soothsayers, but also to amend Vergil's reputation and establish a definite distance between the villainous pagan fortune-tellers like Manto and the virtuous pagan fortune-teller on whom he relies as his guide.

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and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture (New York, 2006), chapters 14 ('Dante and Francesca da Rimini: Realpolitik, Romance, and Gender') and 16 ('Notes toward a Gendered History of Italian Literature, with a Discussion of Dante's *Beatrix Loquax*').

[56] This danger is emphasized particularly after Dante the protagonist and Dante's character Vergil meet Malacoda, since the devils attempt to deceive the travellers and believe (though incorrectly) that they can trap them in the lowest circles (*Inf.* 21.106–11). This danger is allegorical for the danger to the human soul via temptation to sin, the same threat that pulled Dante the protagonist off the *diritta via* and lured him into the *selva oscura*.

[57] Leonardi, *Inferno,* 598, notes the overarching *tristezza* of the twentieth canto.

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