OF “FIRE” AND “FORM”

From Dante’s *Commedia* to C. G. Jung’s *Liber Novus*

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I, Tommaso A. Priviero, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated.
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Abstract

**Of “Fire” and “Form”. From Dante’s Commedia to C. G. Jung’s Liber Novus** recounts the untold encounter between two illustrious visionaries: Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961). For the renowned Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology, Dante’s journey to Hell for the sake of his beloved, Beatrice, perfectly unveiled the passions and struggles of the modern psyche, while providing a pathway to inner freedom. The *Commedia* crucially affected Jung’s own visionary experiences (coalesced into the astonishing book of visions known as Jung’s *Liber Novus*) and indeed the development of his psychological ideas. In light of this, this study provides a thorough comparative analysis of the intertextual and symbolical correspondences between *Liber Novus* and the *Commedia*, upon a continuous intersection of a historical perspective with a symbolical-analytical one. The result is a journey through thematics as various as the metánoia or “radical mental change”, the symbolism of animals, the descent into Hell, Christian mysticism in the Middle Ages, the function of Lucifer, the meaning of the magician or psychopomp (in Greek mythology, the “guide of the souls” in the underworld), the transformative role of the feminine, the erotic and spiritual imagery of the “soul”, the mandala symbolism in relation to Dante’s ecstatic vision of the celestial rose, and the ever-changing action and enigma of love. Threshold by threshold, this project explores in detail Jung’s lifelong confrontation with Dante and uses it as a beacon to capture a fundamentally Dantesque characteristic of analytical psychology: the transformative and healing capacities of man’s visionary potential.
Impact Statement

The first of its kind, this work can equally appeal readers attracted by Jung and/or Dante, as well as the more general reader. The strong interdisciplinary nature of the project directly impacts several areas of scholarship, including, besides Jung and Dante studies, psychoanalysis, depth psychology, history of psychiatry and psychological disciplines, late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century intellectual and cultural history, comparative literature, hermeneutics, Western esotericism. To this date, no comparable projects have been available on this topic, with the exception of a few articles which have indicated an increasing significant appetite for Jung and Dante, which this research has satiated by providing the first ever monograph on the subject. Of “Fire” and “Form”: From Dante’s Commedia to C. G. Jung’s Liber Novus offers an in-depth close reading of Liber Novus as a prism to contextualise and explore Jung’s thinking on the basis of his key understanding of Dante, which in itself covers a hitherto uncharted territory. It also conveys the suggestion that Jung’s reception of Dante through the conceptualisation of “visionary works” could open up significant avenues of research in Dante scholarship too, by highlighting aspects of Dante’s work which have not been engaged with in depth. Moreover, this thesis connects Dante and Jung with a hermeneutical motif, that of creative imagination, which has just started to be properly examined and calls for future explorations. In addition to this, this research has the privilege of being based on the two major posthumous publications of Jung’s works in the last decade: Liber Novus (or The Red Book) (2009) and, in a minor way, the Black Books (2020). In addition to having completely revolutionised the study of Jung’s life and work, the publication of these works has signalled a new unparalleled interest for the Swiss thinker amongst general and academic readers. By focusing on the question of “Jung’s Dante”, this work sheds light on one of the most fascinating thematics that this fresh cultural and psychological concern for Jung sets forth.
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**Introduction**

The present study is inspired by the search for a common terrain of exploration between psychology and visionary texts. The material chosen intends to demonstrate the fresh contribution that stems from bringing these terrains into closer and permeable relation. Meditation, visions, reveries, and creative imagination, on which this project largely concentrates, provide the middle ground between these research areas. In this context, creative imagination comes close to what, at the end of the sixteenth century, the German alchemist Martin Ruland called the *astrum in homine* ("the star in man"): the organ of subtle perceptions and the centre of man’s creative sources.¹ This view of imagination finds a unique point of confrontation with Dante and the Middle Ages. That was a time, as T. S. Eliot once wrote, in which “seeing visions” was a “psychological habit, the trick of which we have forgotten”, and although we may now recur to narcotics to unveil that forgotten world, the medieval man was educated to “a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming”: the practice of visions.² The “medieval imagination”, as Jacques Le Goff pointed out, was in fact always at the crossroad between body and soul, religion and science, by mediating between “external and internal sensibility” in a manner which was not dominated by later essentially Cartesian body-mind dualisms.³ Jung’s variously formulated hope of a reconciliation of modern man with the Middle Ages stems exactly from here. Hence, in the chapter of *Psychological Types* on the type problem in medieval thought, he advocates for the rescue of a necessary mediating point between the pole of ideas (*esse in intellectu*) and things (*esse in re*), the splitting of which caused a great deal of trouble to Western thought. The

problem, for Jung, is that one attitude invariably lacks tangible reality, the other lacks psychic vitality. But since ideas and things come together in the human mind and they constantly urge to be balanced, a third is needed — a third which he believed had been expressed at the core of the medieval imagination — and that is the esse in anima ("living reality"): "Living reality is the product neither of the actual, objective behaviour of things nor of the formulated idea exclusively, but rather of the combination of both in the living psychological process, through esse in anima." What is perhaps most interesting in this discussion is that this problematic reveals a distinctive connection with the motif and experience of love. In fact, as Giorgio Agamben observed, the fundamental motif of the medieval mediating function of imagination between sensual and spiritual realms was the experience of love-sickness, falling in love, as immortalised in Dante’s phantasmic quest for Beatrice. By returning to these questions, modern reflections on creative imagination, such as Jung’s, do not restrict the imaginative faculty to an aesthetic or abstract function. They express instead the idea that imagination conveys the awakening of a deeply transformative core of being, which is “creative” because it appears to happen by itself, showing a superior force to man’s conscious control, and it deals with images more than concepts, with intuition more than knowledge, with inner sight more than objects. A faculty which, according to an important distinction introduced by Henry Corbin, belongs to the “imaginal” and not to the simple “imaginary”. That is, to the topography of an intermediary state between waking and sleeping, in which the appearance of images and forms and places heralds a truly central mediating function between visible and

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hidden realities. The “imaginal”, Corbin writes, “ranks higher than the world of the senses, and lower than the purely intelligible world; it is more immaterial than the former and less immaterial than the latter.” Imagination, far from being in this context a pure game of fantasy, becomes the cognitive function of an in-between world, in an attempt to reclaim its force against its confinement, in present-day language, to the role of “madwoman of the house.”

It is, in Corbin’s words, “imaginative power in its purest form”, close to what Paracelsus referred to in terms of *Imaginatio vera* (“true imagination”). A proper history of creative imagination, for which Corbin coined the term “Imaginatrix” (intending imagination as the spiritual “matrix” of consciousness) has still to be written. Yet, already at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico peculiarly gave voice to a poetic psychology of imagination by insisting that, in the historical development of the human mind, poetic images arose before prose speech, concepts, and intellectual abstractions. About a century later, William Blake evoked in the poem *Jerusalem* the “divine body” of Imagination, calling into radical question the Western dualistic splitting of body and mind.

The conception of imagination this study engages with comes close to this specific non-dualistic appreciation of the imaginative faculty, which approaches imagination mainly in terms of *Einbildungskraft* (“imaginative power”): an active evocation of inner images corresponding to a process of self-transformation. Gaston Bachelard, whose attempt to pioneer the reconciliation of poetry and science in contemporary psychology significantly informs the comparative

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8 Ibid., p. 11.
9 Ibidem.
method of the present research, calls the *vis imaginativa* the very force of psychic production, a “power of poetisation” of life, which “can well be designated as a psychological poetics.”

Similarly aiming at bridging the gap between imagination and modern psychology, James Hillman, in his ground-breaking *Re-Visioning Psychology*, points out:

> Man is primarily an image-maker and our psychic substance consists of images; our being is imaginal being, an existence in imagination. We are indeed such stuff as dreams are made on. Since we can know only fantasy-images directly and immediately, and from these images create our worlds and call them realities, we live in a world that is neither “inner” nor “outer”. Rather the psychic world is an imaginal world, just as image is psyche. [...] Because our psychic stuff is images, image-making is a *via regia*, a royal road to soul-making.

Following this challenging path, it can be said that the illustration of the multiple ways in which image-making can be related to narratives of inner travelling is the main object of interest of this study. The early decades of the twentieth century are its historical background. Dante Alighieri and Carl Gustav Jung its illustrious protagonists.

*Content of the Work*

The content of this research develops along two main tracks: (i) to demonstrate the pivotal importance exerted by Dante, and particularly the *Commedia*, on Jung’s visions in *Liber Novus* and indeed on the development of his psychological ideas, thus offering a novel perspective to Jung studies and an original contribution to Dante scholarship; (2) to illustrate the way in which the Jung-Dante encounter provides a beacon to scrutinise some of the hermeneutical

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tenets which accompany Jung’s hypothesis of a Western “visionary” genre. In response to these questions, this research offers the first detailed study of the relation between Jung and Dante, and more specifically, the intertextual relation of Dante’s Commedia and Jung’s Liber Novus. The focus of the project is thus mainly placed on the literal and symbolic correlations between these works, while having to postpone an accurate analysis of the images and illustrations of Jung’s experiment for a separate study. Overall, the making itself of Liber Novus has been challengingly envisioned in terms of “Jung’s Commedia”, by highlighting Dante’s role in Liber Novus at historical, hermeneutical, and psychological levels.

Chapter 1 (“The Way of the Visionary”) begins by illustrating the background of Jung’s visions, mapping out Dante’s presence in the development of his experiment (1.1. “Jung, Dante, and Liber Novus”). This section introduces the central role of the Middle Ages in Liber Novus, by drawing on parallel writings such as Psychological Types, published in 1921, and the (unpublished) Polzeath seminar, 1923. This chapter also illustrates the genealogy of Jung’s notion of “visionary art”, highlighting the direct correlation between his own “visionary work” (Liber Novus) and the psychological characteristics of this category of creative expression, as well as the distinctive place of the symbolism of the Commedia within this tradition. The second section of the first chapter (1.2. “The Esoteric Dante”) contextualises Jung’s understanding of Dante during Liber Novus with the contemporary historical development of Dante studies in Europe. This section traces a hitherto unexplored connection between the “symbolist” tradition of reading Dante and Jung. Original historical research allows this study to prove the direct fascination of the Swiss psychiatrist for this line of interpretation, particularly with regard to one of its most notable and disputed works: Luigi Valli’s The Secret Language of Dante and the Fedeli d’Amore, appearing in 1928. This fact also enables us to convincingly situate and make sense of Jung’s later references to Dante scattered through his scientific works.
The beginning of the second chapter opens a different part of this study. Chapter 1 served for understanding the multiform hermeneutical connections between Jung and Dante. Chapter 2 ("Into Hell") and chapter 3 ("Rebirth") lead instead into a close reading of *Liber Novus*, through the lens of a comparative analysis with the *Commedia*. Thematically, chapter 2 looks at the “descent” or “way down” of Jung’s journey (2.1. “Noontide”, 2.2. “Katabasis”, 2.3. “Lucifer”), whereas chapter 3 takes into account the motifs and symbols related to the “ascent” or “way up” (3.1. “Daybreak”, 3.2. “Anabasis”, 3.3. “The Guide and the Soul”). Accordingly, chapter 2 proceeds with an analysis of Jung’s and Dante’s visions of Hell, including subjects varying from the motif of “radical mental change” to the symbolism of animality and wild instinctual forces, the conical abyss of the underworld, the Christian framework of the descent, the encounter with the spectres of the dead, the “left” as the side of the “unholy and inauspicious”, and the threatening yet paramount function of Lucifer or the Antichrist. The discussion of Jung’s journey into Hell is underpinned by his evolving reflection on the Western conception of evil, which in his view had been dramatically transformed, in psychological terms, precisely during the Middle Ages. Finally, in the third and last chapter of the work, one is taken out of Hell and led to consider in which ways *Liber Novus* represented for Jung a crucial space of self-regeneration, which originated with the work itself but took shape in a wider and more complex process, as we shall see. In the first place, a new analogy is pointed out between Dante’s Purgatory (in particular the image of the “sacred mountain”) and the purgatorial, transformative aspects of Jung’s journey. This correspondence is directly evoked by a series of entries from *Purgatorio* which Jung copies in the *Black Books*. As illustrated in this section, Dante evokes in these verses the “fire” of love and the “form” of visionary writing. Jung’s variegated understanding of this enigmatic reference represents the common thread of this chapter, which in essence deals with the mystery and transformative power of Eros. On this basis, the chapter tackles two central points of confrontation between our authors: the function of inner guidance and the symbolism of the soul, which elsewhere in his writing Jung
relates to the archetypes of “meaning” and “life”. As for the motif of inner guidance, this section highlights the relevant similarities existing between Jung’s Philemon (the “magician” or “wise old man” who instructs the ‘I’ on the meaning of his visions) and Virgil, Dante’s “dolce padre” (“sweet father”). Having completed an analysis of these symmetries, the chapter proceeds to discuss the motif of the “soul”, by elucidating the way in which this crucial aspect of Jung’s psychology closely intertwines with his reading of Dante. In 1921, Jung considered Dante “the spiritual knight of his lady”, who by venturing for her sake into the realms of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, provided the most beautiful representation of the modern man’s search for the “soul”. Analogously, he essentially comes to see his own experiences in terms of a Dantesque journey “on the service of the soul”, to the extent of claiming to have returned to the “soul” like “a tired wanderer who had sought nothing in the world apart from her.”

The conclusive part of the last chapter is thus dedicated to a study of the roots of Jung’s understanding of the “anima” or “soul” in relation to Dante’s representation of Beatrice, a perspective which, however important, has not been investigated before.

Methodology

The methodology of this project is based on a close reading of Liber Novus, as such technique of reading was applied for the ancient exegesis of visionary texts. Northrop Frye has long since delineated a performative way of intending the act of critical reading, in which the role of the poet and the critic radically approach each other, upon the assumption that criticism should not be an imitation of creative power, but rather its enactment. This research engages with this view, by attempting to balance the study of relevant historical material with patterns of innovative symbolic interpretation. The lens of the critic has thus been placed as close as


possible to the object of analysis: the content of Liber Novus in relation with the Commedia. On this basis, the direction of the work is developed in depth (intensively), rather than in width (extensively), by limiting as much as possible the use of subsidiary commentaries and allowing in this way a significant degree of creative reflection at a symbolical level. This method is evoked in Wolfgang Iser’s phenomenological view of the reading process, as historically developed in the context of the Constance School, in which the active interplay between text and reader is given a central place, following Roman Ingarden’s idea that an interpretation of a text is always an act of present “concretisation”.17 Iser conceives the interaction between text and reader not regulated by given codes, a priori theories or fixed goals of interpretation, but rather as a process set in motion between the poles of structure and recipient, through the active participation of the reader’s imagination with the adventures the text offers them. It is a coming together of text and imagination, in which one pole cannot do without the other.

“Literature stimulates life”, as Iser points out, “not in order to portray it, but in order to allow the reader to share in it.”18 This idea is particularly agreeable when it comes to discuss texts such as the Commedia and Liber Novus, which, due to their strongly imaginal nature, require to take into account in equal measures both a close, almost meditative, proximity to the texts and the instant exceptional creative resonance that these texts stimulate in the reader.

In the context of this study, this perspective is also significantly informed by Jung’s signature notion of “amplification”, which he commonly intended as the application of mythological, cultural, and spiritual analogies to psychic material, and which he once described by translating in psychological terms the image of the philologist who seeks parallels in order to establish the overarching meaning of a text:


What I do is this. I adopt the method of the philologist, which is far from being free association, and apply a logical principle which is called amplification. It is simply that of seeking the parallels. For instance, in the case of a very rare word which you have never come across before, you try to find parallel text passages, parallel applications perhaps, where that word also occurs, and then you try to put the formula you have established from the knowledge of other texts into the new text. If you make the new text a readable whole, you say, “Now we can read it.” That is how we learned to read hieroglyphics and cuneiform inscriptions and that is how we can read dreams.  

However, in the present case, the legacy of Jung’s amplification is transferred from the purposes of psychotherapy to another form of practice: the imminent creative experience of close textual analysis. In doing so, this project reconnects the function of amplification to the original comparative source Jung took it from. By conveying a language that strongly transcends the author’s individuality, in fact, visionary texts align particularly well with a close comparative approach, which ensures the living power of the work of art, while not constraining the experience of the text within one-sided theorisations. Coming to the threshold of works such as the Commedia or Liber Novus implies directly facing the problematic accordance of any fixed methodological deliberation with the imminent experience of being pushed in front of something for which theories only work to a certain extent. These are works which, by conducting the reader into the strange and unfamiliar terrains of visionary images, require a necessary combination of intellectual penetration and creative participation. One can interpret in this manner the way in which Dante, before the breathtaking appearance of Beatrice, reminds us that “who has not felt this cannot understand.”

The close reader is familiar with the *kukeón*, the ancient psychoactive substance which Demeter prepares to find Persephone and Circe gives Odysseus to bewitch him. Some readings, Giorgio Colli has pointed out, are imbued of *kukeón*, such as Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* or the *Commedia* and *Liber Novus*. Whether the drug is cooked by Demeter or Circe, that is, melted in an experience of regeneration or witchcraft, it depends on the reader’s eye. Either way, we are transformed, injected with something we cannot grasp entirely and caught in our own creative quest, as such experience is offered by the polymorphous nature of Dante’s and Jung’s visionary narrations. Of the *kukeón* Heraclitus says that “it separates unless it is stirred”, since the existence of something, in this case a process of interpretation, depends on its undergoing continual movement and concretisation. Before works such as *Zarathustra*, Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the *Commedia*, and *Liber Novus*, the notion of hermeneutic circle that has been illustrated from Friedrich Schleiermacher to Hans-Georg Gadamer, uncoils in a serpent-like form. The vision prevails over the theory, the play of images over the web of words, the symbolical over the personal, the becoming of things over the stagnation of meaning. Thus a phenomenologically oriented reading of a material of this kind inevitably sets itself in a certain accordance with this language.

Yet, before going any further, it is mandatory for the critic–historian to listen first to what our authors have to say about their own works, instead of searching elsewhere. In this way, it is possible to observe that both Jung and Dante not only share the great urge of recording some extraordinary mental experiences, but they also have in common the intent to provide some sort of guidance to the readers. Dante is exceptionally clear in clarifying the primary objective behind writing the *Commedia*: “It can be briefly stated that the aim of the whole and of the part

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is to remove those living in this life from a state of misery and to guide them to a state of happiness.”23 As observed by Ananda Coomaraswamy, these words encapsulate the “science” of Dante, that the whole of his work was undertaken, as the poet claims, for a pragmatic and not a speculative end.24 Christian Moevs, in *The Metaphysics of Dante’s Comedy*, explains these pragmatical aims essentially in terms of a “change of life, experience, and vision” deriving from the “dissolution of the ego”:

The point of the *Comedy* is that understanding is practical. It must not be confused with anything that can be thought or taught, with any ‘doctrine’ or ‘belief’. Understanding—happiness—salvation, for Dante, is not a set of ideas; it is to have experienced the true nature and foundation of reality, to know it as oneself, and thus to live it. [...] The *Comedy* tells us that there is no path to understanding, happiness or immortality that does not go through self-sacrifice, through the death to blind self-interest that is an awakening to love, to freedom, to the infinite in and as the finite: to Christ.25

To achieve this goal, Dante urges us to acknowledge from the start that at least two different identities come into play throughout the *Commedia*. They are Dante the *viator*, or “traveller”, and Dante the *auctor*, or “writer”, corresponding to two different levels of mental and poetic experience. While the former embraces a visionary journey into the realms of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, the latter comes back to tell us about the multiple senses of that stunning event. While the “traveller” moves from thinking to gazing, harking back to images

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and more primitive forms of psychic activities, the “writer” returns from gazing to thinking, with reignited words to shape his visions. And most importantly, the occurrence of this process shows healing and deeply transformative effects on the poet’s mind. As Irma Brandeis has written, the primary subject of Dante’s Commedia is a first person’s spiritual regeneration through an inner metamorphosis subjected to an experience of visions.26

In Liber Novus, a similar combination of views takes place, through the encounter between Jung the viator, taken in by the sudden burst of visionary material forming Liber Novus, and Jung the auctor; who in a second moment of the experiment attempts to elaborate a science of visions based on his then evolving psychological ideas. An intriguing parallel is offered by Corbin's interpretation of Persian “visionary recitals”, a mode of reading texts describing states of possession or ecstatic visions occurring in a state of dream or waking.27 Reading “recitals”, like reading Liber Novus or the Commedia, is, in Corbin's sense, a journey, at once symbolic and existential, into a subtle “order of reality, which corresponds to a precise mode of perception”,28 which becomes shared by the author and the reader. The organ of perception through which this experience of communication occurs is a refined degree of imagination, intended similarly to a meditational practice, in which images and visions become incubated thanks to techniques of introversion and visualisation. About the directionality of this event, Corbin notices:

Undoubtedly what is involved is not a movement from one locality to another, a bodily transfer from one place to another, as would occur in the case of places in the same homogenous space. [...] Essentially the relationship involved is that of the outer, the visible, the exoteric (in Greek ta eko, in Arabic zabir) to the inner, the invisible, the esoteric (in Greek ta eko, in Arabic batin), or the relationship of the natural to the spiritual world.

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Leaving the where, the ubi category, is equivalent to leaving the outer or natural appearances that cloak the hidden inner realities, just as the almond is concealed in its shell.\textsuperscript{29}

In \textit{Liber Novus}, the opening of the “esoteric” or “inner” level corresponds to the eventful emergence of Jung’s experiment, pouring into the \textit{Black Books}: an initiation into vision before a new psychological formulation. Later, in what has been identified as the second layer of Jung’s journey, one finds a critical reflection oriented by a specifically non-reductive interpretation of symbols. When this combined mode of reading, \textit{viator} and \textit{auctor}, vision and interpretation, is considered in relation to Jung’s confrontation with Dante, it is possible to realise that this perspective finds support both in Dante’s own hermeneutics (as indicated not only in the disputed letter to Cangrande della Scala,\textsuperscript{30} but also in the \textit{Convivio}\textsuperscript{31} and in the \textit{Commedia} itself) and in the development of Jung’s analytical approach throughout the years of \textit{Liber Novus}.

Nevertheless, there are also important points of difference to bear in mind from the outset. The major one is that the \textit{Commedia} is the story of a luminous ascension to Heaven from the darkest corner of Hell, framed in a marvelous literary narrative in which each Canto reflects a cosmological structure crafted by the author with the most accurate precision. Hardly could one say the same about the dense nature of Jung’s journey (at least on its textual level), a tangled purgatorial path not without frequent relapses into Hell. Between the circular rhythm of Dante’s heavenly progression and the laboured task of Jung’s unfinished project there is often a contrasting tone. The symbol of the \textit{Commedia} is a spiritual ladder, that of \textit{Liber Novus} a spiral. Thus it is important to distinguish between two elements of Jung’s explorations:

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Convivio}, I, 1 18; II, 1 1-14; Dante Alighieri, 2014, \textit{Opere 2, Convivio, Monarchia, Epistole, Elegie} (Milano: Mondadori), pp. 211-220.
the process and the work. The former is the underlying experiment which began with Liber Novus but did not end with it, for Jung conceived what he developed after Liber Novus as the unwritten Cantos of his notebooks: the next phase of a comprehensive experience of self-transformation. By contrast, the work is what one actually finds in the textual material of Liber Novus. Overall, following this comparison, one may say that the process of Jung’s experiment has a stronger Dantesque feature than the work itself. The second major difference regards the fact that although Jung essentially considered the content of the Commedia the result of a direct visionary experience, and this is the line of interpretation to which the present study generally adheres, we do not have exact biographical information about the states and visions which acted as the original source for the composition of the text. With Liber Novus, on the contrary, the raw material of the author’s visions is present and conveys a substantial component of a hybrid experiment. The result is that with Liber Novus process and work are openly intertwined elements, whereas with the Commedia, what one can say about the process can only be intuitively inferred on the basis of the work, even when one follows Jung’s standpoint that the Commedia was essentially a “visionary work”. The third major point of difference between the Commedia and Liber Novus resides in the fact that Dante entrusted poetry and theology with the fundamental transformative power which Jung ultimately ascribed to the practice of analytical psychology. In this sense, the process which inspired the Commedia comes to coincide and culminate with the actual production of the work, whereas in Jung, the aesthetic quality of a visionary work, whatever form it takes, serves for the deeper task of the process of psychic transformation. The fourth and last major difference stems from the fact that Jung, who was never a critical reader of Dante, significantly undermines or readapts Dante’s theological and philosophical constructions in order to suit his own motifs and his own personal reading of the Commedia. There is no mention of Aristotle, Averroes, Boethius, Richard of Saint Victor or Thomas Aquinas in Jung’s reception of Dante, however central these figures have been for the Italian poet. On the contrary, there is a conception of
Dante’s view of good and evil which notably reminds more of Blake and Yeats than the original Dantesque picture. One should thus never forget that Dante and Jung’s Dante (on which this work focuses) are often very different subjects. Dante may have been a visionary above all, as Jung believed, but he was also a poet, a philosopher, a theologian, a metaphysician, a scientist, a political man, and much more, which are all elements which the Swiss man tends to set aside in order to emphasise the experiential and visionary trait d’union between the *Commedia* and *Liber Novus*. These differences altogether, however, do not affect the paramount evidence that *Liber Novus* and the *Commedia* not only share a great deal of similar symbolism, but also a fundamental common orientation. They both convey the story of a radical process of self-transformation which is essentially based, although in divergent ways, on the renewal of the true inner symbol of Christ through the vision of love: the life-changing task of *becoming divine* which Dante awakens to in his Christic journey and the author of *Liber Novus* ascribes to the motif of the rebirth of God in the soul.

“From Things Heard and Seen”

The idea of an “anagogic” or “constructive” level of symbol-interpretation, which finds in Dante a ground-breaking appearance in Western literature, entails first of all that a symbol is not traced back entirely, i.e., reduced, to a causal understanding or a single logical explanation, but on the contrary it constantly renovates itself through the creative work of imagination. Among many references scattered through his work, Jung provides an optimal synthesis of his constructive method in a lecture delivered to the London Psycho-medical society, in July 1914:

> The scientific mind, so far as it thinks causalistically, is incapable of prospective understanding—it understands only retrospectively. Like Ahriman, the Persian devil, it has the gift of hindsight. Yet this kind of understanding is only one half of the psyche. The other, more important, half is constructive, and if we are not able to understand
prospectively, then nothing is understood. [...] A causal understanding of Faust tells us very clearly how it came to be a finished work of art, but it does not show us its living meaning. That meaning only lives when we experience it in and through ourselves. In so far as our actual life, the life we live here and now, is something essentially new and not just a continuation of the past. The main value of a work of art does not lie in its causal development but in its living effect upon ourselves. [...] This is how we have to consider the human psyche, too. Only on one side is it something that has come to be, and, as such, subject to the causal standpoint. The other side is in the process of becoming, and can only be grasped synthetically or constructively.\(^{32}\)

Gilbert Durand ascribes this approach to the language of a creative hermeneutics, in contrast to the objectives of a reductive hermeneutics.\(^{33}\) The former ex-presses what the latter com-presses, it unites (sym-ballein) what the other divides (dia-ballein), that is, the relation between the symbol and its multiple possibilities of meaning. The symbol, Durand points out, “certainly refers to something, but never to a single thing.”\(^{34}\) By its very nature, the constructive approach is pluralistic and anti-dogmatic, since instead of fixing the understanding of symbol-formation into one-sided patterns, it renovates them into a polyphony. Traditionally, what is referred to as constructive hermeneutics is associated with the anagogic, or spiritual, level of interpretation of texts. The word “anagogic” derives from Greek anágo, “to elevate”, “to enhance” and anagogigós, “sublimation” or “elevation”, and is especially bound to scriptural exegesis, in which it detects the mystical or spiritual level of biblical statements and events. The “unorthodox” psychoanalyst Herbert Silberer, whose

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34 Ibid., p. 66.
correspondences with Jung’s work remain still overlooked,35 pioneered the introduction of the anagogic method into the early history of psychoanalysis. He conceives the psychoanalytic and the anagogic levels as two complementary halves of symbol interpretation. The former examines the “retrograde” aspect of psychological phenomena, that is, their past or motivation, which can be found in primary instinctual forces. The latter unveils their “anagogic” or constructive aspect, namely their future or transformation, which can be found in the refinement of instinctual forces (i.e., sublimation) through practices of meditation or works of art.36 For example, Silberer interprets the alchemical operation of *putrefactio* (self-rotting) as a death wish in psychoanalytic terms and as a mystical death (the death of egoism) in anagogic terms. He conceives techniques of introversion such as kundalini yoga or hypnagogic states as “regression” in analytic terms and “regeneration” in anagogic terms. This view comes close to the way in which the term anagogic indicates in Neoplatonic language the sublimating process through which the perception of reality gradually moves from the sensible or visible particulars to the intelligible or invisible realm. In medieval exegesis, the same term typically refers to a fourfold method of Scriptural reading, divided in literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogic senses, one and yet distinct, as popularised by a distich attributed to Nicholas of Lyra: “The letter teaches the events, the allegory what you should believe, tropology what you should do, and


anagogy where you should aim.” In contradistinction to the allegorical meaning, the particularity of the anagogic sense in this context is to be eschatological or prospective, that is, related to future events such as prophecies or apocalyptic visions. However, the anagogic level is also more broadly intended as one of the three subdivisions of the mystical or inner level of interpretation, as opposed to the literal or outer sense.

Along this tradition, the term famously recurs again when Dante gives to his Veronese noble protector, Cangrande della Scala, disputed indications about the way in which to read his Commedia:

For the clearness, therefore, of what I shall say, it must be understood that the meaning of this work is not simple, but rather can be said to be of many significations, that is, of several meanings; for there is one meaning that is derived from the letter, and another that is derived from the things indicated by the letter. The first is called *literal*, but the second *allegorical* or *mystical*. [...] And although these mystical meanings are called by various names, they can in general all be said to be allegorical, since they differ from the literal or historic; for the word allegoria is derived from the Greek “alleon”, which in Latin is “alienum” or “diversum”.

Similarly, Dante reiterates in the Convivio:

It is necessary to know that writings can be understood and ought to be expounded principally in four senses. The first is called the literal. [...] The next is called the allegorical, and this is the one that is hidden beneath the cloak of these fables, and is a truth hidden beneath a beautiful fiction. Thus Ovid says that with his lyre Orpheus tamed wild beasts and made trees and rocks move toward him. [...] The third sense is called moral. [...] The...
fourth sense is called anagogical, that is to say, beyond the senses; and this occurs when a
scripture is expounded in a spiritual sense which, although it is true also in the literal sense,
signifies by means of the things signified a part of the supernal things of eternal glory.39

Dante’s reception of the scriptural polysemous model has been discussed far and wide. Ezra Pound fascinatingly takes the anagogic level by analogy to the Eastern “law of Karma”:

The “Commedia” is, in the literal sense, a description of Dante’s vision of a journey
through the realms inhabited by the spirits of men after death; in a further sense it is the
journey of Dante’s intelligence through the states of mind wherein dwell all sorts and
conditions of men before death; beyond this, Dante or Dante’s intelligence may come to
mean “Everyman” or “Mankind,” whereat his journey becomes a symbol of mankind’s
struggle upward out of ignorance into the clear light of philosophy. In the second sense I
give here, the journey is Dante’s own mental and spiritual development. In a fourth sense,
the “Commedia” is an expression of the laws of eternal justice; “il contrapasso”, the
counterpass, as Bertran calls it (“Inf.” xxiv.), or the law of Karma, if we are to use an
Oriental term.40

What matters here, most of all, about Dante’s reception of the polysemous model, is that
he claims that there is something else besides the literal sense. Something alienum which,
however, appears knowable only through the literal experience: a compromise between spirit
and matter fundamentally conveyed by the poetic activity. It is in fact often overlooked that
Dante observes in this regard: “In everything that has an inside and an outside it is impossible
to arrive at the inside without first arriving at the outside; consequently, since in what is
written down the literal meaning is always the outside, it is impossible to arrive at the other

senses, especially the allegorical, without first arriving at the literal.”\textsuperscript{41} The revolutionary aspect of Dante’s indications, however, does not reside so much in the traditional illustration of the \textit{quadriga} (the fourfold method of interpretation), but in something uncanny that Umberto Eco sums up as follows: “Here Dante is taking a case of biblical reading as an example of how to read his mundane poem!”\textsuperscript{42} Prior to him, in fact, the classical subdivision into layers of meaning had been applied exclusively to the study of the Scriptures under the authority of Christian theologians. For the first time in the West, Dante transfers this competence to the secular experience of the poet, thus ascribing the \textit{Commedia} to the type of a sacred text, as declared in the poem by the author himself,\textsuperscript{43} and radically calling into question the barriers between poetic and religious authority, when it comes to spiritual matters. The historical importance of this event (Dante’s secularisation of sacred hermeneutics) cannot be stressed enough. Harold Bloom claims “Dante’s poem is a prophecy and takes on the function of a third Testament in no way subservient to the Old and the New.”\textsuperscript{44} But the heresy of the Florentine man seems to the author of the present work of a different nature, belonging less to new testaments or canons, and more to the radical experience of spiritual freedom that characterises mystical joy.

A few centuries after Dante’s indications, the reconciliation of the literal and anagogic senses is echoed in the visions of Swedish scientist Emanuel Swedenborg, in which Corbin saw one of the “most exact” Western formulations of the “mundus imaginalis”.\textsuperscript{45} Swedenborg’s

\textsuperscript{41} Dante, \textit{Convivio}, II 1 9; 2014, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{42} Umberto Eco, 1994, \textit{The Limits of Interpretation} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p. 16.
indebtedness to the *Commedia* is such as to make Gabriele Rossetti (father of the English painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti) marvel at the fact that Dante scholars ignored for centuries that the Italian poet and Swedenborg had expressed, in essence, the same ideas.\textsuperscript{46} Another commentator, Frank Sewall, claims that “to trace in detail all the coincidences in description between Dante’s poem and Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell* would require volumes rather than the few pages at our disposal.”\textsuperscript{47} A member of Swedish aristocracy, Swedenborg spends the first half of his life mastering “all the known sciences of his day.”\textsuperscript{48} Around 1744, while travelling through Europe for scientific research, he is visited by meaningful dreams, recorded in private diaries.\textsuperscript{49} It is the beginning of an increasingly disturbing emotional turmoil which leads him to abandon his scientific pursuits in order to devote himself to record his visionary self-explorations. Originally published in 1758, Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell* details this process, revealing the author’s visits to the “communities” of Heaven and Hell, a journey lasting for about thirteen years and anticipated in his journal of dreams. At the beginning of the work, he claims to have been granted by angels and demons to talk with them “person to person” and to see “what is in heaven and what is in hell.”\textsuperscript{50} In brief, self-centredness, fear, and vanity belong in Hell, self-forgetting and love belong in Heaven, and a certain balance between the two is urged in order to obtain spiritual freedom.\textsuperscript{51} Swedenborg’s explorations occur, as specified in the original title of his work, *ex auditis et visis*, “from things heard and seen”, that is, as a result not of religious imitation or intellectual speculation, but of first-hand experience and practice. This

\textsuperscript{46} Gabriele Rossetti, 1842, *Dante’s Beatrice (La Beatrice di Dante)* (London: privately printed), p. 87.


\textsuperscript{48} Eugene Taylor, 2007, “Jung on Swedenborg, Redivivus”, in *Jung History*, 2, 2, p. 27.


\textsuperscript{50} Emanuel Swedenborg, 2016 (1758), *Heaven and Hell (De Coelo et Ejus Mirabilibus, et de Inferno, ex Auditis et Visis)* (Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Foundation), §1, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{51} Swedenborg, 2016 (1758), §197, p.364.
pragmatic method, which according to Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki mostly dealt with “an art of respiration” and intensive techniques of concentration and visualisation, brings some important discoveries to Swedenborg. Amongst them, in a Dantesque vein, the persuasion that love is the vital core of what man experiences as divine:

The warmth in heaven is meant by sacred and heavenly fire, and the warmth of hell by profane fire and hellfire. Both refer to love: heavenly fire to love for the Lord and for one’s neighbor, and hellfire to love for oneself and love of the world and all the craving that is associated with these loves.

The fact that love is warmth of spiritual origin can be seen from the way we grow warm in proportion to our love, even becoming inflamed and heated in proportion to its intensity and quality.

Swedenborg’s adventures in the lower and upper worlds resemble Dante’s material not only in terms of a vast amount of common sensuous imagery. The principal motif of his reception of Dante resides in fact in the development of an anagogic hermeneutics based upon a series of correspondences established between natural and spiritual levels of perceptions. For the Swedish visionary, the literal motifs appearing in the Scriptures or in records of experiences like his own and Dante’s, reflect inner levels of spiritual progression that the subject begins to perceive by turning inwardly through states of introversion. Journeys to Heaven and Hell unveil that undisclosed mental states are regulated by a karmic equilibrium between “internal” and “external”, “seen” and “unseen”, “natural” and “spiritual”, “material” and

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53 Swedenborg, 2016 (1758), §134, p. 71. Also, §14, p. 11.
54 See for example Swedenborg, 2016 (1758), §§54-55, pp. 28-29; §89, p. 50; §§103-106, pp. 56-57; §305, p. 163; §536, p. 327; §590, p. 360.
“symbolic” correlations. Jung voraciously reads about these views already in his student years, highly intrigued by Swedenborg’s work.\(^{55}\) Despite the surprising absence of direct mentions to Swedenborg in *Liber Novus*, his implicit reference is, as noted by Shamdasani, an important part of Jung’s experiment.\(^{56}\) Both men of science who grapple with a spiritual crisis occurring approximately at the same point of their lives, Jung and Swedenborg link a first-hand practice of introversion with a non-reductive, anagogic method, à la Dante, to explore and interpret the inner world. The difference is, as Shamdasani observes,

> Of an ontological nature. Jung replaces Swedenborg’s spiritual realism with a psychic realism, the notion of “esse in anima” which he elaborated first in *Liber Novus* and then in *Psychological Types*. Swedenborg’s spiritual hermeneutics, translating the symbolic value of the Bible, supplies as well the hermeneutics of the second layer of *Liber Novus*.\(^{57}\)

Thirty-three years after Swedenborg’s visions, the “English mystic” William Blake, as Jung used to call him,\(^{58}\) ventures too into the worlds of Heaven and Hell and gathers his own “memorable fancies” into *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a visionary work composed in between 1790 and 1793, against the background of revolutionary turmoils. Like Swedenborg, Blake writes it at the midpoint of his life, from 33 to 36, a time lapse that separates the *Songs of..."

\(^{55}\) Shamdasani, in Taylor 2007, p. 30. Jung checks out *Heaven and Hell* in September 1898, shortly after the first appearance of the *Commedia* in Jung’s works.


\(^{57}\) Shamdasani, 2016, p. 48.

\(^{58}\) Jung, 1921, *Psychological Types (Psychologische Typen)*, CW6, §460; CW11, §905, n41. As for Jung’s understanding of Blake in *Psychological Types*, see also CW6, §422n.
Innocence from the *Songs of Experience*, corresponding to Blake’s mythological imagery of “unfallen” and “fallen” worlds.

As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent, the Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb: his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, & the return of Adam into Paradise; see Isaiah xxxiv & xxxv Chap.

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to human existence.

From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.

Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.59

For Blake, Swedenborg’s journey was clouded by a moralistic misuse,60 for having spent too much time among the fancies of Heaven and too little with the demons of Hell, and by lack of poetic genius, set aside in the verbosity of a conventional language. On the contrary, John Milton was “in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell”, proving in this manner he was “a true Poet and of the Devil’s party without knowing it.”61 Blake too sides with the Devil’s party, making of Hell, in contrast with Dante, the abysmal receptacle of the creative energy of imagination, the devoted place of the particles of Genius, those “portions of eternity, too great for the eye of the man”, such as “the roaring of lions, the

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60 Ibid., pp. 157-158. See also Blake’s *Annotations* on Swedenborg’s “Wisdom of Angels concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom”, on “The Wisdom of Angels concerning Divine Providence”, on “Heaven and Hell”.

61 Ibid., p. 150.
howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword.”62 By “Hell”, Frye writes, Blake means “an upsurge of desire and passion within the rising body so great that it will destroy the present starry heaven, and he calls it ‘hell’ because that is what the orthodox call it.”63 Thus he commences his work by giving the floor to the Devil himself, since for Blake the pole of Energy is, as counterposed to that of Reason, the creative source of life and light which the name itself of Lucifer, “light-bringer”, exemplifies. He claims that this energy “is the only life and is from Body”, giving to it the immortal characterisation of “Eternal Delight”.64 Despite such a primal force being supposedly cast out by the arrogance of the Age of Reason, it constantly ferments in the depths, like the wrath of Rintrah, the revolutionary prophet, that “shakes his fires in the burden’d air” and drives man to travel along perilous paths.65 Only those who have desire too weak can be restrained, Blake points out, by vainly resisting to such a force of creative expansion, a resistance which is a sign of human sickness, not of healthy civilisation. The expression of this desire has not to do with lust, but with the clairvoyant inner freedom from the chains of morality which is permitted when an inspired imagination walks through the doors of love. W. B. Yeats affirms in this respect that Blakes’s imagination expresses the cry that everything on earth that is living can be holy, a realisation that implies an abnormal suffering on the part of the poet. It was in fact clear to Blake that “passions, because most living, are most holy—and this was a scandalous paradox in his time—and man

62 Ibid., p. 151. On Blake’s fascination as well as strong disagreements with Dante, a wide literature is available, which is aptly summarised in the fairly recent Rodney M. Baine, 1987, “Blake’s Dante in a Different Light”, in Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society, 105, pp. 113-136.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., p. 148.
shall enter eternity borne upon their wings.” The English poet retains that, since “Man has no body distinct from his Soul”, the “Body” is a “portion of Soul discern’d by the five Senses”, intending “Reason” as the “bound or outward circumference of Energy.” This compelling analogy makes us visualise Blake’s poetic creations literally as the effect of an inflamed, centrifugal imagination that by breaking the seal of the perimeter of reason (or cleansing the “doors of perceptions”, as the poet later reminds), pours into an experience of luminous melting. By doubting so radically the separation between body and soul, in few other examples as strongly as in Blake, who was visited by visions the fury of which pushed his wife Catherine to get up at night and stay by his side, silently, during the fiercest moments of inspiration, one is caught up by the impression of the vivid closeness of imagination to an extended degree of sensory experience. Yeats says in this respect that the intensity of Blake’s vision is so concrete as to make of him “too literal a realist of imagination.” This observation resonates in the illuminated precision that characterises Blake’s engravings and drawings, in the images that accompany The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, as well as in his late illustrations to Dante’s Commedia (1824-27). Through the meticulous combination of text and images, Blake’s intuitive discernment comes close to Dante’s crafting of visions from the otherworld, both working as mental engravers who, upon the agency of inspiration, process the raw material of imagination into an illuminated jewel. This process of refinement occurs through a mental alignment with the complementary vital forces that regulate life. The harmony of the mind in action,

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67 Blake, 1974, p. 149.

68 “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, til he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern.”, Blake, 1974, p. 154.


Heraclitus notes, comes from the “strain of binding opposites”,\textsuperscript{71} the capacity of thinking both black and white, masculine and feminine, mind and heart, spirit and matter, without yelling to dualistic discrimination. Accordingly, as Kathleen Raine writes in her extensive work on Blake and tradition, \textit{The Marriage of Heaven and Hell}, “often said to contain Blake’s most original thought”, is “in truth an impassioned re-statement of the philosophy of Alchemy.”\textsuperscript{72} The union of opposite forces conveys in fact the wisdom of the Smaragdine Table of Hermes Trismegistus, a fragment well known to Blake and repeatedly mentioned by Jung in \textit{Liber Novus}: “That which is above is like that which is beneath, and that which is beneath is like that which is above, to work the miracles of one thing.”

That the vital integration of contraries is crucial to Blake and \textit{The Marriage of Heaven and Hell} sparks also Jung’s interest in the English visionary. In 1921, in \textit{Psychological Types}, he copies in a footnote the line “Energy is Eternal Delight” from \textit{The Marriage of Heaven and Hell}, in answer to a question posed by himself in the text: “Whence comes this ‘blissful’ feeling, this ecstasy of love?” Jung refers to the self-regulatory capacities of life to restore mental equilibrium, when the ego disappears from the picture:

> It is a state strongly reminiscent of that of the child on the one hand, and of the primitive on the other, who is likewise influenced in the highest degree by the unconscious. We can safely say that the restoration of the earlier paradisal state is the cause of this blissfulness. But we have still to find out why this original state is so peculiarly blissful. The feeling of bliss accompanies all those moments when one feels borne along by the current of life, when what was dammed up can flow off without restraint, when there is no need to do this thing or that thing with a conscious effort in order to find a way out or to achieve a result.\textsuperscript{73}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Fr. 46; Heraclitus, 2001, \textit{Fragments} (London: Penguin Classics), p. 31.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Kathleen Raine, 2002 (1979), \textit{Blake and Antiquity} (London: Routledge), §51, p. 76. See also §39, p. 49.
\item \textsuperscript{73} C. G. Jung, 1921, CW6, §422 (n159).
\end{itemize}
In the same work, Jung also draws to a close the chapter “The Type Problem in Poetry”, by taking from Blake an expression that summarises the “whole previous discussion”, that is, the differentiation of two classes of man upon earth: the “Prolific” and the “Devouring”, identifying in religion the “endeavour to reconcile the two.”74 These categories recur again as he comes to give a general description of the introvert and extravert types at the end of the work. The tendency of the extravert to expand his energy and propagate it in every way is assimilated to Blake’s “Prolific” type. The tendency of the introvert to conserve his energy and “defend himself against all demands from outside” is tied to the “Devouring” one.75 Later, he refers to Blake’s poetry and painting as an example of the category of “visionary” works, of which we will speak shortly. In his alchemical works, he makes a significant, yet slightly imprecise, use of Blake’s illustrations to Dante’s *Commedia*. Finally, in a letter to Piloo Nanavutty, on November 11, 1948, he refers to Blake as a “tantalising study”,76 which would require a great deal of preliminary research before attempting any serious interpretation of his symbolism. However, in this letter Jung also implies that Blake’s visionary production ultimately belongs to an artistic elaboration, rather than an “authentic representation of unconscious processes”,77 an objectionable distinction which Jung reiterates for Rainer Maria Rilke, but which, interestingly enough, he does not apply to Dante.

As these examples illustrate, it is safe to say that the history of the anagogic interpretation presents a multiform variety of characters and approaches, often developing in significantly distant directions from one another. Many of the protagonists of this hermeneutical line, however, associate the anagogic level of interpretation with a deeper or subtler level of perception beneath the literal or visible dimension: a *something else*, counterposed to the perspective of *nothing else but*. Thus the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa

74 Ibid., §460.
75 Ibid., §559.
77 Ibid., p. 514.
originally binds the ordinary senses to as many levels of interpretation, by associating the
touch to the literal, the taste to the allegorical, the smell to the moral, the hearing to the
anagogic, and finally the deepest sense, the (inner) vision, to divinity.\(^{78}\) In light of this, one can
surely say that fundamental differences run between the interpretation of the anagogic sense
which emerges in Dante’s *Commedia*, Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*, and Blake’s *The Marriage of
Heaven and Hell*. Nevertheless, at least from Jung’s point of view, there is also something that
makes their perspectives unique and alike, as well as inclined to be reflected in *Liber Novus*: the
deeply transforming visionary drive. They have based their work upon a first-hand practice of
experiencing visions, taking shape “from things heard and seen”, as Swedenborg says. They
claim to have been deeply affected by such experiences, by giving themselves to the force of
imagination as a systematic training of de-personalisation. Finally, they have developed a new
hermeneutics on this basis, which has approached the anagogic sense to a form of visionary
realism, that is, an exercise of inner insight or intuition corresponding to the opening of a
subtle mode of perception. And despite the significant differences that incur in the
reconstruction of these visions and the variegated cultural and philosophical systems acting
behind them, a web of direct and mediated layers between these figures and texts take shape in
the background, until reaching Jung. Yet, possibly neither Blake nor Swedenborg, nor other
interpreters of the anagogic method, reach the importance Dante comes to have for Jung at
the time of his experiment and after. Not only because one does not find as many significant
concrete references to their work as one does for Dante in Jung’s material, both in the *Black
Books* and in *Liber Novus*. Not because, after all, both Swedenborg and Blake refer to Dante as a
compelling point of inspiration and critical distance, which is taken in by Jung in the
development of his later constructive method. But first of all because, at the heart of Jung’s
journey, *Liber Novus* takes a turn exactly into that spiritual land where Dante and the Fedeli
d’Amore began their quest:

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I must catch up with a piece of the Middle Ages—within myself. We have only finished the Middle Ages of—others. [...] My I, you are a barbarian. I want to live with you, therefore I will carry you through an utterly medieval Hell, until you are capable of making living with you bearable. You should be the vessel and womb of life, therefore I shall purify you.

The touchstone is being alone with oneself.

This is the way.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{79} Jung, LN, p. 330.
Chapter 1

The Way of the Visionary

Whoever cannot seek the unforeseen sees nothing, for the known way is an impasse.

_Heraclitus_
Fig. 4. C. G. Jung's *Liber Novus* (*The Red Book*).
Fig. 5. LN.
Fig. 6. LN.
Fig. 7. LN.
Fig. 8. LN.
Fig. 10. LN.
Fig. 11. Dante's *Commedia*, 1544, (Venezia: Per Francesco Marcolini ad instantia di Alessandro Vellutello).
Fig. 12. Commedia, Inferno.
Fig. 13. Commedia, Purgatorio.
Fig. 15. Dante, 1629, *The Vision* (*La Visione: Poema di Dante Alighieri diviso in Inferno, Purgatorio & Paradiso*) (Padova: Per Donato Paiquardi & Compagno).
1.1. Jung, Dante, and Liber Novus

1.1.1. Hypnagogia

The publication of Liber Novus (The “New Book”, 2009) and the Black Books (2020) let emerge that in a period stretching from 1913 to the late 20s, the Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology C. G. Jung embarked on a visionary experiment which remained unavailable to the public for about a century. Be the reader familiar or not with Jung’s ideas, Liber Novus is a work of a serpentine nature which escapes the use of ordinary criteria of analysis. It can hardly be categorised as a scientific, literary, artistic, or spiritual text, counterposing to any optional artificial characterisation, the polyphony of a work whose title, the “New Book”, evokes above all an experience of rebirth. Although it cannot be proved that the title Liber Novus has been directly informed by Dante’s Vita Nova, a certain similarity of content is there. As Dante’s Vita Nova entails the beginning of a new life (“vita nova”) in the poet’s heart through the vision of love, so Liber Novus heralds the complete transformation of his author’s life and thought, also through an experience of love. As the Vita Nova unravels a

new vision out of the suffering of a symbolical death, so Liber Novus claims the sacrifice of past values into a higher and different order of perceptions. As the former, along the tradition of Apuleius and the ancient mysteries, announces the conversion of a neophyte (lit. “newborn”, “born to a new life”) into a spiritual journey (the Commedia), so the latter proclaims the unfolding of unborn things that are “yet to come”. Liber Novus immediately leads the reader off the beaten path, casting doubt over the safer habitual lens which one would be tempted to use according to one’s favourite viewpoint. It questions, in one word, “imitation”, which the author of Liber Novus describes as a surpassed monkey-like “way of life when men still needed the heroic prototype.” No matter the eye that looks, Liber Novus calls to look deeper, by challenging the reader to experience firsthand what they see, with the “new eyes” of a neophyte. For all that one cannot know and say about it, in fact, there is something of the nature of this experiment that can be affirmed with confidence. Liber Novus is Jung’s own account of a visionary experience of regeneration, the result of a practice that challenged at bottom conventional boundaries between psychology, science, and art.

It is therefore mandatory to first look again at what this practice exactly consisted of. Liber Novus essentially develops on the basis of a technique of meditation or creative visualisation, which in a later phase will be called “active imagination”, sometimes also referred to as “visioning” or “trancing”. The term recurs when, following the years of his self-explorations, Jung takes the notion of active imagination from ancient spiritual and artistic traditions (of both Western and Eastern origins) and makes of it one of the most representative therapeutic tools of analytical psychology or “complex psychology” (“komplexe Psychologie”), as he preferred to call his psychological approach. However, prior to being applied to a therapeutic context, the implications of active imagination are an event in his life,

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81 Jung, LN, p. 245.
the power of which seizes him as a “stream of lava”, pouring into Liber Novus. As the name implies, active imagination emphasises an active or creative capacity of imagination to convey transformative properties over the mind. In this context, imagination is neither constrained to an aesthetic sense, as an artistic play of fantasy, nor into an intellectual one, as an organ of understanding and conceptualisation. Differently, in this formulation, the function of active imagination transcends both formal and rational aspects of the fantasies produced, dealing with another fundamental concern: the direct activation of an interaction with hidden psychic material which through the work of imagination becomes “visible” to the mind and suitable for psychic transformation. In other words, it is a method for unleashing a healing source of equilibrium beyond the threshold of ordinary mental activity. In this sense, the practice of active imagination comes remarkably close to a form of meditational training, sharing in fact a similar terrain of confrontation with Buddhist techniques of breathing control, image-making, and mental concentration. The adjective “active” highlights that through active imagination nature itself comes into play, via the creative force of subconscious images to compensate and restore what the ego has made sick. This technique should thus be understood first of all in relation to Jung’s vision of sub-conscious phenomena as essentially compensatory to the conscious attitude of the individual. Active imagination develops without effort what the efforts of the conscious mind cannot reach. Gadamer has similarly written of the “art of healing”: “Medical practice is not concerned with actually producing equilibrium, that is, with building up a new state of equilibrium from nothing, but rather is always concerned with arresting and assisting the fluctuating equilibrium of health.” Paraphrasing Gadamer’s words,

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one can see active imagination, in Jung’s view, as a systematic training at mentally “assisting”
the natural equilibrium of the mind, however opposite this may look to the contingent wishes
of the ego.

The scientific text in which Jung first elaborates on the psychological application of
active imagination is *The Transcendent Function*, originally written in 1916, but only published in
1957-58. In a later prefatory note to the text, written in 1958-59, he notably claims that the
technique of active imagination is “the most important auxiliary for the production of those
contents of the unconscious which lie, as it were, immediately below the threshold of
consciousness and, when intensifi ed, are the most likely to irrupt spontaneously into the
conscious mind.” At the time Jung writes *The Transcendent Function*, the topic discussed in the
paper reflects the direct engagement of the Swiss thinker with the sudden burst of visions that
will occupy him for many years. By “transcendent function”, he intends “nothing mysterious or
metaphysical”, but a specifi c psychological technique arising “from the union of conscious and
unconscious contents”, aimed at widening consciousness and bringing to light elements of
emotional disturbance. The text outlines an important alternative trajectory of psychological
analysis developing around that time. Despite psychoanalytic theory considered then dream
analysis the “royal way” of dealing with psychic phenomena, in fact, Jung and other fi gures like
Silberer and Ludwig Staudenmaier, not only extensively used psychological methods to
interpret the symbolism of the dreaming state, but equally sought a way to enter the dream as
awake. Although acknowledging the fundamental analytical importance of dream
interpretation, Jung argues in *The Transcendent Function* that other sources are necessary to
animate more closely the energy of the subtle mind. He advocates a mental training in
“exercises for eliminating critical attention”, subjected to what Pierre Janet calls an

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84 Jung, 1958-59 (1916), *The Transcendent Function (Die Transzendente Funktion)*, CW8, p. 68.
85 Jung, CW8, §131.
86 Jung, CW8, §155.
“abaissement du niveau mental”, a phenomenon which intensifies the counteraction of hidden sources of psychic energy over conscious control. When critical attention is properly eliminated, the introversion of libido that follows enlivens an entire world of symbolic and imagistic forms of thinking. Besides the experience of analysis itself, *The Transcendent Function* outlines a variety of ways in which this mind training can occur, according to the different nature of individuals:

Visual types should concentrate on the expectation that an inner image will be produced. As a rule such a fantasy-picture will actually appear—perhaps hypnagogically—and should be carefully observed and noted down in writing. Audio-verbal types usually hear inner words, perhaps mere fragments of apparently meaningless sentences to begin with, which however should be carefully noted down too. [...] There are others, again, who neither see nor hear anything inside themselves, but whose hands have the knack of giving expressions to the contents of the unconscious. Such people can profitably work with plastic materials. Those who are able to express the unconscious by means of body movements are rather rare. [...] Still rarer, but equally valuable, is automatic writing, direct of with the planchette. This, too, yields useful results.  

What the development of the “transcendent function” shares with meditation is first-hand observation of the mind and a practical training in methods of self-transformation. Before formulating this view theoretically, however, Jung elaborates his own practice first and foremost through the compelling amount of visionary material that finds its place in *Liber Novus*. The self-exploratory character of this work is not without parallels. From 1909, Silberer begins conducting experiments on himself in hypnagogic states, i.e., a transitional state  

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87 “A reduced state of concentration and attention, accompanied by a loosening of inhibitions and relaxation of restraints, in which unexpected contents may emerge from the unconscious.” (Oxford Dictionary of Psychology).

88 Jung, CW8, §§ 170-171.
between sleep and waking, characterised by receptivity and passive concentration. Swedenborg refers to this technique as a form of “passive potency”. Edgar Allan Poe describes it as a special kind of mental activity, occurring to him on the very brink of sleep, with the consciousness of being so: “In these fancies [...] it is as if the five senses were supplanted by five myriad of others alien to morality.” A similar term, “psychagogia” (soul-guiding), appears in Aristotle’s Poetics, to designate the cathartic condition of the spectator whose mind is “entranced” before the dramatic action of the tragedy. Silberer notices that in such a state of drowsiness, counteracted by a certain effort to think (the two fundamental conditions to activate a hypnagogic state), thoughts are replaced by a pictorial-symbolic representation of it. Thus he starts to formulate the hypothesis of “auto-symbolic” phenomena, namely automatic self-portrayals, in a symbolic form, of the mind’s striving for expression. He conceives the hypnagogic state an optimal method for spontaneously letting images appear in a half-waking state, achieving in this way a deeper degree of continuity between waking and dreaming. At that time, Silberer sends his articles to Jung, bearing dedications. In the same years, Staudenmaier embarks on similar self-experimentations, made available through research published in 1912, Magic As an Experimental Natural Science. In this work, Staudenmaier explores automatic writing, self-induced hallucinations, and dialogues with autonomous inner characters, digging out a scientific way to explore the roots of magical thinking. Jung’s copy of this work is annotated on almost every page, with a particular emphasis on Staudenmaier’s

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method of personifications. Silberer, who is acquainted too with Staudenmaier’s investigations, establishes parallels between his experimental technique and Eastern practices of introversion, such as Hatha-Yoga and Kundalini Yoga. For the Viennese psychoanalyst, the primary sense of Staudenmaier’s method is that “through the exercise he carries on, and which produces an intense introversion, psychophysical energies are set free that make him capable of greater efficiency”, deriving from this view the more general assumption that “a treasure can be gained (by practices having a significant introversion character), a treasure which permits an increased thinking and feeling activity.”93 In the particularly dynamic context of the early twentieth century, a common interest for techniques of introversion is encouraged by numerous cross-fertilisations between experimental psychology and esoteric research. As a number of abnormal psychologists find in esoteric material a pragmatic view on spiritual matters, so writers and researchers involved in the study of esoteric traditions find in non-reductive psychological approaches a scientific counterpart to their arguments.

Fascinatingly, in 1918, W. B. Yeats gave in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* an account of the techniques of trancing and visioning with which he widely experimented, which comes strikingly close to Jung's method in *Liber Novus*:

> One must allow the images to form with all their associations before one criticises. [...] If you suspend the critical faculty, I have discovered, either as the result of training, or, if you have the gift, by passing into a slight trance, images pass rapidly before you. If you can suspend also desire, and let them form at their own will, your absorption becomes more complete and they are more clear in colour, more precise in articulation, and you and they begin to move in the midst of what seems a powerful light.94

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Similarly, the visionary procedure elaborated in *Liber Novus* consists of a technique, closely related to a hypnagogic mechanism, that enables its author to get to the bottom of his inner processes and bring to light the images stirring beneath the threshold of waking consciousness, allowing in this way psychic contents to appear as freely as possible. He then begins to interact with the multifarious personifications that rise out of this process, by enacting inner dialogues between the standpoint of the ‘I’ and the autonomous forces of the fantasies evoked. In 1925 he recalls that “in putting down all this material for analysis, I was in effect writing letters to my anima, that is to a part of myself with a different viewpoint from my own.” He refines this praxis of visualisation by a method of concentration and mental digging up, a process of “auto-fécondation” (Léon Daudet) or inner awakening of energy which he compares to the Indian concept of *tapas* (fire within). He depicts the difficulties of this state of introversion as facing a deep dark crater or entering into a cathedral, a catacomb, or an antediluvian forest, whose mysterious inhabitants have been suddenly awakened:

I devised such a boring method by fantasising that I was digging a hole, and by accepting this fantasy as perfectly real. This is naturally somewhat difficult to do—to believe so thoroughly in a fantasy that it leads you into further fantasy, just as if you were digging a real hole and passing from one discovery to another. But when I began on that hole I worked and worked so hard that I knew something had to come of it—that fantasy had to produce, and lure out, other fantasies.

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96 Ibid., p. 37.

97 Ibid., p. 51.
He recounts that the more he becomes acquainted with this method, the deeper and clearer the vision appears to reach him.\textsuperscript{98} This phenomenon gradually allows him to make voluntary use of visions and altered mental states, by deliberately engaging, as in a dramatic performance, with the variety of figures and images which appear to his mind. In this way, he experiences that by lowering the level of habitual perceptions, greater psychic sources are activated. The core aspect of this whole experience, he argues, consists of acquiring the ability of letting psychic events happen of their own accord, as in Meister Eckhart’s principle of “letting oneself go.”\textsuperscript{99} For Hillman, in his “descent into the underworld”, Jung acquired a technique to give up his psychiatric standpoint and experienced his journey “imaginally, thereby opening it to insight”, which also led to a switch in his conception of man’s personality, from a “single-centred” view to a “polycentric” one.\textsuperscript{100}

1.1.2. A “Meditation Book”

Over more than sixteen years of dedicated exploration, Jung first notes accurately the records of the experiment in private notebooks, the \textit{Black Books}, for personal use. The \textit{Black Books} unveil the most esoteric core of these experiences at the time and indeed the inception his later exoteric psychological theorisation.\textsuperscript{101} They are a series of seven notebooks in which he records the visions from 1913 to 1932, drawing the appellation “black book” from the colour of their cover, except the first one, which is in brown. The entries contained in the \textit{Black Books} constitute the raw material of the experiment, particularly based on the inner experiences

\textsuperscript{98} Jung, LN, p. 246, n161.


lived from 1913 to 1916, with the gap of one year from summer 1914 to summer 1915. Then he commences revising the content of the visions and elaborates reflections on them by copying the material into a new work entitled, indeed, *Liber Novus*. In the *Draft of Liber Novus*, he transcribes a significant part of the visions from the *Black Books*, about 50 percent of the original material. In the *Black Books*, he literally notes the stream of the visions as they occur to his mind, without any attempt to alter them through intellectual or aesthetic elaboration. Differently, in the *Draft of Liber Novus* he starts to add sections of commentary in which he introduces a level of interpretation based on his then evolving psychological model. This distinction of layers echoes the attempt to theorise an objective and a subjective level of the interpretation of dreams and psychological phenomena, which he elaborates in 1913 and first discusses in the Zürich Psychoanalytical Society on January 30, 1914. A little later, he completes a handwritten version of *Liber Novus (Handwritten Draft)*, then he edits it and types it (*Typed Draft*). Further on, he adds illustrations to the text and begins to faithfully transcribe his material in a quasi medieval calligraphic manuscript. The final outcome is a large folio volume of more than 600 pages, with gothic characters, miniatures, historiated initials, and paintings, conferring to the work some significant resemblance to Blake’s illuminated books. An excellent synthesis of this multilayered practice is in Jung’s later indications to Christiana Morgan’s personal engagement with visioning, which evidently paralleled the method adopted in his own journey:

I should advise you to put it all down as beautifully & as carefully as you can—in some beautifully bound book. It will seem as if you were making the visions banal—but then you need to do that—then you are freed from the power of them . . . . Then when these things are in some precious book you can go to the book & turn over the pages & for you it will

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103 Ibid., p. 202, n94.
be your church—your cathedral—the silent places of your spirit where you will find
renewal. If anyone tells you that it is morbid or neurotic and you listen to them—then you
will lose your soul—for in that book is your soul.\(^{104}\)

Karl Baier has valuably suggested to approach *Liber Novus* essentially as a “meditation
book”, for “the writing and reading practices that are associated with it, are part of an ancient
Western tradition of meditative interaction with the book and, at the same time, are part of
the history of European meditation.”\(^{105}\) This “meditation book”, or even better, “meditation
practice”, as he calls it, is constituted of three parts, divided into multiple chapters and
sections. *Liber Primus* (The First Book), which Jung entitles “The Way of What is Yet to Come”
(“Der Weg des Kommenden”), *Liber Secundus* (The Second Book), or “The Images of the
Erring” (“Die Bilder des Irrenden”), and *Liber Tertius* (The Third Book), or more precisely,
*Scrutinies* (*Prüfungen*).\(^ {106}\) Although the material is gathered under the title *Liber Novus*, the work
remains more popularly known as Jung’s *Red Book*. “Das Rote Buch” (The “Red Book”) is in fact
the term used by Jung with his closest acquaintances to refer to his work, due to its huge red
leather cover. Furthermore, Cary Baynes records a conversation in 1922, in which the Swiss
psychologist refers to the freshly appeared novel by Gustav Meyrink, *The White Dominican*, a
book in which he finds similar images to his experiences at the time. In the novel, the
protagonist becomes acquainted with the secret Cinnabar-red book, a vehicle of spiritual


\(^{105}\) Karl Baier, 2011, “The *Red Book* in the Context of European Spiritual History” (“Das Rote Buch im Kontext
europäischer Spiritualitätgeschichte”), in *Recherches Germaniques*, Hors Série Nr 8, p. 28.

\(^ {106}\) On the chronological sequence of Jung’s material, see Shamdasani, 2009, “Editorial Note”. *Liber Primus* and
*Liber Secundus: Black Books* 2-5 (November 1913-April 1914); *Handwritten Draft* (Summer 1914-1915); *Typed Draft* (circa
1915); *Calligraphic Volume* (1915-1930). For *Scrutinies: Black Books* 5-6 (April 1914-June 1916); *Calligraphic Septem
Sermones* (1916); *Printed Septem Sermones* (1916); *Handwritten Draft* (circa 1917); *Typed Draft* (circa 1918).
illumination which the ancient Chinese tradition represented in red, the colour of the garments of those who walk along the pathway of inner elevation.\textsuperscript{107} The choice to consistently refer in this study to \textit{Liber Novus}, instead of \textit{Red Book}, adheres to Jung’s original deliberations and aims to highlight the central meaning of the word \textit{novum}, within the longstanding tradition this term evokes in apocalyptic literature. In his own words, Jung vividly refers to the material taking shape in the \textit{Black Books} as “the most difficult experiment” of his life.\textsuperscript{108} In hindsight, he acknowledges the years of his engagement with \textit{Liber Novus} as the “beginning of everything”: the epicentre of the entire development of his later work and scientific elaboration.\textsuperscript{109} Seen as a whole, the records of this experiment reveal the momentous transformation of a profound existential crisis, described as an ineluctable visit to Hell, into the source of a life-changing process of creative expansion. Altogether, the \textit{Black Books} and \textit{Liber Novus} represent the centre of gravity of everything new one may want to say about Jung. Without a proper understanding of the significance of \textit{Liber Novus} for its author, as Shamdasani has pointed out, one is “in no place to understand fully Jung’s intellectual development” and any account of it “would be like writing the life of Dante without the \textit{Commedia}, or Goethe without \textit{Faust}.”\textsuperscript{110}

With these premises, the critical response to the publication of \textit{Liber Novus} in 2009 has been far-reaching, in many respects. At a popular level, it has triggered a new increasing interest for Jung, whom, unlike many other comparable figures of the twentieth century, tends to be perceived as a contemporary author. At an academic level as well, it has begun to notably change the study of the life and work of the Swiss thinker, by setting forth an exceptional number of paths to explore within the history of Jung’s thought and analytical psychology. The extraordinary richness of \textit{Liber Novus} opens up an impressive number of contents, themes, interlinked threads, and comparative sources of study. Several central motifs have now started

\textsuperscript{107} Jung, LN, p. 212.
\textsuperscript{108} Jung, LN, p. 200.
\textsuperscript{110} Sonu Shamdasani, 2005, \textit{Jung Stripped Bare by His Biographers, Even} (London: Karnac), p. 103.
to be examined from a different light, such as Jung’s distinctive relationship with Nietzsche, German philosophy, the Romantic tradition, Christianity, Gnosticism, Swedenborg, visual art, psychotherapy, William James, the history of psychiatry and psychotherapy. However, other core elements of Liber Novus have not been considered yet in depth, surprisingly, if not left completely unexplored. It is in within this category, that the inspiration of this study finds its place.

1.1.3. Jung’s Dante

Among those novel elements of research concerning Liber Novus, one notably stands out: Jung’s multifaceted confrontation with Dante’s Commedia, embedded within the in-depth fascination for the Middle Ages that characterises, on the whole, Liber Novus.111 In this regard, besides evoking the traits of a “meditation book”, Baier has also approached Liber Novus to “a transgressive book of Christian visions”, by juxtaposing it to the medieval tradition of soliloquies and books of visions.112 The intuition is correct, yet it fails to mention the proximity of Dante, arguably the most transgressive of the Christian visionaries, to the same tradition, which in itself provides a historical trait d’union between some primary characteristics of Jung’s experiment and aspects of medieval texts of visions. Liber Novus presents indeed a few intriguing analogies with the visionary corpus of the Middle Ages from the 13th and 14th century, particularly in relation to the dramatised inner dialogues and stages of self-transformation that inform the soliloquies (visio, narratio, argumentatio). Liber Novus shares with the medieval books of visions the strongly autobiographical dimension of the genre (the visionary never speaks by imitation or artificial construction, but by direct meditative


experience upon self-induced or received visions) and the equally strong pragmational exigencies of the text (the visionary offers a system of contemplative self-transformation which the attentive reader is called to enact). Furthermore, it has in common with the works of medieval visionaries that the transformative experience occurs by travelling into the “other world”, while gathering a series of visions from this extraordinary situation. This journey involves some important recurrent elements, such as the threats of ghosts and demons, the appearance of travel companions, the help of celestial guidance, the interaction with the deceased, the apocalyptic framework, the phases of spiritual transformation, the sequences of invocations, the use of incantations, the increasingly illuminated vision. However, beyond these connections, the most challenging point of confrontation that Liber Novus receives from the medieval visionary tradition and the spirit of the late Middle Ages is the permeation between religion and science, in a phase of the development of European thought in which the separation between these disciplines, as it is known to the modern mind, had not been formed yet. In this regard, the function of creative imagination comes along a similar terrain to that of the medieval Magia Naturalis: a conception of imagination as the dedicated mediatory agency between invisible and visible dimensions of mental operations. At the time, this characteristically synthetic approach finds in Dante’s complexity of thought one of its most fruitful expressions. Scientific and religious components appear not antagonistic but rather sympathetic forces, forming an elaborate, organic whole, which stresses more than one element of connection with the underlying spirit of Jung’s experiment. Moreover, Liber Novus, starting from its title, echoes aspects of what is known as the ars nova of medieval vision books. Remarkably, these texts of spiritual self-regeneration were often accompanied by pictures, indicating a general amplification of the text into an imagistic form. One original example is offered by John the Monk’s Liber visionum (Book of Visions), burned at Paris in 1323 as a heretical and sorcerous document. Liber visionum is a late medieval book of prayers and magical operations. It is closely connected to a group of ritual magic texts mostly known as the
“Ars Notoriana” (the “Notory Art”) of Solomon, the content of which, detailed in Lynn Thorndike’s History of Magic and Experimental Science,\(^{113}\) was condemned by Thomas Aquinas and other theologians. The Liber visionum contains several significant parallelisms with Dante’s Commedia.\(^{114}\) It draws from the “Notory Art” (also referred to as sacratissima ars notoria) the characteristic inscription of notae or figures next to the text, normally diagrams or words in elementary geographical shape. The notae do not simply belong to the art of the medieval notaries in the traditional sense, for their primary function was instead to provide focal points for meditation while the texts were recited in a meditational state. This adequately highlights, as illustrated by Michael Camille, that throughout the Middle Ages “visual and magical arts were intimately intertwined”,\(^{115}\) this being one of the main reasons of the theological condemnation for “idolatry” of a significant number of medieval visual texts. Despite the Commedia not explicitly following the technique of inscription of images next to the text, its inherently visual power and unorthodox elements share at bottom the fundamental traits of a “meditation book” and “a transgressive book of Christian visions”, both categories which suitably describe a work, the Commedia, which until the 16th century had been translated in English only as The Vision or The Vision of Dante Alighieri. An early edition (Venice, 1544) of the Commedia (La comedia di Dante Alighieri con la nova esposizione di Alessandro Vellutello) of rare beauty, features a series of notae or geometrical images illustrating the various stages of Dante’s journey of self-transformation. When the reader glances at these beautiful images, of shape and colours suggestively close to mandalas, one soon realises that a comparative study of Liber Novus and Dante’s Commedia was urgently needed.


Jung reads Dante throughout his entire life, with an increasing interest for a few Dantean motives: Lucifer, the soul, and the mystical rose, which become stable references in his seminars, lectures, and scientific works. However, in no other place more than in Liber Novus, the Italian sommo poeta exerts such a direct and important function for the Swiss psychiatrist. This is proved by the fact that in a period prior to Liber Novus, the references to Dante in Jung's work are mostly occasional, while precisely throughout the visionary experiment which occupies him for about 20 years, Dante and the Commedia become a most important point of confrontation. Later, Jung commits himself to scientific studies and seminars with a widespread interest for the Italian poet which lasts until his latest writings. Overall, this study traces more than 70 Dantean occurrences in Jung's work, counting among published and unpublished scientific works, seminars, and letters. Of this number, a couple of references appear before Liber Novus, 13 throughout, and approximately 55 after, of which circa 25 in the 30s, 21 in the 40s, and 9 in the 50s. Jung had read Dante since his youth. It is difficult to confirm whether he was already doing so when his mother suggested to him, at about 15-16, the unsettling reading of Goethe’s Faust.\textsuperscript{116} It is hard as well to say whether his juvenile reading of Dante had the same explosive impact as Nietzsche\textsuperscript{117} or the “breath of life” perceived in Meister Eckhart.\textsuperscript{118} Nevertheless, it is a proven fact that in 1898, when he was 23, he received a German edition of Dante’s Commedia (Jung read Dante in German) from an aunt, a copy that now presents signs of frequent reading, underlining, annotations, and various slips of paper accompanying significant passages.\textsuperscript{119} Thus, already as a medical student, Dante is present in Jung's extracurricular readings at Basel University. There he spends his time immersed in his studies, the seances of his cousin Helene Preiswerk, and the gatherings of the student

\textsuperscript{116} Jung, ETG, p. 65.

\textsuperscript{117} Jung, 2012 (1925), p. 7.

\textsuperscript{118} Jung, ETG, p. 74.

fraternity Zöfingia, of which he becomes president in 1897, holding 5 lectures. In one of these, in the summer semester of 1898, the name of Dante occurs for the very first time within his material, with a singular mention.\textsuperscript{120} Jung draws here on a well known, yet quite specific, episode of the \textit{Inferno}, Cantos XXXII and XXXIII, in which Dante sets Conte Ugolino frozen into the ice of the second circle (Antenora) of the lowest zone of Hell, containing traitors to a country or party:

\begin{quote}
Noi eravam partiti già da ello,
ch’io vidi due ghiacciati in una buca,
sì che l’un capo a l’altro era cappello;

e come l’pan per fame si manduca,
cosi ’l sovran li denti a l’altro pose
là ’ve ’l cervel s’aggiugne con la nuca.\textsuperscript{121}
\end{quote}

Several years will have to pass before Dante appears again in Jung’s writings. It occurs in the earliest version (1911–1912) of \textit{Transformations and Symbols of the Libido}, containing a long citation from Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue, which famously evokes the coming of a \textit{puer} heralding the beginning of a new golden age.\textsuperscript{122} In a footnote, Jung summons the idea that drove several Christian commentators to retrospectively interpret Virgil as a quasi Christian poet, announcer

\begin{footnotes}
\item[120] C. G. Jung, 1983 (1897/1899), \textit{The Zöfingia Lectures. Supplementary, Volume 1} (London: Routledge), §229.
\item[121] Dante, \textit{Inferno}, XXXII, 124–129; 1987, p. 321. “We had already gone away from him, / When I saw two so frozen in one hole / That the head of one made headgear for the other; / And, as in hunger people will gnaw bread, / So the one on top fixed his teeth in the lower one, / Just where the brain joins to the nape of the neck.”
\end{footnotes}
ante temporem of the imminent spreading of Christianity. This would be, he argues, one of the principal reasons why Virgil assumes the role of psychopomp in Dante's *Commedia*, i.e., the creature, deity, or anthropomorphic figure, whose main function in ancient Greek religion was to escort the souls in their journeys to the afterlife. What matters most here about this notation is that soon Jung himself, at the commencement of *Liber Novus*, will experience his visionary encounter with the psychopomp Philemon, whose characteristics come to closely echo those of Dante's Virgil, as will be discussed later.\(^\text{123}\) Against this background, he begins to actively read Dante's *Commedia* at the heart of his experiment. And as early as December 26, 1913, about a month after the beginning of his self-explorations, he copies together in *Black Book* 2 the following citations from two different Cantos of Dante's *Commedia*:

\[\text{I' mi son un che, quando}
\]
\[\text{Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo,}
\]
\[\text{ch'e' dita dentro vo significando.}\(^\text{124}\)
\]

\[\text{E simigliante poi a la fiammella}
\]
\[\text{che segue il fuoco là 'vunque si muta,}
\]
\[\text{segue lo spirto sua forma novella.}\(^\text{125}\)
\]

These lines convey the core of Jung's confrontation with Dante. The combination of “fuoco” and “forma” (“fire” and “form”) provides in fact a remarkable poetic synthesis of Jung's method to make sense of his experiment, meaning by “fire” the psychic energy of visions and


\(^{124}\) Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXIV, 52-54; 1987, p. 624. “And I to him: ‘I am one who, when love / Breathes on me, notices, and in the manner / That he dictates within, I utter words.’”

\(^{125}\) Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXV, 97-99; 1987, p. 636-637. “And then, in the same manner as a flame / Which follows the fire whatever shape it takes, / The new form follows the spirit exactly.”
by “form” a house to host them là ‘vunque si muta, “whatever shape they take”, that is, whatever
direction the emergence of visions takes the traveller of the mind to venture. The entries hint
at a radical reversal of perspective, in which the microcosm of the individual, the “flame”, is
put on the service of a greater macrocosm, the “fire”, the consistence and effects of which,
though mysterious in their innermost nature, have essentially to do, one reads, with “the
inspiration of love.” Like different degrees of the same substance, the “flame” returns to the
“fire” in a process of communion, in the same manner as the body and mind of the subject who
loves are healed and transformed by the act of love. The energy of the event is such that the
subject can only strive to keep up with its transforming manifestation, by taking notes in a
state of visionary possession. Psychologically, the subject is awakened to a deeper dimension of
reality, permanently active beyond the narrowness of the I-ness. Or to say it in the manner of
the French surrealist Robert Desnos, “ultimately, it is not poetry that must be free, it is the
poet.” These initial reflections make us suggest that right at the inception of his experiment,
Jung comes to read the Commedia in terms of a guidance for his own journey into the depths.
What this study aims to demonstrate is that on the basis of this encounter, Liber Novus
presents a highly significant degree of literal and symbolic correspondences with the purposes
and content of Dante’s visionary travelling.

Curiously, such indications have been almost completely overlooked until now, although
even during the years in which this research has been conducted, there has been an evident
growing interest for Jung and Dante among scholars and analysts, which has been reflected by
the decision of the IAAP (International Association for Analytical Psychology) to organise the
first IAAP Jung-Dante conference, in Ravenna in 2021, upon the seven-hundred anniversary of
Dante’s death. In the past, in a very different manner from the methodology of the present
work, several authors have placed Dante’s Commedia under the lens of Jung’s psychology, such

as Helen Luke, Mary Patricia Sexton, and Adriana Mazzarella. Luke, a Jungian analyst trained in Zürich, interprets the whole narrative line of Dante’s journey (“from dark wood to white rose”) by analogies with Jungian psychological tenets. Accordingly, Dante’s advancement through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven is taken as a paradigmatic example of Jung’s conception of the “individuation process”. The motifs, figures, and mythological images that accompany the Commedia become instances of inner psychic development, from the obscurity of a threatening psychological crisis to an increasingly wider enlargement of consciousness. Sexton develops her work along similar lines, by comparing the circular spiral like structure of the Commedia to Jung’s interpretation of mandala symbolism and then examining the primary elements of Dante’s visions upon a markedly Jungian outlook. More comprehensive (and more informed about Dante) than the first two is Mazzarella’s work. The author was based in Milan as a Jungian psychotherapist and a disciple of Dora Kalff, the creator of Sand Play Therapy. Throughout her life, she embarks on a passionate study of the spiritual and symbolic dimension of Dante’s poetry, resulting in a major publication, Alla ricerca di Beatrice, a book which boasts the direct confrontation with Marie-Louise von Franz among its primary sources of inspiration. Though this work too essentially tackles the visions of the Italian poet from the viewpoint of a Jungian language, it does so in a non-reductive manner, merging significant personal experience as a practitioner into an extensive analysis of the Commedia, canticle by canticle. In more than one occasion, the volume provides some original inspiration, for example by juxtaposing the structure of Dante’s otherworld to the different chakras of Kundalini Yoga (a parallel which is not ignored by Jung either) or by taking into account elements of the symbolist interpretation of Dante, eliciting in this way a point of confrontation between the latter and Jung’s psychology. Engaging as these works may be,

however, they all choose to ignore the historical and hermeneutical aspects of Jung’s relation to Dante, opting rather for a Jungian reading of the *Commedia*, no matter how deliberate this choice may be for critical purposes. Furthermore, they appear, *nolens volens*, before the fundamental publication of *Liber Novus* and they do not include Jung’s unpublished works in their analysis, a crucial component of any study on the topic. After the appearance of *Liber Novus*, in fact, the connection between Jung and Dante has become more evident, yet not followed by a thorough examination. Dennis Patrick Slattery has for example suggested to approach *Liber Novus* as “Jung’s Divine Comedy”,128 but this indication, however interesting, falls within a literary analysis of epic patterns which has little or nothing to do with Jung’s own recounting of his experiences (let alone his conception of aesthetics), nor it has, unfortunately, the depth of an approach *à la* Frye. Without starting from sound historical grounds, any study of this topic in a way or another misses the factual, experiential dimension of Jung’s explorations, which in its turn gives to following speculations a somewhat artificial degree of theoretical facade. Finally, the question of Jung and Dante has in recent times made a breach even into the strong walls of academic Dante scholarship. In this context, a valuable kind of work has been introduced by Dante scholar Daniela Boccassini, who has started to propose a few innovative lines of comparison between Dante and Jung,129 thus invigorating this perspective of research with the complexity of Dantesque knowledge which a study of this sort essentially requires. Though her work may certainly help approaching Jung in an unusual manner, its main signature trait resides in building up a fresh and challenging methodology that calls into question a few compelling aspects within the tradition of Dante scholarship. All in all, therefore, the cited publications and authors bear witness to the fact that, in present


times, the Italian poet continues to exert a particular fascination within a Jungian framework. After all, even Henri Ellenberger, in the Jung chapter appearing in his monumental *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, chose a vivid Dantesque metaphor to portray a key point of Jung’s psychological model:

One characteristic feature of any journey through the unconscious is the occurrence of what Jung called *enantiodromia*. This term, originating with Heraclitus, means the “return to the opposite”. Certain mental processes are turned at a given point into their opposites as if through a kind of self-regulation. This notion has also been symbolically illustrated by poets. In the *Divine Comedy* we see Dante and Virgil reaching the deepest point of hell and then taking their first step upward in a reverse course toward purgatory and heaven. This mysterious phenomenon of the spontaneous reversal of regression was experienced by all those who passed successfully through a creative illness and has become a characteristic feature of Jungian synthetic-hermeneutic therapy.\(^\text{130}\)

Though Ellenberger was most likely unaware of the fact that Jung actively read Dante during his “confrontation with the unconscious”, his observations provide an optimal angle to highlight a primary aspect of Jung’s encounter with the *Commedia*. Namely, that Dante furnishes him with a synthetic model that is able not only to pave a way into Hell, but especially to deliver “a first step upward” over the legs of Lucifer, “a ritornar nel chiaro mondo; / e sanza cura aver d’alcun riposo”—“to return to the bright world; / And not worrying about taking any rest.”\(^\text{131}\) In contrast with the above-mentioned literature, therefore, this work is based on an entirely different approach, which finds in *Liber Novus* its departure point and main object of interest. Far from being a commentary of Dante’s *Commedia* in a Jungian vein or a retrospective analysis of *Liber Novus* using Jung’s later psychological jargon, the main


inspiration of this research stems from the effort to delineate the way in which (Jung’s) Dante has informed the elaboration of Liber Novus at historical and hermeneutical levels. It cannot be stressed enough that the Black Books and Liber Novus do not contain any of the characteristic terms that would later become the hallmark of analytical psychology; words such as “shadow”, “animus” and “anima”, “archetypes”, and the infamous “unconscious”, which appears only once in Jung’s notebooks before being disposed with altogether. Thus, projecting ex post the theories of the Swiss psychologist onto Liber Novus not only is historically inappropriate, but it can also be misleading at a critical level, for it conveys the temptation to seek validation for his experiment into a more or less explicit Jungian ontology. In fact, though it is safe to say that Jung’s work is crucial to the understanding of his mature psychology, “to conclude that it therefore proves the truth of that psychology is an evident non sequitur”, as Wouter Hanegraaff points out: “Jung’s well-known theories provide us simply with one possible vantage point for interpreting his text, and not necessarily the most convincing one.”

Similarly, it seems to us that adopting a Dantesque hermeneutics to approach Liber Novus gives more fruitful insights than the other way around. Accordingly, this study adheres as much as possible to the eventful language of Jung’s visions, while on the other hand privileging the scientific texts of Jung that are contemporary and more complementary to the development of Liber Novus, by drawing equally on published material, such as the 1925 seminar on Analytical Psychology, and unpublished works, such as the 1923 Polzeath seminar.

About six centuries run between the masterpiece of Italian medieval poetry and the start of Jung’s work. The challenging investigation of this connection is something that requires the right balance between the “scientist’s patience” and “the artist’s passion”, as Vladimir Nabokov envisioned the act of penetrating reading. Therefore, besides a legendary prophecy predicting that Dante’s Commedia would be finally understood only after nearly seven centuries, Shamdasani offers a more reliable place to start: “It is clear that [Dante’s] Divine Comedy has

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inspired Jung in his journey both from an existential and a literary angle." Our inquiry proves and develops further this conviction, by understanding Jung’s approach to Dante as a springboard, from which to examine his personal and psychological concern about the nature and meaning of visionary experiences. Ten years after Dante’s appearance in the *Black Books*, Jung holds a seminar in Polzeath, Cornwall, in the summer of 1923. There he claims, for the first time in public, that Christianity had lost its validation to speak for a universal religious experience, which it only had in the Middle Ages, going as far as to claim that the only “real Christianity was medieval.” Fascinatingly, he frames this critique by bringing up again the contrast between “fire” and “form”, as evoked in Dante’s verses from *Purgatorio*. The greatest psychological loss of the Christian, he argues, comes from having forgotten the “fire” of spiritual experiences, as caused by the four great exclusions of the Western mind: sex and nature, animality, the inferior man, and creative imagination.

It is only our damnable pride in having the best thing that makes us call our ultimate truth Christianity. What is exclusively traditional Christianity? It is difficult to say just what has been repressed by Christianity. In your own life you cannot say what categories of things have been repressed in you by historical Christianity, but the Church appears to have made four great exclusions psychologically: 1. The world of nature and of flesh. 2. The animal. 3. The inferior man. 4. Creative fantasy and freedom.

In response to this critical situation, which occupies a central place in Jung’s reflections, a reference like Dante’s *Commedia* places itself exactly at the opposite end of such an impasse. A work deeply inspired by an erotic episode, based on the transgressive spiritual freedom of his author, and shaped into the tradition of a medieval “meditation book”.

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133 Shamdasani, 2016, p. 46.
135 Ibid., pp. 74-75.
Though in a heavily edited form, Memories, Dreams, Reflections recounts how since his childhood Jung experienced a number of significant hallucinations, dreams, and visions, leading him to his psychological vocation. From a very early age, he appears to have had an exceptional faculty of evoking images voluntarily, a disposition which becomes a technique throughout the elaboration of Liber Novus. At that time, a precocious thirst for knowledge concerning God and evil makes him soon grow a skeptical distance from his father, Paul Achilles Jung, a Christian pastor of the Swiss reformed Church. What most of all disappoints him of his father is the lack of immediate spiritual experience outside Church and theology: a sacrifice of practice in the name of faith and beliefs. In his father’s library, he reads classics such as Homer’s Odyssey, Virgil’s Aeneid and Eclogues and German authors like Friedrich Schiller, Eduard Mörike, and Friedrich Hölderlin, but he cannot find philosophers, regarded by his father as “suspect because they thought.” He will then read the philosophers later, while a medical student at Basel, being especially impressed by Arthur Schopenhauer, the first thinker whose language he feels as his own, Eduard von Hartmann, Nietzsche, Carl Gustav Carus, Immanuel Kant, and Swedenborg. Young Carl Gustav perceives his mother, Emilie Preiswerk, of an opposite kind, the stronger personality of the two, by day a loving mother and at night the keeper of a secret, archaic spirit, like “one of those seers who is at the same time a strange animal, like a priestess in a bear’s cave”:

137 Jung, ETG, p. 66.
Archaic and ruthless; ruthless as truth and nature. At such moments she was the embodiment of what I have called ‘the natural mind’. I too have this archaic nature, and in me it is linked with the gift—not always pleasant—of seeing people and things as they are. [...] This ‘insight’ is based on instinct, or on a ‘participation mystique’ with others. It is as if the ‘eyes of the background’ do the seeing in an impersonal act of perception.139

He finds the trace of this archaic spirit also in the emergence of two personalities within himself, dubbed NO. 1 and NO. 2.140 Where the former, more Apollonian, pursues science, social life, and the clarity of daylight, the latter, more Dionysian, indulges on religion, solitude, and mythological imagination. The early experience of this multiplicity makes him soon grapple with the contradictory idea of a unified ego, at a psychological level, and a unified God, at a spiritual level. Much later, he would make of this problem one of the central questions of his psychological system, by deploring how “our true religion is a monotheism of consciousness, coupled with a fanatical denial of the existence of fragmentary autonomous systems. But we differ from the Buddhist yoga doctrines in that we even deny that these systems are experienceable.”141 As a young man, through NO. 1, he builds up his personal image in the world, whereas thanks to NO. 2 he becomes aware of “the feeling that something other than myself was involved. [...] As though a breath of the great world of stars and endless space had touched me, or if a spirit had invisibly entered the room.”142 When still a boy, Jung’s personality NO. 1 likes among other things to spend time reading novels, away from the religious preoccupations conveyed by NO. 2. One day, however, his mother suggests him to read Goethe’s Faust. Taking such indication as one of his mother’s uncanny, prophetic insights, he duly reads Faust and is exceptionally struck by its content, finding in it a subtle door to

139 Jung, ETG, p. 56. (Tr. by R. And C. Winston).
140 Ibid., p. 51.
141 Jung, 1929, CW13, §51.
142 Jung, ETG, p. 71.
enter into communication with his personality NO. 2. Later, he reads Dante along similar lines. Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* makes an even more profound impression on him. It is the beginning of that abiding concern for what in parallel to the elaboration of *Liber Novus* and after, he starts to identify by the category of visionary art.

Jung’s characterisation of the notion of visionary art first takes shape in a lecture given in Zürich in 1922, entitled “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry”, and then in *Psychology and Poetry* in 1930.143 The primary source of this exposition concerning the notion of “visionary works” is his own visionary work: *Liber Novus*. In fact, Jung’s confrontation with this kind of art responds to his attempt at finding analogous symbolism to the visionary experiences he lived first-hand, particularly in the period in between 1913 and 1916. Therefore, one can look at Jung’s critical discussion of visionary art as a valuable parallel companion to understand significant aspects of the symbolism which originally took form in *Liber Novus*. By “visionary works”, he broadly intends a particular form of artistic creation that would incorporate under the aesthetic layer a substantial proximity to primordial psychic experiences. To get a better understanding of this conception, he refers to a specific corpus of literary and artistic works of European tradition in which this mode of creation appears particularly well expressed. In this personal pantheon, there are Dante’s *Commedia*, Blake’s poetry and illustrations, Swedenborg’s visions, the second part of Goethe’s *Faust*, Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* and *Dionysian-Dithyrambs*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Francesco Colonna’s *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, Böhme’s mystical accounts, Meyrink’s esoteric novels, Alfred Kubin’s *The Other Side*, Hermann Hesse’s *Demian*, E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *The Golden Pot*, Gérard de Nerval’s *Aurélia*, Richard Wagner’s *Ring*, *Tristan*, and *Parsifal*, Carl Spitteler’s *Olympian Spring*, Rider Haggard’s *She*, Pierre Benoît’s *Atlantide*, Bruno Goetz’s *The Kingdom Without Space*, Ernst

Barlach’s *The Dead Day*, and even Rilke’s angelical imagery. For Jung, these works, however far apart they may be, share some important similar traits which do not resolve in the aesthetic dimension. They utilise strongly mythological and symbolic patterns, conveying forms of imagination which markedly transcend the personal level to merge into collective degrees of psychic expression. They seem to write the authors themselves rather than the other way around. They deal with magical and preternatural elements, coming into close proximity with the sphere of interest of the esotericist. And what is more, they often culminate in a journey of purification and renewal into a maternal or feminine symbol, as suggestively portrayed by the Dantesque appearance of Eva in Hesse’s *Demian*:

There she was, the tall, almost masculine figure, looking like her son, but with maternal traits, traits of severity and deep passion, beautiful and alluring, beautiful and unapproachable, daimon and mother, fate and lover. There was no mistaking her!

The discovery that my dream-image existed on this earth affected me like some fantastic miracle! So there was a woman who looked like that, who bore the features of my destiny!

Where was she? Where? And she was Demian’s mother!

Shortly after this I embarked on my journey.\(^{144}\)

Jung’s copy of *Demian* presents an annotation right by this passage. He heavily read and marked the book, recognising in it a literary elaboration of experiences close to what he directly faced in *Liber Novus*.\(^{145}\) Thus he wrote the following to Hesse:

Your book hit me like the beam of lighthouse on a stormy night. A good book, like every proper human life, must have an ending. Yours has the best possible ending, where everything that has gone before runs truly to its end, and everything with which the book

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began begins over again—with the birth and awakening of the new man. The Great Mother is impregnated by the loneliness of him that seeks her. In the shell burst she bears the “old” man into death, and implants in the new and everlasting monad, the mystery of individuality. And when the renewed man reappears the mother reappears too—in a woman on this earth.146

Visionary works like Demian, Jung argues, overtly unmask the limitations of a reductive approach to artistic material. He ascribes this perspective, which he mainly identifies with orthodox psychoanalysis, to a “purgative method”.147 It consists of reducing the work of art to its elementary psychological processes, supposedly situated in some repressed content acting as the cause of the creative process. To proceed in this manner, from his point of view, is just as misleading as driving on a car by looking back in the rearview mirror. It only gives a reflection of the past, while losing the sense of the present and future journey, in which the living meaning of the creative process abides. It mistakes the symbol for a sign or symptom of an underlying medical assumption, when the true meaning of the symbol “should be understood as an expression of an intuitive idea that cannot yet be formulated in any other or better way.”148 It locates the origin of the creative process in an egocentric delusion, when its coming into existence is on the contrary a matter of self-forgetting. Thus, he argues, the fact of speculating on allegedly morbid aspects emerging out of artist’s biographies, “may perhaps have the same kind of scientific value as, for instance, a post-mortem examination of the brain of Nietzsche, which might conceivably show us the particular atypical form of paralysis from

146 Jung to Hesse, December 3, 1919, Letters 1, pp. 573–574.
147 Jung, CW15, §125.
148 Ibid., §105. This follows Jung’s definition of symbol in Psychological Types, CW6, §§815–816: “A view which interprets the symbolic expression as the best possible formulation of a relatively unknown thing, which for that reason cannot be more clearly or characteristically represented, is symbolic. […] So long as a symbol is a living thing, it is an expression for something that cannot be characterized in any other or better way.”
which he died. But what this would have to do with Zarathustra? Similarly, he points out, “we can certainly learn to understand some of the plant’s peculiarities by getting to know its habitat, and for the botanist this is an important part of his equipment. But nobody will maintain that everything essential has then been discovered about the plant itself.” Accordingly, he suggests that the real concern of the psychologist should not be what the work of art may tell us about the artist, but rather what it tells us more than the artist, like the case of works of strongly archetypal content aptly demonstrates. In fact, the primary characteristic of the visionary mode of creation as delineated by Jung is to be fundamentally impersonal. While more ordinary forms of creative expression appear to stem from the author’s intention to produce an artistic effect or transmit a certain meaning, this is not the case at all for the visionary type, the existence of which essentially derives from necessity and not from deliberate intentions. The greater power of these works escapes the author’s control and there is little they can do but fully give themselves up to it. The true source of creativity does not depend upon the individual but upon something else. The author looks at their work with horror or amazement, as if someone else other than themselves was the dictator of what they craft under states of visionary possession:

These works positively force themselves upon the author; his hand is seized, his pen writes things that his mind contemplates with amazement. The work brings with it its own form; anything he wants to add is rejected, and what he himself would like to reject is thrust back at him. While his conscious mind stands amazed and empty before this phenomenon, he is overwhelmed by a flood of thoughts and images which he never intended to create and which his own will could have never brought into being. Yet in spite of himself he is forced to admit that it his own self speaking, his own inner nature revealing itself and uttering things which he would never have entrusted to his tongue. He can only obey the apparently

149 Ibid., §103.
150 Ibid., §107.
alien impulse within him and follows where it leads, sensing that his work is greater than himself. [...] He fancies he is swimming, but in reality an unseen current sweeps him along.\footnote{Jung, CW15, §§139–140.}

In *Psychology and Poetry*, he reaffirms the foregoing by introducing a distinction between a “psychological” and a “visionary” form of creation, as follows:

The psychological mode works with materials drawn from man's conscious life—with crucial experiences, powerful emotions, suffering, passion, the stuff of human fate in general. [...] The raw material of this kind of creation is derived from the contents of man's consciousness, from his eternally repeated joys and sorrows, but clarified and transfigured by the poet. [...] Whatever artistic form they may take, their contents always derive from the sphere of conscious human experience—from the psychic foreground of life, we might say. That is why I call this mode of creation “psychological”; it remains within the limits of the psychologically intelligible.\footnote{Ibid., §§110–113.}

The nature of the “visionary” mode of artistic creation appears completely different from the “psychological”. What the second part of Goethe's *Faust* and Dante’s fancies from the underworld suitably illustrate is a real experience of visions retaining nothing but a faint echo from man’s conscious life:

The gulf that separates the first from the second part of *Faust* marks the difference between the psychological and the visionary modes of artistic creation. Here everything is reversed. The experience that furnishes the material for artistic expression is no longer familiar. It is something strange that derives its existence from the hinterland of man's
mind, as if it had emerged from the abyss of prehuman ages, or from a superhuman world of contrasting light and darkness. It is a primordial experience which surpasses man’s understanding and to which he may easily succumb. The very enormity of the experience gives it its value and its shattering impact. Sublime, pregnant with meaning, yet chilling the blood with its strangeness, it arises from timeless depths; glamorous, daemonic, and grotesque, it bursts asunder our human standards of value and aesthetic form, a terrifying tangle of eternal chaos, a *crimen laesae majestatis humanae*. On the other hand, it can be a revelation whose heights and depths are beyond our fathoming, or a vision of beauty which we can never put into words. [...] We find such a vision in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, in Dante, in the second part of *Faust*, in Nietzsche’s Dionysian experience [...] 153

Visionary thinking encapsulates the shift of poetic imagination into nature. Unlike the skilful writer, who binds his creation to a human, all too human world, the visionary poet surrenders to an expansion of consciousness. Thus these authors submit their technical mastery to an experience of anagogic and apocalyptic images, “as if the personal experience were only a prelude to the all-important ‘divine comedy’.” 154 If this reversal, as Jung points out, marks the difference between the first and the second part of Goethe’s *Faust*, it is possible to extend such reflection to the roles of Virgil and Beatrice in the *Commedia*. Virgil, whom Dante names “lo mio maestro e ’l mio autore” 155 since the beginning of their adventures, allows the poet to see and take notes of his journey, by reaching a higher degree of understanding. Beyond the peak of the mount of Purgatorio, however, Virgil can go on no longer. He must give way to Beatrice, the soul and real *motore* of Dante’s higher visions, whose fire ignites his experience of self-transformation. Virgil makes Dante understand the ultimate sense of his explorations,

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153 Ibid., §§141-142.
154 Jung, CW15, §148.
155 Dante, *Inferno*, I, 85; 1987, p. 48. “You are my master, and indeed my author;”
Beatrice is wisdom beyond all things that may be said. Virgil gives Dante the word, Beatrice the silent epiphany in which the poet’s mind stammers like a new child.\textsuperscript{156}

Jung’s critical reflections about the visionary state suitably summon the condition which he experiences throughout \textit{Liber Novus}. A journey of self-transformation beginning, in the manner of Dante, “On the Service of the Soul”,\textsuperscript{157} that is, with the complete submission of Jung’s ‘I’ to a greater force of inspiration, enigmatically introduced as “The spirit of the depths”.\textsuperscript{158} This experience of reversal calls forth, once more, that recording visions under states of inspiration belongs in a matter of urgency rather than of intentional desire. This state can be approached to the overriding necessity, the \textit{ananke}, which in Orphic theology embodied the power of unavoidable events. For the Greeks, necessity is the invisible force that binds the seer or inspired poet to the possession by the Muses, according to the ancient feeling that “creative thinking is not the work of the ego”, as Eric Robertson Dodds points out.\textsuperscript{159} Thus Democritus first claims that no real poetic vision occurs \textit{sine furore}, without frenzy or madness, for only an abnormal inner experience turns poetry into a revelation “apart from reason and above reason”.\textsuperscript{160} Later, more famously, Plato echoes the Dionysian tradition according to which madness is the “channel by which we receive the greatest blessings”,\textsuperscript{161} pointing in \textit{Phaedrus} to four types of heaven-sent enthusiasm, i.e., prophetic divination (Apollo), oracular prayer (Dionysos), poetic frenzy (the Muses), and the most powerful type of possession, erotic madness (Aphrodite). In all cases, the inspired or possessed person can accomplish things which would be impossible to achieve soberly. Nevertheless, the Greek man also knows very

\textsuperscript{156} Dante, \textit{Paradiso}, XXXIII, 139-145; 1987, pp. 1145-1146.

\textsuperscript{157} Jung, LN, p. 234.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., p. 229.


\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., p. 82. See 1999, \textit{The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus} (Toronto: Toronto University Press), p. 9.

well that the time of inspiration is “given” and not “chosen”.\textsuperscript{162} As the lovers can love for a time that is given to them and which they do not control or choose, so too can the emergence of visions seizes the visionary to unfathomable degrees. In Jung’s view, the psychological analogy to the state of possession is the “autonomous complex”, namely “a split-off portion of the psyche, which leads a life of its own outside the hierarchy of consciousness. Depending on its energy charge, it may appear either as a mere disturbance of the conscious activities or as a supra-ordinate authority which can harness the ego to its purpose.”\textsuperscript{163} The autonomy of the complex, or symbol, lies for Jung in its tendency to appear or disappear independently of conscious will, which is what ties so closely the condition of the madman to that of the visionary, or the lover, as already hinted at in Plato’s discussion of the divine gifts of madness. Both the madman and the visionary experience intense states of introversion that activate archaic levels of imagination beyond the margin of rational insight. Both abandon the little island of reason to sail for the “wide and stormy” waters of the ocean of irrationality.\textsuperscript{164} But while one ship willingly embarks on the journey, the other does it involuntarily; one freely leaves the land behind without a regret and seeks for the milky way, the other craves to return to the ground without knowing how to make its way back. The difficulty and depth of the journey are such that the oscillation between opposite attitudes seems unresolved. However, when the attention is again turned to Jung’s material, one notices that, if an arbitrary criterion could be adopted to measure the directions of that mental oscillation, this seems to have to do with love. Love, indeed, appears to essentially justify the capability of letting oneself go against the will to cling to one’s personal attachments. Surrendering to love, after all, is what makes Dante’s advancement in Hell possible, towards brighter mental states. Similarly in Liber Novus, Jung’s ‘I’ first experiences the threatening and dreadful state of possession conveyed by the

\textsuperscript{162} Dodds, 1973, p. 80.

\textsuperscript{163} Jung, CW15, §115.

\textsuperscript{164} Immanuel Kant, 1919 (1781), \textit{Critique of Pure Reason (Kritik der reinen Vernunft)} (Leipzig: Verlag Von Felix Meiner), p. 270.
sacrifice of egocentric views. It is the flame of love, as brought up by Jung’s entries from Dante’s *Purgatorio* in the *Black Books*, to turn the state of unwilling possession into a spontaneous act of surrender of the ‘I’ to a superior autonomous image, the “Dictator of Love”. In Swedenborg’s visions, the cathartic fire of love substantiates the difference of degree existing between a diabolical and a heavenly mental state.\(^{165}\) Likewise, love in Silberer’s conception of mystical experience determines the difference between the poles of “shrinking and extension” of personality occurring in states of deep introversion. While self-oriented introversion methods contract “the sphere of their interest upon the narrowest egoism”, “the mystic expands it immensely in that he comprises the whole world in himself. The person egoistically entering into introversion can preserve his happiness only by a firm self-enclosure before the ever threatening destruction; the mystic is free.”\(^{166}\) In Dante, the mind in love corresponds to the mind in action, operating the transformation of the wounded poet into a seer. Similarly, Jung establishes a direct connection between love and visions, by recognising in the love-episodes underlying Dante’s *Commedia* or Goethe’s *Faust* the preliminary event which serves as the physical and psychic basis for the sensory sublimation expressed in the visionary state of mind.\(^{167}\) In conclusion, Jung’s extensive reflections on the nature of visionary art provides this study with an important hermeneutical connection between *Liber Novus* and the *Commedia*. In short, this consists of the assumption that visionary experiences convey the emergence of a primordial level of imagination which according to Jung encapsulates the bedrock of psychic reality. Separate distinctions between artistic, scientific, or religious propensities are challenged towards a more unified way of thinking in which the mind of the individual flourishes into wholeness. Any subsequent hermeneutics of visions, therefore, should

\(^{165}\) Swedenborg, 2016 (1758), §14, p. 11. See n38.

\(^{166}\) Silberer, 1917 (1914), pp. 287–288.

\(^{167}\) Jung, CW15, §148.
come to terms with the evidence that before interpreting symbols, the visionary lives them in a silent, bewildering experience of chaos and contemplation:

We are astonished, confused, bewildered, put on guard or even repelled; we demand commentaries and explanations. We are reminded of nothing in the everyday life, but rather of dreams, night-time fears, and the dark uncanny recesses of the human mind. The public for the most part repudiates this kind of literature, unless it is crudely sensational, and even the literary critic finds it embarrassing. It is true that Dante and Wagner have made his task somewhat easier for him by disguising the visionary experience in a cloak of historical or mythical events, which are then erroneously taken to be the real subject-matter. In both cases the compelling power and deeper meaning of the work do not lie in the historical or mythical material, but in the visionary experience it serves to express.\(^\text{168}\)

As clearly expressed in this passage, Jung’s conviction that Dante’s *Commedia* conveys first and foremost a real visionary experience beyond the veil of aesthetic or historical layers, fascinatingly aligns not only with the material that emerges out of his own experiment. It also comes very close, in fact, to an original interpretation of Dante which was evolving in Europe around the same time as Jung’s self-explorations: the so called “symbolist” reading of Dante’s *Commedia*. A hermeneutical trajectory which Jung directly came into contact with, a remarkable fact which has not been noted until now.

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168 Jung, CW15, §143.
Fig. 16. Jung's library, Küsnacht.
Fig. 17. Jung's copy of Dante's *Commedia*. Author photograph.
Fig. 18. Jung’s copy of Luigi Valli’s *The Secret Language of Dante and the Fedeli d’Amore*. Author photograph.
1.2. The Esoteric Dante

1.2.1. Dante at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

The beginning of the twentieth century sees a great deal of increased interests for Dante from intellectuals of markedly different backgrounds. In 1933, Osip Mandelstam wrote:

It is inconceivable to read Dante’s *Cantos* without directing them towards contemporaneity. They were created for that purpose. They are missiles for capturing the future. They demand commentary in the *futurum*. [...] Dante is an antimodernist. His contemporaneity is continuous, incalculable and inexhaustible.\(^{169}\)

A detailed illustration of the proliferation of studies about the great Florentine appearing at the time far exceeds the boundaries of the present discussion. Two main schools competing in Italy for supremacy over Dante scholarship can be broadly identified. The “positivist school”, which favours a philological approach to Dante, in rigorous accordance with historical purposes. And the “idealistic” or “aesthetic” line of criticism, as sketched out mainly in Benedetto Croce’s writings, which highlights instead the literary value of Dante’s poetry, following the idea that Dante criticism should be subordinated to the fact that he was first and foremost “an immense poet”\(^{170}\) and so he had to be studied. Alternative approaches to the poet’s “inexhaustible” contemporaneity should be searched elsewhere. First of all, amongst the early twentieth-century responses to Dante, it is the voices of a few major contemporary poets who inspire an original appreciation of the Florentine, emerging through the works of T. S. Eliot, Edgar Lee Masters, W. B. Yeats, and the most Dantesque of the modernists, Ezra


\(^{170}\) Benedetto Croce, 1921, *Dante’s Poetry (La poesia di Dante)* (Bari: Laterza), pp. 9-10.
Pound. Through the voice of the poets, the living implications of Dante’s imagination are unleashed again, linking the creative force of his material to the European call for cultural renewal that characterises the beginning of the new century. The imagistic force of his poetry stands out in this context as the underlying language of Europe, beyond the singularity of the Italian tongue. T. S. Eliot points out in this respect that Dante’s images are suitable to be genuinely experienced by those who have little knowledge of the language, because the associations pertaining to his words are those common to the European man. His poetry is “in one sense, extremely easy to read”, Eliot argues, for it is an exceptional test “that genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood”, insofar as “Dante is, in a sense to be defined [...] the most universal of poets in modern languages.” Along similar lines, Mandelstam observes that the future of Dante criticism does not belong to literary, historical, or theological studies, but rather to the “natural sciences when they will have achieved a sufficient degree of refinement and developed their capacity for thinking in images.” Titus Burckhardt, the great-nephew of historian Jacob Burckhardt, points out:

Dante has seen in spirit what he seeks to express in words, and that he is to an equal degree poet and spiritual visionary. [...] The simpler an image is, the less restricted is its content; for it is the symbol’s prerogative, thanks to its concrete and yet open character, to be capable of expressing truths that cannot be enclosed in rationalized concepts; which, however, in no way implies that symbols have an irrational and permanently “unconscious” background.

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The depth of Dante’s language is thus associated, in this context, with its visionary nature: “thinking in images”. Dante leads to subterranean layers of European literature, inasmuch as, as Eliot noticed in 1929, his poetry is a “disciplined kind of dreaming” that arose in a time in which experiencing visions was the noblest of the arts:

Dante’s is a visual imagination. It is a visual imagination in a different sense from that of a modern painter of still life: it is visual in the sense that he lived in an age in which men still saw visions. It was a psychological habit, the trick of which we have forgotten, but as good as any of our own. We have nothing but dreams, and we have forgotten that seeing visions—a practice now relegated to the aberrant and uneducated—was once a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming.175

Eliot’s description of Dante’s “practice” of visions evokes the Florentine’s unique combination of the reality of the experienced vision and the depths of such experience, which binds an escalating capacity for surrendering to higher powers of inspiration with a growing mastery of poetic craft, earthly to the core. Erich Auerbach, in a seminal work, has famously framed this mastery of visions in terms of Dante’s visionary “realism”.176 All the poets of the stil nuovo had a “mystical beloved” and “had roughly the same fantastic amorous adventures” and “belonged to a kind of secret brotherhood which molded their inner lives and perhaps their outwards lives as well”, but “only one of them, Dante, was able to describe those esoteric happenings in such a way as to make us accept them as authentic reality.”177 In no other medieval poet, he continues, “the center of the vision, a God-sent mystical wisdom, takes on

so vivid and concrete a reality that even without supposing her to have been modelled on any living Florentine woman, we quite naturally join Dante in calling her Beatrice.”

Dante’s visionary realism was also fascinatingly outlined by Pound in 1910, in a manner that stresses a line of comparison with the method adopted by Jung throughout his self-explorations:

Anyone who has in any degree the faculty of vision will know that the so-called personifications are real and not artificial. Dante’s precision both in the Vita Nuova and in the Commedia comes from the attempt to reproduce exactly the thing which has clearly been seen.

Finally, following T. S. Eliot and Pound, an outstanding reception of Dante the “visionary” is that of W. B. Yeats, who not only extensively mentions the Florentine poet in his published prose and poetry, but also, and less famously, bestows a central role on him in the highly complex esoteric system elaborated in A Vision (1925/1937), a copy of which was possessed by Jung. Just a few days after their marriage in October 1917, Yeats discovered his wife’s extraordinary inclination for trance and automatic writing, which formed the basis of his then flourishing occult interests: “A system of symbolism, strange to my wife and to myself, certainly awaited expression; and when I asked how long that would take I was told years.”

At the time, Georgie Hyde-Lees already speaks Italian and is well acquainted with Dante’s works, which she occasionally even translates. Her deep engagement with the Italian poet, together with her automatic abilities, inspire and direct Yeats’s multiform focus on Dante at the inception of A Vision. By combining his admiration for the Florentine man with a strong convergence of romantic and esoteric motifs, Yeats understands Dante as the master of a

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178 Ibid.
visionary knowledge which he longs for becoming enlightened with. In the deeply obscure structure of *A Vision*, made of cones, gyres, and cryptic symbolical calculations, Yeats outlines 28 fundamental phases of the moon which correspond to different states of human personality and inner development. Each phase is represented as one of the spokes of a Great Wheel and tends towards “Unity of Being”, supreme harmony of body and mind, a term borrowed from Dante’s *Convivio*. In this scheme, he positions Dante at phase 17, like himself, and defines him as the “Daimonic Man” in which Unity of Being attained its ultimate expression. But this story, unfortunately, has to be saved for another time.

1.2.2. A Short History of the Symbolist Reading of Dante

Alongside the multiform contribution of the modernist poets, the prioritisation of Dante’s visionary content over philological quarrels (only one of the many possible ways to read Dante, yet the one that seems to align most consistently with the present study) simultaneously finds place in a very different context: the “symbolist” interpretation of Dante, an often ignored perspective within orthodox Dante scholarship, which develops in Europe at the turn of the century and in the following decades. A brief history of this tradition of reading Dante requires further clarification, not because this study aligns with its views, which remain controversial in many respects, but because it was this line of interpretation and not others which historically intersected with the composition of *Liber Novus* and Jung’s multifarious understanding of Dante. In this respect, it should also be noted that some of the esoteric interpretations of Dante were surely more accepted during the first decades of the twentieth century than today, which in itself significantly contributed to the fact that Jung had access to them and considered them perfectly legitimate.

To begin with, it should be noticed that a remarkable “esoteric” component in Dante’s work was highlighted even by an authority such as Ernst Robert Curtius, who considered it a

181 Ibid., p. 82.
“philologically established” fact. The symbolist hermeneutics distinctively brought this element to the fore. The origins of this particular mode of reading Dante are traditionally traced back to the work of the Italian early romantic and patriot Ugo Foscolo, who settled down in London in 1816, in voluntary exile after the entry of the Austrians to Northern Italy. In the favourable English cultural climate, he publishes two articles in the liberal *Edinburgh Review* (February and September 1818), in which he presents a Neo-Ghibelline ant clerical interpretation of Dante, whilst romanticising him as a symbol of the contemporary Italian struggle for national freedom. Developing these views in subsequent more extensive contributions, Foscolo appears to be the first to stress the need to locate a different core beneath the aesthetic layer of Dante’s work. A few years later, another exile in London, the Italian patriot Gabriele Rossetti, begins to work on the “hidden truth beneath a beautiful fiction” conveyed by Dante’s allegorical language. Drawing on Foscolo’s Ghibelline


187 Gabriele Rossetti, 1832, *Disquisitions On the Anti-papal Spirit Which Produced the Reformation (Sullo spirito antipapale che produsse la Riforma)* (London: privately printed); Id., 1840, *The Mystery of Platonic Eros in the Middle Ages* (Il mistero dell’amor platonico nel Medioevo), 5 vols. (London: R. & J. E. Taylor); Id., 1842, *Dante’s Beatrice (La Beatrice di Dante)* (London: privately printed); see also Michelangelo Caetani, 1921 (1865), *The Divine Comedy Described in Six Plates (La materia della Divina Commedia dichiarata in VI tavole da Michelangelo Caetani)* (Firenze: Sansoni); Id., 1881, *Three Notes by Michelangelo Caetani on Dante’s Divine Comedy (Tre chiose di Michelangelo Caetani Duca di Sermoneta nella Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri)* (Roma: Salviucci).
suggestions, he reads the Commedia as intended for the radical renewal of the Church operated by a brotherhood of which Dante and members of the group of poets known in the Middle Ages as the Fedeli d’Amore would have been an active part. The initiates of this group would communicate with each other through a covert mystical language in order to escape the persecution of the Church and interact in a way incomprehensible to the ears of the uninitiated or “gente grossa” (the “ignorants”). They would celebrate behind the image of the Muse or beloved woman a hidden philosophical ideal, no different, Rossetti argues, from that which inspired ancient Egyptian and Pythagorean mysteries. Francesco Perez, a Sicilian diplomat and Dante scholar, further develops some of these ideas, though critical towards Rossetti’s exaggerated attention towards the sectarian side of the question. What really matters is grasping the primordial allegorical sense of Dante’s love for Beatrice: “From ancient times, where the arcane forces of nature were personified, the myth of woman and love was always used to convey man’s blessings.” This author highlights Beatrice’s role as the active mediation of Dante’s mystical epiphany, a pattern long existing in Western and Eastern traditions, for example in the image of the beloved girl in Persian mystical poetry, in the feminine Wisdom from the biblical Book of Solomon, in the mystical wife from the Song of Songs, or in the living, immanent aspect of God which the Gnostics identify as ennoia, or Sophia, the eternal force permeating all things in nature.

The little known history of the esoteric Dante begins to increase its popularity when its fame intersects with the name of Giovanni Pascoli, one of the most well-known Italian poets of the time. In his house near Lucca, Pascoli used to have three different writing desks, for three types of work, as a poet, Professor of Latin, and Dante scholar. When sitting at the Dante desk, he used to give unorthodox projects free rein, regularly shocking the Dantean

academics, including Giosuè Carducci, his former mentor and a major proponent of the old positivist school, with such instances as calling Dante the “Buddha of the West”. Almost to justify him, Giovanni Getto writes that “rather than a critical vocation”, behind Pascoli’s studies on Dante should be placed a “mystical frame of mind”, for all of his work as a Dantist is conditioned by a poetical fervour. At any rate, Pascoli’s studies on Dante result in more than two thousand pages of critical commentaries, developed into three main works in between 1899 and 1902. In these volumes, he claims of having caught a glimpse of the visionary substance beneath the veil of Dante’s work. In order to prove this, he lines up a panoply of symbolic correlations, particularly oriented to the meaning of sacred numbers, the mysterious recurrence of the Eagle and the Cross throughout the entire *Commedia*, and the original division of Dante's journey in two main halves, the first dedicated to the purposes of active life (from Hell to the Earthly Paradise), the second to the realisation of contemplative life (from the Earthly Paradise to the vision of the rose). Despite these efforts, however, it was up to one of Pascoli’s pupils to take the symbolist studies on Dante thoroughly to another level.

Luigi Valli was a vitalist philosopher and Dante scholar born in Rome in 1878, whose fame is principally tied to some of the most well known contributions within the symbolist tradition. First of all, he takes from Rossetti the idea that Dante historically belongs to a sect of poets, the Fedeli d’Amore, the common intent of which was a lot more than literature or friendship. At the same time, he takes from Perez and Pascoli the allegorical dimension of...
Beatrice, bringing these two tracks to the level of a whole Dantesque hermeneutical system. After several publications, his ideas find their place in a monumental work, about seven hundred pages, appearing in 1928 and arguably constituting the most important contribution within this tradition of reading Dante: *The Secret Language of Dante and the Fedeli d’Amore.* In this volume, he strongly distances himself from the various detractors of his ideas, namely the positivists and the idealists, to whom he often refers in polemic and sarcastic terms. He corroborates his views by engaging the reader through conviction and advancing an enormous amount of proof. This aspect drives Pound, in his confrontation with Valli’s work, to refer to him as a very “bad advocate” of his thesis, despite acknowledging that “at any rate Valli deserves thanks for disturbing a too facile acceptance of cut and dried acceptances. In one or two cases where I think him wrong, I certainly owe him a quickened curiosity, and a better guess than I should have made without the irritant of his volume.” Valli aims to demonstrate how all the principal representatives of the Fedeli d’Amore are either Ghibellines (the party that in Medieval politics supported the Holy Roman Empire against the Pope and his faction, the Guelphs), heretics, or in some way or another opponents of the Church, like the case of Dante testifies. Under the protection of a literary language, the Fedeli d’Amore would in fact be an initiatory group to some of the most brilliant and well educated minds in the Middle Ages, actively cooperating towards the most burning issues of the time, according to the characteristic ways of esoteric organisations. Accordingly, Valli argues, the references to Beatrice in Dante, Giovanna in Guido Cavalcanti, Lagia in Lapo Gianni, Selvaggia in Cino da Pistoia, Madonna Intelligenza in Dino Compagni, Laura in Petrarch, Fiammetta in Boccaccio,

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196 Ibid., p. 173.

would not indicate real women (or at any rate their historical identities would be irrelevant), but the same symbolical Muse under different names, representing political and spiritual regeneration. Many years later, this thesis will still resonate in Mircea Eliade’s 1956 Haskell Lectures at the University of Chicago:

The fedeli d’amore constituted a secret and spiritual militia, devoted to the cult of the “one woman” and to initiation into the mystery of “love”. [...] They all used a “hidden language” (parlar cruz) so that their doctrine should not be accessible to “la gente grossa”. [...] “Woman” symbolises the transcendent intellect—wisdom. Love of a woman awakens the adept from the lethargy into which the Christian world had fallen because of the spiritual unworthiness of the pope. [...] We know nothing of their initiation rites; but they must have had such rites, for the fedeli d’amore constituted a militia and held secret meetings. But they are chiefly important because they illustrate a phenomenon that will become more marked later—the communication of a secret spiritual message through literature. Dante is the most famous example of this tendency.\textsuperscript{198}

Behind the spreading of the “one woman” in the Middle Ages, Valli recognises multiple traditions, distinguished in a philosophical, mystical, and sectarian aspect.\textsuperscript{199} The first, through Averroes’s reading of Aristotle, represents active intellect, namely the capacity of the mind to turn potential ideas into experience, as a woman. The second one depicts the unio mystica of man with God through feminine symbols of cosmic force such as the gnostic Sophia, the rabbinic Shekinah, the Eastern Shakti. In this sense, Valli adheres to a comparative approach, by affirming that it would be a huge mistake to imagine that the history of Western mysticism in the Middle Ages was not influenced by Eastern mystical currents, let alone, he adds, that

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\textsuperscript{199} Valli, 2014, pp. 93–94.
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“there is nothing on earth resembling more a mystic than a mystic of another religion.”

The third aspect, as already said, conceals in the form of poems for the beloved woman, a declaration of loyalty to an initiatory brotherhood. As it can easily be expected, the appearance of Valli’s work soon triggers a variety of heated reactions. These vary from the dismay of Dantean scholars, to the critical, yet also appreciative, reading of Pound, or the amendments of those who, like Alfonso Ricolfi, though recognising the importance of Valli’s work, begin to criticise the exceedingly ethereal dimension of a purely allegorical conception of Beatrice. In any case, no matter how acceptable its author’s views, The Secret Language of Dante and the Fedeli d’Amore exemplifies at best the rising interest for the symbolist interpretation of Dante that accompanies the early decades of the twentieth century, lasting for much longer. A fascination from which, as this study can prove, Jung has not been exempt.

1.2.3. Jung and the Symbolist Reading of Dante

In Jung’s library in Küsnacht, there is only one major commentary on Dante’s Commedia: “The Secret Language of Dante and the Fedeli d’Amore.” This is a German translation (“Die Geheimsprache Dantes und der Fedeli d’Amore”) of part of Valli’s text appearing in 1930 in the Europäische Revue (February, VI Jahrgang, Heft 2), whose title looks heavily underlined by

200 Valli, 2014, p. 133.
201 Alfonso Ricolfi, 2006 (1933/1940), Essays on the Fedeli d’Amore (Studi sui “Fedeli d’Amore”) (Milano: Luni Editrice), pp. 9-10.
202 The Europäische Revue was a journal centred around the activities of the Europäische Kulturbund, a network of conservative intellectuals founded by Austrian aristocrat Karl Anton Prinz Rohan in 1925, with the intent of promoting a cultural, elite-led renewal of Europe. The journal had different seats across Europe, and for some time Valli was the president of the Italian one. Jolande Jacobi, who would later become one of Jung’s closest collaborators, was the vizepräsident of the Kulturbund. Jung regularly contributed to the Europäische Revue, before stepping back after that, from 1932-1933, the journal became more openly associated with fascist ideologies. (Martin Liebscher, “Introduction” to C. G. Jung, ETH, Vol. 7, forthcoming).
Jung, both on the cover page and in the table of contents. Other related works appear to have been in his possession, in particular Victoria Ocampo’s *From Francesca to Beatrice Through the Divine Comedy* (1926), Helen Flanders Dunbar’s *Symbolism in Medieval Thought and Its Consummation in the Divine Comedy* (1929), Karl Vossler's *Mediaeval Culture. An Introduction to Dante and his time* (1929), Georges Méautis’s *Dante: The Ante-Purgatory* (1944), and the seminal work by German philologist and literary scholar Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948), in its original German version.\(^\text{203}\) However, Valli’s contribution significantly stands out amongst these references. In the *Europäische Revue*, the Italian philosopher provides a synthesis of the major points of his thesis, starting from the idea that “the *Divine Comedy* slips in a mystic-theological mystery.”\(^\text{204}\) He highlights once more that the different identities of the beloved women celebrated by the Fedeli d’Amore conceal the worshiping of a single inner woman, whose elected name is the “*rose*”, a universal mystical symbol known in Dante’s time “from India to the Loire”,\(^\text{205}\) to which Valli refers at length in the paper:

They differ from one another only by the name, and sometimes not even by the name, for from Friedrich II to Guido Guinizzelli, the woman has only a single name: “Rose”. And that is exactly the name of the mystical flower, which also in Persia meant the doctrine of true wisdom.\(^\text{206}\)

Similarly, he points out in another passage:

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\(^{205}\) Valli, 2014, p. 475.

\(^{206}\) Valli, 1930, pp. 97–98. (Translation mine).
All these poets openly opposed the Church in the realm of moral life. But when it came to saying: “the Church conceals the divine Wisdom she possesses, she teaches the error, and we are faithful to the sacred original truth”, then they secretly said that behind the image of that rose which already in Persia was the symbol of divine wisdom, the rose which until Guinizzelli was the only female name in Italian love poetry, which then apparently turned into a mere woman's name, but which always remained a rose, for in the Divine Comedy Dante arrives on the height of Paradise, after having crossed the whole universe, into a white rose.\textsuperscript{207}

The esoteric reading of Dante’s mystical rose provides Jung with an important point of comparison for his evolving interests concerning mandala symbolism, a parallelism which widely occupies him in his later works. This image appears towards the end of the Commedia, stretching from Paradiso, XXX, 82 to the end of the Canticle (Paradiso, XXXIII, 145), immortalised by Gustave Doré’s “Celestial Rose”, in 1868.\textsuperscript{208} The poet has reached the ultimate level of his great voyage, the highest heavenly sky. Guided first by Beatrice and then by St. Bernard, he is led to contemplate the Empyrean in a sequence of dissolving waves of blissful light. He feels his tongue cannot utter any longer, though an incredible effort to recount what he “saw” pervades these pages. Yielding to a power beyond his own, the contemplation of Beatrice’s love “deprives” him “of the use” of his “mind” (Paradiso, XXX, 27), letting light enter through this crack of the intellect. The ineffable vision of the Empyrean takes shape “in forma di candida rosa” (“in form of a shining white rose”, Paradiso, XXXI, 1), in eternal circular movement, described in full details to Dante by St. Bernard. It is time for the poet to turn his gaze directly on the “primal love” and penetrate the refulgence of divine light “quant’è

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid., p. 104.

possibile” (“as far as possible”, Paradiso, XXXII, 142-144), that is, as far as he can do with his mind. To achieve this state, St. Bernard utters a prayer to the Virgin Mary (Paradiso, XXXIII, 1-45), requesting her intercession for the poet that he may complete his quest. The fact that in this place St. Bernard speaks on behalf of Dante is interpreted by Jung in Psychological Types as “an indication of the transformation and exaltation of his own being”, the “same transformation” that happens to Faust.209 Jung’s personal copy of the Commedia presents handwritten annotations by this passage, particularly next to Paradiso, XXXIII, 7-9. Purified after this blessing, Dante is free to “look up” a final time, in this occasion towards the pulsing divine light of the rose, a “vista nova” (“new vision”, Paradiso, XXXIII, 136) inside the luminous substance, in which he amazingly fixes his gaze, until surrendering to a sublime speechlessness that, like the divine infant, put an end to his journey:

tal era io a quella vista nova:
veder volea come si convenne
l’imago al cerchio e come vi s’indova;

ma non eran da ciò le proprie penne:
se non che la mia mente fu percossa
da un fulgore in che sua voglia venne.

A l’alta fantasia qui mancò possa;
ma già volgeva il mio disio e ’l velle,
sí come rota ch’igualmente è mossa,

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209 Jung, 1921, CW6, §§377-378.
Jung's engagement with mandalas directly intersects with his fascination with Dante's vision of the rose. As early as on January 16, 1916, he draws a mandala in the *Black Books*, corresponding to the first sketch of the complex “Systema Munditotius” crafted many years later and published anonymously in a special issue of *Du* (1955), representing “the antinomies of the microcosm within the macrocosmic world and its antinomies.” During his military service in 1917, he draws a great number of mandalas in pencil in his army notebook, observing the change of these images day by day. In one occasion, on August 6, 1917, a piece of a new mandala breaks off from the symmetry of the sketched image. He claims to have understood at that point the real meaning of mandalas: “the self, the wholeness of the personality, which, when everything is well, is harmonious, but which can bear no self deception. My mandala images were cryptograms on the state of my self, which were delivered to me each day.” In the following years, he reproduces the mandalas in *Liber Novus* and increasingly comes to grasp them as representations of the “self”, the “monad”, “the microcosmic nature of the soul”, by establishing analogies with the Atman/Brahman conception in Hinduism and Nietzsche’s “Selbst”. “When I began drawing the mandalas”, he recalls in *Memories*, “I saw that everything, all the paths I had been following, all the steps I had taken, were leading back to a single point—namely, to the mid-point. It became increasingly plain to me that the mandala is...

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210 Dante, *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 136-145; 1987, pp. 1145-1146; “So was I faced with this new vision: / I wanted to see how the image could fit the circle / And how it could be that that was where it was; / But that was not a flight for my wings: / Except that my mind was struck by a flash / In which what it desired came to it. / At this point high imagination failed; / But already my desire and my will / Were being turned like a wheel, all at one speed, / By the love which moves the sun and the other stars.”


212 Jung, ETG, p. 199. (Tr. by R. and C. Winston).

213 Ibid., p. 200.
the center. It is the exponent of all paths. It is the path to the center, to individuation.\textsuperscript{214} From the 1920s onwards, Jung expands his psychological reflections concerning mandala symbolism, to such an extent that mandalas become one of the most representative images of the ideas and therapeutic implications of the Swiss thinker. Thus he consistently interprets Dante’s mystical rose in terms of a highly perfected representation of a Western mandala and a trait d’union between Eastern and Western images of psychic totality. Even if Jakob Böhme, he argues, may have been the “first to try to organise the Christian cosmos, as a total reality, into a mandala”, this attempt was unsuccessful, for he never achieved that supreme union of being which Dante portrayed more than two centuries before the German mystic.\textsuperscript{215} Leaving aside for the moment the references in the Visions seminar and the Zarathustra seminar, Dante’s rose occupies Jung during the Berlin seminar in 1933,\textsuperscript{216} in several occasions at the ETH lectures (March 3, 1939, January 19, 1940, February 28, 1941), in the alchemical writings,\textsuperscript{217} in the seminar on Dream Interpretation Ancient and Modern,\textsuperscript{218} and even while commenting on one of Wolfgang Pauli’s dreams, confronted with the analysis of the symbolism of a blue flower blossoming in a starry night:

Now this is the same as the vision in Dante’s \textit{Paradiso} where the rose is formed in Heaven by all the Saints with the Deity in the center. It is a cosmic mandala. From this he realizes

\textsuperscript{214} \textit{Ibidem}.  
\textsuperscript{215} Jung, 1939-1940 (1933), “A Study in the Process of Individuation” (“Zur Empirie des Individuationsprozesses”), CW 9\textsuperscript{1}, §603.  
\textsuperscript{217} Jung, 1945, “The Philosophical Tree” (“Der philosophische Baum”), CW 13, §389.  
that the mandala is a cosmic thing; an idea of complete symmetry between the physical and
the psychological realms, that is, between the conscious and the unconscious cosmos.\textsuperscript{219}

Even as late as 1950, he reiterates the view of the celestial rose as the Western equivalent
to the Buddhist lotus, thus finding in Dante’s mystical visions a preeminent symbolical
connection between Western and Eastern spirituality.\textsuperscript{220} These references altogether bear
witness to the substantial increase in interest for Dante that accompanies Jung through the
development of his work during and after Liber Novus. The reading of Valli significantly shapes
this turning point. Thus in the Visions seminar, on June 24, 1931, he sketches a parallel between
Dante’s mystical rose and Kundalini yoga, by drawing on the ideas that emerged from Valli’s
work:

The rose, according to old tradition, was withheld by the church. The poets of the Court
of Frederick II in Salerno and those in Dante’s group complained that the medieval church
withheld the sweet secret of the rose. An interesting article was published in the
Europäische Revue by Luigi Valli, a modern commentator on Dante, about the secret
language used by the poets of Dante’s time in order to designate the mystical rose. The
rose means love. And this red is the color of passion. It is not a light red, it is a strong red, a
burning color. It is also the color of the muladhara region, the lowest center according to
the Kundalini yoga.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{219} C. G. Jung, 2019 (1936–1937), Dream Symbols of the Individuation Process: Notes of the Seminars given by Jung in Bailey

\textsuperscript{220} C. G. Jung, 1950, “Concerning Mandala Symbolism” (“Über Mandalasymbolik”), CW9i. §652.

\textsuperscript{221} Jung, 1997 (1930–1934), p. 413 (n2).
Furthermore, in a letter to Werner Kaegi dated November 7, 1932, he interestingly refers to Valli as a key contemporary writer with regard to the role of medieval thinkers in the psychological background of European Renaissance:

Dear Herr Kaegi,

[...]

As you are obviously well acquainted with Walser’s writings, I would like to ask you whether Walser has also taken an interest in the *Ipnerotomachia* of Francesco Colonna. I find that it gives us a key to the backdoors of the Renaissance. It is strange that the broad, shining surface of things always interests me much less than those dark, labyrinthine, subterranean passages they come out of. Civilizations seem to me like those plants whose real and continuous life is found in the rhizome and not in the quickly fading flowers and withering leaves which appear on the surface and which we regard as the essential manifestation of life. Burckhardt mentions Colonna’s work but for understandable reasons he sees nothing in it.

Of the more recent writers, it seems to be chiefly Luigi Valli who has ventured into the background. I almost believe that the real history of the human mind is a rhizome phenomenon. [...][222]

A few years later, in 1936, Valli’s name reappears again in Jung’s alchemical lecture *Dream Symbols of the Process of Individuation.*[223] In this context, following an illustration of Dante’s heavenly rose taken from the Codex Urbanus Latinus 365 (15th century), he refers to the vision of the rose as the mandala of medieval symbolism, by once more drawing on the work of the

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[223] *Traumsymbole des Individuationsprozess*, later expanded in *Id.*, 1944, *Psychology and Alchemy (Psychologie und Alchemie).*
Italian philosopher. All in all, though not elaborated further, Jung’s reading of Valli indicates something important about the historical development of his approach to Dante. Namely, that besides an original phase in which Jung comes to terms with the *Commedia* at the earliest time of his self-explorations, the Swiss psychiatrist later implements such reading with parallel related texts, like Valli’s, towards a wider and increasingly present confrontation with Dante’s hermeneutical model. In this direction, a relevant connection is also offered by Jung’s familiarity with Dunbar’s book on medieval symbolism (1929). Dunbar, an eclectic American physician and earliest advocate of psychosomatic medicine, was also a theologian and a gifted medievalist, attempting to bind, in a properly Dantesque manner, her scientific practice with multiple spiritual interests. Her book on the *Commedia*, though scarcely known and only apparently unrelated to the esoteric historiography on Dante, is a symbolist reading of the poem, which makes abundant use of alchemical treatises, Kabbalah, and numerology, not without references to the works of Silberer, Rudolf Steiner, and G. R. S. Mead. At the centre of this work is Dante’s use of the symbolism of light and sun, the roots of which are considered in their relation to medieval philosophy, spirituality, and popular usage. Furthermore, she stresses the mystical reflections of the mathematical symmetries emerging from Dante’s numerical references, especially emphasising the function of the “quaternity” or “fourness” as an all-inclusive symbol of universal radiance. To any reader of Jung, this cannot but sound like something particularly congenial to the Swiss man, who in fact curiously annotates all passages

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224 “Circle and basin emphasise the mandala, the rose of medieval symbolism. The ‘rose garden of the philosophers’ is one of alchemy’s favourite symbols.” Jung, CW12, §235, n115.

225 In 1929, Dunbar embarks on a European trip. In Vienna, she undertakes analysis with Helene Deutsch. Later, she visits and exchanges correspondence with Jung in Zurich, serving for a brief period at the Burghölzli.

226 Dunbar’s bibliography features titles like M. A. Palacios’s *Islam and the Divine Comedy* (1926) and Pascoli’s *Minerva Oscura* (1899).
in Dunbar’s book containing references to Dante and the “quaternity”. Although less important than Valli’s, the appearance of Dunbar’s text can also be contextualised roughly at the same time, the turn of the 30s, in which Jung further develops his previously described conception of “visionary” works, including the illustrious example of Dante’s *Commedia*.

In light of these observations, it is possible to suggest that the major point of confrontation between Jung and the tradition of the symbolist reading of the *Commedia* resides in the valorisation of the compelling visionary substance of Dante’s poetry, which by underpinning the literary facade, also substantially escapes ordinary psychological tools of interpretation. The major point of difference, however, is that what the Dantean symbolists mostly interpret, often controversially, in a sectarian or philosophical sense, Jung turns it into an empirical domain, by reconnecting Dante’s initiation with the experience of plunging into a visionary state of mind. In this context, Jung’s multifaceted confrontation with Dante suitably illustrates a more general contemporary phenomenon: the symbolist thesis begins to fascinate intellectuals who, despite coming from a variety of backgrounds, most of them not making a career as Dante scholars, share an interest in highlighting a hidden dimension of the Florentine’s poetry.

In parallel to Valli’s volume, the Spanish scholar Miguel Asín Palacios publishes in 1919 *La Escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*, known in English as *Islam and the Divine Comedy* (1926). Palacios brings to light the close resemblance between Dante’s adventures in the otherworld and the islamic “nocturnal journey”, which from Ibn Arabī to Mahomet himself consists in the correspondence between the “Isra”, a descent to the infernal regions, and the “Miraj”, the ascension to the glory of heaven. This intuition, supported by a formidable

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227 “The deepest mystery of reality is its quaternity, the three of the Trinity, plus that on which it acts, while within the ten is the totality of all that is.” Helen Flanders Dunbar, 1929, *Symbolism in Medieval Thought and Its Consummation in the Divine Comedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 466. Jung’s annotations appear at pp. 231, 281, 282, 337, 339, 340, 343, 357, 358, 449, 466, 467, 503, 504. In *Psychology and Religion* (1938/1940), Jung suggests Dunbar’s book as a source for the study of the *quaternarium* or quaternity (CW11, §62, n7).
number of analogies, provides a starting point for the still open question of Dante’s direct or indirect contact with Spanish and Arabic sources. Years later, Corbin will contribute to this discussion, expanding it towards the symbolical correlations between Dante, the Fedeli d’Amore, and the poetry of love in Persian mysticism. Corbin does not align either with philological or exceedingly allegorical visions of Beatrice, by suggesting a third way beyond both, in a manner which stresses a line of comparison with Jung’s perspective:

We have already had occasion to speak of the Fedeli d’amore, and we shall speak of them again, for the theopanism of Ibn ‘Arabi has a good deal in common with the ideas of the symbolist interpreters of Dante (Luigi Valli), though it is secure against such criticism as that of the literalist philologists, who were alarmed to see the person of Beatrice fade into a pale allegory. We have suggested that both the Fedeli d’amore and their critics can be reproached with one-sidedness. In any case, the young girl who was for Ibn ‘Arabi in Mecca what Beatrice was for Dante, was a real young girl, though at the same time she was “in person” a theopanic figure, the figure of Sophia aeterna (whom certain of Dante’s companions invoked as Madonna Intelligenza).

The history of the symbolist interpretation of Dante intersects too with the more extreme interpretations of a few controversial players of contemporary esoteric research, such as the disputed French philosopher René Guénon, his less debated contemporary Arturo

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Reghini, and the infamous Italian thinker Julius Evola.\textsuperscript{231} Despite the scholarly flaws of parts of these works, worth of a mention for the present discussion is an article appearing in UR (1928), in which Reghini, under the pseudonym of Pietro Negri, writes about the all-encompassing mystical rose, in a manner which can be compared to Jung’s language:

As the ‘rose’ that we find in the pagan tradition [...] has a correspondence with the ‘lotus’ of oriental traditions, so the ‘woman’ of the Fedeli d’Amore can be compared with the ‘Sophia’ that generates ‘resurrection’, the ‘Diana’ that in Hermetic Philosophy acquires a specific technical meaning, the Çakti of Induism, the prajna or prajna paramita that in Mahyanic Buddhism is represented as a celestial woman Buddha unites with.\textsuperscript{232}

Taking a similar route, Evola, who read Paschal Beverly Randolph and was close to the Russian poetess and teacher of sexual magic Maria de Naglowska, elaborates his visions on Dante and the Fedeli d’Amore in a late pivotal work on sex and metaphysics, \textit{The Metaphysics of Sex}, published in 1958, although significant references to the subject appear also in \textit{The Mystery of the Grail} in 1937 and \textit{The Yoga of Power} in 1949. The way in which he engages with the trials of Dante and the poets of love is by analogy with a Dionysian or Tantric symbology, i.e., through the discussion of the sublimation of sexual energies for purposes of spiritual realisation. A perspective which Silberer once provokingly summarised as follows: “The mystical manuals


show that the most active power for spiritual education is sexual libido.” The Italian philosopher relates this subject to the chivalric tradition of the Middle Ages, in which the initiatory woman assumes the fundamental role of enlivening what exists only latently in the intellect of man, thus giving rise to a compelling process of self-transformation in which the feminine element conveys the ultimate point of union between sensual and spiritual levels:

The various women celebrated by the Worshippers of Love, whatever their names might have been, were one single woman, an image of “Blessed Wisdom” or Gnosis, an image of a principle of enlightenment [...]. However, we are not dealing here with allegories or mere personified doctrinal abstractions, which the school of Dante had already supposed in Beatrice. The plane is that of an actual experience, as in the ancient mysteries and secret rites of the Templars. [...] Although here it is essentially a matter of the “initiatress” or “glorious woman of the mind” (as Dante called her and added that “She was called Beatrice by many who did not know what her name was”), this woman was not reduced to a symbol among the Worshippers of Love; instead we believe that contact with the occult force of womanhood played an essential part. Love aroused by real woman could be employed to develop the initiatory process. Only by looking at the question in this way can we take into account everything that these poetic creations offer in terms of their lively, open-hearted humanity.

In conclusion, however questionable the outcome of many of the assumptions of the symbolist interpreters may be, it is safe to say that the importance given to the feminine symbolism in Dante which emerge especially in Valli, Corbin, Eliade, and other proponents of this line of interpretation of the Commedia, reveals a compelling correspondence with Jung’s interests for very similar matters. Suffice it to say that the theme of the soul or inner feminine

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is so present in Jung to drive Corbin, in the aftermath of *Answer to Job*, to compare him to the tradition of the Russian Sophiologists (Vladimir Solovyov, Pavel Florensky, Sergei Bulgakov), who considered divine wisdom (Sophia) in terms of an ever-changing principle of feminine fertility, acting as the immanent and experiential counterpart of God.\(^{335}\) In Corbin’s view, Jung’s kinship with the Sophianic tradition consists of an empirical transposition of the dynamic and creative forces of life which, in metaphysical terms, many ancient spiritual and artistic traditions depicted through the archetype of feminine energy, and which Goethe called in *Faust* “the Eternal Feminine.” Corbin conceives Jung’s synthetic model of the mind as a suitable psychological analogy to prepare, yet not to finally unravel, the spiritual quest into the realm of subtle bodies which the Fedeli d’Amore ventured too. However hazardous Corbin’s Sophianic comparison may be, the central part of the soul motif in Jung’s self-explorations and psychological theorisation has vastly been discussed and accepted. What has still not been considered in this regard, however, is the direct relationship of this pivotal element of Jung’s reflections with Dante, a point of confrontation which this section aimed at introducing.

In his seminar on Kundalini Yoga in 1932, Jung compares the “Lady” or “anima” for which the Knights of the Middle Ages did “marvellous works”, to the feminine power of Kundalini, a parallel possibly suggested to him by the image of the “Inner Woman” appearing in Arthur Avalon’s *The Serpent Power* (1919).\(^{336}\) A few years before and in the middle of his journey “on the service of the soul”, in 1921, Jung notices that the birth of modern European individualism occurred in the late Middle Ages through the symbol of the “worship of the woman”. This factor “strengthened the man’s soul very considerably as a psychological factor”, because “worship of the woman meant worship of the soul.” This fact, he notably adds, “is nowhere more beautifully

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and perfectly expressed than in Dante's Divine Comedy. Dante is the spiritual knight of his lady; for her sake he embarks on the adventure of the lower and upper worlds.” At the time, Jung himself was engaged with a similar quest.

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Chapter 2

Into Hell

As I was walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity, I collected some of their Proverbs, thinking that, as the sayings used in a nation mark its character, so the Proverbs of Hell show the nature of Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings or garments.

William Blake

If you want to create yourself, then you do not begin with the best and the highest, but with the worst and the deepest.

Jung (LN)
Fig. 19. Sandro Botticelli, 1480-1495, *The Abyss of Hell (La voragine infernale)*.
2. 1. Noontide

2.1.1. The Sacrifice of the Hero

Shortly before embarking on writing the *Black Books*, Jung, married to Emma Rauschenbach from 1903, is the first president of the newly founded International Psychoanalytical Association, one of the prominent architects in the foundation of the earliest psychoanalytic movement, a lecturer at the University of Zurich, and a highly esteemed psychiatrist, mainly due to his experiments on associative reactions and emotionally stressed complexes at the Burghölzli asylum. The first part of this successful career culminates in the publication of *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, a comparative study of an impressive amount of mythological and religious symbols, appearing in its original version in two instalments in 1911-1912. Historical readings take this work as Jung’s critical turning point from psychoanalytic theories, presiding over the foundation of analytical psychology. More significantly, the author recounts the experience of writing the whole book as the forceful eruption of the psychic transformation that approximately one year later will lead to *Liber Novus*. The work is structured as the psychological study of Miss Frank Miller’s fantasies, which, as the author later states, acted as a catalyst for the exceptional amount of mythological and anthropological material he gathered for the study.\(^\text{238}\) Later, he will recognise the projection of his own material over Miss Miller’s mythological imagination, by calling her the “stage director” of his fantasies and disquiet.\(^\text{239}\) Throughout the writing of *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, he feels exceptionally involved with the archaic material presented. It is the beginning of a highly critical moment:


\(^{239}\) Ibid., p. 28.
While working on the book I was haunted by bad dreams. I feel that I must speak of my dreams even though one is unavoidably personal to a degree when one does so. But dreams have influenced all the important changes in my life and theories. [...] At that time, I mean when I was working on the Psychology of the Unconscious, all my dreams pointed to a break with Freud. Freud could see nothing in the book but resistance to the father, and the point in it to which he took the greatest exception was my contention that the libido is split and produces the thing that checks itself. [...] After this break I had with Freud, the pupils that I had all over the world left me and turned to Freud. They were told that my book was rubbish, and that I was a mystic, and with that the matter was settled. Suddenly I found myself completely isolated. This, however disadvantageous it may have been, had also an advantage for me as an introvert; that is it encouraged the vertical movement of the libido. Cut off from the horizontal movement which activity in the outside world brings, I was driven to investigate fully the things within myself.240

At the heart of this restless investigation, he takes from William James a fundamental differentiation between two types of thinking: directed thinking and fantasy thinking. An objective form of thinking directed to the outside world and a subjective form of thinking activated by inner motives.241 The former corresponds to the logical thinking of science, linked in its primitive origins to a system of emotive and imitative sounds, i.e., thinking “in words”. The latter corresponds to the imagistic thinking revealed in the spontaneous language of children, primitives, madmen, visionaries, about which “from the poets we learn much, from the scientist little.”242 The differentiation of types of thinking appearing in Transformations and Symbols of the Libido is presented again by Jung in the 1925 seminar:


241 Jung, WSL, p. 22.

242 Ibid., p. 31.
Two kinds of thinking can be observed: intellectual or directed thinking, and fantastic or passive automatic thinking. In the process of directed thinking, thoughts are handled as tools, they are made to serve the purposes of the thinker; while in passive thinking thoughts are like individuals going about on their own as it were. Fantastical thinking knows no hierarchy; the thoughts may be even antagonistic to the ego.\(^{243}\)

The two types of thinking relate to symbolic representations of libido in opposite manners. Directed (objective) thinking links the symbol with a symptom or a known fact that is assumed to be its origin, fantastic (subjective) thinking regards the symbol as a living thing that could not be characterised in a better way than in the symbolic expression itself. Accordingly, Jung argues that the eighty generations that separate us from the Golden Age of Greek culture have been fundamentally shaped by the increasing development of rational, technical thinking to the detriment of fantastic thinking. As to the meaning of such progress, however, he observes:

It would be an absurd and entirely unjustified self-glorification if we were to assume that we are more energetic or more intelligent than the ancients—our materials for knowledge have increased, but not our intellectual capacity. For this reason, we become immediately as obstinate and insusceptible in regard to new ideas as people in the darkest time of our antiquity. Our knowledge has increased but nor our wisdom. The main point of our interest is displaced wholly into material reality; antiquity preferred a mode of thought which was more closely related to a phantastic type.\(^{244}\)

The question that follows from this is how to abdicate such a saturation of rationalistic knowledge, without provoking the breakdown of the individual’s adaptation to reality, as

\(^{243}\) Jung, 2012 (1925), p. 28.

\(^{244}\) Jung, WSL, p. 24.
exhibited for example in psychopathology. In *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, Jung begins to tackle this problem by framing it in terms of an original approach to the hero myth. He highlights the rebirth of the hero in the mother-cosmos as a fundamental psychological law, of which mythologies, literatures, and religions offer numberless accounts. This central motif appears to be then underpinned by Jung’s growing skepticism towards the moral, cultural struggle described by the psychoanalytic use of the Oedipus myth. According to Jung, the hero, a highly recurrent motif in the literature at the time, is the symbol of the individual whose battle for the psychological independence from mother-nature represents the birth of man out of the powers of chaos. In the process of growth, the hero is born when the individual separates his libido from the original attachment to the mother. Concerning the types of thinking, the hero personifies the rise of outward or ego-oriented imagination. As pointed out by Jung in 1925:

> The hero is a most ideal image whose qualities change from age to age, but it has always embodied the things people value the most. […] The hero is a very perfect man, he stands out as a human protest against nature, who is seeking to rob man of that possibility of perfection.²⁴⁵


Taking cues from the works of Leo Frobenius and James Frazer, among others, Jung juxtaposes the journey of the hero to the trajectory of the sun, by elaborating on psychological aspects of a variety of solar myths:

> We approach the personification of the libido in the form of a conqueror, a hero or a demon. With this, symbolism leaves the impersonal and neuter realm, which characterises the astral and metereologic symbol, and takes human form: the figure of a being changing
from sorrow to joy, from joy to sorrow, and which, like the sun, sometimes stands in its
zenith, sometimes is plunged in darkest night, and arise from this very night to new
splendor. Just as the sun, guided by its own internal laws, ascends from morn till noon, and
passing beyond the noon descends towards evening, leaving behind its splendor, and then
sinks completely into the all-enveloping night, thus, too, does mankind follow his course
according to immutable laws, and also sinks, after his course is completed, into night, in
order to rise again in the morning, to a new cycle in his children.246

In a first part of those myths, the journey of the hero reflects the movement of the sun
sailing over the sea, like a god being born anew every morning from the depths of the waters.
This half of the journey depicts the awaking of the hero, or in Jung’s terms, the birth and rising
of the ego over the realm of nature. Like the sun climbing up the sky and conquering the
darkness of night, the hero gains power, knowledge, and independence in the world. The
zenith of the heroic trajectory occurs at the stroke of noon, when the sun travelling through
the air reaches the middle of the sky, the maximum height and brightness of its pathway. In
this precise moment, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra begs his heart to stop singing and remain still
and soft, as if something particularly mysterious was about to pour out:

Oh happiness! Oh happiness! Would you sing, O my soul? You lie in the grass. But this is
the secret, solemn hour when no shepherd plays his flute.
Take care! Hot noontide sleeps upon the fields. Do not sing! Soft! The world is perfect.
Do not sing, you grass bird, O my soul! Do not even whisper! Just see - soft! it moves its
mouth: has it not just drunk a drop of happiness

246 Jung, WSL, p. 191.
- an ancient brown drop of golden happiness, of golden wine? Something glides across it, its happiness laughs. Thus - does a god laugh. Soft!  

Noontide, for Nietzsche, is a “death with waking eyes”, “a very heavy kind of happiness”, and “he to whom an active and stormy morning of life is allotted, at the noontide of life feels his soul overcome by a strange longing for a rest that may last for months and years.”

Noontide, therefore, a “solemn hour” when the “world is perfect”, is also the time, according to ancient southern traditions, when it is dangerous to walk around, for the wandering ghosts appear, as noted by Jung:

Very often the soul is also identified with the shadow, hence it is a deadly insult to tread on a person’s shadow. For the same reason noonday, the ghost-hour of southern latitudes, is considered threatening; one’s shadow then grows small, and this means that life is endangered. This conception of the shadow contains an idea which was indicated by the Greeks in the word synopados, ‘he who follows behind’.

Similarly, in Jung’s reception of Frobenius, the sun never rises through the air without casting a shadow on the sea, following the movement of a sea-monster that mirrors in the dark each single step of the hero’s rising journey. The trajectory of the sun is cyclic and in perpetual movement. No rising occurs without descending, no construction without destruction. Thus


\[\text{\footnotesize 249 Jung, 1931, “The Unveiling of the Soul” (“Die Entschleierung der Seele”), CW8, §665.}\]
the hero who like the sun reaches the stroke of noon faces the inevitable inversion of the actual situation, a reversal described by the alchemical symbol of the “shadow of the sun” (*umbra solis*). At the apex of power, the heroic mind comes to terms with its opposite, the radical inversion of everything one wishes and desires, and just “as the dry Fish which is thrown on dry land” (The Dhammapada 3, 34) out of the maternal waters, it struggles to get free from the powers of death.

Roger Caillois has investigated at length the implications of ghosts and demons of midday, by taking into account the widespread appearance of this motif in the ancient world, in the Biblical Psalm 91, in Homer, Plato, Aristotle, St. Antonius, the magical papyrus of Berlin, and the history of exorcism. He observes that in Latin cultures midday is the magical and religious time par excellence, the sacred and dangerous hour “well known by magicians and exorcists.” It is the time of “nympholepsy”: the wild frenzy and prophetic delirium of those who expose themselves to Nymphs and *succubi* under the scorching heath of midday, a condition traditionally characterised by *akinésia* (incapacity to move), *afonia* (incapacity to speak), and *mania* (frenzy). And what is more, it is also and especially the favourite time in which the living are granted access to the land of the dead. Noon, in fact, announces the reversal of the course of the sun, which takes the travelling hero to a new descent into the waters (the *Leitmotif* of the “night-sea journey”), leading to the encounter with sea-monsters.

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252 Ibid., p. 91.
253 Ibid., p. 68.
254 Ibid., p. 33.
(“ascendit de mari bestia”, as announced in the *Apocalypse of John*,
dragons, and terrifying creatures. Even more common to the Western imagination, the inversion of the journey leads
to the confrontation with the Dead, the katabasis or descent into Hell underpinning spiritual
teachings as ancient as the Orphic and Eleusinian Mysteries, but also European narratives
going from Odysseus to Dante, and reaching as far as Jung’s *nekya* in *Liber Novus*.

The sea-journey implies two possible reactions, which in Jung’s view are equivalent to two
opposite mental dispositions. Either the heroic mentality rejects the descent, by attempting to
counteract the transformation of all things which the continuous movement of light and
darkness describes. Or it takes a step back, by sacrificing itself and favouring the inevitable
decline of the sun that mirrors its own transformation, thus activating a process of inner
rebirth. The discussion of this ambivalent phenomenon is taken up again in the 1925 seminar:

The unconscious makes the hero symbol, and therefore the hero means a change of
attitude. But this hero symbol comes also from the unconscious, which is also nature, that
same nature which is not the least interested in the ideal that man is struggling to
formulate. Man comes then into conflict with the unconscious, and this struggle is that of
winning free from his unconscious, his mother. [...] His unconscious, as I said, forms
images of perfect people, but when he tries to realize these hero types, another trend in
the unconscious is aroused, [a trend] to the attempt to destroy the image. So is developed
the terrible mother, the devouring dragon, the dangers of rebirth, etc. [...] A sacrifice must
be done in order to cut the hero away from the power of the unconscious and give him his
individual autonomy. He has to pay himself off and contrive to fill the vacuum left in the
unconscious. What is to be sacrificed? according to mythology, it is childhood, the veil of
Maya, past ideals.\(^{256}\)

\(^{255}\) “And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea.” John, *Revelation*, 13:1, in R.
French philosopher Edgar Morin describes this contrast as the struggle, biological and psychological at once, between the individual and the universal impulses of the hero. Individually, the hero tries to escape from the danger of plunging into the waters, upon a drive of self-preservation. Universally, the hero seeks to melt with the waters, pursuing an experience of cosmic self-liberation. For Jung, when the hero (the I-ness) acknowledges the ineffable power of the water monster and the transforming necessity of journeying to Hades, consciousness is expanded and an experience of renewal can arise. Thus it is traditionally said that the hero has “dragon”, or “serpent’s eyes” (“the hero himself is of serpent nature”), when one acknowledges within oneself the essential counteracting force represented by the dragon, sea-monster, or shadow, as for example described in the eleventh labour of Hercules by the appearance of the dragon before the Garden of the Hesperides, where the monster is also the keeper of the sacred treasure.

Fascinatingly, the ancient Greek word for “dragon” comes from drakon, and derkomai, “to have the longest sight.” An act of courage is requested, as Rilke points out to the young poet Franz Xaver Kappus, when the dragon steps before us and call for the radical transformation of everything we long to see beyond the surface of things:

How should we be able to forget those ancient myths that are at the beginning of all peoples, the myths about dragons that at the last moment turn into princesses; perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave. Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us.

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2.1.2. Toni Wolff: la Femme Inspiratrice

At the end of *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, the motif of the crisis of heroic powers directly reflects Jung's critical experiences in 1912. While feeling exceptionally intoxicated with the mythological material he has just worked on, significant dreams convey to him a profound psychological transformation of his work and life, beyond his capacity to understand it. In particular, one dream points to the almost irreversible separation from Freud, depicted through the encounter with an Austrian officer at twelve o'clock on a bright midday. Another dream, shortly after Christmas 1912, shows the appearance of a beautiful white bird, turning into a small blonde girl of eight years, which in *Black Book 2* he interprets as a suggestion to develop further his relationship with future Swiss Jungian analyst Toni Wolff. Although the break from Freud is still more cited than the decision to embark on the relationship with Toni Wolff, it is in fact the latter event which is substantially more significant within the development of Jung’s explorations.

As first highlighted by Shamdasani, the protocols of Aniela Jaffé’s interviews with Jung for *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, clearly show the vital importance of Toni Wolff during those critical years, despite this part being eventually “omitted” from Jaffé's heavily adjusted rendition of *Memories*.260 Jung’s multifaceted relationship with Toni Wolff undoubtedly represents one of the most fascinating evolving chapters of research within Jung studies.261 Those who knew Toni Wolff depicted her as an enigmatic, utterly brilliant and charming woman, with a mystical allure of her own and a melancholic introspective temperament. Jane Wheelright later recalls her magnetic beauty resembling the traits of the Egyptian Queen Nefertiti,262 with a distinctive capacity to usher individuals in their psychic journeys. Later, she will become a gifted therapist, as recounted by many close associates that considered her

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analytical skills second to none, and one of the prominent figures in the earliest Jungian community. Tina Keller refers to her therapeutic practice as going “beyond psychology”, more similar to a “work of art” based on a unique combination of intuition and intellectual understanding.\(^{263}\) By contrast with the published version of *Memories*, a first general account of Toni Wolff’s role in Jung’s life appears in Barbarah Hannah’s biography of the Swiss thinker in 1976.\(^{264}\) Hannah, Keller, and Liliane Frey bring to light something that the fresh publication of the *Black Books* has now fully confirmed: Toni Wolff’s indispensable presence throughout the emotional turmoil experienced by Jung during the time of *Liber Novus*.\(^{265}\) She meets Jung for the first time on September 20, 1910, at the age of twenty-three, suffering from an accentuated depression following her father’s death, and starts an analysis with him lasting at least until the end of the following year. The analysis will be ended by Jung, despite growing personal feelings towards her. During this time and after, their mutual closeness dramatically increases, culminating in the start of their relationship sometime in 1913. Shamdasani recounts two significant related episodes that drove Jung to take up this decision:

He dreamed that they were together in the Alps in a valley of rocks, and that he heard elves singing, and that she was disappearing into a mountain, which filled him with dread. After this, he wrote to her. He noted that after this dream, he knew that a relationship with her was unavoidable, and that his life was in danger. On a later occasion, while swimming, he found himself with a cramp and vowed that if it went away and he survived, he would give in to the relationship.\(^{266}\)

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263 Keller, 1972, p. 11, in Ibid., p. 503.


266 Ibid., p. 30.
Years later, the protocols of Memories report that around that time he and Toni Wolff became drawn to similar inner experiences, beginning to grapple with a threatening stream of ignited psychic material: “My phantasies and hers were in a participation mystique. It was like a common stream, and a common task. [...] At that time she was entirely drawn into this terrible process in which I was involved, and she was just as helpless as I was.”²⁶⁷ He begins to regularly meet with her and discusses at length with her his visionary experiences, with which he mostly engages at night. As noted by Shamdasani, the equilibrium in the family was a delicate one: “Emma came to accept the relationship between her husband and Toni Wolff. By all accounts, the triangular situation was not easy, but a respectful modus vivendi was found. Jung would have dinner with Wolff on Wednesdays at her home, and she came to Küsnacht on Sundays.”²⁶⁸

In this situation, he thinks to have drawn Toni into the dangerous process he becomes involved with, but he also realises that she is in a similar condition, which he believes he has triggered. In this exceptional context, the participation of an experience of this psychological depth together with the increasing feelings involved, make of this figure a unique agent in the development of Jung’s self-explorations, corresponding to the image of the femme inspiratrice. Although, unfortunately, Toni Wolff’s visions which parallel Jung’s have not survived, it is clear that her intuitive gift and facility for active imagination soon becomes a turning point for him. In retrospect, she recalls in this way the crucial yet burdensome role played in this context:

> What C. has achieved now is all based on me. Through my faith, love, understanding and loyalty I have kept him and brought him out. I was his mirror, as he told me right at the beginning. / But my entire feeling, phantasy, mind, energy, responsibility worked for him. I

²⁶⁸ Shamdasani 2020, p. 31.
have an effect—but I don't have substance. I didn't know how to “play.” I gave him his life.

Now he should give me mine and be a mirror to me.269

On his turn, Jung considers her his inner companion, the closest confidante, the alchemical soror mystica, as he has referred to her at various times, the “mystical sister” who guides the alchemist through the dangers and treasures of self-transformation. Her personal copy of Psychological Types bears this evocative dedication: “This book, as you know, has come to me from that world which you have brought to me. Only you know out of which misery it was born and in which spirit it was written. I put in your hands as a sign of gratitude, which I cannot express through words.”270 Altogether, Jung’s relationship with Toni Wolff bears a characteristically Dantesque trait. One should not forget, however, two concurrent biographical elements. The first one concerns Emma’s stable presence on Jung’s side during this critical period. As Ximena Roelli de Angulo, Cary Baynes’s daughter, significantly recalls, Emma’s role for her husband “must have always played just as large a part in his creative life as Toni did—just a different part.”271 This remark cannot be emphasised enough. The second element regards Jung’s encounter with another woman besides Toni Wolff, the Dutch analyst Maria Moltzer, who enters his life at a similar point in time and with whom he will stay deeply connected for a number of years. As hinted in the Black Books, the relationship with Moltzer appears more troubled and arguably less debated than the one with Toni Wolff, yet a very significant one. In between 1916 and 1918, the “soul” in the Black Books converses with Jung’s ‘I’ by referring at multiple times to the “white one” and the “black one”, seemingly indicating in this way Maria Moltzer and Toni Wolff, who respectively had fair and dark hair.272 The “soul” advises the ‘I’ to be very careful about his relationships with women, for they take him away

269 Ibid., p. 96.
270 Ibid., p. 97.
271 Ibid., p. 33, n96.
272 Ibid., p. 60.
from her, the “soul”, despite him proclaiming his “impersonal love” of both women.273 “Women are my most dangerous opponents”, the “soul” even claims, “since they have my qualities.”274 The “soul” then gives to the ‘I’ alternate suggestions on how to cut off his attachments and become independent from either the “white one” or the “black one”, not without shifting opinions about them in the course of time. Eventually, the relationship will end with Maria Moltzer’s decision to leave in 1918, which was not well received at all by Jung. Before this, as recounted in a famous episode, he was also once terribly annoyed by a letter from Moltzer in which she claims that the material he is bringing up with his “confrontation with the unconscious” and the drawing of mandalas, “should be considered art”, which makes him question the spontaneity of his processes and the assumption that the “unconscious” is nature.275 However, Moltzer’s conception of “Art” has richer and spiritually elevated aspects that transcend what Jung has instinctively intended, and the episode is particularly important, for it well depicts his unsettled response to what Moltzer’s vision and personality embodied.276 By 1918, however, his personal difficulties with her seriously intensified, with mutual accusations of “unresolved transferences”, until his final separation from the Dutch analyst, and Moltzer’s resignation from the Psychological Club. In spite of the various nature of these events, Jung’s multifarious engagement with Emma, Toni Wolff, and Maria Moltzer describes a process to which the Swiss man will give an essential value at an existential and psychological level: man’s coming to terms with the feminine side of the “soul”. On March 30, 1917, Jung’s “Dreams” notebook features a powerful vision which aptly summons this transforming process:

Very deep introversion in the evening. Completely frozen. At first a vision: Dark sky over the Albis. A fountain of fire rises from the mountain. A golden bird lowers himself down on

273 *Ibidem.*


276 *Ibidem.*
it from above with a crown in its beak. It flies over the lake toward me. While it approaches me, it becomes immensely large. It delivers the crown to me. While it comes to me, an entire garland of fiery beams soars from my head. My wife stands in front of me. Maria on my left, and Toni on my right. I faint. At this point I see a second vision behind this vision [...] characters: a young girl, similar to Grethli, around 17 years of age, leaning against a piano, smoking a cigarette.

I: What are you doing here?

She: I look after you.

I: Why?

S.: So that the fire will not burn you.

I.: Why do you play the piano?

S.: To distract myself.

I.: Why do you smoke?

S.: Also to distract myself?

End. 277

Having to postpone the discussion of the “soul” motif until later, it is now time to look more closely at Jung’s frightening sense of bewilderment at the commencement of his self-explorations. At this delicate turning point, a period of intense self-analytic activity follows, resolving almost nothing, in which he engagingly continues his theoretical work. The calling of a very different kind of investigation grows stronger and stronger. Finally, in October 1913, on a train journey to Schaffausen, Northern Switzerland, he is suddenly seized by a waking apocalyptic vision, consisting in Europe being devastated by a flood. Curiously, just a decade before, the Hungarian avant-garde painter Tivadar Csontváry Kostzka portrayed the very same site, Schaffausen, in a visionary, expressionistic style (“Waterfall at Schaffausen”, 1903). In the painting, one can see a train in the background crossing the bridge towards the mountains,

precisely the place (a tunnel in the mountains) where Jung had his first visions. The Swiss psychologist describes what occurred then to him in hypnagogic terms, as follows:

It happened in October of the year 1913 as I was leaving alone for a journey, that during the day I was suddenly overcome in broad daylight by a vision: I saw a terrible flood that covered all the northern and low-lying lands between the North Sea and the Alps. It reached from England up to Russia, and from the coast of the North Sea up to the Alps. I saw yellow waves, swimming rubble, and the death of countless thousands.

This vision lasted for two hours, it confused me and made me ill. I was not able to interpret it. Two weeks passed then the vision returned, still more violent than before, and an inner voice spoke: “Look at it, it is completely real, and it will come to pass. You cannot doubt this.” I wrestled again for two hours with this vision, but it held me fast. It left me exhausted and confused. And I thought my mind had gone crazy.278

Following this event, Jung’s tormenting doubts as to his own sanity will not leave him soon.279 He initially conceives the devastation of Europe appearing in his visions as the potential catastrophe of his relationship with the world: “I thought to myself, ‘If this means anything, it means that I am hopelessly off.’”280 A threatening feeling of being menaced by a psychotic element will not abandon him until at least August 1914, right after the outbreak of World War 1. In hindsight, he recalls in an interview with Eliade:

As a psychiatrist I became worried, wondering if I was not on the way to “doing a schizophrenia”, as we said in the language of those days . . . I was just preparing a lecture

278 Jung, LN, p. 231.

279 On Jung’s fear of insanity, see Quentin Schaller, 2019, “Jung’s Alleged Madness: From Mythopoeia to Mythologisation”, in Phanês, 2, pp. 1-27.

on schizophrenia at a congress in Aberdeen, and I kept saying to myself: “I’ll be speaking of myself! Very likely, I’ll go mad after reading out this paper.”

Later, he has another similar vision:

In the following winter I was standing at the window one night and looked North. I saw a blood-red glow, like the flicker of the sea seen from afar, stretched from East to West across the northern horizon. And at that time someone asked me what I thought about world events in the near future. I said that I had no thoughts, but saw blood, rivers of blood.

The emergence of this material leaves him with the perception of an ongoing revolution, a radical change of individual and collective proportions, the outcome of which appears then not clear in any way other than through a dangerous mental shift. In the protocols of Memories, he notes that he was in a “tempest” and there was “a daemonic force” in himself. He could not talk with anyone, except Toni Wolff, about his inner experiences. At times he had to hold on to the table “in order not to fall apart”. Neither could Emma help him beyond a certain extent, though he also recalls that the urgency of being “a normal father and husband, a doctor and all the rest” played a substantial part in enduring the complexity of this situation, which fundamentally was a “case of brute force.” As sketched out earlier, Jung’s reaction to this challenging situation takes form in the inevitable necessity of giving start to the self-explorations forming the Black Books. He allows a few of his closest pupils and associates to

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282 Jung, Draft, p. 8, in LN, pp. 198–199.


284 Ibid.
read some of the sections of the *Black Books*, including Jaffé and Keller (apart from Toni Wolff). Later, a number of copies of *Liber Novus* are circulated amongst some of those he fully trusted, such as Wolfgang Stockmayer, Peter Baynes, and Cary Baynes, while parts are read by Richard Hull, James Kirsch, Ximena Roelli de Angulo, Kurt Wolff. The work will also most likely be shown to Emil Medtner, Franz Riklin Sr., Erika Schlegel, Hans Trüb, and Marie-Louise von Franz. In the 1925 seminar, he describes this paramount moment of change as the awakening of the soul, leading to the “other side” of the mental activity of a man of science. In order not to become a victim of the tremendous power of this force, one has, he argues, to give up the idea of suppressing the emotional disturbance and privilege in all possible manners the capacity of letting oneself go, by giving all the energy to its creative power. The *Black Books* contain an emblematic note about this technique: “This is the hardest and highest art, to let yourself sink.” This method requires no secret intentions or hopes, but just “the maximum of honesty” with oneself, “following the Greek mandate: ‘Give away all thou possessest, then thou shalt receive.’” This characteristic combination of a deep state of introversion with the imperative of carefully noting down whatever this condition brings out resonates in Dante in terms of “inspiration” (“spirar”) and “inner dictation” (“dittar dentro”), as expressly brought up by the entries from *Purgatorio*. In 1914, the creative emergence of symbolic material out of states of deep introversion is described by Silberer in terms of “intra-determination of libido”: a process of reverting to more primordial psychic activities and ultimately to maternal images such as earth, waters, catacombs, caverns, subterranean crypts, vaults, Hell, and broadly what the Viennese psychoanalyst calls “elementary” or “titanic” forces. About the nature of these experiences, Silberer shares with Jung the warning that “introversion is no child’s play”, leading to abysses “by which we may be swallowed up past recall”, upon the risk

that “if the libido remains suspended in the wonder realm of the inner world the man has become but a shadow for the world above.” Thus Silberer recognises that the spectrum of introverting experiences fundamentally oscillates between two poles, the prevailing of one over the other depending on the subject’s attitude towards them. The “diabolical” pole tends to turn the intra-determination of libido in egoistic or infantile terms, a powerful attraction for the depths that sucks the subject down until the point they cannot longer resurge. The “heavenly” or anagogic pole of introversion tends instead to lead the same process in an opposite direction, by conveying a process of self-transformation and widening of personality that sets oneself free from egocentric desires while unleashing greater sources of psychic energy.

All the instances that Jung repeatedly ascribes to the type of visionary art disclose very familiar aspects with this oscillation. He evokes what Hölderlin notes at the beginning of *Patmos*: “Near is God / And hard to apprehend. / But where danger is, there / Arises salvation.” The words suggestively summarise the ambivalent force of that approximation to the inner world which Hölderlin calls *annäherung*: the experience of coming into contact with the “deity within” or “divine immanence”, which David Constantine has suggested to interpret in terms of divine “imminence.”

In 1912, Jung interprets this passage from *Patmos* as disclosing particularly well the dangers and treasures of introversion: “the libido has now sunk to the lowest depths, where ‘the danger is great’ (Faust, Part II, Mother scene.) There ‘the God is near’; there man may find the inner sun, his own nature, sun-like and self-renewing, hidden in the mother-womb like the sun in the nighttime.” Along similar lines, he engages with the motif of Nietzsche’s “gazing into the abyss”, and an analogous motif appears as well in Blake at the beginning of *The

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289 Ibid., p. 269.
290 Ibid., p. 287.
293 Jung, WSL, pp. 382–383. (tr. B. M. Hinkle).
Marriage of Heaven and Hell: “In a perilous path, / The just man kept his course along / The vale of death. / Roses are planted where thorns grow, / And on the barren heath / Sing the honey bees.”[294] The protagonist of Kubin’s autobiographical *The Other Side*, published in 1908, pays a visit to the “other side” of imagination after an irrefutable invitation to a magical land from an old friend, which his wife senses from the start as a terrifying omen. The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, another of Jung’s favourite references, sets the protagonist into a wild forest amongst dragons, wolves, and maidens, with the sole possibility of moving forward into a phantasmagoric journey.[295] And finally the *Commedia*, which proverbially begins with the image of a man lost in the savage wilderness of a desert, where an unexpected guide appears to suggest that he “must take another path” to escape that place, another path that will first conduct him to traverse Hell in order to reunite with his beloved.[296] These various suggestions provide us with parallels from those visionary sources that will fascinate Jung with something crucially related to the condition in which the Swiss man finds himself from the autumn of 1913. It is only during the Advent of 1913 (December 12) that he decides to “resolve upon the decisive step” and, by letting himself drop into the depths, “it was as though the ground literally gave way beneath my feet.”[297] In those same days, he had on hand his copy of the *Commedia*, as bewildered as Dante at losing himself in the maze of a dark forest, at the beginning of his adventures. He consults the *Commedia* and among all possible mentions he may have taken out of this work (a poem of 14,233 hendecasyllables in terza rima grouped in 100 cantos), he copies in his diaries, in December 1913, two tercets (interestingly belonging in different cantos) in which the Italian poet speaks of the powerful inner transmutation enacted by a mind inflamed by love. This fact cannot be stressed enough. A love of Dantesque echoes is chosen by Jung as a poetic reference to illuminate the way into the chaotic blackness that

threatens to seize him. Emma provides him with an anchor to his family, his everyday duties as husband and father, and certainly much more than one would be able to say. Toni Wolff with the inner sight to penetrate and survive the journey into the depths. Yet, just as the protagonist of the Commedia, he appears for the most part deeply uncertain, at times entirely unsure, about the direction and meaning of the experiment he decides to carry on. Except for one thing. That the “incandescent” heat of the tempest in which he finds himself reveals itself so strong as to leave him with no other choice than proceeding forward. Thus, in retrospect, he describes this pivotal turn in the following way:

I hit upon this stream of lava, and the heat of its fires reshaped my life. That was the primal stuff which compelled me to work upon it, and my works are a more or less successful endeavor to incorporate this incandescent matter into the contemporary picture of the world. The years when I was pursuing my inner images were the most important in my life—in them everything essential was decided. It all began then; the later details are only supplements and clarifications of the material that burst forth from the unconscious, and at first swamped me. It was the prima materia for a lifetime’s work.²⁹⁸

On the basis of these words, the image of the “stream of lava” has often been adopted to depict the volcanic “fiery basalt” that characterises Jung’s inner experiences. Little noticed, however, is what in the protocols of Memories Jung remarkably adds to clarify the substance of this fire: “creative passion.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Jung/Jaffé, ETG, p. 203.
Fig. 20. Toni Wolff.
Fig. 21. Jung family portrait.
2.2. Katabasis

2.2.1. The Midpoint of Life

The “stream” of fire and its magmatic symbolism connects Jung’s material and the *Commedia* in a remarkable way. It is a symbol so widespread in the recurrence of images, visions, and passages that characterise these texts, that a line from Claude de Saint-Martin may be recalled: “The movement of the mind is like that of fire. It is created as it rises.”

In a Bachelardian vein, fire is the element that most suitably describes Jung’s confrontation with the Italian poet, if already in the *Black Books*, he quotes from Dante’s *Purgatorio*: “As a flame / Which follows the fire whatever shape it takes, / The new form follows the spirit exactly.” Of the Dantesque flame, Irma Brandeis has written memorable pages, which occasionally dwell on Jung, but also on the previously mentioned Dunbar’s *Symbolism of Medieval Thought* and Maud Bodkin’s *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination*. She suggests a reading of Dante’s journey thoroughly in terms of the symbolism of fire and light. Hell is “the place of isolation, of the cultivated ego.” “A lightless cavern, not given by the heavens, but made by eyes which are dull to light.” A spiritual eye-malady that compels the traveller to look sharp through the darkness of mental dismay. For Brandeis, Dante’s travelling to other worlds is a living experience of enlightenment, consisting of the freeing of the natural light within (en-lightening) that has been obscured by the ego, for “unwilling eyes alone can create the potentiality of Hell.”

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303 Brandeis 1962, pp. 188–227.
304 Ibid., p. 68.
305 Ibid, p. 190.
306 Ibid.
order to illuminate the descending path amongst the damned. When Dante’s ‘I’ finds a way not to move against the fire in which he is melted, but instead learns how to follow and act in harmony with it, a new advancement is possible, corresponding to a process of mental brightening that makes of Hell the puzzling commencement of inner cleansing. Then darkness unravels, a “new form follows the spirit”, and slowly the flame of the individual experiences itself as part of a universal fire. Fire is no longer a prison of infernal flames (*Ignis Gebennalis*), but a source of light that shines in the flaming image of Beatrice, in which Dante gazes at the very end of his adventures. Thus Brandeis’ vision of Dante’s journey, by sharing a few traits of a Neoplatonic reading of the *Commedia*, tells us also something important about the way in which one can read Jung’s visions through the lens of his understanding of Dante’s visionary experiences. The multifaceted manifestation of fire and light in Jung’s visions shows important points of comparison with Dante, both similarly conceiving fire as the vital medium of self-transformation. Without the light and heat of fire, no work of inner change could be fulfilled, since fire serves for many commanding symbolical functions, among which, burning out negative emotions, lighting up the way of darkness, inflaming the power of vision, and materialising transitional passages from old to new states of being. Fire is never stagnant, and the contemplation of the flame, to which Bachelard has dedicated an entire book,\(^{307}\) conveys the reawakening of psychic energy, which reflects a flamingly creative state of mind. Provokingly describing the psychic force of the heath of fire and its reflection on visions and reveries, Bachelard has written that “among all the phenomena is the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil.”\(^{308}\) This ambiguity of fire traverses the whole structure of the *Commedia*, in which Dante explores a most various hidden interior world of flames and embers, moving from instrument of retribution and purification

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(Inferno), to source of catharsis (Purgatorio), and finally catalyser of higher inner elevation (Paradiso). In Transformations and Symbols of the Libido, Jung discusses at large the magical primitive force of fire making and elaborates for the first time, on the basis of his reading of Paul Deussen's General History of Philosophy,\(^3\) on the principle of tapas, the imaginal energy of concentration through which “one is fertilised, inspired, regenerated, and reborn.”\(^4\) The difference now for Jung, when hitting upon the material that forms Liber Novus, is that this magical force finds a direct enactment in his own experiences. The symbol of fire evokes a primitive force, a Blakean energy of imagination, which in retrospect appears to Jung as a deeply threatening “stream of lava”, and which then becomes the fundamental source of energy to use for the work of inner transformation, a highly complex and enduring process of initiation which Shamanic traditions call “mastery over fire”\(^5\).

Upon this fiery stream, Liber Novus opens with a “Prologue”, written by Jung approximately two years after the beginning of his experiment. He gives it the suggestive title “The Way of What is to Come”, in this way assessing the nature of his visions from the angle of a prospective process of self-transformation. The things that “are to come” point in fact to an imminent process of rebirth, for, as Jung states later (“Descent into Hell in the Future”), “whoever considers the event from outside always sees only that it already was, and it is always the same. But whoever looks from inside, knows that everything is new.”\(^6\) In a prophetic tone, therefore, the “Prologue” of Liber Novus heralds the enigmatic announcement of new things to come, by enacting a first confrontation between the “spirit of the times” (“Geist der Zeit”) and the “spirit of the depths” (“Geist der Tief”). The “spirit of the times” (or “spirit of our time”), he argues, is characterised by “use”, “justification”, “value”, and “meaning”,

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\(^3\) Jung, WSL, p. 415.

\(^4\) Jung, WSL, p. 415.


\(^6\) Jung, LN, p. 239.
depending on human pride and common sense. It is the political spirit of a certain age, made of hopes, fears, and beliefs of a generation living in a specific time and culture. The “spirit of the times”, following the rational judgment that differentiates between good and evil, necessary and unnecessary, does not know ambiguity. It firmly follows Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction, for which a thing, a value, or a model, cannot be its opposite or different from what it is: “It is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing in the same respect.” In the language of Liber Novus, the sum of the values of the “spirit of the times” are ascribed to the principle of “Sense” (“Sinn”): the socially good, reasonable, and acceptable, is what makes sense to the individual and the community. The opposite of “Sense”, Jung argues, is represented by the principle of “Absurd” (“Widersinn”), or what lies at the opposite end of each value. The “pendulum of the mind”, Jung later points out in his conversations with Jaffé, does not oscillate between “right or wrong”, but between the poles of “sense and absurdity”, while reminding us that “Nirdvandva (freedom from opposites) is the Orient’s remedy for this.” The denial of this continuous oscillation, which occurs when one lives just in the hope and light of personal success, makes the individual one-sided, by pushing him to fall into the realm of “Non-sense” (“Unsinn”). In the layer added to the Draft of Liber Novus, Jung connects the typically dualistic perspective of the “spirit of the times” to the traits of the heroic mentality, which deliberately scales reality according to its standards of truth:

The heroic in you is the fact that you are ruled by the thought that this or that is good, that this or that performance is indispensable, this or that cause is objectionable, this or that goal must be attained in headlong striving work, this or that pleasure should be

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313 Jung, LN, p. 230.
ruthlessly repressed at all costs. Consequently you sin against incapacity. But incapacity exists. No one should deny it, find fault with it, or shout it down.\textsuperscript{316}

On the contrary, a progressive integration of the opposites, “Sense” and “Absurd”, leads the individual to access a more refined mental state, to which Jung gives the name “Superior Meaning” (“Übersinn”). In order to vitalise such a process, however, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of another character at work together with the “spirit of the times”. In the “Prologue”, this presence is crucially introduced as the “spirit of the depths”. The “spirit of the depths” rules the paradoxical and the spiritual towards the ambivalent attraction of the opposites. It conveys nature, instincts, energy, life, folly, beyond the rational judgment of the individual, resembling the \textit{pur perieikon} (ever-lasting circling fire) which the Pythagoreans considered the true agency of divinity. In the dramatic development of the “Prologue”, the ‘I’ grapples with a strenuous confrontation between the two spirits at work. What one considers light, the other sees as darkness. What one defines as the personal and only personal, the other conceives as self-overcoming. One pursues knowledge through the way of explanation, the other seeks freedom through the way of comprehension. One seeks the goal through a linear movement, the other seeks the process through a circular advancement. One moves right or left, the other moves right and left, like a serpent shedding its skin at every turn, following the principle of “hinübergehen” (“going across”), a vision which Jung takes from Nietzsche.\textsuperscript{317} In short, the “spirit of this time” would like the ‘I’ to think of this world and plunge into its desires, wishes, and honours. But the “spirit of the depths”, which “from time immemorial and for all the future possesses a greater power than the spirit of this time”,\textsuperscript{318} would like the ‘I’ to think of another world, having nothing to do with the rewards or punishments of an after-world, but rather with the subtle bodies and hidden perceptions of a living invisible world.

\textsuperscript{316} Jung, LN, p. 240.

\textsuperscript{317} Shamdasani, 2009, p. 120, n8.

\textsuperscript{318} Jung, LN, p. 230.
Finally, the “spirit of the depths” steps up to the ‘I’ and forcefully leads him to catch a glimpse of the “hidden things”, just as Dante recalls Virgil drawing him into “le segrete cose” (the “secret things”), while crossing the gate of Hell. Travelling through mental liminal spaces is the pathway to madness for the “spirit of this time.” But the same experience is a path of wisdom and renewal for the “spirit of the depths”: “The foundation stone of what is yet to come.” In the midst of this inner struggle, in the darkest night of despair and solitude, Jung’s ‘I’ turns to his soul and calls her, on November 12, 1913, as a spiritual knight of the Middle Ages would have turned to the guidance of the inner mysterious lady:

My soul, where are you? Do you hear me? I speak, I call you—are you there? I have returned, I am here again. I have shaken the dust of all the lands from my feet, and I have come to you, I am with you.

At this pivotal juncture, by fully giving in to the soul, the journey begins. No sooner has he taken this resolution, than the voice of the soul brings the I a first bitter tasting of Hell, in the form of a disturbing, prolonged feeling of fright and despair, with no promise of improvement. Since the doors of Jung’s Inferno open in this guise, no better warning can guide the reader through it than the adamantine inscription appearing over the gate of Dante’s Hell. An inscription which in those winter days of December 1913 the Swiss thinker had occasion to read another time:

‘Per me si va ne la città dolente,
per me si va ne l’eterno dolore,
per me si va tra la perduta gente.

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320 Jung, LN, p. 230.
Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore;
fecemi la divina podestate,
la somma sapienza e l’primo amore.

Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create
se non etterne, e io etterno duro.
Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch’intrate’.

With these words in mind, it is possible to notice that in a section of Liber Novus entitled “Nox Tertia” (Liber Secundus, Chapter XVI) Jung reports a “strange voice” revealing to him “There is no salvation here” (January 18, 1914), a message strikingly akin to the spirit of Dante’s infernal inscription. Dante’s verses sharply convey the tone of the paradoxical request which the “spirit of the depths” advances to the ‘I’: abandon your hopes and wishes, abandon above all solace or requests of salvation, that is, give up the certainties and expectations that belong to the power of the ego and the narrowed perspective of the spirit of this time. They are the cause and not the solution to the hero’s distressed wanderings. Giving them up might look like entering into Hell, and in one sense will it be so, but the first step on a journey of rebirth is to entirely revert one’s current beliefs. This is the paradoxical calling that triggers the very opening lines of Jung’s journey “on the service of the soul.”

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322 Dante, *Inferno*, III, 1-9; p. 59. “Through me you go into the city of weeping; / Through me you go into eternal pain; / Through me you go among the lost people. / Justice is what moved my exalted Maker; / I was the invention of the power of God, / Of his wisdom, and of his primal love. / Before me there was nothing that was created / Except eternal things; I am eternal: / No room for hope, when you enter this place.” See Virgil, *Eneid*, VI, 126-127. See also Mt 7:13: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in through.”


324 Jung, LN, p. 234.
exact commencement of *Liber Novus*, that in the fortieth year of his life the desire for “honor, power and every human happiness” suddenly ceased and “horror came over” him.\(^3\)

This Dantesque passage echoes a biblical line from the prophet Isaiah (38:10): “I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave”,\(^3\) in which the “cutting off of days” indicates the thirty-fifth year, the precise symbolical half of what man’s lifespan is said to be in the Psalms (70 years).\(^3\) The division of the arc of life in two halves, which symbolises the motif of the separation (*dia-ballein*, “separation”) and reunion (*syn-ballein*, “reunion”) of the opposites, establishes a remarkable analogy between the midpoint of day (noon) and the midpoint of life (thirty-five year).

The hero encounters the serpent and prepares to descend into Hell. In the ancient world, one finds references to this division in Homer, Plato, and Aristotle.\(^3\) Later, the motif of the half turning point of life is connected to the time of mysteries and demons, libations to the Dead and offerings to Chthonic deities, frantic madness and sexual ecstasy in the summer fields. Even St. Antonius seems to have been aware of the apocalyptic aspects of this moment.\(^3\)

However, it is also a favourite time for magicians to practice their magic and for prophets and sibyls to open their mouth, for preternatural energies captured in nature can finally be communicated. This turning point (a “sacred and dangerous moment” as Caillois has described it)\(^3\) has also been cause of much distress for early Christian commentators of the Psalms, because of the mysterious occurrence of a *daimónion mesembrínon* (or *daemonium meridianum*, “noonday demon”) in Psalm 90:6, which “has

\(^3\) Ibid., pp. 231-232.


\(^3\) Ibid., p. 691: “The days of our years are three-score years and ten.”

\(^3\) Plato, *Phaedrus*, 259, A and D; Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1390b, 8-9; Homer, *Iliad*, XXI, III.

\(^3\) Caillois, 1991, p. 86.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 50.
long been, and to this day remains, a central feature of the Catholic rite of exorcism”.\textsuperscript{331} Despite the incursion of this demon being expunged by the authorised version of the Holy Writ, to be replaced by Jerome with the formulation “the bite of insanity at midday”\textsuperscript{332} and then substituted by a more general “destruction that wastes at noonday”, Evagrius considers it “the source of the most difficult trials a monk can face”\textsuperscript{333} and Bernard of Clairvaux conceives it as nothing less than the transformation of Satan himself into an angel of light (PL 183, 199).

The biblical recurrence of the same demonological motif is repeated in Isaiah (38:10): reaching the half-way of life corresponds to a “sacred and dangerous” symbolical reversal. Although the biblical reading interprets this moment principally in terms of spiritual conversion, atonement, and change of mind, Isaiah 38:10 reveals something less idyllic. That this time of passage and unforeseen circumstances cannot but first occur by traversing the threshold of the underworld.

Along this tradition, the motif of going to Hell at the midpoint of life inspires as well the more famous example of Dante’s Commedia, in which the very beginning of the protagonist’s journey to Hades occurs in the thirty-fifth year of the poet’s life:

\begin{quote}
Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
ché la diritta via era smarrita.\textsuperscript{334}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{332} Ibid., p. 32.
\textsuperscript{333} Ibid., p. 30.
\textsuperscript{334} Dante, Inferno, I, 1-3; 1987, p. 43. “Half way along the road we have to go, / I found myself obscured in a great forest, / Bewildered, and I knew I had lost my way.” Being Dante born in 1265, the thirty-five years reference dates the beginning of his journey at 1300, first year of the new century, and year of the first jubilee in Roma organised by Boniface VIII.
As the reader now considers again the sudden horror which came over Jung around the fortieth year of his life, it is almost impossible not to think of these lines. A piece of paper (in which one can still curiously glimpse the remnant of an I Ching annotated consultation) is inserted next to this page by Jung, in his German copy of the first Canto of the *Commedia*. Furthermore, in the same text, he interestingly underlines segments of the biographical introduction compiled by the German translator, Friderich Notter, a reference to the circumstances that led Dante to embark on his journey in the thirty-fifth year of his life. The
pattern of the thirty-five years’ “radical mental changing” (“Lebenswende”), which the ancient Greeks called metánoia and which William James relates to an essential principle of religious experience (“conversion”), in fact occupies Jung in numerous works and in particular in an article originally published in 1930, “The Stages of Life”.\(^{335}\) Strangely ignoring Swedenborg’s metánoia, who in the middle of his life is forced to abandon a glorious scientific career to experience his visions, Jung’s favourite examples in this respect are Dante, Nietzsche, and Christ. A bizarre trio, to which one can add the case of Siddharta Gautama, who leaves the royal palace of his father at twenty-nine, practices asceticism for several years, and then abandons the way of extreme solitude to reach illumination at thirty-five, sitting in the lotus position under a fig tree on a full moon night of May. In a lecture at the ETH in 1935, Jung claims how “we can learn a great deal from Dante”, by noting that:

He began to write his “Divine Comedy” in his thirty fifth year. The thirty-fifth year is a turning point in life - it is an interesting fact that Christ died in his thirty-fourth year - [...]. A point in life exists at about the thirty-fifth year when things begin to change, it is the first moment of the shadow side of life, of the going down to death. It is clear that Dante found this point and those who have read Zarathustra will know that Nietzsche discovered it. When this turning point comes people meet it in several ways: some turn away from it; others plunge into it; and something important happens to yet others from the outside. If we do not see a thing, Fate does it to us.\(^{336}\)

The juxtaposition of Dante and Nietzsche in this context is particularly meaningful, for in several aspects, Jung’s interpretation of the Florentine poet offers a counterpart of his unsettled confrontation with Nietzsche. In the same years, this line of comparison emerges in

\(^{335}\) Jung, 1930, “The Stages of Life” (“Die seelischen Probleme der menschlichen Altersstufen”), CW 8, §773.

several passages in Jung’s seminar on Zarathustra. In a lecture on October 31, 1934, he identifies a thread of connection between Dante’s mystical rose and Zarathustra:

He makes a difference between himself and the *dynamis*; he is not identical with the psychopompos. Virgilius is to him of course this same archetype, but it is a different kind of teaching. It is the message of the Middle Ages. But the future idea is already appearing when Dante reaches Paradise, for at the very summit of Paradise is the mystical rose in which individuation is indicated. That is the end of the Christian mandala, the highest realization of the time, and the mystical rose is the future. And it is Nietzsche, or Zarathustra, who continues, who takes up the eternal thread and carries it further, bringing the idea of the mystical rose down into the being of man. Of course, there were other expressions of it in the meantime: medieval alchemistic philosophy, and Master Eckhart, and Faust, and many other stepping stones led to that transformation of the human mind or the human psychology.\(^{337}\)

Later, on February 12, 1936, he returns to the Nietzschean motif of the noontide of life and links it to Christian symbolism, once more referring to Dante’s experiences:

The great noontide is the midday meal, and if one takes the words and supposes that this Christian analogy of the communion is only apparent, one gets the real message. Then one comes to “the great noontide when man is in the middle of his course between animal and Superman”—then he celebrates that communion with Zarathustra—with the self. This is psychological, for in the middle of their way, Dante's adventure happens to certain people, if not consciously, then at least unconsciously. Then they feel the touch of the self.\(^{338}\)


\(^{338}\) Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 838.
For Jung, Nietzsche’s later years represent an example of the dramatic consequences that may derive from an opposition to the metánoia. The attitude of turning away from it causes at best a profound isolation within oneself, at worst the risk of mentally falling apart, resulting in the disputable “morbid” interpretation of Nietzsche given by Jung in the Zarathustra seminar.

Dante’s model, at least as filtered through the pages of the *Commedia*, conveys instead to Jung an alternative experience of visions and inner transformation. Where Nietzsche’s katabasis epitomises the spiritual alienation of modern man, the *Commedia* encompasses a hermeneutical model to overcome it. Where Nietzsche heralds the announcement of the death of God, Dante announces the rebirth of divine inspiration in the soul. Where Zarathustra proclaims the coming of the “Übermensch” and the dominion of the will to power, Dante establishes through Virgil and Beatrice a sacred alliance with love, a *theologia ludens* (“joyful theology”), channeling the immediate experience of divinity through the sensual and spiritual apprehension of love, that is, exactly what Jung believes Nietzsche lacked above all. At this crossroads, in order to properly understand the way in which Jung’s own mid-life turning point, as presented at the commencement of the *Black Books* in 1913, entails a characteristically Dantesque connotation, one should look carefully at the psychological and symbolic background of the first lines of the *Commedia*.

Let us briefly review the story. About seven centuries ago, the Italian poet Dante Alighieri, born in c. 1265, meets a lady from Firenze whose glorious name, Beatrice Portinari, will be remembered for centuries, and whom Dante sees for the first time at the age of nine, a little girl of stunning beauty completely dressed in scarlet red. The vision is so powerful as to

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339 See Domenici 2019.

make him claim, in Homeric manner, that “she seemed the daughter not of a mortal man but of God.”\footnote{Dante, VN, II, pp. 2-3: “Ella non parea figliuola d'uomo mortale, ma di deo.”} About this woman, marvellously portrayed by Rossetti (\textit{Beata Beatrix}, 1870), we do not know much, historically, other than that she probably was the daughter of Italian banker Folco Portinari, and married to another banker, Simone dei Bardi. Nonetheless, so much has been written about her that it has become almost impossible for the modern reader to bear in mind the essential fact of the story: Dante falls instantly in love with her. Against those interpretations that make of Beatrice the allegory of theology or the conventional image of a longstanding literary tradition, which adds very little to our imagination, one has the spell-like imminent experience of Dante’s love, a mystical account of a similar nature to the visionary encounter with the \textit{donna angelicata} in the Sufi poetry of Ibn Arabī.\footnote{Corbin, 1998 (1969), pp. 100-101.} Dante has revealing dreams about her, visions and fants. He often feels his tongue composing poetry by “moving almost of its own accord.”\footnote{Dante, VN, XIX, p. 29.} He describes his love as an ineluctable act of surrender of his ‘I’ to a state of visionary possession or “creative passion”, to recall Jung’s expression appearing in the protocols of \textit{Memories}: “Here is a god stronger than I who is coming to rule over me.”\footnote{Ibid., VN, II, p. 2.} He calls Beatrice “la gloriosa donna de la mia mente” (“the glorious lady of my mind”),\footnote{Ibid., VN, II, p. 1.} which serves as an outstanding point of comparison with Jung’s meditations on the anima, on which this study will focus later. All these experiences are recounted by Dante through the \textit{Vita Nova}, an autobiographical journal of dreams and visions which presents some significant elements of comparison with \textit{Liber Novus} (from its title and polymorphous structure, made of visions and commentaries to the visions, to the hermetic and apocalyptic reminiscence of the principle of \textit{novum}), though Jung does not refer to this work in any explicit occurrence. Besides the revelation of Dante’s stunning love for Beatrice, however, one also learns from the \textit{Vita Nova}
that she tragically dies at a very young age, causing tremendous suffering for the poet. Thus Dante describes his lifelong love for Beatrice and the intention to overcome the unbearable pain of her disappearance through a precise deliberation: “To write of her that which has never been written of any other woman.” Words of this magnitude fit particularly well with Jung's characterisation of the great Florentine as the “spiritual knight of his lady”, who for the sake of her love embarks on any kind of hazardous adventure, taking up the gauntlet with monsters, spectres, and demonic forces of all kinds. Nevertheless, in the following years Dante commits himself to philosophical work and controversial political vicissitudes, forgetting his promise to Beatrice. One must bear in mind that Dante is at that time one of the most learned men of his time and he is deeply involved with contemporary political affairs, particularly concerning the rivalry between “guelfi” and “ghibellini” (Guelphs and Ghibellines), occurring in Florence and in central and northern Italy. The Guelphs support the Pope, the Ghibellines the imperial party. By 1300 in Florence, the Guelphs have divided into White and Black Guelphs, the first faction still endorsing the papacy, the second opposing influence from the Pope. Dante sides with the Whites and in the summer of 1300 he becomes Priore of Florence, a position that obliges him to expel from the city several important figures, thus creating for him many enemies. When later on the Blacks take power of Florence, Dante is absent, being sent to Rome as an ambassador. As an immediate result, his enemies decide, in 1302, to perpetually exile him from Florence, on charges of fraud, concussion, and opposition to the Pope. His house is plundered. Summoned to clear his position in court, Dante does not attend. He is then declared a heretic and condemned to the stake, a fact which will force him into a life of


exile for more than twenty years. It is at this point, indeed around the thirty-five year, that Dante experiences such a threatening state of despair that he describes it as finding himself lost in a “selvaggia, aspra e forte” (“savage, dense, and difficult”) “selva oscura” (“shadowed forest”), “che nel pensier rinova la paura!” (“which even in recall renews my fear!”).\(^{348}\) Now finally remembering his promise, he decides to embark on a journey to find again the beloved Beatrice, for as Brandeis notices, he “has forgotten what Beatrice taught, and meshed himself in other loves. Yet he has not so completely forgotten her that she cannot rescue him.”\(^{349}\) Thus, for her sake Dante embraces a dangerous expedition into the afterlife, which he imagines to occur in 1300, venturing with the help of the Roman poet Virgil into the invisible realms of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, resulting in the general plan of Dante’s *Commedia* and representing “the story of nothing less than seeing God face to face and coming back to tell the tale.”\(^{350}\)

\(^{348}\) Dante, *Inferno*, I, 1–6; 1987, p. 43.

\(^{349}\) Brandeis, 1962, p. 119.

Fig. 23. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1859, *The Salutation of Beatrice*.
2.2.2. Forest, Desert, and Fearsome Beasts

And into the forest I go, to lose my mind and find my soul.

*John Muir*

For Auerbach, Dante is “a witness who has seen everything with his own eyes and is expected to give an accurate report.” Thus he does not say “‘Muse, name to me the man . . .’, or ‘Once upon a time King Arthur held a royal feast at the Pentecost’”; he begins instead: “In the middle of my life, I found myself in a dark forest.” The great symbol of the dark forest, in which Dante loses his way to commence his journey, implies several points of comparison with the experience of bewilderment that Jung comes to face at the beginning of *Liber Novus*. Besides psychologically elaborating on the symbolism of trees, woods, and forests in many places throughout his scientific work, and in particular in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, Jung refers to Dante’s shadowed forest in the seminar on *Dream Analysis*, commenting on the appearance of a wood in the dream of a patient (January 30, 1929): “Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. This is a well-known symbol of the Middle Ages, and it means the descent into the unconscious. Dante loses his way then finds the descent into the unconscious.” Similarly, throughout the records of his own descent, on December 28, 1913 (a few days after the recorded quotes from Dante’s *Purgatorio*) he describes his condition of mental disarray in this way: “I am walking alone in a dark forest and I notice I have lost my way.” At a symbolical level, the parallel inspires a few further comments. First of all, Dante has really not taken part in deciding where he is. Contrariwise, he only knows he has ended up in a dark forest, he “finds himself” (“mi ritrovi”) there, similarly to the way in which Jung “finds himself” losing his way and being

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353 Jung, LN, p. 261.
plunged into a hidden world. Throughout the *Inferno*, Dante also refers to the motif of the dark forest in terms of “un bosco che da neun sentiero era segnato” (“a wood / Which had no path marked in it at all”) and a “dolorosa selva” (a “sorrowful wood”). The forest, a place of the holy and numinous par excellence, which Greeks and Romans saw as primordial matter and abode of the godhead, is at the same time a place of great danger which leads the traveller astray from past and known ways. For Jung, it is a forcible expression of what the psyche may reveal, for the womb of the forest harbours the path of the seekers who, willingly or not, walk off the beaten paths. Similarly, at the beginning of the Rosicrucian parable which Silberer sets at the centre of *Problems of Mysticism and Its Symbolism* in 1914, the protagonist has this vision:

As once I strolled in a fair forest, young and green, and contemplated the painfulness of this life, and lamented how through the dire fall of our first parents we inherited such misery and distress, I chanced, while thinking these thoughts, to depart from the usual path and found myself, I know not how, on a narrow foot path that was rough, untrodden and impassable, and overgrown with so much underbrush and bushes that it was easy to see it was very little used. Therefore I was dismayed and would gladly have gone back, but it was not in my power to do so, since a strong wind so powerfully blew me on, that I could rather take ten steps in advance than one backward.

“Finding oneself” in the forest is a silence of reason and speech that rekindles a primordial layer of imagination. Here, the Italian, properly Dantesque, “ritrovarsi” (“refinding oneself”) shows a point of confrontation with Jung’s German expression “Wiederfindung der Seele” (“Refinding the Soul”). “Ritrovarsi” in the forest suggests that the forest, as the place of the soul and the numinous has truly *always* been there, where the subject can re-find a

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355 Silberer, 1917 (1914), pp. 1–2.

356 Jung, LN, p. 231.
hidden treasure by returning to nature. A reversal of perspective that echoes Jung’s famous words, for which “one does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.”

Fig. 24. William Blake, 1824-1827, *Dante running from the three beasts.*

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Entering the forest, Dante openly admits: “Io non so ben ridir com’i v’intrai.” (“I cannot tell exactly how I got there.”) This remark as well characterises the strongly impersonal nature of experiencing the depths. The journey begins with the weakness of the rational eye (belonging in the realm of past ideals) and so it will continue, becoming ever clearer that Dante has simply no clue how to behave in Hell, as Pound has clearly highlighted. The katabasis in fact, by its very definition, escapes the ‘I’’s control, provoking the increasing emergence of creative autonomous forces. Thus a different, greater question arises. That of the imminent necessity of the journey, as Rilke suggests to the young apprentice poet: “Nobody can counsel and help you, nobody. There is only one single way. Go into yourself. [...] This above all—ask yourself in the stillest hour of your night: must I write?” A similar question (must I record all of this?) is undertaken by Jung at the time, plunging into the “stillest hour” of his nights. The critical situation reveals that there is no real choice, when attempting a lyrical elaboration over the disclosure of states of visionary possession. Differently, the material forces itself upon the author, against conscious deliberations, by writing things that they would have never entrusted, a situation in which the author “can only obey the apparently alien impulse within him and follow where it leads, sensing that his work is greater than himself and wields a power which is not his and which he cannot command.” Just as in Dante’s narratives of Heaven and Hell, so in Jung’s visionary records, the experience of abandonment to a greater, self-regulatory impulse, belongs in acquiring a capacity for self-forgetting that initially appears to be like essentially going against oneself, namely against one’s desires and ordinary patterns of life and thoughts. Thus, commenting on the first dialogue with the soul occurring on November 12, 1913, Jung adds in the Draft of Liber Novus: “The spirit of the depths forced me to say this and at the same time to undergo it against myself.” On this basis, another element must be taken into

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358 Dante, *Inferno*, I, 10; 1987, p. 44.


360 Jung, 1922, CW15, §110.

361 Jung, LN, p. 232.
account, as one proceeds into the elucidation of correspondences between Jung's experiment and the *Commedia*. Dante points out that the experience of being lost in the forest and everything that follows after that, comes very close to a near-death condition (*Inferno*, I, 7). He repeats it later in such a vivid manner that most of the symbolist interpreters of the poem take this beginning as evidence of the characteristically initiatory significance of Dante’s journey, by intending the quasi death in the forest as the sacrifice of the past that precedes the incubation of the adept into a different and higher future self. In this respect, prior to the *Commedia*, Dante’s travelling through liminal spaces between life and death is a central motif in the *Vita Nova*, a work that from cover to cover provides us with dreams, fancies, hallucinations, visions, and half-way perceptions between sleep and waking, which a modern eye may well bind to the domain of altered and exceptional mental states, but that in the Middle Ages typically corresponded to the fundamentally phantasmagoric nature of experiencing love.\(^{362}\) The deeper the act and extension of love, the more radically challenging Dante’s consciousness of death becomes. The reader should just think of the memorable episode, occurring approximately half way through the *Vita Nova*, when a dream occurs to Dante’s enamoured mind, who finds himself in bed with a severe illness, “like a paralysed person.” The dream reveals that one day soon Beatrice will have to die, thus bringing forward the event that triggers everything that the poet will be called to explore in the *Commedia*. Before the anticipatory thought of Beatrice’s death, Dante’s forceful vision (“I went so out of my head that I closed my eyes and became convulsed as one in a delirium”) features images present in a longstanding apocalyptic tradition, including the choral appearance of “amazingly sad” women weeping down the street and extraordinary natural phenomena such as the darkening of the sun, the almost expressionistic image of the starry vault becoming deformed into a cry of nature, the falling of dead birds from the sky, and earthquakes:

Then sighing loudly, I said to myself: ‘Some day the most gracious Beatrice will surely have to die.’ I went so out of my head that I closed my eyes and became convulsed as one in a delirium and began to have these imaginings: how at the outset of my imagination's wandering certain faces of ladies with dishevelled hair appeared to me and they were saying: ‘You too shall die.’ And then after these ladies there appeared to me certain faces, strange and horrible to behold, saying to me: ‘You are dead.’ As my imagination wandered in this fashion, I came to such a point that I no longer knew where I was. I seemed to see ladies amazingly sad, weeping as they made their way down a street, their hair dishevelled; I seemed to see the sun darken in a way that gave the stars a colour that would have made me swear that they were weeping; it seemed to me that the birds flying through the air fell to earth dead, and that there were great earthquakes.363

When a little later Dante’s greatest fear is confirmed, the poet begins to align a series of invocations to his own death, before finally deciding to go after Beatrice into a different world. The event epitomises the bridge towards the *Commedia*, in which, from the start, images of death acquire a markedly initiatory character. The time spent in the forest enacts the concentration of Dante’s previous mental attitude, based on philosophical, political, and personal aspirations. Going out of it represents at once the death of that binding and the beginning of Dante’s transformation through the means and expression of love, thus giving...
start, out of the obscurity of the dark forest, to a series of rituals and symbols of death and rebirth that will thoroughly accompany Dante on his adventures.

At this point, the reader should recall that the journey to the gates of Hell does not begin exactly within the forest, but rather with the act of waking up from a night of profound sleep in it. Otherwise, no journey at all would have been possible. According to Dante’s narration, in fact, the protagonist of the Commedia, who trembles just at remembering the “night of sorrow” (Inferno, I, 21) he has spent in the threatening forest (“So bitter—death is hardly more severe!”), Inferno, I, 7), is now moving on, alone and forsaken like a naufrago, surrounded by a “piaggia deserta” (a “barren land”, Inferno, I, 29), which a little later is called the “gran deserto” (the “great desert”, Inferno, I, 64).\[^{364}\] Valli suggests we read the advancement from the dark forest to the desert from an Augustinian perspective, in terms of the differentiation between the stages of ignorantia ("ignorance") and difficultas ("distress").\[^{365}\] The obscurity of the dark forest mirrors the traveller’s ignorance, completely clouded by misplaced desires. The boundless extension of the desert reflects instead the traveller’s tremendous distress, now forced to listen to the threatening sound of an anguished isolation within themselves. If the forest is the subterranean place of a long dark sleep, the desert is where the subject begins to engage with the trials of the inner world. In this situation of extreme exile, Dante truly looks like Odysseus, a castaway who has painfully reached the shore after having been long menaced by “acqua perigliosa e guata” (“dangerous waters”, Inferno, I, 24), a highly primordial and maternal symbol to which Jung already in 1911 gives a “dangerous” significance when not differentiated from its chaotic, embryonal form.\[^{366}\] Foscolo sharply notes here that the words “fuor del pelago” (“out of the sea”, Inferno, I, 23) that Dante uses to describe himself as he escapes (“practically winded”) from the waters, “present the man to our imagination as if he had been just vomited up by the

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\[^{365}\] Valli, 1925, p. 77.

\[^{366}\] Jung, WSL, pp. 244-245.
ocean.”367 There Dante, who has also been called “the poet of the desert”,368 finds himself in a situation that can be figuratively compared to the spiritual condition of the early Christian desert Fathers, such as Antonius, Pachomius, Arsenius the Great, Macarius, Moses the Black, who went to the desert to experience physical solitude and inner awakening. Antonius thus comments on Moses’s vision of the burning bush, occurring around the fortieth year of his life in the Midian desert: “Moses did not move from one place to another, but his transformation was indeed a wondrous event.”369 The abysmal isolation of Dante’s desert traverses all four hermeneutical levels, from the literal sense determined by the political exile, to the ethical disquiet and spiritual inner turmoil given by his burning love for the lost Beatrice. The act of awakening in the desert implies going deeply into oneself, whilst facing the unbearable situation of being “alone with the Alone”, to quote the English title of one of Corbin’s most read books. Introversion in the desert, according to Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, entails two essential features: “primordial undifferentiated state, or [...] superficially sterile crust under which Reality must be sought.”370 The ambivalence of the desert, one of the most fertile symbols of the Bible, is profound. For St. Matthew (12:43) and others the desert is traditionally the abode of demons and temptations. For Richard of St. Victor it is the centre of the heart and spiritual elevation. A medieval German song entitled Granum sinapsis (often attributed to Meister Eckhart), captures as follows the mysterious nature of journeying into the innermost desert of oneself:

The way leads you
into a wondrous desert

367 Foscolo, 1818b, p. 339.
which extends wide
and immeasurably far.
The desert knows
neither time nor space.
Its nature is unique.

Never has a foot
crossed the domain of the desert,
created reason has never attained it.
It is, and yet no one knows what.
It is here, there,
far, near,
deep, high,
so that
it is neither the one nor the other.

Light, clear,
completely dark,
nameless,
unknown,
without beginning and also without end,
it rests in itself,
unveiled, without disguise.
Who knows what its dwelling is?
Let him come forth
and tell us of what shape it is.371

Throughout the *Commedia*, the attraction of the pilgrim poet to wondrous deserts and thick forests is a circularly evolving motif. It can be observed, for example, that inflamed wastelands heat up the grounds of Hell, such as in Canto XIV, where a barren land is surrounded by the wood of the self-murderers: “Sovra tutto ’l sabbion d’un cader lento, / piovean di foco dilatade falde, / come di neve in alpe sanza vento.”372 Differently, the sweetest fruits of the desert will be offered in the Garden of Eden (that “divine forest, which was dense and alive”),373 when Dante reaches Matelda (the guardian and only permanent resident of Dante’s earthly paradise), while climbing up to the peak of the mountain of Purgatorio. Along this transformation, the desert is a place of extreme solitude and at the same time the holy precinct of self-blossoming: “It is here, there, / far, near, / deep, high, / so that / it is neither the one nor the other.”374 A similar ambivalence characterises a few significant passages appearing in *Liber Novus*, starting from one of the quotes from Isaiah that opens the “Prologue” (together with John 1:14): “Laetabitur deserta et invia et exultant solitudo et florebit quasi lilium.” (“The wilderness and the solitary shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.”) Like Odysseus and Dante, soon after having placed himself “on the service of the soul”, the ‘I’ is led by her to a hot dusty desert (November 28, 1913). His soul is a desert herself, in which he experiences long days and nights of torment and uncanny wilderness.375 At first, he notices:

My soul leads me into the desert, into the desert of my own self. I did not think that my soul is a desert, a barren, hot desert, dusty and without drink. The journey leads through

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372 Dante, *Inferno*, XIV, 28-30; 1987, p. 153. “Upon them all the great sand, falling slowly, / Rained down dilated flakes of fire, just as / In the mountains snow falls without wind.”

373 Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXVIII.


375 Jung, LN, p. 235.
hot sand, slowly wading without a visible goal to hope for? How eerie is this wasteland. [...] My soul, what am I to do here? But my soul spoke to me and said, “Wait”. I heard the cruel word. Torment belongs to the desert.376

In *Black Book* 2 is recorded that in this place of radical isolation within himself images of the desert Fathers occur to him: “I think of Christianity in the desert. Physically, those ancients went into the desert. Did they also enter into the desert of their own self? Or was their self not as barren and desolate as mine? There they wrestled with the devil, I wrestle with waiting. It seems to me not less since it is truly a hot hell.”377 In Layer [2], he expands on the meaning of this episode, by pointing out the feeling of being overwhelmed by the “endless infertility” of the desert, a complete isolation in the wilderness. The desolate land epitomises the meditative state that leads Jung’s ‘I’ away from men and external events, to dive into the world of inner images. This inversion makes scorched earth of thoughts, desires, and capacities, resulting in the great emptiness of the desert, an “undergrowth of doubt, confusion, and scorn.”378 A new inner creative act, having one’s inner self as the *prima materia* of the work, has to populate anew this state. In fact it will not be long before the void of Jung’s wasteland becomes animated by creatures and figures with commanding requests of sacrifice and purification. About a month later, the ‘I’ is placed in front of another compelling vision from the desert, with an anchorite from the Libyan lands, Ammonius, with whom he has a long confrontation about Christianity and nature.379 During this time, in an opposite direction to the teachings of the monk, the ‘I’ ends up worshipping animals, stones, and the grains of sand in the desert.380 In the end, the anchorite monk concludes that the new visitor must be the

376 Ibid., p. 235.
377 Ibid., p. 236, n74.
378 Ibid., p. 236.
379 Ibid., p. 267.
380 Ibid., p. 271.
devil in disguise and kicks him out of his way, terrified. The ‘I’ realises then that Ammonius buried himself in the emptiness and helplessness of the desert, instead of finding a way to accept the darkest and threatening aspects of himself that extreme solitude brings forth and magnifies. So that a flowering garden can be made out of a desert, however, no route is secured nor is suffering spared. In this respect, amongst the experiences lived by the ‘I’ in the desert, the most difficult of all, he argues, consists of learning how to do nothing but “waiting”, a trial no less demanding than dealing with the devil for the desert Fathers. In his debated essay on James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Jung recalls that an uncle used to ask him: “Do you know how the devil tortures the souls in hell?” When I said no, he replied: ‘He keeps them waiting.’”81 In the context of *Liber Novus*, waiting may sound misleading and paradoxical, for one would think of that as giving up. In one sense it would be so, but in an opposite manner to what the ordinary thinking of the ego holds true. In the desert of oneself, in fact, any directed effort of movement may result in further consumption of energy, while mirages and demons are likely to occur. On the contrary, Jung argues, the capacity for waiting implies letting life play beyond man's deliberations. It does not correspond to melancholic abandonment, an ultimate hope concealed under the abandonment of hopes, nor a deceptive plan of escaping life. Differently, waiting in the desert is *really* going beyond hopes and fears. It means, being able to detach from intentions, deliberations, and judgments, thus freeing the mind from the distortions provoked by the will to turn everything into methods and expectations, i.e., into the well too known language of the “spirit of the time”. Thus Jung notes down:

My faith is weak, my face is blind from all that shimmering blaze of the desert sun. The heat lies on me like lead. Thirst torments me, I dare not think how unendingly long my way is, and above all, I see nothing in front of me. But the soul answered, “You speak as if you have still learned nothing. Can you not wait? Should everything fall into your lap ripe and

finished? You are full, yes, you teem with intentions and desirousness!—Do you still not know that the way to truth stands open only to those without intentions?382

Emptying the mind of the ‘I’-control characterises not only the experiences of the desert, but in general the whole mental training developed in *Liber Novus*, by increasingly letting psychic content appear of their own accord. Central to Eastern practices of meditation, this method comes also very close, as Jung points out in 1929 in the “Commentary to the Secret of the Golden Flower”, to Eckhart’s technique of “letting go of oneself”, that is, becoming psychically able to “let things happen”:

The art of letting things happen, action through non-action, letting go of oneself as taught by Meister Eckhart, became for me the key that opens the door to the way. We must be able to let things happen in the psyche. For us, this is an art of which most people know nothing. Consciousness is forever interfering, helping, correcting, and negating, never leaving the psychic processes to grow in peace. It would be simple enough, if only simplicity were not the most difficult of all things. To begin with, the task consists solely in observing objectively how a fragment of fantasy develops. Nothing could be simpler, and yet right here the difficulties begin.383

The more one interferes with this process of equilibrium, the more psychic energy is accumulated at the doors of the mind, striving for expression. On the contrary, the more one practices the art of letting oneself go, the better the energy flows. A process which Eckhart calls “magical power” (“Zauberkraft”): a beneficial force that effortlessly acts upon the subject who surrenders to it. In this state of mind, the desert begins to unravel shadowy images, taking shape beyond the dusty horizon of sand, figures gone in the past and unborn figures yet to

382 Jung, LN, p. 236.
383 Jung, 1929, CW13, §20; also Jung, LN, p. 237, n78.
come. Along the journey, however, the desert first brings up mysterious fruits, the opposite of what the seeker would expect to see, visions filled with terror and despair: “When the desert begins to bloom, it brings forth strange plants. You will consider yourself mad, and in a certain sense you will in fact be mad.”

Thus, while advancing in the “great desert” like Odysseus, Dante is suddenly menaced by the puzzling vision of three fearsome beasts: a “lonza” (leopard, lust), a “leone” (lion, arrogance or violence), and a “lupa” (she-wolf, greed). This famous episode too has been the object of Jung’s later psychological interests. In the Children’s Dreams Seminar, he interprets Dante’s triad as an initiatory sublimation of the instincts. Against the Christian subjugation of animality, he conceives Dante’s episode within the framework of a Mithraic liturgy, in which the animal conveys the core of what man has to discover out of their hidden psyche and transform. Furthermore, in the seminar on Kundalini Yoga, Jung compares Dante’s encounter with the wild animals to the beginning of Colonna’s Hypnerotomachia. He recalls that the protagonist of Colonna’s work encounters a wolf. He becomes suddenly very afraid and wants to turn back, but unfortunately it is too late, for a dragon now bars the way behind him, leaving the protagonist with no other option than to proceed further:

It was written in the fifteenth century by a Christian monk of a famous Roman family. He got into the unconscious, as we say. It is like the beginning of Dante’s Inferno, but expressed in entirely different terms. He depicts himself as travelling in the Black Forest, which in those days, especially to Italians, was still the ultima Thule. [...] And there he loses his way, and then a wolf appears. [...] Then suddenly is afraid; it becomes uncanny. He wants

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384 Jung, LN, p. 238.
385 Dante, Inferno, I, 31-60; 1987, pp. 45-46.
to go back, and he turns to go through the gate again, but now there is a dragon sitting behind him that bars the way, and he cannot go back; he simply must go forward.387

So it is Dante’s situation (and Jung’s). He can no longer follow the path of the past. Now he is truly stuck. He cannot go back “là dove ’l sol tace” (“back to the region where the sun is silent”, i.e., the dark forest; *Inferno*, I, 60), nor is he allowed to move ahead (the fearsome beasts cross the path). He is impeded to advance on his way, and the obstacle would push him back to the turmoil of the forest (*Inferno*, I, 61), unless in the middle of the wilderness of the great desert (*Inferno*, I, 64), he makes a precise movement of the eyes, anticipated a few lines beforehand, “guardai in alto e vidi” (“I looked up and saw”; *Inferno*, I, 16). Something suddenly changes. Thanks to the symbolical reversal of perspective represented by the optical turning, Dante acquires the faculty to notice the appearance of a guide behind the back of the triad. It is Virgil, who has been sent on ahead by Beatrice to rescue the lost one. About the consequences of this pivotal encounter and its remarkable significance for Jung’s relationship with Philemon in *Liber Novus*, proper space will be given in due time. As for now, let us recall that Dante, who is deeply touched by having recognised his master, is soon informed by Virgil, in their first dialogue in the *Commedia*, that if he really wants to get away from those wild beasts, he can only do it by taking another way and following his guidance “out of here, by a place in eternity” (*Inferno*, I, 114). Dante knows nothing yet of that which awaits him from a journey of this sort, but Virgil provides him with some essential details. He tells him that, granted that he will have sufficient courage and strength of mind to embark on the journey, he will have to listen first to the “shrieks of men without hope” (I, 115). Then he will be able to lead him to see “those who, though in the fire, / Are happy because they hope that they will come, / Whenever it may be, to join the blessed” (I, 118-120). Finally, if Dante showed himself

as appropriate for such challenging travels, he will leave him with “a spirit more worthy than I am” (I, 122) to undertake the final part of the adventure. At the end of this clarification, Dante and Virgil begin to approach the doors of Hell, the Italian poet in dread. It should be noted at this point that Dante’s funnel-like Hell, as superbly portrayed by Sandro Botticelli, is situated by the Florentine man at the centre of the earth, underneath Jerusalem. The abyss of Hell has been provoked by Lucifer’s fall after the defeat in his rebellion against God. It is shaped into nine circles, going consecutively from the widest to the smallest, in which Lucifer’s flapping wings are kept frozen.388 The most precise illustration of the structure of Dante’s Hell is given right in the Commedia, detailed by Virgil to Dante in Inferno, Canto XI.389 Ante-Hell accommodates the souls of the damned at their death. They are brought to Hell through the river Acheron by Charon, “occhi di bragia” (“with his eyes like ember”, Inferno, III, 109), except of the “ignavi” (the “neutrals”), those who have spent their lives “sanza infamia’ e sanza lodo” (“without disgrace and without praise”, Inferno, III, 36) and remain in Ante-Hell. By entering Limbo, an in-between place that receives the souls of those who have died in the friendship of God but born before the advent of Christ, or not baptised, one has properly crossed the gates of Dante’s Inferno. In the upper part of Hell, there are the circles of the Lustful, the Gluttonous, the Avaricious and Prodigals, the Wrathful and Sullen, all corresponding to Incontinence. Then across the river Styx, surrounding the infernal city of Dis, one enters into the lower and deepest zone of Hell. The following circles are characterised by Violence and Fraud. The eight circle is called “Malebolge”, because it is divided into ten “bolge” (“ditches”). Finally, the ninth circle, the most tragical of all, hosts in four divided zones the sinners for treachery, held in the dreadful frozen lake of Cocytus. Between this place and the centre of the earth, only Lucifer remains, with three monstrous faces, each one chewing a great traitor: Judas, Brutus, and Cassius.

388 Dante, Inferno, XXXIV, 121–126; 1987, p. 194.
Fig. 25. Follower of Hieronymus Bosch, 15th Century, *The Harrowing of Hell.*
2.2.3. Good Friday: Jung, Dante, and the Apocryphal Christ

If Jung looks at Dante’s metánoia as an inspiring reference for his own, Dante has in mind another similar and illustrious event as he heads to the gates of Hell. That is the metánoia of Christ, to which he refers in details in the Convivio and which provides us with a tertium comparisonis between Liber Novus and the Commedia:

The master of our life, Aristotle, knowing of this arc of which we speak, appears to believe that our life is simply a rise and fall, and so he says in his book On Maturity and Old Age, that maturation is simply growth. It is difficult to establish where the highest point of this arc lies, because of the variation in span mentioned above, but in most lives, I believe, it is attained between the thirtieth and fortieth year, and in those whose nature is perfect, I believe it is attained in the thirty-fifth year. And this logic convinces me: that our Saviour, Christ, had a perfect nature and chose to die in the thirty-fourth year of his life, because it would not have been fitting for divinity to enter into such a decline. Nor is it credible that he would not have wished to remain alive until he had reached this summit of ours, since he had lived here during the inferior state of youth. This is revealed by the hour of his death, since he wished to make it conformant with his life. As Luke says, it was near the sixth hour when he died, which is to say the height of day. Thus we may take the word ‘near’ to signify that Christ’s thirty-fifth year was the summit of his life.390

Christ’s crucifixion at the age of thirty-three traditionally occurs in the Gospels at the stroke of noon on Good Friday (Mt, 27, 45-46; Mk, 15-33; Lk, 23-44). According to Swedenborg (The Arcana Coelestia), the event should be interpreted as a puzzling transition to a different stage of consciousness, heralding the death of the personal ego and the arising of the spiritual

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centre of personality: a “cataclysmic event in consciousness.” This metamorphic vision runs along the lines of Swedenborg's interpretation of the literal appearance of biblical images as reflections of interior levels of self-regeneration, a hermeneutical methodology substantially inspired by Dante. Without the literal dimension, it would be “impossible and irrational” (Dante, Convivio, II, 1) to attend to the others, as much as without the anagogic dimension, the literal experience would not be sublimated at refined degrees of psychic energy. It is especially this convergence, also conceivable as the merging of empirical and poetic or spiritual means, to foster the extraordinary trans-liminal and transformative reality of Dante's, Swedenborg's, and Jung's visions of Hell. Christ's “eloì, eloì, lemà sabachtani” (Mk 15:34, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”) is amplified by symbolic references featuring in the apocalyptic tradition, such as the shadowing of the sky and the tremendous earthquake that follows Christ's death, which, as previously mentioned, both appear also in the Vita Nova as presages of Beatrice's death. Christ's cry on the Golgotha cracks the sky as a tragical lament breaking through the solar apotheosis of the day, epitomising the separation (dia-ballein) of the ego from the father-imago and the beginning of Christ's descent to the Dead. In this regard, G. R. S. Mead has explored the symbol of the crucifixion and its Gnostic implications by dwelling on the visions of John in the Acts of John. In this context, the cross, free of a dogmatic relation to sin or salvation, becomes a pathway of initiation leading to the unification of the worlds of light and darkness. Mead claims that “For the Gnosis, the that which at once separated and united the Light and the Darkness was the Cross”, for it “is the that which causes all opposites. At the same time it shares in all opposites.” Thus “The Cross of Life may well be called the Harmony of Wisdom, for it is by means of Wisdom that all the contraries are joined together.” Moreover, Mead adds:

393 Mead, 1907, p. 26; p. 28; p. 38.
It is only when the Cross is regarded as separator, that it may be said to have a right and a left, with good forces on the one hand, and evil on the other. The forces are in reality in themselves the same forces; it is the personality of the man (represented by the upright of the Cross), which refers all things to its incomplete self, that regards them as good and evil. [...] But in reality there are roots below and branches above, of the trunk of this Tree of Life and Light.  

Similarly to Swedenborg, Mead, whose translations and commentaries of Gnostic texts occupy an important place in Jung’s library, indicates an outer and an inner meaning of the crucifixion, with separate implications, and for this very reason complementary: “The outer story was centred round a dramatic crisis of death on a stationary cross—a dead symbol, and a symbol of death. But the inner rite was one of movement and “dancing”, a living symbol and a symbol of life.” Against this background, Dante’s Hell is a reversed chasm situated exactly below Jerusalem and the Golgotha, the “place of the skull” where the cross was risen (Mt 27:33; Mk 15:22; Lk 23:33; Jn 19:37). As annotated also in Liber Novus (commenting on the visions occurred on January 18, 1914), the unifying binding of the cross is completed by the two thieves appearing on either side of Christ, representing for the Swiss thinker two opposite halves of a triune symbol. The interpretation finds a literary reflection in Hesse’s contemporary Demian:

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394 Ibid., p. 39.


396 Mead, 1907, p. 64.

397 Jung, LN, p. 300; see also Jung, 1952, Answer to Job (Antwort Auf Hiob), CW11, §659.
Wonderful how the three crosses stand next to each other on the Mount! But then why this tract-like story of the honest thief! [...] If you had to choose one of the two thieves today for a friend or consider which of the two you would prefer to trust, it certainly wouldn’t be the snivelling convert. No, the other is the man and has real character. He despises a conversion which for a man in his position can only be a pretty speech, and pursues his own way to the end; he does not forswear the Devil who must have aided and abetted him at the eleventh hour.\footnote{Hesse, 2017, p. 48.}

Thus, the time Dante spends in Hell in the \textit{Commedia}, before moving on to the upper realms, mirrors precisely the days of Christ’s death, from Good Friday to Sunday.\footnote{Dante’s journey in the \textit{Commedia} lasts for a week, and precisely the Holy week going from 8 to 15 April 1300, following the first Christian Jubilee induced by Bonifacius VIII, or from 25 March to 1 April, following the anniversary of Christ’s death.} Dante reenacts the mystery of the Golgotha. Similarly, Jung vividly describes the puzzling emergence of the visions as the opening of the doors of Hell, and more precisely as the beginning of Good Friday (January 19, 1914): “This is really Good Friday, upon which the Lord died and descended into Hell and completed the mysteries.”\footnote{Jung, LN, p. 304.} This cryptic mention of the mysteries refers here, at first glance, to the \textit{Apostles’ Creed}, in which it is written that after his death Christ “descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the Dead.”\footnote{See \textit{Apostles’ Creed}, 2005, \textit{Dictionary of the Christian Church} (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 90. Christ’s descent is also hinted in the first letter of Peter (1 Pt 2:18-20).} An astonishing representation of this event appears in a painting by an imitator of Hieronymus Bosch, depicting Christ in the act of entering Hell in a citadel populated by naked humans, animals, and demons disgorged from the mouth of a monster. As to the problematics presented by Christ’s venture to a place of this sort, theologians since Thomas Aquinas (\textit{Summa Theologiae}, ...
Questio 52, Pars 3) have attempted to solve mainly by interpreting the fact in terms of “Christ’s harrowing of Hell”, i.e., Christ descends to the land of the Dead and triumphantly conquers the power of evil. Nevertheless, the theological understanding of the passage maintains a distinction between *Inferno* (‘Hell’), which allegedly indicates the eternal destiny of those condemned to the Final Judgment, and *inferos* (‘hell’, from *locus inferos*, “the place beneath”, like in Isaiah 14:9), which alternatively represents the abode of the Dead, the Hell of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Sheol, the Greek Hades, the underworld of Odysseus, Aeneas and the heroes of Jewish and Graeco-Roman mythology inherited by European literature up to Dante’s time. Hence, *inferos* would supposedly be the place into which Christ descends for three days, but unlike with Odysseus or Dante, no details are given about the events occurring during his visit. However, Christ’s descent into Hell is described in depth in several apocryphal accounts, such as the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, also known as *Acts of Pilate* from a section of its text, and the *Apocalypse of Peter*, not to be confused with the Christian Gnostic *Revelation of Peter*. The *Apocalypse of Peter* is an early apocalyptic Christian text (c. 150 AD) and the earliest extant paleo-Christian description of Hell. It is framed as a series of visions of Heaven and Hell which Christ offers to the faithful Peter, including, among other images, blasphemers hanged by the tongue, apostates tormented by angels in a lake of mire, murderers cast in a gorge of “creeping things”, some people gnawing their tongues with fire in their mouths, some others in torment with heated iron plunged in their eyes. The influence of Peter’s account of Hell over subsequent Christian texts is considered as great as to have also supplied, as argued by Montague Rhodes James, the *pandemonium* of demons and visions appearing in Dante’s *Inferno*, in which the combination of Christian and traditional Greco-Roman representations of Hell

402 Jerome’s Vulgate, for example, incorporates into a single “infernus” various intersecting terms from the Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew texts, such as, indeed, Sheol, Hades, Gehenna, Abyss, and Tartarus.


404 Ibid., pp. 603-611.
attains its medieval apogee.\textsuperscript{405} To what extent Dante’s text would be informed by the apocryphal tradition at a literal level, however, is for us a secondary aspect. Our main concern in this context is that Jung’s confrontation with the apocryphal sources enabled him to directly juxtapose Christ’s and Dante’s visions of the underworld, as similar experiences of \textit{nekya}, reflecting such parallelism into his own experiences in the \textit{Black Books} and \textit{Liber Novus}. The apocryphal texts provide Jung in fact with a basis for conceiving Dante’s journey in terms of a true \textit{imitatio Christi}, an experience of rebirth of the same nature as Christ’s. This parallel is most explicitly developed by Jung in his late alchemical writings, where he confronts Dante and the apocryphal Christ as analogous examples of descents into Hades, in which the hero recognises and accepts the evil counterpart, wins back the power of darkness, and gains a state of shining inner renewal.\textsuperscript{406} In alchemical terms, Jung refers to Christ’s apocryphal descent into Hades as a process of purification into the flames of Hell, out of which the “New Fire” rises again.\textsuperscript{407} Later, he comments on the meaning of this event:

\begin{quote}
The three days descent into Hell during death describes the sinking of the vanished value into the unconscious, where, by conquering the power of darkness, it establishes a new order, and then rises up to heaven again, that is, attains supreme clarity of consciousness.\textsuperscript{408}
\end{quote}

The apocryphal works are a huge abiding interest in Jung’s intellectual and psychological research concerning the historical significance of Christianity. References to apocryphal pieces are increasingly scattered throughout his works, by dwelling upon fundamental related sources such as James’s version of the \textit{Apocryphal New Testament} (1924). Some of these references recur, revealing a particular importance, such as one of Christ’s esoteric sayings appearing in the \textit{Acts}\textsuperscript{408}

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotetext{405} M. R. James, in Elliot 1993, pp. 594-595. See also Shamdasani 2016.
\footnotetext{406} Jung, 1944, \textit{Psychology and Alchemy}, CW12, §61, n2; also \textit{Mysterium Coniunctionis}, 1955/1956, CW 14, §475.
\footnotetext{407} Jung, CW12, §§440, 451.
\end{footnotesize}
of Thomas (early 3rd century AD): “He who is near unto me, he is near unto fire.” Concerning the apocryphal interpretation of Christ’s nekya, in particular, Jung draws upon, among others, Albrecht Dieterich’s Nekya: Beiträge zur Erklärung der neuentdeckten Petrusapokalypse, which allows him to read fragments from the aforementioned Apocalypse of Peter. For Jung, as most famously discussed in Answer to Job and in the concurrent controversial correspondence with Father Victor White, one of the major issues of the Christian mindset derives from the suppression of the ambivalence of psychic functioning, by hierarchically ascribing—as consolidated in the doctrine of privatio boni (“absence of the good”)—all the goodness to God (summum bonum) and all the evil to Satan (infimum malum), with the result of rejecting all that in the human mind belongs in division, contradiction, paradox, animality, and folly. In “Attempt at a Psychological Interpretation of the Dogma of the Trinity”, he expresses this conundrum as follows:

This classic formula [privatio boni] robs evil of absolute existence and makes it a shadow that has only a relative existence dependent on light. Good, on the other hand, is credited with a positive substantiality. But, as psychological experience shows, “good” and “evil” are opposite poles of a moral judgment which, as such, originates in man. A judgment can be made about a thing if its opposite is equally real and possible. The opposite of a seeming evil can only be a seeming good, and an evil that lacks substance can only be contrasted with a good that is equally non-substantial.

Accordingly, for Jung, the dogmatic vision for which Christ, as the son of a God of goodness and almighty power, could only go to Hell to descend triumphant, would confirm this splitting, for which only Satan would be responsible for man’s vulnerability to evil.


Contrariwise, the apocryphal vision of Christ’s journey to Hell heralds a radical reversal of this perspective, by reconnecting Christ to the powers of darkness (the Anti-Christ), or to put it differently, by radically bridging the incommensurable gap between goodness and evil deriving from a conception of evil as purely the “privation of good”. If the splitting of good and evil, or separation of the opposites, leads to a one-sided vision of *staying in* Hell as the place of tremendous fixation, the rapprochement of the opposites, as conveyed by the apocryphal descent to Hell, triggers a dynamic conception conducting to a vision of *traversing* Hell as a potential transformative condition. At the time of his self-explorations, Jung’s encounter with Dante provided him with an important point of confrontation for this discussion: a Christian-framed, yet heretic and visionary, visit to Hades, taking shape right at the core of the spiritual transformation of the Middle Ages.

Against this background, commenting on a vision occurring on December 20, 1913, Jung describes his experiences along similar lines as Dante and the apocryphal Christ:

> After his death Christ had to journey to Hell, otherwise the ascent to Heaven would have become impossible for him. [...] No one knows what happened during the three days Christ was in Hell. I have experienced it. The men of yore said that he had preached there to the deceased. What they say is true, but do you know how this happened? It was folly and monkey business, an atrocious Hell’s masquerade of the holiest mysteries. How else could Christ have saved his Antichrist?413

The passage unveils some of the most compelling characteristics of Jung’s experience of the depths, each of them revealing a singular connection with Dante. First of all, one reads, Hell is a living, bewildering experience. Secondly, this occulted experience implies a startling mental reversal, by leading to the encounter with the opposite side of one’s mind. Lastly and

413 Ibid., p. 243.
most importantly, the necessity of descending into Hell incubates a potential movement forward towards inner regeneration. As the *prima materia* of Jung’s visions discloses, starting from 1913, Hades in *Liber Novus* is experienced as an in-between state. It is not a hypostatised principle nor a place where someone can go via the imitation of any external pattern, for there is “only one way and that is your way.”\(^{414}\) Hell depicts the imminent and immanent conversion to a hidden psychic world, being unveiled by an experience of radical lowering of consciousness. It is an experience, yet it is no longer only a personal experience, for it opens up the subject’s first threatening glimpses into a psychic polyphony of images, figures, creatures, and symbols. As Hillman writes: “things fall apart as the one becomes many. Recognition of the multiple persons of the psyche is akin to the experience of multiple personality. Personifying means polycentricity, implicating us in a revolution of consciousness.”\(^{415}\) What makes of this radical reversal an infernal place, as Brandeis suggests with regard to Dante’s Hell, is the subject’s unreadiness and unwillingness to face their hidden fear and despair. The English classical scholar and mythologist Maud Bodkin writes:

> The hero experiences the anguish that befalls the man who in the midst of a momentous enterprise turns from action, and, plunging into the depths of his own being, meets the shock of secret fears that the self-maintenance of his own courage held down while confronting the outer world.\(^{416}\)

Besides influencing Jung’s Hell with a significant range of suggestive images at a literal level, the *Commedia* provides a specific inspiration for travelling to the underworld kingdom as an initiatory undertaking, a way into the inner things similar to the rites explored by the

\(^{414}\) Ibid., p. 308.

\(^{415}\) Hillman, 1992 (1975), p. 35.

ancient mysteries. Hell is actually at first a proper “masquerade of the holiest mysteries”, which takes the mental traveller to the bottom of one's self-deceptions. It should not be forgotten that the Dantesque Hell follows the typically medieval conception of the bowels of earth as the seat of the individual microcosm, its radical egocentricity, as sharply represented by Lucifer’s paralysis after his fall. To plunge into Hell hints at exploring the full extent of the egocentric delusions, whilst progressively preparing oneself to enact their sacrifice. Similarly, as previously anticipated, in *Heaven and Hell* (a work which Jung consults for the first time in September 1898) Swedenborg makes of Hell, out of claimed first-hand communications with the world of the spirits, the place of vanity and misuse of rationality, rather than the abode of retribution. This particular conception of Hell suggests an analogy with another great mind of the Middle Ages, which can only be hinted at here: the German mystic and theologian Meister Eckhart, an exact contemporary to Dante and “the greatest thinker of that time” according to Jung.\(^{417}\) Drawing on the work of Bruno Nardi, Moevs sketches out a fascinating parallel between Dante and Eckhart in these terms:

Dante is the harbinger, and cisalpine counterpart of the great flowering of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century German mysticism. Philosophically, and perhaps temperamentally too, Dante’s nearest kinsman may be Meister Eckhart, his exact contemporary (1260-1327). Both had the unconventional audacity and fearless self-assurance of those who seem to speak from some direct experience of truth [...]. What has been said of Eckhart might be said of Dante too: he “was a breaker of shells, not as an iconoclast breaks them, but as life breaks its shells by its own resurgent power”; as Eckhart himself says, “If you want the kernel, you must break the shell.”\(^{418}\)

\(^{417}\) Jung, 1921, CW6, §410.

\(^{418}\) Moevs, 2005, p. 175.
In a truly exceptional fashion for his time, Eckhart, whose theory of the birth of God within the “little inner castle” of man (Opus tripartitum, 1305) is condemned as heresy by Pope John XXII in the 1320s, empties Hell of images of suffering, punishment, and eternal regret, to substitute them with the condition of those who cannot yet free themselves from the attachments of the ego.\(^{419}\) Hell is there not a place of discrimination, but a situation of terrifying self-suspension, in which a journey of purification is urged, by compelling the subject to a symbolic death. Two principles essentially characterise Eckhart’s reflection in this respect: “conversion” and “detachment”.\(^{420}\) Through the act of “conversion”, the subject awakens to a new self beyond one’s ordinary identity. One turns one’s mind to self-inquiry, following the old precept “know thyself.” Through the act of “detachment”, in particular from hope of salvation or solace, the subject engages with a process of refinement of inner energy.\(^{421}\) When the conversion is at its beginning, such as in the alchemical stage of nigredo (“becoming black blacker than black”), the clash between ordinary and new centres of energy is so strong as to result in the visionary imagery of a voyage to Hell. Marco Vannini observes in Dante and Eckhart the apex of medieval spiritual freedom, represented by the embrace of direct divine inspiration beyond ideological mediation.\(^{422}\) Similarly, Moevs points out: “That divine union [deificatio] is possible in this life constitutes the foundation, the driving force, of Eckhart’s message, and Dante’s.”\(^{423}\) By “divine union”, both Vannini and Moevs refer to a purification of the mind progressively reaching the state which the medieval mystic Margherita Porete calls


\(^{420}\) See Marco Vannini, 2018, *Introduction to Eckhart (Introduzione a Eckhart)* (Firenze: Le Lettere).


the “simplest vision”, a vision of rays of light in which the mind becomes one with the light itself, light into light. In a different context, analogies between Dante and Eckhart deeply interest Jung as well, as especially discussed in Chapter V, “The Type-Problem in Poetry”, of *Psychological Types*, in which Dante and Eckhart represent his major points of confrontation regarding the relativity of God and the soul in the Middle Ages:

In Eckhart, we are confronted with new ideas, ideas having the same psychic orientation that impelled Dante to follow the image of Beatrice into the underworld of the unconscious and that inspired the singers who sang the lore of the Grail.424

However important this idea, it is necessary to come back to it at a more advanced state of the present study, because for now the darkness of Hell in *Liber Novus* requires us for longer. If Hell is then essentially a phenomenon of radical obscuration of the mind, the most immediate consequence of experiencing Hell, as described in the first layer of Jung’s experiment, is that one cannot go into Hell “without becoming Hell oneself”, thereby facing the risk of being overpowering by isolation and growing mental darkening.425 In Jung’s material, the motif shows strongly Nietzschean echoes: “If you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes back at you.”426 Thus, on December 1913, he notes down:

To journey to Hell means to become Hell oneself; It is all frightfully muddled and interwoven. On this desert path there is not just glowing sand, but also horrible tangled invisible beings who live in the desert. I didn’t know this. The way is only apparently clear,

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424 Jung, 1921, CW6, §410.

425 Jung, LN, p. 244.

the desert is only apparently empty. It seems inhabited by magical beings who murderously attach themselves to me and daimonically change my form.\textsuperscript{427}

Similarly later: “He who journeys to Hell also becomes Hell; therefore do not forget from whence you come. The depths are stronger than us; so do not be heroes, be clever and drop the heroics, since nothing is more dangerous than to play the hero.”\textsuperscript{428} What Jung describes here is also a most remarkable characteristic of Dante’s \textit{Inferno}, illustrated in particular by fainting, delays, cries, and moments of bewilderment which the poet faces while encountering shadows and ghosts that accompany him on his journey from the start. The fading Dead are intrigued and magnetised by the physical body of the protagonist of the \textit{Commedia} and by the bleeding life energy that pours out of him. They challenge Dante’s binding to the past, that state of extraordinary confusion which has (mis)taken him off the path and put him into the dark forest. The critical situation urges to transform the awakening of spectral appearances into a sacrifice of some sort. One should thus observe that Dante’s journey to Hell proceeds, circle by circle, as long as he is willing to grant time, space, and above all, attention (the noblest form of sacrifice for Simone Weil) to the shadows of the Dead, who live a present catharsis through the memories of the stories they recount to Dante’s ‘I’. Fear withholds Dante with the demons. Acceptance and consideration grant the transformation. Similarly, the “spirit of the depths” urges Jung’s ‘I’ to embrace wisdom and patience in “wakening the dead”: “Take pains to waken the dead. Dig deep mines and throw in sacrificial gifts, so that they reach the dead. Reflect in good heart upon evil, this is the way to the ascent. But before the ascent, everything is night and Hell.”\textsuperscript{429} The motif recurs all throughout the records of Jung’s visions, at various levels. As a vivid example, one can just refer to some significant sections (December 1915-January 1916)

\textsuperscript{427} Jung, LN, p. 240.
\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., p. 244.
\textsuperscript{429} Ibid.
appearing in Scrutinies, just before the beginning of the first of Jung’s “Sermons to the Dead” (January 30, 1916). The ‘I’ is again filled with disquiet, solitude, and fear of madness. Three shades approach him and one of these, the figure of a woman acquainted with the Egyptian mysteries, demands blood and juice of life out of Jung’s thoughts (“Give blood, so that I may drink and gain speech”). The dead ask so, because through the blood of Jung’s thinking, his vital energy, the evanescent shape of the ghost acquires life, words, and a way of freedom. The encounter with the shades anticipates Jung’s dialogues with the “dark ones”, who will ask the ‘I’, as their first request: “We implore you to let us in. You have what we desire.” So in the manner of Odysseus and Dante, the shades demand to the ‘I’ expiatory libations (of psychic nature) in order to be able to speak, and eventually liberated, re-absorbed into the light from which they came. In 1912 in Transformations and Symbols of the Libido, Jung applies the image of Odysseus’s libations to the Dead for the case of Miss Miller, intended as a way in which to give away “some of the secrets of the underworld.” Now listening to the voice of the Dead is for him no longer a psychotherapeutic metaphor, but a threatening actuality. Similarly, Dante, by increasingly giving voice and space to the Dead through the katabasis, differentiates himself from the shades and is granted the advancement into different places and mental states. Down in the circles of Inferno, the perilous risk of identification with the world of darkness is counteracted by Virgil’s recurrent warnings to the poet so as not to remain behind during the descent. Thus even when Dante, at the end of Francesca’s narration in Canto V, feels profoundly touched by her story and falls down “come corpo morto cade” (“as a dead body falls”, Inferno, V, 142), such a moving empathetic turn implies a cathartic resolution. “Al tornar de la mente” (when “consciousness returned, after the darkening”, Inferno, VI, 1), he advances, transformed, towards more oncoming visions. The moments of recurrent darkness, fallings,
faints, deep sleeps, which often in the *Commedia* connect one Canto to the other as bridges, are potent symbols of the nature of Dante’s visionary travelling, half-way though day and night, form and fire, death and light. But they are also the subtle indicators of Dante’s physical and spiritual transformation. The poet, in other words, must “fall” to the experienced state, namely give up the heroic ‘I’, rather than identify with it. That is the only way to proceed further through the states that occur across the journey. In this way, in Dante’s experiences as well as in Jung’s visionary experiment, the distinction between identification and transformation, submission and integration, comes to constitute a cornerstone of the work. However, the process is certainly easier to illustrate than to enact, involving anguish, despondency, relapses, and difficulties of all sorts. The *Commedia* and *Liber Novus* reveal that the visions of Hell disclose the most unknown, rejected, and controversial material one may imagine to come across. At this point, another remarkable aspect of Jung’s alignment with Dante should be taken into account.

2.2.4. The Left Side

The psychic movement to the reversed pole of oneself resembles the coiling of a serpent-like spiral and seems to entail a precise directionality. Intriguingly, in fact, both Jung and Dante refer to the *left* as the side of the descent into Hell, like the poet recalls on many occasions and Virgil explains to him most diffusely in the third ring of the seventh circle (violence against God, in His person and in His possessions):

Ed elli a me: “Tu sai che ’l loco è tondo;
e tutto che tu sia venuto molto,
pur a sinistra, giù calando al fondo,

non se’ ancora per tutto il cerchio völto,
per che se cosa n'apparisce nova,
non de' addur maraviglia al tuo volto. 433

As detailed in this passage, Dante’s circular journey (circumambulatio) through the rings of Hell occurs always by keeping to the left and going towards the bottom (except in two very brief moments: *Inferno*, IX, 132 and *Inferno*, XVIII, 31). 434 In this way, while descending into Hell, Dante remains on the side of Virgil, who leads the way while protecting his frightened disciple from falling into the abyss, as suitably described, for example, when the travellers catch their first sight at the dreadful Malebolge’s evil ditches: “Il poeta tenne a sinistra, e io dietro mi mossi.” (“The poet / kept to the left, and I followed him.”) 435 As the two poets reach the bottom of Hell and start their new ascent to Heaven, the direction is inverted, beginning to advance towards the right (the side of the anabasis), while gaining light and relief on each step upward. Similarly, in his own experiences Jung refers to the visions from the left, as emerging from the side of the “unholy, unknown or inauspicious.” 436 Commenting on the appearance of Salome, in particular, he ascribes the left to the place of feelings, instincts, wilderness, and things that are yet to be, into which one can only go “without purpose and intention”:

The serpent moves in the same direction. The serpent represents magical power, which also appears where animal drives are aroused imperceptibly in us. They afford the movement of Eros the uncanny emphasis that strikes us as magical. Magical effect is the

433 Dante, *Inferno*, XIV, 124-129; 1987, p. 159. “And he replied: ‘You know that the place is round; / And although you have come a long way, / Always to the left, and descending to the bottom, / You have not yet done the complete circle; / So that if anything that is new appears, / It ought not to make you look astonished.”

434 Dante, *Inferno*, X, 133; *Inf.*, XIV, 126; *Inf.*, XVIII, 21; *Inf.*, XXVI, 126; *Inf.*, XXIX, 53; *Inf.*, XXXI, 83.

435 Dante, *Inferno*, XVIII, 20-21; 1987, p. 188.

436 Jung, LN, p. 366.
enchantment and underlining of our thought and feeling through dark instinctual impulses of an animal nature.\footnote{Ibid.}

On this basis, Jung later significantly returns to the motif of the left as the side of the unknown and inauspicious, in multiple occasions. For example, already in 1921 in \textit{Psychological Types} (once more in the section “The Type Problem in Poetry”, tackling the visions of the Shepherd of Hermas), he annotates what follows about the origins of the Latin word for left, “sinister”, which has maintained its eerie connotation in many modern languages:

\begin{quote}
For although signs coming from the left were regarded as favourable in the Roman auguries, the left side, for both the Greeks and the Romans, was on the whole inauspicious, as the double meaning of the word “sinister” shows. But the question raised here of left and right has nothing to do with popular superstitions and is clearly of Biblical origin, referring to Matthew 25:33: “And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.” Because of their guileless and gentle nature, sheep are an allegory of the good, while the unruly and lascivious nature of goats makes them an image of evil. By assigning him a seat on the left, his mistress tactfully reveals to him her understanding of his psychology.\footnote{Jung, 1921, CW6, §389.}
\end{quote}

What changes with the Greeks is the fact that they start doing divination while facing the North, unlike the Romans who traditionally looked at the South for similar purposes. The augurs observed the sky as divided into two imaginary halves. The signs coming from the East or right, such as bird flights or natural phenomena, would be taken as good omena, following the traditional association of the East with images of dawn, birth, and the rising sun. On the contrary, the signs appearing from the West or left would be interpreted as harmful or unfavourable, coming from the side of the sunset and evoking, as the Latin word for West,
occidentem (from occido, “falling down”, “passing away”), implies, death and destruction. In *Psychology and Alchemy*, Jung elaborates further the left motif by referring to the circumambulation of square ground-plan stupas in Lamaic tradition, bringing up the psychological analogy of an “unconscious” dimension:

According to the ritual, stupas must always be circumambulated to the right, because a leftward movement is evil. The left, the “sinister” side, is the unconscious side. Therefore a leftward movement is equivalent to a movement in the direction of the unconscious, whereas a movement to the right is “correct” and aims at consciousness. In the East these unconscious contents have gradually, through long practice, come to assume definite forms which have to be accepted as such and retained by the conscious mind. Yoga, so far as we know it as an established practice, proceeds in much the same way: it impresses fixed forms on consciousness.439

Similarly, he recalls that in the Buddhist tradition the image of the leftward-moving swastika occupies a special place within the ancient Tibetan current of the Bön religion, symbolising night and tantric elements and aspects of black magic.440 Furthermore, the psychological symbolism of the left side recurs as well in the recently published first volume of Jung’s ETH lectures and in more than one occasion in the seminars on Pauli’s dreams, in which, discussing the counterclockwise circumambulation “a parte sinistra”, he refers to the left not only as the place of uncanny and unknown motivations, but also as the side of the heart

439 Jung, 1936-1937, CW12, ¶166.

and emotional impressions. This concurrent aspect of the left motif is present in the Commedia too, as the poet traveller in Purgatorio binds the left side to the heart, by connecting in this way an anatomic observation of popular origins to an important symbolical dimension. Silberer too notes the particular directionality, “from right to the left”, embraced by the wanderer of the Rosicrucian parable in Problems of Mysticism and Its Symbolism. In a similar vein, in Swedenborg’s visions from Heaven and Hell, the left eye is the eye of the moon, feelings and receptivity. As the Swedish visionary senses the angels rolling back a covering from his left eye, he begins to lose his rational sight, to gain spiritual perception of the world of the spirits and finally “be able to see”. Interestingly, in medieval Christian thought it was often believed that Satan marked his consecrated ones with a sign on the left eye, as opposed to the rightness or “dexterity” of the devoted ones. In the Old Testament the left is the direction in which one goes to Hell, as clearly followed by Dante, whereas the right denotes the path that leads to Heaven. From another angle, in the Middle Ages the left comes also to represent the abode of female energies and the right the male ones, generally establishing a differentiation between active and passive elements, a perspective vastly explored not only in Western esoteric and occult practices, but equally present in Eastern traditions, in which left and feminine symbols often characterise higher and more powerful, yet no less dangerous, forms of magical practice. Back to Liber Novus, it is possible to observe, in short, that the act of descending to the left side, which Jung essentially characterises as “the way of the serpent”,


442 Dante, Purgatorio, X, 48; 1987, p. 487.

443 Silberer, 1917 (1914), pp. 52-53.

444 Swedenborg, 2016, §118, p. 65.

445 Ibid., §450, p. 256.

446 Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1994, p. 801.
epitomises two fundamental stages of the spiral-shaped movement into Hell: (1) the actualisation of a mental reversal that leads to the materialisation of unknown or unborn aspects of the mind; (2) the challenging emergence of psychic elements belonging to the erotic and emotional sphere of life. It cannot be forgotten, to conclude, that even Dante’s Odysseus (\textit{Inferno}, XXVI, 85-142), abandoning Penelope to cross the sea toward the Southern Hemisphere, enters the wide unknown sea leaving behind Ceuta and Seville, and turns toward the left . . .
Fig. 26. William Blake, 1824-1827, *Lucifer*. 
2.3. Lucifer

2.3.1. The Devil Motif in Liber Novus

If ever you have the rare opportunity to speak with the devil, then do not forget to confront him in all seriousness. He is your devil after all. Jung (LN)

It is no surprise that through a “descent into Hell” one may meet the devil. So does happen to Jung, or better yet, Jung’s ‘I’, the narrator of Liber Novus. The voices of the devil in the course of the Black Books and Liber Novus are at least as various as the ways in which the author names him throughout his notebooks: Devil, Satanas, Satan, Serpent, Antichrist, the “terrible worm”, God’s dark side, the Horned God, the “Red One”, the black one, the “fourth one”, the tempter of Christ, the destroyer, the devourer, the leader of a “herd of dark companions”, the father of the Cabiri (the “sons of the devil”), the “frightful” one, the “shadow of beauty”, the “one who dwells behind the night.” Altogether, the references to the devil in Liber Novus outnumber the two hundred. In the Black Books, there are a few mentions of the Archfiend which do not appear in Liber Novus. For example, a passage in which the “soul” tells Jung’s ‘I’ that “it seems to me that you miss the devil.” And another one, in which He appears amid “burdensome vapours”, like a seasoned rockstar, and utters a sentence which strikes the ‘I’ as “shiny, glistening words, bright as sharp steel, and cutting as the north wind. Mockery of exquisite value.” Not only the references to the devil are so numerous, but they are also scattered across the entire chronological spectrum of Jung’s experiment, from the first lines to the “Epilogue”. Five crucial thematic variations of the devil motif can be identified: the devil in the desert (temptations), the motif of the Antichrist, the pagan “Red One”, the devil in the “Magician” section, the final appearance of Abraxas in “Scrutinies”. Broadly speaking, however

47 Jung, BB4, p. 263.
48 Jung, BB5, p. 282.
complex may be to summarise such a controversial image, the role of the devil in *Liber Novus* shows the two main properties of the fire element, with which this figure is traditionally associated: “to destroy” and “to create anew”. He is, on the hand, the “devourer”, i.e., the mind intoxicated with the obsession of “understanding” and “grasping”, the “quintessence of the personal” (ego-clinging), the sinister messenger of death, chaos, and suffering. On the other hand, he bears the torch of his Luciferian nature, in the capacity of bringer of light and instinctual energy, without which, as Jung argued in a Blakean vein, no self-transformation or psychological purification would be possible. Around the search for a balance between the destructive and the creative aspects of the *imago diaboli* revolves the author’s encounter with the devil in the *Black Books* and *Liber Novus*. An encounter which, however dreadful and unpleasant, resulted in a cathartic process of confrontation. Or to say it with the words of Mephistopheles to Faust: “Formation, transformation / the eternal mind’s eternal recreation.”

For Jung, the quest of assimilating and transforming the evil counterpart, which the devil announces, contrasts the one-sidedness of absolute truths, by rekindling an Heraclitean principle of divine ambiguity: “The god is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, surfeit and anger; but he takes various shapes, just as fire, when it is mingled with spices, is named according to the savor of each.” It is well known that the problematic of the integration of Satan and evil in the Western one-sided image of God occupies a central place in Jung’s interests, notably in the late *Aion* (1951) and *Answer to Job* (1952), as well as in the fifteen years long passionate correspondence with Father Victor White (1945-1960), which conveyed the apex of Jung’s critical engagement with classical theology and the doctrine of *privatio boni*. However, once more, the original material for this discussion directly springs from the

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449 Jung, LN, p. 432.
450 Heraclitus, DK B67.
time of his self-explorations and shows again an important thread of connection with the Middle Ages. There is no “shadow” abstractionism in *Liber Novus*: there is the image of the devil. And like a “roaring lion” (1 Peter 5:8), this symbol brings forth the energy of chaos, the receptacle of the instinctual and the animal. He is the overthrowing of moral codes and deceptive beliefs, of the stagnation of life into one-sided dogmas. He is a dreadful force, far away from being relegated to a hierarchy of goodness, and certainly no less demanding than “lo ’imperador del doloroso regno” (“the emperor of the despondent kingdom”, *Inferno*, XXXIV, 28) whom Dante encounters at the end of the *Inferno*. In a different guise, dressed as the “Red One”, he is simply a pagan spirit, exuberant and eccentric, bringing joy and humour to the *gravitas* of Jung’s ‘I’, and reminding him, in the manner of Nietzsche, that “life doesn't require any seriousness. On the contrary, it’s better to dance through life.” Most notably, the image of the devil in *Liber Novus* heralds the search for a new spiritual orientation beyond the one-sidedness of the Christian godhead, a transformation which culminates in the appearance of Abraxas, the time “God who is difficult to grasp”, and whose force unites and cancels at once the opposition of “truth and lying, good and evil, light and darkness.” While the crown of a tree reaches Heaven, Jung points out, its roots simultaneously touch the bottom of Hell. Of the “essence” of this Hell, he says:

Hell is when the depths come to you with all that you no longer are or are not yet capable of. Hell is when you can no longer attain what you could attain. Hell is when you must think and feel and do everything that you know you do not want. Hell is when you know that your having to is also a wanting to, and that you yourself are responsible for it. Hell is when you know that everything serious that you have planned with yourself is also

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452 Jung, LN, p. 260.
453 Jung, LN, p. 350.
454 Ibid., p. 299.
laughable, that everything fine is also brutal, that everything good is also bad, that
everything high is also low, and that everything pleasant is also shameful.\textsuperscript{455}

To which he significantly adds:

But the deepest Hell is when you realize that Hell is also no Hell, but a cheerful Heaven,
not a Heaven in itself, but in this respect a Heaven, and in that respect a Hell.
That is the ambiguity of the God.\textsuperscript{456}

Hell in \textit{Liber Novus} is certainly a threatening and frightful place. One which is easy to get
into but difficult to leave, as Virgil writes in the \textit{Aeneid}. This can be easily observed while going
through the records of Jung’s experiences, in which the terrifying return of infernal visions has
little of the progressive nature of Dante’s descent through the rings of the \textit{Inferno}.
Nevertheless, as this passage aptly brings out, Jung’s vision of Hell implies as well, at bottom,
that by starting to embrace a reversal of perspective, Hell can represent the first inception of
self-transformation. Experiencing Hell can lead to the radical realisation that “Hell is also no
Hell, but a cheerful Heaven”, that is, it can unveil a deeper awareness of the forces that
regulate life and without which no progression would be possible. The one-sided
misinterpretation of the opposites in moralistic terms provokes a biased vision of the
functioning of the mind, reflected in the cosmological splitting of Heaven and Hell. Visionary
exercises like the technique developed at the root of the \textit{Black Books} proceed in the opposite
direction, by unveiling the free play of the opposites at work, which Heraclitus calls, with an
unsurpassed expression, the \textit{“mind in action.”}\textsuperscript{457} In Blake’s \textit{Marriage of Heaven and Hell}, a work
which, as already pointed out, Jung read and admired, the necessary help of the devil for any

\textsuperscript{455} Ibid., p. 244.
\textsuperscript{456} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{457} Heraclitus, 2001, Fr. 13, p. 9.
energetic advancement is famously captured at the very beginning of the text, by identifying in the poles of “attraction and repulsion”, “reason and energy”, and “love and hate”, the great contraries that are “necessary to Human existence” and which the religious man ambiguously calls “good and evil”—“Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.”

Similarly, Swedenborg’s doctrine of “correspondences” drives Suzuki to establish a parallel between the visions of the Swedish mystic and the Buddhist principle of universal interdependence (Pratityasamutpada). For Swedenborg, all things in nature are linked to each other through material and symbolic analogies. In Heaven and Hell, he states “absolutely everything in nature, from the smallest to the greatest, is a correspondence”, and “there is a connection of the natural world with the spiritual world that results in a correspondence between everything in the natural world with everything in the spiritual world.” Accordingly, the law of correspondences is reflected in the realms of Heaven and Hell. Like Dante’s, Swedenborg’s Heaven and Hell host many degrees and communities, which indicates that self-transformation never occurs in a fixed movement, but through slow changes, inversions, relapses, and continuous passages and thresholds of regeneration. The vision comes close to Jung’s experiences, who, in a Dantesque manner, claims that “Hell has levels”, although unfortunately, unlike Dante, he sketches no heavenly correspondence to this first stratification. For Swedenborg, Hells and Heavens are threefold and composed of threefold communities. Eliade has already noticed the archaic and shamanic recurrences of the nine levels of lower and upper worlds. The magical number nine (3 x 3) is notoriously crucial for Dante too, both in the Vita Nova, in which it accompanies every passage of the poet’s relationship to Beatrice, and

458 Blake, 1974, p. 149.


460 Swedenborg, 2016, §106, p. 57; Ibid., §303, p. 163.

461 Jung, LN, p. 265.

in the *Commedia*, in which the nine circles of Hell are perfectly mirrored, through an inverted image, by the nine skies of Heaven. In passing, it should be noted that an interesting symbolical use of the number nine (three times repeated) is also made in the section of *Liber Novus* in which the serpent tells Jung’s ‘I’ the fairy tale of the king with no children. As numerology suggests, Swedenborg concludes that it is essential that an equilibrium is maintained between Heaven and Hell, and likewise between natural and spiritual forces. The last section of *Heaven and Hell* is entitled, indeed, “The Equilibrium of Heaven and Hell”:

> For anything to happen, there needs to be an equilibrium of everything involved. If there is no equilibrium, there is no action nor reaction, because the equilibrium occurs between two forces, one acting and the other reacting. [...] Absolutely everything in the universe, everything in both the natural and the spiritual world, is constituted by an equilibrium.

In contrast to the idea of a dialectical advancement from Hell to Heaven, Jung suits his reading of the *Commedia* to his own perspective, by highlighting a circular, spiral-shaped interpretation of Dante’s journey, to be read backwards as well as forwards, as the eternal return of a correspondence, at higher degrees of consciousness moving from personal to cosmological dimensions. It is the more or less increasing awareness of this equilibrium that makes venturing into Hell look like the necessary counterpart to a heavenly regeneration, as in the yin-yang symbolism the seed of whiteness grows in the blackness and vice-versa. This dynamic angle of interpretation makes of Dante’s valorisation of the underlying correspondences between the opposites, which accompanies the *Commedia*, an essential condition to turn the chaos of Hell into energy for the purposes of mental purification. For Jung, this occurs in Dante first of all by giving sufficient recognition to the function of Lucifer, an aspect which appears profoundly connected to the transformation of the *imago diaboli* in

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463 Jung, LN, pp. 327-328.
medieval history. It is in fact in the late Middle Ages that the image of Satan undergoes a most notable change, moving from malignant adversary of God to active enemy set on tormenting as many souls as possible. The devil gains a higher rank, necromancy soars, and as pointed out by Traugott Konstantin Oesterreich, mediumistic possession becomes fundamentally diabolical. According to Gian Luca Potestà and Marco Rizzi, the rise of the Antichrist in between the 12th and 15th century, is accompanied by substantial rhetorical propaganda led by the spreading of new religious orders and the foundation of the first European universities. At a popular level, the Middle Ages sees the wide diffusion of the ludi de Antichristo, folkloristic dramatisations having for their main protagonist the Antichrist, remarkably influencing the public imagination at social and political levels. From being relegated to the role of rebellious angel of God, Satan raises to the status of a fully fledged counterforce. This transformation finds possibly its most well known poetic representation in Dante’s encounter with Lucifer at bottom of the Inferno, portrayed by Gustav Doré and William Blake. When Lucifer, ultimate symbol of Dante’s katabasis, enters the scene at the fourth zone of the nine circle (Dante’s “deepest Hell”, to use the jargon of Liber Novus) the poet declares: “Io non mori’ e non rimasi vivo; / pensa oggimai per te, s’hai fior d’ingegno, / qual’io divenni, d’uno e d’altro privo.” As in a proper Sabbath, Lucifer is introduced by Virgil through a medieval Latin formula that reverts the Christian one adopted during the celebration of the Cross on Good Friday.

467 Dante, Inferno, XXXIV, 25-27; 1987, pp. 333-334. “I did not die, nor yet remain alive: / Think for yourself, if you have a trace / Of intellect, how I was, in that condition.”
Friday. Dante adjusts the expression coined by Venanzio Fortunato with a single peculiar contribution: “infernī”, which turns the coming of “the King” into the “King of Hell”. Lucifer abides in the centre of the ninth and lowest circle of Hell, the dreadful frozen lake called Cocytus which Dante refers to as the home of traitors to family, nation, guests, and, worst of all, Christ. By striking contrast with the symbolism of fire that has dominated Dante’s journey until this point, the element of ice invades the scene, a highly significant contrast which should be indeed the object of much future exploration. In this context, it conveys a paramount sense of fear and paralysis of vital impetus, a complete stagnation of energy and self-absorption that combines extreme darkness and absolute stillness. At the same time, the temporary solidity of ice preludes to a state of inner transformation, located as it is in the *Commedia* as a powerful medium in between the fire of punishment (Hell) and the fire of purification (Purgatorio). An interlude between the centripetal and the centrifugal tension of Dante’s journey, the lowest point of his descent which is also the beginning of the upward reversal. A fascinating parallelism may be thus recalled with the moment in which Dante will encounter again Beatrice in Purgatorio, where the compassionate intercession of the angels (*Purgatorio*, XXX, 85-99) will melt “the ice which was packed round about my heart” (“lo gel che m’era intorno al cor ristretto”), allowing the profoundly cathartic cry of the poet and a new disposition to live. However, a long way before that momentous change, in this place of congestion and abysmal isolation represented by Cocytus, Dante’s progression is more than ever an enactment and a mockery at once of the holy mysteries. To move out of Hell, the poet and Virgil will have to climb over Lucifer’s legs, so that by embracing a further complete reversal of perspective, the katabasis will turn into a movement forward towards higher and brighter skies:

Lo ‘imperador del doloroso regno

da mezzo ‘l petto uscia fuor de la ghiaccia;

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e più con un gigante io mi convegno,

che i giganti non fan con le sue braccia:
vedi oggimai quant’esser dee quel tutto
ch’a così fatta parte si confaccia.

S’el fu sì bel com’elli è ora brutto,
e contra ’l suo fattore alzò le ciglia,
ben dee da lui proceder ogne lutto.

Oh quanto parve a me gran maraviglia
quand’io vidi tre facce a la sua testa!
L’una dinanzi, e quella era vermiglia;

l’altr’eran due, che s’aggiugnieno a questa
sovresso ’l mezzo di ciascuna spalla,
e sé giugnieno al loco de la cresta:

e la destra parea tra bianca e gialla;
la sinistra a vedere era tal, quali
vegnon di là onde ’l Nilo s’avvalla.

Sotto ciascuna uscivan due grand’ali,
quanto si convenia a tanto uccello:
vele di mar non vid’io mai cotali.

Non avean penne, ma di vispistrello
era lor modo; e quelle svolazzava,
sì che tre venti si movean da ello:

quindi Cocito tutto s’aggelava.

Con sei occhi piangea, e per tre menti
gocciava ’l pianto e sanguinosa bava.

Da ogne bocca dirompea co’ denti
un peccatore, a guisa di maciulla,
sì che tre ne facea così dolenti.470

Undoubtedly, the Dantesque representation of Lucifer must have particularly impressed Jung, who richly annotates the thirty-fourth Canto of his copy of the *Commedia* and makes an interpretation of this figure which has more to do with his own ideas than with those of the author of the *Commedia*, especially in light of the critical attitude of the Swiss thinker towards Thomistic philosophy. In fact, the complex interplay between goodness and evil in Dante’s

470 Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIV, 28-57; 1987, pp. 334-335. “The emperor of the kingdom of pain / Had half his chest sticking out of the ice; / I am nearer to being as tall as the giants / Than the giants are to being as big as his arms: / See now how great the whole of him must be, / Proportionate to such parts as that. / If he was as beautiful as he now is ugly, / And yet dared to rebel against his maker, / Well may he be the source of all mourning. / Oh, what a wonder it appeared to me, /When I saw three faces on his head! / One, which was of fiery red, in front; / The other two, which were grafted on to that, / Stood one above the middle of each shoulder, / And came together where his crest was; / The right hand one seemed between white and yellow; / The one on the left had the look of those / Who come from where the Nile has its source. / Under each face protruded two great wings, / Each as would seem right for a bird of that size, / Broader than any sea-sails I ever saw. / They had no feathers, but their make-up was / More like a bat’s; and he so fluttered them / That three several winds went out from him. / It was by them all Cocytus was frozen; / With six eyes he wept, and down three chins / Dripped tears and dribble, mixed with blood. / In each mouth he was chewing with his teeth / A sinner, as if pounding him with spikes, / So that he kept the three of them in torment.”
depiction of Lucifer as opposed to Jung’s own interpretation of Dante’s Lucifer could potentially be the central object of interest of a future separate study. In the years following Liber Novus, Dante’s Lucifer is one of his favourite analogies to illustrate the necessity of a more balanced conception of the relativity of the Western God image. It is broadly the theme from Dante which Jung most frequently refers to in his published and unpublished scientific works. We find it in the seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, on May 19, 1937, and on June 23, 1937, in which another important juxtaposition between Dante and Nietzsche takes place:

You remember a while ago, we spoke of the infernal trinity: namely, the reflection in hell of the spiritual trinity, the threefold devil. In Dante’s Inferno he is in the form of Satan, with the three faces—whitish-yellow, red, and black. Now, since then I have found in a medieval treatise another formulation which states most clearly that there is a trinity in heaven, a trinity in man, and a trinity in hell. Nietzsche becomes aware of the trinity in hell from the fact that he feels himself as a trinity, and that feeling comes from his identity with God, the trinity in heaven. He denied the existence of the Christian deity, and so he would be apt to have first an inflation, and then, by a sort of mirror reflection, he discovers again the trinity, but a trinity in which he is included. Instead of Father, Son, and Holy ghost, it would be himself, life, and wisdom.\footnote{Jung, 2010, p. 203; Jung, ETH, Vol. 8, July 4, 1941.}

The same motif can be tracked in Jung’s seminar on Children’s Dreams and in the ETH Lectures.\footnote{Jung, 1989, pp. 1172-1173.} A significant mention appears too in “Attempt at a Psychological Interpretation of the Dogma of the Trinity”, debating the exclusion of Satan from the Christian godhead, which in the Middle Ages generates a specular opposition:
Medieval representations of the triune God as having three heads are based on the three-headedness of Satan, as we find it, for instance, in Dante. This would point to an infernal Antitrinity, a true ‘umbra trinitatis’ analogous to the Antichrist.473

Significantly, Jung once again traces the overcoming of the one-sided image of God back to the medieval world. The three heads of Dante’s Lucifer—for him a similar motif to Hecate, the ancient Greek goddess protector of magic and witchcraft, often represented with three heads—are also mentioned in “The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales”, with a very similar meaning as above: “Among the alchemists we can see how the divine Trinity has its counterpart in a lower, chthonic triad (similar to Dante’s three headed devil)”474 in the commentary on the “Rosarium Philosophorum” appearing in The Psychology of the Transference: “He [Mercurius] is a trinity [...], the chthonic, lower, or even infernal counterpart of the Heavenly Trinity, just as Dante’s devil is three-headed”;475 in “Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon”, with reference to the astrological significance of Ares (Mars) as the instinctual and affective nature of man: “He also has this significance in Canto I of Dante’s Inferno, where he appears in a triad of animals. This lower triad corresponds to the upper Trinity; therefore we meet it again as the tricephalous Satan in Canto XXXIV.”476 These references altogether convey Jung’s attempt to strengthen through a later intellectual and psychological understanding of the Dantesque Lucifer what, at the time of his experiment, come to him through a first-hand visionary experience, which was also informed by the reading of the Commedia. Overall, the imago diaboli in Liber Novus is unpredictable and multifaceted as the very

476 Jung, 1942, CW13, §177.
nature of the “Father of All Tricksters”, as Jung calls the devil in *Answer to Job*.\(^{477}\) The Antichrist brings its dramatic element, connected to a Christian framework. The “Red One” its humoresque side. The Cabiri the mysterious creative powers of the underworld and the entanglement of madness. The serpent or dragon its magical transformative force. Within this characteristic multiplicity, a special appearance of Satan in *Black Book 4* deserves a special mention, which takes place when the ‘I’ decides to summon the devil by pulling him by horns and tails, to his utter annoyance. The ‘I’ contemplates nothing less than the throne of God and the trinity ascending to Heaven, and the Dark one with them, unwillingly invited. The entire scene is not void of sense of humour (a fundamental prerequisite to deal with the devil), and Satan complains: “For God’s sake,” (sic!) “why this hopeless fuss? Why such nonsense?”\(^ {478}\) The ‘I’ explains that the meaning of his call resides in the attempt of unifying the opposites by integrating the dark side of the devil motif with the lightness of life, through the binding image of the trinity. After all, as he tells Satan in this dialogue: “You’re the liveliest and most interesting thing in the whole dogma.”\(^{479}\)

In a fascinating closeness to Dante’s medieval imagination, the Lucifer motif in *Liber Novus* announces a completely reversed order of reality. Now the potential movement forward towards the “rise to heaven”, i.e., a deep psychological renewal or a new state of consciousness, necessitates further refinement of the energetic chaos which Hell discloses. It would be impossible to the apocryphal Christ to return from the Dead as it would be for Dante, Jung argues to describe his own daunting condition, if, before ascending to the nine skies of Paradise the mental traveller had not plunged, level by level, through the nine circles of Hell. In fact, as poignantly noticed by Maud Bodkin:

\(^{477}\) Jung, 1952, CW 11, §620.

\(^{478}\) Ibid., p. 420.

\(^{479}\) Jung, BB 4, p. 241. Italics added.
The horror of Dante’s Hell is made bearable for the reader by the fact that interest is concentrated upon a forward moment. The torments of the damned are described as unending, but they have their effect as incidents in a journey—a transition from darkness to light, from the pangs of death to new life. [...] Opening the way of the pilgrim through the depth of Hell toward the light of Heaven, appears as the supreme motif of the story.\textsuperscript{480}

By contrast, the case of Liber Novus surely entails a different and more difficult transition, one in which the equilibrium between the two realms is never completely settled. Exploration prevails over resolution: it is a strenuous work of purgatorial passage. Yet, despite this overarching distinction, the orientation of the Commedia towards regeneration accompanied and inspired in the background the longer process which, based on the material of Liber Novus, slowly turned the fiery basalt of the visions into a drop of gold, making Jung speak of his experiment, in retrospect, as the “numinous” inception of his scientific project.

2.3.2. The Wild Flight

In one of the earliest commentaries on the Inferno ever written (late XIII-XIV AD), Guido Da Pisa suggests a quasi hypnagogic reading of Dante’s journey: “half way along our life, that one of sleep state, he finds himself in a dark forest.”\textsuperscript{481} Da Pisa associates the visionary way of dreaming and reverie with the opposite state of waking up, and Dante’s ‘I’ with a mental traveller reawakened into the complete reversal of his own being. Dante’s Hell, like Jung’s, looks indeed like the place of the abysmal reversal, an inner tower of Babel in which the poet enters “neither dead nor alive”, surrounded by a spectral multitude of creatures, shades, and demons of the mind. This powerless condition comes close to what Jung notices about his own descent: “When you step into your own Hell, never think that you come like one suffering in

\textsuperscript{480} Bodkin, 1951 (1934), p. 136.

\textsuperscript{481} Guido Da Pisa, V. Cioffi (ed.), 1974, Expositiones et Glose super Comediam Dantis (Commentary on Dante’s Inferno) (New York: SUNY).
beauty, as a proud pariah, but you come like a stupid and curious fool and gaze in wonder at the scraps that have fallen from your table.” For Irma Brandeis, Dante’s Hell is essentially the place of those who “fail to recognise.” The poet’s progress out of the forest has been “a journey of the mind-clarifying purpose, diminishing egocentric pride and hunger, and leading back into the world.” Hell discloses the incapacity to let oneself go. Fear and deceptions dominate the mind. An entire world beyond the ‘I’ is discovered, and yet the unreadiness to navigate through it outlines a gigantic task. From this angle, Liber Novus and the Commedia may also be read in terms of a transition into subtle mental energies, a journey into the underworld within, although a thorough comparison in this respect has to be postponed. Mental travelling acquires the traits of a phantasmagoric adventure in the beyond. The shades are ethereal figures living in-between and as we had the opportunity to observe in Dante and Jung, they torment the subject because they want something from them. They want libations in the form of psychic energy, the sacred wine of the wayfarer: imagination. Thus the narrator becomes a gateway for this encounter half-way through sleep and wake. In this borderland, the ghosts convey a double message: they evoke the phenomenal detachment towards a semi-material state and they establish a cathartic death-passage. Since the living elaborate their presence first upon their own substance, the ghosts acquire masks, traits and peculiar movements that can be recognised by the visionary. The actor is taken into the midsts of a ghostly Chorus and in this place they confront the terror that derives from the absolute deformation of their awake language. But they also learn to recognise the voice of the Chorus, made of whispers, requests, riddles, and contradictory hints. In the Commedia, the poet’s advancement is granted upon the “gifts” to the depths that he is willing to concede by dwelling into the vision, the disposition to “give away” without expecting to receive. The ghosts lack the vital energy, the fiery blood that

482 Jung, LN, p. 264.
483 Brandeis, 1962, p. 52.
the shades observe in Dante’s body, a man of the living travelling amongst the Dead, something that makes them complain, half-way between rage and scorn: “Chi è costui che sanza morte / va per lo regno de la morta gente?” (“Who is this creature who, without death, / Travels through the kingdom of the dead?”) T. S. Eliot points out in this respect that while the souls in Dante’s Hell are burnt into their own fire, as if consumed by their own desires in an implosive movement, like the hungry ghosts, the penitent souls in Purgatorio deliberately accept the purifying action of the flame upon themselves. Hence, in Dante’s Inferno, fire describes the concentration of energy given by an uttermost state of introversion, whereas in Purgatorio it expands in the direction of a refinement of energy (purification as “cleansing action of fire”) which in Paradiso becomes so sharply brightened as to culminate in a complete participation of light. However, when the individual procrastinates the sacrifice of fear, the ghosts consume the energy of the living, by sucking the flame down to the point where the latter loses the trace of fire, completely reverted against oneself. The journey that begins in Hell is truly a psychic initiation into fire, a transformative act resembling the movement of a flame into the greater circle of fire, a Dantesque image that resonates in Liber Novus.

Amongst the panoply of shades and spectres encountered by Dante in the Inferno, one stands above all, possibly above Lucifer himself. It is a great flame that reveals itself to Dante by swaying, trembling, and murmuring just like “a fire that is buffeted by wind.” It is Dante’s alter ego in Hell, condemned over the horse’s fraud which caused the fall of Troy: the glorious Odysseus. Dante’s Odysseus is such an important figure in the Commedia that Guglielmo Gorni claims that the Florentine wrote the Inferno just to meet there the Greek hero. And Brandeis sincerely admits something that many readers of the poem have shared in the course of time:

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485 Dante, Inferno, VIII, 84-85; 1987, p. 106.
487 Dante, Inferno, XXVI, 85-87; 1987, p. 264.
I have found myself asking, along with many other readers: does not the whole scene presented in Canto XXVI more exalt Ulysses in our imagination than convince us of his sinfulness? What flaw do we see in his soul? How is his suffering inevitable?

It seems to me that even if we enter upon the scene in Inferno XXVI the poem compels us to feel for and not against Ulysses, inviting us by visual effects of mystery and beauty.489

No one better than Odysseus, in fact, yet one of Orphic traits such as that one from Porphyry’s On the Cave of the Nymphs, embodies the appropriate characteristics for delving into the adventure and exorcism of the wayfarer’s ablation to the Dead’s womb. In Homer’s great poem, Odysseus’s epithets are the “technical mind”, the “mastermind of war”, the “power of deception”, the “hero”. He goes to Hades and interrogates the sentient Tiresias about his return to Ithaca, by offering cups of black blood in order to be allowed to speak with the souls of the Dead (Odyssey, Book XI). Dante’s Odysseus, however, is not Homer’s. The poet makes of the Greek hero, despite the profound underlying sense of brotherhood, the hybris of science, the danger of human knowledge without wisdom. Thus in the Commedia, Odysseus is first of all the human talent or science, driven by desire and thirst for knowledge, an image which Dante takes especially from Virgil, Seneca, and Horatio, and not directly from Homer. He appears imprisoned in a two-prolonged flame with Diomede (as “evil counsellors”), in which one sees a “dark parody of the flame in which the Holy Ghost descended to the Apostles.”490 He is called by the poet “lo maggior corno de la fiamma antica.” (“the bigger horn of the ancient flame.”)491 Homer’s Odysseus questions the ghosts about his return home. Dante’s Odysseus ignites the souls of his brothers on a new journey beyond the pillars of Hercules, in what becomes soon a “folle volo, / sempre acquistando dal lato mansino.” (“a wild flight / and always gained upon our

491 Dante, Inferno, XXVI, 85; 1987, p. 264.
left—hand side.”)\textsuperscript{492} But Dante makes Odysseus’s mad journey to the unknown end quickly, as soon as the Greek hero comes across the slopes of a dark mountain, the mountain of Purgatorio, a place which you cannot ascend equipped only with the weapons of reason and guile:

\begin{flushleft}
Noi ci rallegrammo, e tosto tornò in pianto;
ché de la nova terra un turbo nacque
e percosse del legno il primo canto.

Tre volte il fé girar con tutte l’acque;
a la quarta levar la poppa in suso
e la prora ire in giù, com’ altrui piacque,
infin che ’l mar fu sovra noi richiuso.\textsuperscript{493}
\end{flushleft}

It should be recalled that Odysseus’s shipwreck is a Dantesque invention. The scene represents a sacrifice of the ship of human \textit{ingenium} occurring right next to the mountain where the poet’s venture into the second kingdom begins (\textit{Purgatorio}, I). It is a new threshold, a sharp liminal passage that encompasses a further symbol of death and rebirth, suggestively revealed by the image of the sea crashing down over the travellers, burying them in its watery depths. Out of the remains of the ancient hero, a renewed flame can now be incubated into a deeper process of self-transformation. The ancient “flame” (Odysseus, the “mind”, human

\textsuperscript{492} Ibid., \textit{Inferno}, XXVI, 125-126; 1987, p. 266. (Tr. A. Mandelbaum)

\textsuperscript{493} Dante, \textit{Inferno}, XXVI, 136-142; 1987, p. 267. “We all rejoiced, but soon it turned to grief; / For from the unknown land a storm blew up / And struck against the fore part of the ship. / Three times it turned her round, with all the waters; / At the fourth turn it raised the stern aloft, / And the head went down, as it pleased another it should, / Until the sea again closed over us.”
science) is magnetised by the “greatest flame” (Beatrice, the “soul”, sacred science), taking Dante up into the continuation of his journey.

Fascinatingly, just prior to the commencement of the earliest layer of Liber Novus, Odysseus holds an important significance also for Jung. As early as around 1910, he notes that shortly after a sailing trip with Albert Oeri and Andreas Vischer, in which they read together chapters from the Odyssey, he felt he would be presented with a similar fate to that of Odysseus in Hades. Furthermore, in the Handwritten Draft of Liber Novus, he gives to the second section of his material, Liber Secundus, the subtitle “The Adventures of the Wandering”, before turning it in the Corrected Draft into “The Great Wandering”, describing the time of his self-explorations like a proper Odyssey. Most importantly, on December 21, 1913, at the beginning of the visionary drama entitled “Mysterium Encounter”, he claims to have caught “a sight of Odysseus and his journey on the high seas.” In a later commentary on this section (“Appendices”), he refers to Odysseus as the most fitting image of adventurousness and associates the Greek hero with his own adventures: “I became an Odysseus on an adventurous journey, which concludes with the aging man’s return to Penelope, the motherly woman.”

This parallel is intriguing. First of all because it establishes a connection between Odysseus’s journey, Dante’s return to Beatrice, and Jung’s self-explorations “on the service of the soul.” Secondly, because it occurs precisely at the time, late December 1913, in which Jung’s close reading of the Commedia finds a place in the Black Books. There is no reference in Jung’s works to Dante’s Odysseus and its shipwreck or to any differentiation between Dante’s and classical representations of the Greek hero. However, in the material of Liber Novus, it is possible to come across a “sacrifice” of a hero with some resemblance to Dante’s sacrifice of Odysseus, occurring shortly before the appearance of Odysseus in the “Mysterium” play.

495 Jung, LN, p. 245.
496 Ibid., p. 367.
It is December 18, 1913, and after another terrible and frightful night of emotional turmoil, Jung is grappling with the vision of Siegfried (“Murder of the Hero”). In a dream, he sees himself in the mountains, just before daybreak, and suddenly hears the jubilant sound of Siegfried’s horn, the hero of old German epics that enraptured Richard Wagner. In the vision, the ‘I’ observes the German hero “boldly and magnificently” coming high across the mountains, on a terrifying “chariot made of the bones of the dead.” The ‘I’ hides with a youth, a little brown man of strikingly contrasting features to those of the blonde German hero. As Siegfried arrives around them, they fire him to death, after which terrible rain and deep torment follow, driving Jung to note down that “I felt certain that I must kill myself, if I could not solve the riddle of the murder of the hero.” Later, the voice of the “spirit of the depths” immediately notes to him: “The highest truth is one and the same with the absurd.”

Later in the Draft, he recognises the murder of Siegfried as the frightful attempt to sacrifice an ideal of strength, boldness, and pride within himself. In the 1925 seminar, he interprets this vision as the “deposition” of his own “superior function”, represented by “thinking” and personal will to power, culturally exemplified by the symbol of the “hero”:

It was a case of destroying the hero ideal of my efficiency. This has to be sacrificed in order that a new adaptation can be made; in short, it is connected with the sacrifice of the superior function in order to get at the libido necessary to activate the inferior functions. if a man has a good brain, thinking becomes his hero and, instead of Christ, Kant, or Bergson, becomes his ideal. If you give up this thinking, this hero ideal, you commit a secret murder—that is, you give up your superior function.

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497 Ibid., p. 241.
498 Ibid.
499 Ibid., p. 242.
The murder of the German prince represents then a first necessary task to accomplish self-transformation, an act appearing as absurd to the logic of the ‘I’ as to require a subtle act of psychological self-trickery, like a traitor or a proper “Judas”: “You can reach your God only as an assassin, if you want to overcome him.” Thus he comments on this episode in the Layer [2] of Liber Novus, as follows:

Oh that Siegfried, blond and blue-eyed, the German hero, had to fall by my hand, the most loyal and courageous! He had everything in himself that I treasured as the greater and more beautiful; he was my power, my boldness, my pride. I would have gone under in the same battle, and so only assassination was left to me. If I wanted to go on living, it could only be through trickery and cunning. [...] What does Siegfried mean for the Germans! What does it tell us that the Germans suffer Siegfried’s death! That is why I almost preferred to kill myself in order to spare him. But I wanted to go on living with a new God.

The passage is followed by another significant recurrence of the Antichrist, interpreted again as the fruitful transition to a blossoming conception of the new God, out of the “terrible” ambiguity of the opposites along a serpent-like advancement:

After death on the cross Christ went into the underworld and became Hell. So he took on the form of the Antichrist, the dragon. The image of the Antichrist, which has come down to us from the ancients, announces the new God, whose coming the ancients had foreseen. [...] The rain is the fructifying of the earth, it begets the new wheat, the young, germinating God.

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501 Ibid.
502 Ibid.
503 Ibid.
Previously, in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, the hero had a burden to sacrifice, which was essentially represented by the infantile attachment of the individual to the maternal womb. Differently, in the *Black Books*, the burden to sacrifice becomes the hero itself, taking in this way the psychological implications of the sacrificial act to a substantially deeper level. Now a much greater riddle arises upon the ghostly remains of Jung’s heroic times: how can one go into Hell without getting stuck there? This, at least according to Jung, is what may have happened to Nietzsche, but arguably not to Dante, who found a way to move out to Hell and embrace, through the doctrine of correspondences and the “dictation” of love, a pathway of spiritual transformation. How can Hell, in other words, be experienced without the explorer of Hell being overpowered by what the “spirit of this time” would identify, in one word, as *madness*?
Chapter 3

Rebirth

I’ son Beatrice che ti faccio andare;
vegno del loco ove tornar disio;
amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare.504

Dante

Great is he who is in love, since love is the present act of the great creator, the present moment of the becoming and lapsing of the world.

Jung (LN)

504 Dante, Inferno, II, 70–72; 1987, p. 55. “For I am Beatrice who send you on; / I come from where I most long to return; / Love prompted me, that Love which makes me speak.” (tr. A. Mandelbaum).
Fig. 27. William Blake, 1824-1827, *The Ascent of the Mountain of Purgatory.*
3. 1. Daybreak

3.1.1. The Dark Mountain

When Dante begins his ascent in Purgatorio, three days have passed since the start of his journey into Hell. Emerging from the long and strenuous climb through the underworld, the poet is greeted by the sweet colours of daybreak, a “gentle hue of oriental sapphire” (Purgatorio, I, 13) which tells us a dramatic transformation is occurring. Dante is on the shore of Mount Purgatory and this is the place, as Teodolinda Barolini writes, “where everyone is working on becoming new again.” The “dark and dim” mountain was in the Inferno (XXVI, 133) announced as the place where the “wild flight” of Dante’s Odysseus came to an end, with the Greek hero and his ardent companions drowning in a terrible whirlwind. Now everything is different, yet the Mount is exactly the same. The sky is blue and peaceful, the poet’s sight is cleansed, and the earth rejoices in a luminous glittering. Unlike Odysseus, Dante has survived the perilous waters, has crossed Lucifer’s legs with his arms around Virgil’s neck, and is now ready to begin his anabasis, or “upper advancement” (technically “ascension”, or “climbing up”, to use one of Dante’s favourite verbs in Purgatorio). Jorge Luis Borges, Carlo Steiner, and August Rüegg believe that the essential difference between Dante and (Dante’s) Odysseus lies in the capacity to surrender to higher guiding powers. Both illustrious explorers who venture along virgin paths, they travel across the limits of mankind, until approaching a mountain that, in Dante’s creation, forms the exact inversion of the depths of Hell. Dante calls it “lo monte che salendo altrui dismalà.” (“The mountain which / Purifies as one climbs it.”) Climbing the mount, in fact, implies spiritual progression, and Taoists affirm that the difficulties of climbing a

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507 Dante, Purgatorio, XIII, 3; 1987, p. 515.
mountain without training oneself through spiritual exercises can be enormous.\(^{508}\) Dante’s *Purgatorio* is a journey of elevation and mind-clarification, one which occurs by steadily advancing from darkness to light. At this point, if Odysseus has navigated only on his own strength and intelligence, Dante allows himself to be illuminated by the higher forces of wisdom and grace, embodied by the alliance of Virgil and Beatrice. Thus at the crossroad of the dark holy mountain, the old Greek hero drowns in a terrible maelstrom, the other raises his eyes in wonder to that imperious “eminence / That rises highest to heaven from the sea”\(^ {509}\), finding a way of ascension to new and different lands. There is, therefore, a remarkable difference of directionality between Odysseus’s and Dante’s travelling. The Greek hero sets sail for forbidden adventures over the endless sea, where no man has attempted to stray before, beyond the Pillars of Hercules, the hallmark of the Western world. He is the heroic master of the visible world and eventually, Dante imagines, he is swallowed by the depths of the sea. Dante’s journey, differently, develops in all senses in a vertical direction, from the bottom of the earth, to the stairs up the mountainside, until the blissful skies of heaven. In Dante’s own extraordinary invention, the “holy mount” or “sacred mount” of Purgatorio resides in the Southern Hemisphere. It consists of seven levels or terraces of repentance and growth (the Proud, the Envious, the Wrathful, the Slothful, the Covetous, the Gluttonous, the Lustful), culminating in the Earthly Paradise where the poet meets Matelda and purifies himself in sacred rivers (Lethe and Eunoe), before further ascending to the heavenly skies. In a seminal study, *The Birth of Purgatory*, Le Goff traced the birth of Purgatory to the late Middle Ages, about a hundred years before the *Commedia*, when the idea of “intermediacy”, which Purgatory encapsulates, started to affect European society at a political, cultural, and intellectual level.\(^ {510}\) The French medievalist recognises in Dante’s work the “poetic triumph” of the new idea of


Purgatory, no less than the “noblest representation of Purgatory ever conceived by the mind of man.”

This merit, he argues, derives above all from Dante’s sublime spatialisation of the law of progress underlying the idea itself of Purgatory. This intermediate place is not a limbo, a time of eternal suspension. Differently, it is the enactment of a transformation that operates, essentially, through the cathartic action of purifying fire. In this sense, Purgatory offers an alternative view to that of the dualistic splitting of Heaven and Hell which will notably characterise the Protestant rejection of the doctrine of Purgatory, by affecting more static visions of the underworld such as in Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*. The symbol of Purgatory introduces instead a third element, a bridge between two worlds. It has something of Hell and something of Heaven, an image in *chiaroscuro* that turns a more earthly version of both realms into the possibility of movement and future progression. It is the place where heaven and earth come closest. Thus Le Goff points out:

Purgatory is clearly a “second kingdom” between Hell and Heaven. But Dante’s idea of this intermediate zone is dynamic and imbued with spirituality. Purgatory is not a neutral intermediary but an intermediary with an orientation. It points from the earth, where the future elect are when they die, to Heaven, their eternal abode. As they proceed on their way, they are purged and become more and more pure as they come closer and closer to the summit, to the spiritual heights to which they are destined. From the abundance of geographical imagery of the other world bequeathed him by earlier centuries, Dante chose the one image that expresses Purgatory’s true logic, that of the climb: a mountain.

The whole story of Dante’s *Purgatorio* can be intuitively visualised as an arch that encompasses the momentous changeover between Virgil and Beatrice, who appears towards the end of the second Canticle to reproach the poet for his misconduct and lead him to a

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511 Ibid., p. 334.
512 Ibid., p. 337.
thoroughly alternative journey. Just before the commencement of this reversal, of which the reader will be informed in due time, Dante gives a piercing look straight into the reader’s heart, calling forth a new centre of vision: “Aguzza qui, lettor, ben li occhi al vero, / ché il velo è ora ben tanto sottile, / certo che ’l trapassar dentro è leggero.”\(^{513}\) The passage signals a shift in the poem’s tone, such as in other significant moments throughout Dante’s journey. It carries out a challenging invitation to refine our efforts of concentration and participation. By inviting us so directly to sharply look through the veil of perception, Dante reminds the reader to open the mind’s eye in order to be able to move forward with him. The first half of the journey prepared the pathway to Hell, that is, the obscuration of the eyes that brings forth madness and chaos. Now another complementary half is brought up altogether: the cleansing and purification of the eyes that convey the narrative of an inner rebirth. In Neoplatonic language, the reversal of the journey (which Ellenberger recognises as the fundamental characteristic of the Jungian hermeneutical model) is described in terms of two fundamental movements of the mind, one necessary to the existence of the other. The “\textit{katabasis eis andron}” (“descent into the cave”) and the “\textit{anabasis}” or “\textit{anandromè eis to noeron eidos}” (“new tension towards the intelligible form”). The former describes the melting of the subject with matter and non-differentiation, the latter the process of a new individual differentiation. The former evokes the act of plunging into chaotic energy, the latter a refinement of psychic energy into a new orientation of life. One speaks the Luciferian language of Hell, the other the transformative light of Purgatory and Heaven. One is fire without form, the other is fire within the form, fuel for self-transformation.\(^{514}\)

\(^{513}\) Ibid., \textit{Purgatorio}, VIII, 19-21; 1987, p. 463. “Here, reader, look sharply to the truth, / For the veil is now of such a fineness /That it is easy to pass beyond it.”

3.1.2. Liber Novus as Jung’s Purgatorial Labor

Alphonse Maeder, in the winter of 1917, gave two talks at the universities of Geneva and Lausanne on the topic “Healing and Transformation in the Life of the Soul.” On February 2, 1918, he discussed the same subject at the Association of Analytical Psychology (in the presence of Jung), suggesting a fascinating parallel between the Commedia and psychoanalysis. Though Jung believed that Maeder’s contribution presented a few limitations, overall he pointed out that “the parallel with Dante is very good as an educational introduction to analysis.”

The ancestors of psychoanalytic work, Maeder claims, are the rituals of the “ancient mysteries” and the works of “the great inspired” like Dante, a similar notion to Jung’s later conceptualisation of “visionary writers.” For Maeder, Dante’s descent to Hell corresponds to the conflicts of the past, the subject matter of the causal approach. The second half of the journey, instead, corresponds to the future, the teleological movement: “It is an upward progressive movement, a channeling and application of mobilised energies.”

Hell is “a state of slavery, an immobilisation of the vital impetus”, Purgatory “a work of purification.” This advancement essentially results in the transformation of what originally was “a desire to possess” into “a new stage of life, a gift of giving.” The will to power “undergoes a parallel change. It is put on the service of the cosmic self: the individual self, humbled, serves as a soldier for the Grande Armée.” These observations provide insightful analogies to proceed with this study. Several correspondences have been established so far, at literal and symbolical

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516 Minutes of the Association of Analytical Psychology. Courtesy of Sonu Shamdasani.

517 Maeder, 1918, p. 23.

518 Ibid., p. 35.

519 Ibid., p. 36.

520 Ibid., p. 38.
levels, between the *Commedia* and *Liber Novus*. These include the motif of the metánoia or midpoint crisis, the structure and directionality of Hell, the Dead, the ghosts, the apocryphal Christ, Odysseus, the symbols of the forest, the desert, and the dangerous waters. Altogether, these elements of comparison should be understood as acting on the service of what has been acknowledged in this research as the major theme of connection between Jung and Dante: self-regeneration. The model of a Dantesque hermeneutics provides the author of *Liber Novus* with the suggestive image of a journey of renewal, in which every downward moment of regression is counter-balanced and invigorated by a corresponding upward tension, following an increasing reconciliation of opposite forces which one may call a *psycho-cosmology of the opposites*. As in Virgil’s classical formulation, it is in the upward movement, the return from Hades, and not in the descent, that the real “*task and mighty labor*” lies. However, as clarified since the start of this project, the closeness of *Liber Novus* to the *Commedia* should be conceived in terms of a central inspiration rather than a resolution. Thus a differentiation has been introduced between work and process, that is, between what can be read in the pages of *Liber Novus* and the underlying movement of transformation which affected its author during as well as after the phase of its composition. Nevertheless, precisely because of its liminal and metamorphic nature, *Liber Novus* emerges as a work of distinctively purgatorial traits: a “mighty” task of psychic purification which incubates a few important “seeds” of that longer process of transformation which led Jung out of the early infernal phase of his experiment and into the birth of a new cosmology. In this respect, this study demonstrates that the motif of the anabasis or self-regeneration in the *Black Books* and *Liber Novus* in relation with Dante’s *Commedia* is structured around two pivotal symbolical elements which will be discussed in the following pages. One is the image of the psychopomp, as expressed through the multiform connection between Jung’s Philemon and Dante’s Virgil. The other is the symbolism of the feminine, as delineated through a comparison between Dante’s Beatrice and Jung’s “soul”, on the basis of the subtle way in which the Swiss thinker develops this topic against the background of the Middle Ages.
The decision to copy in the **Black Books** two entries from Dante’s *Purgatorio* seemingly highlights a particular connection with this specific Canticle of Dante’s tripartite poem. Should one wonder what type of reading Jung explicitly offers on Dante’s Purgatory, a quite unusual occurrence appears after *Liber Novus*. It occurs in the 1930-1934 seminar on Christiana Morgan’s visionary experiences, similarly repeated on three different occasions (March 9, 1932, June 14, 1933, October 11, 1933). In this context, he dwells in depth on the symbolism of fire, interpreted as the quintessential element of self-transformation, the one that binds together most closely the means of destruction and re-creation. With reference to Morgan’s material, fire evokes the necessary burst of passion that burns up all rubbish and makes it possible to see that “in the ashes a molten drop of gold will appear.”

A similar process characterises the *Commedia* and *Liber Novus*. In the katabasis, fire shows a consuming centripetal power, implosive, and self-destructive. In the anabasis, fire conveys an explosive, centrifugal force that sparks and illuminates the creative nature of the subject. Dante’s journey, in many senses a great illustration of the art of mastery over fire, sharply delineates the trajectory of this differentiation, in terms of a process of sublimation of fire, from wild chaotic frenzy to cosmic radiance. Thus fire encapsulates one of the most significant aspects of the transitional movement from Hell to Purgatory. It is specifically in the *Purgatorio* that fire becomes the pre-eminent instrument of purification, the most important symbolical beacon of Dante’s ascent. The noun itself, *purgatorium*, which first appeared in Latin dictionaries in the second half of the twelfth century, derives from Latin *purgare* (“cleansing”) and *purus* (“pure”), from the Greek root *pur*, meaning “fire”. Hence Jung observes the following about an episode from Dante’s *Purgatorio*:

> People are afraid of the fire of passion and then passion seizes them. They think it is a mistake, but they need and are really looking for it; and the more they know, the less they

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will deny passion. They will accept it because they know it is the purifying fire that is needed for the production of the pure gold. So to get into a purified condition one must pass through the zone of fire in which every desire is burned out, the result being worthless ashes blown away by the wind, and the pure gold that stands the fire forever. There is a beautiful expression of that symbolism in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. In the last circle of purgatory, when approaching the celestial sphere, Virgil leads Dante to the flame of purification; he himself steps back—because he is a heathen, he cannot pass through that flame—but Dante, baptized a Christian, can enter the fire of pure love where everything earthly is burned out of him, and then ascend to heaven.

You see, this symbol is a psychological experience, and it shows itself in the form of a continuous machine-gun fire of emotions which in the end die down, and one would say the fire had burnt out, that it was a burnt-out crater; and externally, or if one looks at it superficially, one might see it as complete destruction, with nothing left. But if one goes down into the crater, at the bottom one finds the gold, the valuable substance which is no longer touched by fire, and this is the meaning of all the nonsense that went before.522

The image is later reiterated in more refined detail, by establishing an original correspondence between the stages of Dante’s journey in the *Commedia* and the levels of Kundalini Yoga, an unusual parallelism that finds its place in the tradition of the esoteric reading of Dante. In Jung’s view, Purgatory would correspond to the third chakra, or *manipura* (“resplendent gem”), the region of the solar plexus associated with the fire element:

[... ] When the image is held in the flames in order to strengthen it magically, or to purify it—which amounts to the same thing—it indicates that man ought to be strengthened, he should be passed through the fire. There is the same idea in the *Divine Comedy*. When Dante was approaching the heavenly sphere of paradise, on the last circle Virgil, his guide,

522 *Ibidem.*
led him up to the purifying flames and Dante had to pass through them. But Virgil could not because he still belonged to purgatory. He was a pagan after all, despite the fact that he was a prophet of Christ; in his four Eclogues he prophesied the coming of the Child, according to the medieval tradition, but that is a disputed point. So Dante had to pass through that pure flame in which all earthly admixture, all ego desirousness, was burned out of him. That would be the sacrificial fire, and only the one who has passed through that fire can be absolutely whole and strong and enter the supreme condition. Now if you take these states as stages of psychology, the lowest place described by Dante is *muladhara*; then comes the middle region, purgatory, which would be the region of the diaphragm; and then the upper region would be called hell in Christian-projected psychology—or mythology; purgatory was always characterized by the purifying fire, and that would be the *manipura* center. And this fire is the anticipation of a complete condition in which there is no wounding, no dissociation; but nobody can attain to that condition unless he has passed through the flames of desire; in other words, until he has fulfilled what the specific desires of his nature are or have been. If they are fulfilled, he is burned through by the flame and the next stage can begin.523

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523 Ibid., pp. 1107–1108. It is very curious, yet arguably a mistake in the transcription of the original material of the seminar, that Jung calls the upper region “hell”, instead of “heaven”, as it would logically follow from the passage.
3.2. Anabasis

3.2.1. Christmas 1913, Jung’s “Mysterium”

Long before these observations, Jung directly evokes Dante’s purgatorial fire in the *Black Books*. A closer look at the context of those entries reveals a deeper connection with the *Commedia* than expected, driving this research to further reflections. It is nearly Christmas 1913, when he draws on Dante’s *Purgatorio* in order to somehow move out of his entrenchment in Hell. At that particular moment, *Liber Novus* features one of the most important episodes appearing in Jung’s visions. The scene is entitled “Mysterium”, or “mystery play”, and is divided into three parts: “Encounter” (“Begegnung”), “Instruction” (“Belehrung”), and “Resolution” (“Lösung”). The sequence enacts a proper drama of the mind, significantly informed by Dantesque symbolism and the tradition of ancient mysteries. As Jung begins to record the experiences coalescing into the “mystery play”, occurring shortly after the first visions of Hell and the episode of the “Murder of the Hero”, he notes down in his diaries that by that time, the technique of active imagination has led him to catch a glimpse of cosmic depths, resembling the shape of a giant volcanic crater or a “ring-chain of mountains”, an image very close to the landscape of Dante’s Hell.\(^{524}\) He then sees himself (the ‘I’) becoming the protagonist of an enigmatic initiation rite, guided by two figures (“events” or, to conform to the language of the *Black Books*, “realities”)\(^{525}\) with whom he engages in a long multifaceted dialogue: Elijah (the prophet and thaumaturge of the Old Testament who first appears in 1 Kings 18) and Salome (the stepdaughter of King Herod and murderess of John the Baptist that at the turn of the century fascinated many European writers and painters). Salome, blind, is uncannily introduced by the prophet as his daughter. Jung’s ‘I’ claims to catch sight of “Odysseus and his journey on the high seas.”\(^{526}\) Elijah gives him the shocking news that he and Salome have been united since

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\(^{524}\) Jung, 2012 (1925), p. 68.

\(^{525}\) Jung, BB, (2), p. 189.

\(^{526}\) Jung, LN, p. 245.
the beginning of time (“her blindness and my sight have made us companions through eternity”) and that the ‘I’ must learn how to love Salome without judgment, despite his horror before such a dreadful request:

E: “We are real and not symbols.”

I see how the black serpent writhes up the tree, and hides in the branches. Everything becomes gloomy and doubtful. Elijah rises, I follow and we go silently back through the hall. Doubt tears me apart. It is all so unreal and yet a part of my longing remains behind. Will I come again? Salome loves me, do I love her? I hear wild music, a tambourine, a sultry moonlit night, the bloody-staring head of the holy one—fear seizes me. I rush out. I am surrounded by the dark night. It is pitch black all around me. Who murdered the hero? Is this why Salome loves me? Do I love her, and did I therefore murder the hero? She is one with the prophet, one with John, but also one with me? Woe, was she the hand of the God? I do not love her, I fear her. Then the spirit of the depths spoke to me and said: “Therein you acknowledge her divine power.” Must I love Salome?527

The urgency of an act of love becomes the turning point for Jung’s dramatic vision. Stretching along a series of tormented nights before Christmas, the “Mysterium” evolves in all sorts of eerie visions, in the midst of rocky depths, mountains, dark rooms, curling serpents, and blazing fires. Finally, on December 25 (the night before the appearance of Dante’s entries in the Black Books), the proper initiation takes place. Jung points out that after a few nights, a “deep longing to continue experiencing the mysteries seized me. The struggle between doubt and desire was great in me. But suddenly I saw that I stood before a steep ridge in a wasteland. It is a dazzling bright day.”528 In the 1925 seminar he elaborates further about this inner

527 Ibid., p. 246.
528 Jung, LN, p. 251.
conflict, originally appearing in *Liber Novus* in the form of two battling serpents.\(^{529}\) Although in *Liber Novus* the serpents are only described as black and white, the *Black Books* provides a richer description of this psychomachy, resembling the gigantic revolution and subsequent harmonisation of the Yin-Yang:

The night is like a monstrously huge, black, but transparent monster like a serpent or a dragon.

The day, in contrast, contains a massive white serpent (with a golden crown?)

Both serpents thrust their heads toward each other, eager for battle. Elijah stands on the heights between them. The prophet raises his hands in prayer. Suddenly the serpents throw themselves from the ridge and a terrible wrestling ensues. The serpent of the night is to a larger extent on the side of the day. Enormous billows of dust rise from the place of struggle and blur sight. The serpent of the night pulls itself back. The front part of its body has become white. The serpents curl about themselves, one in light, the other in darkness.\(^{530}\)

The prophet Elijah climbs before the ‘I’, showing the way to a high mountain summit where a stone by the shape of an altar symbolises “the temple of the sun”, “a vessel, that collects the light of the sun.”\(^{531}\) A little later, the image of the stone turns into the house of the prophet, in which Jung’s ‘I’ becomes the protagonist of a Mithraic crucifixion. At first, he is forced to behold the “unbearable” revisiting of some moments from Christ’s passion.\(^{532}\) Then Salome draws near and a serpent coils all around the body of the ‘I’, while he recounts that his “countenance is that of a lion.”\(^{533}\) At this point Salome begins worshipping Jung like Christ,

\(^{529}\) Jung, 2012 (1925), pp. 103-104.

\(^{530}\) Jung, BB, (2), p. 191.

\(^{531}\) Jung, LN, p. 251.

\(^{532}\) Ibid., p. 252.

\(^{533}\) Ibidem.
preparing the ‘I’ for a deification ritual: a “terrible and incomprehensible power forces me to imitate the Lord in his final torment.”\textsuperscript{534} The willingness to accept to love Salome and abandon himself to her worshipping becomes the key to unravel the enigma of the ritual. When Jung surrenders to this call, at the apex of the initiation, a momentous reversal of the situation occurs. Salome bends down and cries at the protagonist’s feet. She suddenly acquires sight, with her eyes wide open. The serpent uncoils from the ‘I’ and Elijah transforms into a beaming source of blissful fire. The ‘I’ finally feels released from the enormous burden of the trial and begins to cry with joy, suddenly feeling his body leave the ground of the earth and fly into space:

S: “You are Christ.”

I stand with outstretched arms like someone crucified, my body taut and horribly entwined by the serpent: “You, Salome, say that I am Christ?”

It is as if I stood alone on a high mountain with stiff outstretched arms. The serpent squeezes my body in its terrible coils and the blood streams from my body, spilling down the mountainside. Salome bends down to my feet and wraps her black hair round them. She lies thus for a long time. Then she cries, “I see light!” Truly, she sees, her eyes are open. The serpent falls from my body and lies languidly on the ground. I stride over it and kneel at the feet of the prophet, whose form shines like a flame.

E: “Your work is fulfilled here. Other things will come. Seek untiringly, and above all write exactly what you see.”

Salome looks in rapture at the light that streams from the prophet. Elijah transforms into a huge flame of white light. The serpent wraps itself around her foot, as if paralyzed. Salome kneels before the light in wonderstruck devotion. Tears fall from my eyes, and I hurry out

\textsuperscript{534} Ibidem.
into the night, like one who has no part in the glory of the mystery. My feet do not touch
the ground of this earth, and it is as if I were melting into air.\footnote{Ibidem. The Black Books contain an additional entry after this moment: “I am back again. Something has been completed. It is as if I had brought with me a certainty—and a hope.” See Jung, BB, (2), p. 196.}

Fig. 28. LN, Mysterium.
By putting on stage a ritual of deification (“the rise of an individual to divine stature”), the “Mysterium” tackles at bottom one of Jung’s most visceral points of criticism towards Protestantism: the reduction of spiritual experience to a system of beliefs, with the resulting exclusion of man from a direct participation with “divine matters”. The excruciating torments of “becoming Christ” reflects a cultural and psychological conundrum which, according to Jung, is in large part responsible for the spiritual malady of modern Western man: the apish imitation of Christ instead of a real *imitatio Christi*. Thus the “Mysterium” evokes at once Jung’s attempt at overcoming such impasse, by unleashing and turning inwardly the energy of this experience, no longer envisioned in terms of external models or patterns, but of a first-hand Christic awakening. The *Corrected Draft* of the “Instruction” scene presents a notable passage in this respect: “thus I become, like the Buddha sitting in the flames.”536 “The numbness is like a death. I needed total transformation. Through this my meaning, like that of the Buddha, went completely inside. Then the transformation happened.”537 Buddhism becomes in this context a pre-eminent symbolical reference of the reconciliation of the Western mind with the experiential dimension of spiritual life, as expressed by the immediate participation of man with the divine nature of Buddha, through forms of practical engagement such as meditational and visionary techniques, to which the nature of Jung’s experiment comes close. For similar reasons, alongside Eastern sources, he later turns to the esoteric traditions of the West and the work of those visionaries that, according to his view, embraced analogous experiences. Yet already in the *Black Books*, the *Commedia* provides an excellent example in this direction, by recounting the story of a deification (Dante’s reconciliation with Beatrice), in direct relation to the mystical imagination of the Middle Ages. In these terms, Pascoli even refers to Dante as a Buddha of the West, a “Shakya-muni of the Western world”, both arising from misery, “one to

536 Ibid., p. 250, n195.
537 Ibid., n196.
disappear in the Nirvana, the other to merge in the wondrous whirlpool” (Paradiso, XXX, 68), in order to preach love and happiness.538

The Christmas background of Jung’s material gives to the entire scene a tone of advent. It shows a ritualistic connotation that, be it literally intended or not, opens up a line of comparison with the Christian symbolic background of the Commedia, fictionally occurring during the Holy Week of 1300. Yet the initiation ritual juxtaposes the image of Christ with the tradition of Mithraic liturgies. Jung in fact refers to the “Mysterium” in the 1925 seminar by highlighting that “All this is Mithraic symbolism from beginning to end.”539 Already by the time of the first appearance of Transformations and Symbols of the Libido, he has read highly relevant related texts such as Dieterich’s Mithras Liturgy (1910) and Franz Cumont’s Texts, Monuments, and Figures Related to the Mysteries of Mithra (1896–1899) and The Mysteries of Mithra (1911).

Mithraism was a Roman mystery religion inspired by the worship of the Zoroastrian god Mithra (from modern Persian “mihr”, meaning “love” and “sun”), that formed through a long and complex syncretic process between Iranian and Hellenistic cultures.540 It became especially popular among Roman military in the early centuries of the Empire, soon suffering persecution and suppression from the Christians. The worshippers of Mithras organised themselves around a complex system of seven grades of initiation. They distinctively practiced the mysteries in underground temples or caves called “mithraea”, a sacred microcosm in which rituals were performed. The main ceremony was the “vision of the deity” or “union with the godhead”, a deification process that, as Manfred Clauss points out, could only be fulfilled with


“a particular state of mind.”541 The narrative of the mystery culminated in the celebrated “bull-slaying” scene. The killing of the bull had evidently “nothing to do with slaughter or destruction”, but with “psychic transfiguration and transformation.”542 Mithraism fascinates Jung particularly during this decade, to such an extent that he famously suggested Freud, on August 31, 1910, to adopt a Mithraic fragment as a “motto of psychoanalysis” (“Give what thou hast, then shalt thou receive.”)543 Historically, Jung argues, Mithraism broadly represented Christianity’s “sister-religion” and its “most successful” antagonist.544 This common view, according to Clauss, exaggerates the missionary zeal (“itself a Christian idea”) of the mystery cult: “None of them aimed to become the sole legitimate religion of the Roman empire. The alternative ‘Mithras or Christ?’ is wrongly framed.”545 Nevertheless, the Swiss thinker emphasises the role of the Mithraic tradition as a central forgotten piece of Western spirituality. And what is more, in one of the ETH lectures, in June 1935, he discusses the Mithraic mysteries in relation to Dante’s Purgatorio. In that context, he compares Dante’s multiple “sun visions” in Purgatorio (“so brilliant” that they hurt the poet’s eyes) to the allegedly Mithraic liturgy translated by Dieterich. He interprets these visions along similar lines of his experiences in Liber Novus, in terms of a “technique by which to induce visions” or “a method of active phantasying.”546 A little later, on June 28, 1935, he compares, once again, the fire and light symbolism that characterise both Dante’s purgatorial visions and the Mithraic liturgy to a profound exercise of meditation on the diaphragm region, the Manipura centre.547 Dante’s sun

541 Clauss, 1990, p. 15.
542 Ibid., p. 79.
547 Ibid., p. 231.
visions incessantly occur through *Purgatorio*, starting from the first footsteps into the new realm, where the poet meets Cato Uticensis, guardian of Purgatory, accompanied by the vision of the “holy four-starred light”:

> Li raggi de le quattro luci sante  
> fregiavan sí la sua faccia di lume,  
> ch’i’ l vedea come ’l sol fosse davante.\(^{548}\)

Fascinatingly, Jung’s copy of the *Commedia* presents several annotations right by passages that refer to Dante’s solar visions. Particularly next to *Inferno*, XXXIV, 105, but also close to the just mentioned tercet (*Purgatorio*, I, 37-39) and the following Canto:

> Già era ’l sole a l’orizzonte giunto  
> lo cui meridîan cerchio coverchia  
> Ierusalèm col suo piú alto punto;  
> [...]  
> Ed ecco, qual, sorpreso dal mattino,  
> per li grossi vapor Marte rosseggia  
> giù nel ponente sovra ’l suol marino,  
> cotal m’apparve, s’io ancor lo veggia,  
> un lume per lo mar venir sí ratto,

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che 'l muover suo nessun volor pareggia.\textsuperscript{549}

It is difficult to establish with certainty the exact chronology of these annotations. Dunbar's \textit{Symbolism in Medieval Thought and Its Consummation in the Divine Comedy}, which he necessarily reads after 1929, contains large sections on the esoteric significance of the sun (and quaternity) in Dante and may have affected his interest in the matter in the early 30s. Nevertheless, it is most likely that, together with the rest of the material that Jung draws from Dante, this symbolical element is also taken from the earliest reading of the \textit{Commedia} that accompanies the \textit{Black Books}. In the clear Mithraic symbolism of the “Mysterium”, these aspects find their most immediate enactment, following some of the most characteristic traits of Mithraic initiation rituals. The most important of them have been highlighted in the 1925 seminar, such as the esoteric role of the snake, the Mithraic origin of Christmas (in which the followers of Mithras celebrated the \textit{Sol invictus}, or resurrection of the sun), and the feeling of his face being turned, at the apotheosis of the initiation, into a lion, closely following the model of the “Deus Leontocephalus” (“lion-headed god”).\textsuperscript{550} Other correspondences should also be taken into account. For example, the motif of the “\textit{theós ek petras}”, namely the “birth of the god from the stone” (or “from the heath of libido”), which later finds place in several of Jung’s scientific works.\textsuperscript{551} Or an intriguing parallelism between the ascensions of Elijah and Mithras, already appearing in the 1911-1912 version of \textit{Transformations and Symbols of the Libido}.\textsuperscript{552}

\textsuperscript{549} Dante, \textit{Purgatorio}, II, 1-3, 13-18; 1987, pp. 400-401. “Already the sun had reached the horizon / Of which the meridian circle, at its highest / Point, passes directly. [...] And there as, at the approach of morning, / Through the close-gathered mists Mars glows deep red, / Down in the west, above the level sea, / So appeared to me—may it not be the last time— / A light coming over the sea so swiftly / That its motion was faster than any flight;”

\textsuperscript{550} Jung, 2012 (1925), pp. 106-113.


\textsuperscript{552} Jung, WSL, p. 112, n52.
Against this background, the Mithraic elements that the “Mysterium” most forcefully brings forth are the reconciliation with animality (winning back the alienation of man from the realm of the instincts) and the research for a spiritual practice. The ritual closely resembles the burial of a previous identity leading to the birth of a new consciousness. Eliade explains initiation as “a break in the homogeneity” of time and space that paves the way to the experience of the “sacred”. This experience is equivalent to “a basic change in existential condition; the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation; he has become another.” It is, in Clauss’s words, “a revolutionary cosmic deed.” This act of deification implies what Jung describes elsewhere as a feeling of “godlikeness” which leads to a temporary identification with the collective psyche. For Jung, the central psychological law of initiation is the sacrifice or killing of the ego, towards a rising renewal of consciousness. The variety of stages and occurrences of the rituals convey the refinement of this process through an increasing detachment from the idea itself of ego.

According to Eliade, this transformation process constitutes the common thread not only of Mithraic liturgies, but also of the visions of Apuleius, the rituals revealed in the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Dionysian and Orphic traditions, and the practices diffused amongst the Fedeli d’Amore. A similar phenomenon of self-regeneration is described by the Vita Nova, through symbols of thresholds between death and “new life”, and by the stages that accompany Dante’s journey throughout the Commedia. The originality of Jung’s perspective in Liber Novus is that this tradition of esoteric rituals is now linked to its psychic phenomenology. The Roman soldiers went to the mithraeum, the underground caves, to take part in the initiations. In Jung’s experiment, this cave becomes by all means an internal event, according to a Swedenborgian law of correspondences between outer and inner realms. Thus he claims, while examining

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555 Clauss, 1990, p. 82.
further the significance of the deification process, that what happens at a deep psychological level in the initiation is that “you make yourself into the vessel, and are a vessel of creation in which the opposites reconcile.”

3.2.2. The Symbol of the Reversed Cones

The “vessel”, one reads in the *Liber Novus*, is a place of regeneration that resides at the highest summit of a mountain and “collects the light of the sun.” Precisely like in Dante’s Purgatory, the mountain has been formed by the enlargement of a crater in the underworld growing towards heavenly heights. The air is “clear and cool as in the remotest heights, a wonderful flood of sunlight all around, the great wall surrounds me.” Suddenly “the walls enlarge into a huge mountain and I see that I am below on the foundation of the crater in the underworld, and I stand before the house of the prophet.” The sequence aptly illustrates the motif of the reconciliation of the opposites through the specular images of the crater and the mountain. Against the background of Dante’s *Purgatorio*, the vision appears informed by Dante’s correspondences between lower and upper worlds. Commenting on this vision in the 1925 seminar, Jung makes this reference explicit:

> There was a real conflict in me, a resistance to going down. My stronger tendency was to go up. Because I had been so impressed the day before with the cruelty of the place I had seen, I really had a tendency to find a way to the conscious by going up, as I did on the mountain . . . Elijah said that it was just the same below or above. Compare Dante’s *Inferno*. The Gnostics express this same idea in the symbol of the reversed cones. Thus the mountain and the crater are similar. There was nothing of conscious structure in these

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558 Jung, LN, p. 251.
559 Ibid., pp. 251-252.
fantasies, they were just events that happened. So I assume that Dante got his ideas from the same archetypes.\textsuperscript{160}

\textbf{Fig. 29.} Ruth Gesser, 2011, \textit{The Architecture of Hell} and \textit{The Architecture of Purgatory}.

\textsuperscript{160}Jung, 2012 (1925), p. 105.
William McGuire, in his notes on the 1925 seminar, adds that Jung would be referring here to Dante’s structural analogies between the circles of Hell and the spheres of Heaven. More precisely, however, Jung’s visual construction resembles the Dantesque correspondence

\[\text{Ibidem.}\]
between the conical abyss of the underworld and the mountain of Purgatory, caused by
Lucifer’s fall to the bowels of the earth. In passing, it should be noted that the idea that
Dante’s work contains remarkable analogies with the Gnostics is not only a prerogative of the
symbolist hermeneutics. Even Curtius notices in Dante constructions “manifestly related to
Gnosticism”, which “must be pointed out.”

The descent into the crater is a rich psychological motif in Jung’s works. It is variously
associated with the spatial symbolism of caverns, caves, grottoes, pits, dens, sanctuaries,
catacombs, cathedrals, graves, dark galleries, and all sorts of inner, hidden, or subterranean
spaces that symbolise the act of re-entering the womb of primordial life. He primarily
interprets it in terms of the incubation of a mental rebirth by analogy with the return of the
hero to the maternal vessel. Similarly, in Mithraic and Eleusinian rituals, the physical act of
descending into the dark cave entails the beginning of psychic self-transformation. In De antro
nympharum, the Greek Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry examines the hidden significance of
ancient representations of caves and caverns, by drawing on the Homeric description of the
cave of the Nymphs in Ithaca, appearing in the thirteenth book of the Odyssey:

“High at the head a branching olive grows
And crowns the pointed cliffs with shady boughs.
A cavern pleasant, though involved in night,
Beneath it lies, the Naiades’ delight:
Where bowls and urns of workmanship divine
And massy beams in native marble shine;
On which the Nymphs amazing webs display,
Of purple hue and exquisite array.
The busy bees within the urn secure


Honey delicious, and like nectar pure.
Perpetual waters through the grotto glide,
A lofty gate unfolds on either side;
That to the north is pervious to mankind:
The sacred south t’immortals is consign’d."

Porphyry’s view, which is the object of Jung’s interests in Transforms and Symbols of the Libido, suggests that the real purpose of the Homeric narration does not reside in a historical exposition or a poetic fiction for procuring delight. Differently, the ancients made of the cavern, not only a mirror of the sensible nature of the world, but a properly consecrated symbol of all invisible and occult powers. Thus Porphyry fascinatingly aligns with related aspects of modern psychological research, in which descending into the cavern conjures up the idea of going to the roots of one’s beginnings. Analogously, in the Commedia the bowels of the earth represent the microcosm of individuality. The crater exemplifies the first level along the journey of death and rebirth, in which man experiences a chthonic reunification with matter, whilst coming to grips with the darker recesses of the psyche. At the same time, as Jung’s material reveals, craters and caves epitomise the symbolical passage from earth to air, the purgatorial connection between the terrifying darkness of Hell and the enactment of rebirth. Even Christ’s decent into Hell before the ascension to Heaven is traditionally anticipated by his burial in a cave, where his body mysteriously disappears, when the journey to Hades begins. By observing that the symmetry of Dante’s lower and upper worlds resembles the image of Gnostic cones, Jung aligns with the symbolist reading of the Commedia. The underworld

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565 Ibid., p. 12.
566 Yeats’s use of reversed cones and diagrams in A Vision appears as well significantly informed by the specular geometry of Dante’s Commedia.
forms a triangle towards the centre of the earth, which is balanced by an equivalent triangle pointing towards the opposite direction, as sharp as the towering ridge of a mountain. Yet the closeness of this material to Dante’s imagery in December 1913 is even more subtle than what the Swiss psychologist lets us know in the 1925 seminar.

As anticipated earlier, in fact, at the end of the initiation rite Salome “kneels before the light in wonderstruck devotion” and Jung is so touched by the revelation that tears fall from his eyes. He hurries out of the darkness of night, and feels his feet leaving the ground to melt into air. It is a moment of deep transformation that significantly marks the conclusion of Liber Primus, the first of the three parts forming Liber Novus. One should recall at this point the intersection of physical and metaphysical facts that accompany the end of Dante’s Inferno, the first of the three Canticles of the Commedia. The poet, after having reached the deepest bottom of the earth, has to climb up Lucifer’s legs, hurrying out of a last night in Hell. Since Lucifer’s body is stuck there at the centre of the earth with his legs in the air, the act of climbing over the satanic figure forces Dante to turn his vision upside down, in order to be able to come out of the opposite hemisphere of the earth. The undertaking of the reversal would not be comprehensible to Dante without Virgil, who has just told him that “now is the time / We should be off, / for we have seen everything.” (Inferno, XXXIV, 68-69):

Com’ a lui piacque, il collo li avvinghiai;

ed el prese di tempo e loco poste,

e quando l’ali fuoro aperte assai,

appigliò sé a le vellute coste;

di vello in vello giù discese poscia

tra ’l folto pelo e le gelate croste.

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Jung, LN, p. 252.
Quando noi fummo là dove la coscia
si volge, a punto in sul grosso de l’anche,
lo duca, con fatica e con angoscia,
volse la testa ov’elli avea le zanche,
e aggrappossi al pel com’ om che sale,
sí che ’n inferno i’ credea tornar anche.

“Attienti ben, ché per cotali scale”,
disse ’l maestro, ansando com’ com lasso,
“convieni dipartir da tanto male”.

Poi uscí fuor per lo fóro d’un sasso
e puose me in su l’orlo a sedere;
appresso porse a me l’accorto passo.

Io levai li occhi e credetti vedere
Lucifero com’ io l’avea lasciato,
e vidili le gambe in sü tenere;

e s’io divenni allora travagliato,
la gente grossa il pensi, che non vede
qual è quel punto ch’io avea passato.

“Levati sü”, disse ’l maestro, “in piede:
la via è lunga e ’l cammino è malvagio,
Intriguingly, the whole passage appears underlined in Jung's personal copy of the *Commedia*, including a piece of paper to accompany the page. This is a further element that indicates that the Swiss thinker, while investigating the common symbolism of *Liber Novus* and the *Commedia*, draws on Dante's journey especially for the paradigmatic example of enantiodromia that the *Commedia* provides him with. As soon as Virgil communicates to the poet that they are now ready to move on, a “hole” opens through the rocky depths, letting light come in, like an invisible door into a hidden level of perception. Just as this hole grants the entrance into a new world, so Jung elaborates the image of “boring through” the crater in terms of the act of digging a mental hole in which light can come through. The symbol of a hole in the cave that permits the passage from night to day, darkness to light, below to above, and past to future, has been fascinatingly described by Chevalier and Geerbrant:

The cavern—whether symbolically or the actual home of cave-dwellers—had a hole in the middle of the roof to allow smoke to escape, light to come in and to give passage to the spirits of the dead and of the shamans. This was the ‘Sun Gate’ or ‘Cosmic Eye’ through

568 Dante, *Inferno*, XXXIV, 70–96; 1987, pp. 336–337. “As he wished, I put my arms round his neck; / And he chose his time and position with care; / And when he saw the wings were spread wide, / He caught hold of Dis’ hairy sides: / And then went down from one knot to the next, / Between the thick hair and the frozen crust. / When we were at the point where the thigh hinges, / Just where the haunch begins to widen, / My guide, with laborious effort, / Turned his head to where his legs had been, / Catching hold of the hair as if to climb, / So that I thought we were going back to hell. / ‘Hold tight, for this is where we climb up,’ / My master said, panting as if he were weary, / ‘We must do, to leave so much evil behind.’ / Then he went out through a hole in the rock; / He made me sit on the edge of it, / And then warily climbed up where I was. / I raised my eyes, and I expected to see / Lucifer just as I had left him; / I saw him with his legs uppermost; / And if I was perplexed at that moment, / Let stolid people judge, who do not see / What point it was that I had just passed. / ‘Get up’, the master said, ‘get on your feet: / The way is long and the road difficult, / And the sun is already well up in the sky.”
which ‘detachment from the cosmos’ took place. Incidentally, it should be observed that both the alchemist’s furnace and the human skull have ‘openings’ in the top, and both may be likened to the cavern. Taoist symbolic anthropology is quite explicit on this point, identifying the skull with Mount Kun-Lun, the centre of the world. There is a secret cave in which a return to the primal state occurs before detachment from the cosmos.\textsuperscript{569}

A remarkable analogy should be noted at this point. In both Jung and Dante, the transformation which occurs following their time spent in the cave corresponds with a phase of deep concentration, focusing on the inner roots of oneself. In both cases, the localisation of this centre appears connected to the symbolism of the heart and light. Jung’s later interpretation of Dante’s sun visions in terms of Manipura states confirms this. On this basis, the advancement of the journey seems also to imply a profound underlying enlargement of perspectives from matters of the intellect to matters of the heart. It is, fundamentally, an energetic process that has in the elements of light and fire its direct enactment, through a process of increasing “il-lumination”: the act of making the mind “brighter and brighter”. Fire destroys the old form and vestiges of personality. The “Remains of Earlier Temples”, to use the title of one of Jung’s sections from \textit{Liber Secundus}, yet the same fire creates a new shining form, which “following the spirit exactly” derives its essential force from “love”. It is around the means of love, in fact, that the most important, yet mysterious, aspects of Jung’s initiation in \textit{Liber Novus} take shape.

3.2.3. \textit{The Syzygy: “Forethinking” and “Pleasure”}

The appearance of Elijah and Salome heralds the union of two crucial symbolical elements of \textit{Liber Novus}: the role of “inner guidance” and the imagery of the “soul”. In the 1925 seminar,

\textsuperscript{569} Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1994 (1969), pp. 169-170. One should also recall in passing that the biblical location of Christ’s crucifixion right outside Jerusalem, beneath which Dante locates the entrance into the cavity of Hell, is the Golgotha or Calvary, in ancient Greek “Kranión”, i.e., the part of the skull enclosing the brain.

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Jung notices that “whenever you take journeys like this you find a young girl with an old man”, such as in the Gnostic legend of Simon Magus and Helen. Elijah and Salome are the first expression of a combination of linked forces that recur throughout Liber Novus, by following some key points of alignment with Dante’s representation of Virgil and Beatrice. Jung essentially envisions the couple in terms of a “syzygy”, a notion appearing in fields as far as astronomy and theology, which indicates the union of a pair of opposite poles or principles. Jung frequently draws on the term “syzygy” in his scientific works in order to illustrate the energetic transformation that occurs, at a psychic level, when two opposite forces become reconciled, thus overcoming a dualistic attitude of mind or signalling the irruption of compensatory psychic contents into consciousness. In Liber Novus, Elijah and Salome as a couple represent the union of “logos” (Elijah) and “eros” (Salome). The former defines thinking and rational insight, the latter feeling and instinctual energy. The male-female syzygetic process they describe is for Jung the most important in practice and commonest of all pairs of opposites. Namely the male-female union that alchemy depicts through the image of the “divine hermaphrodite”. They are united through a third fundamental principle, the serpent, that symbolises the introverting libido that activates the visionary process. In a serpent-like movement, the mind constantly oscillates in opposite directions. The more balance there is between the two sides, Jung argues, the more the mind flows in harmony with nature.

Accordingly, layer [2] of Liber Novus offers a detailed account of the psychological significance of Elijah and Salome as the opposite primordial principles of “forethinking” and “pleasure”:

Forethinking is not powerful in itself and therefore does not move. But pleasure is power and therefore it moves. Forethinking needs pleasure to be able to come to form. Pleasure

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571 C. G. Jung, 1936, “Concerning the Archetypes, with Special Reference to the Anima Concept” (“Uber den Archetypus mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Animabegriffes”), CW9i, §142.

needs forethinking to come to form, which it requires. [...] Pleasure is not older than forethinking, and forethinking is not older than pleasure. Both are equally old and in nature intimately one. Only in man does the separate existence of both principles become apparent.

Apart from Elijah and Salome I found the serpent as a third principle. It is a stranger to both principles although it is associated with both. The serpent taught me the unconditional difference in essence between the two principles in me. [...] The way of life writhes like the serpent from right to left and from left to right, from thinking to pleasure and from pleasure to thinking. Thus the serpent is an adversary and a symbol of enmity but also a wise bridge that connects right and left through longing, much needed by our life.573

Salome enters the scene from the left, which later on Jung interprets by saying that “Eros does not tend toward the right, the side of consciousness, conscious will and conscious choice, but toward the side of the heart”, in an uncanny union with the serpent that strikes him as magical as “the enchantment and underlining of our thought and feeling through dark instinctual impulses of an animal nature.”574 The psychic danger of the situation makes him summon the images of Eve and the serpent, together with the lengthy wanderings of Odysseus. The Greek hero, after a year spent with the sorceress Circe, is advised that, prior to returning home to Penelope, he should visit the underworld and learn how to appease the Gods. A thinker, Jung claims, should be very cautious with an enchantress such as Salome, Circe or Lilith, since they want his head, in which he hides himself in vain. The serpent appears when a discrepancy between the opposites is manifested, as both a symbol of poisonous splitting and a source of future unifying healing. Hence he points out: “What a thinker does not think he believes does not exist, and what one who feels does not feel does not exist. You begin to have

573 Jung, LN, p. 247.
a presentiment of the whole when you embrace your opposite principle, since the whole belongs to both principles, which grow from one root. Self-transformation is carried out by the embrace of the opposite principle (the “unknown”), which leads, in the language of Liber Novus, to the passing over into a new creation, the “divine son”, the inception of a new vision. As long as Salome is misjudged through the lens of the sole power of thinking, she is only seen as blind irrational desire. A treacherous messenger of disruptive forces. A maiden of Kali. Yet she still appears so, for Jung’s ‘I’ is not yet fully familiar with the art of appeasing the serpent, the switching from one side to the other of mental opposites. A sacrifice of some sort is required, that the ‘I’ becomes able to give in to the unknown, learning to let things happen in the mind, in an imperturbable manner. In Jung’s visions, this sacrifice acquires the connotation of a “sacrum facere”: the process of “making” something “sacred”. A suspension of judgment and fear towards the images generates a process of transformation that elicits the same content but from an opposite view, by turning a “profaned” or emotionally disturbing vision, into a “sacred” source of psychic energy. In Liber Novus, the novelty of this experience is announced by a precise lexical transformation. At the beginning of the “Mysterium”, the author refers to the power of the irrational mostly in terms of “blind” desire and “pleasure”. At its end, he begins to frame it in terms of “love”. A pivotal sublimation has occurred. Interestingly, in a later commentary written in the mid 20s, he points out that despite “all free thinking, our attitude to Eros [...] remains the old Christian view”, for “if we merely reject the dogmatic view, our liberation from the well-established will be merely intellectual, whereas our deeper feeling will persist on the old path. Most people, however, are unaware of how this sets them at odds with themselves.”

This view introduces a key element of the transformative process occurring in Liber Novus: the active reconciliation of sensual and spiritual elements, which in this context takes place in the symbolical association between Salome and Mary, the Virgin Mother. The

575 Ibid., p. 248.
576 Jung, LN, p. 368.
motif strongly underlies the “deification” ritual, epitomised by the images of the uncoiling of
the serpent and the novel sight of Salome. During the very same days, Jung reads the Commedia
and quotes from it at various times. In particular, he recalls the state of visionary possession of
the enamoured mind, that turns the impossible plan of a journey to the underworld into a
vision of divine bliss and love. In 1921, in Psychological Types, he interprets Dante’s journey to
Beatrice as the quintessential transformation of the object of love into a “purely psychological
factor”, the sublimation of an erotic episode into a heavenly dimension triggered by the inner
dictation of Love. In layer [2] of Liber Novus, he takes notes of a similar process, as essentially
related to the unleashing of the mystery of love:

If you go thinking, take your heart with you. If you go to love, take your head with you. [...] 
Great is he who is in love, since love is the present act of the great creator, the present
moment of the becoming and lapsing in of the world. [...] Whoever is in love is a full and
overflowing vessel, and awaits the giving. Whoever is in forethinking is deep and hollow
and awaits fulfilment.
Love and forethinking are one in the same place. [...] 
If you will one of these principles, so you are in one, but far from your being other. If you
will both principles, one and the other, then you excite the conflict between the principles,
since you cannot want both at the same time. [...] 
Love is sighted but pleasure is blind. Both principles are one in the symbol of the flame. 578

The elaboration of these ideas will inspire a few core principles of Jung’s psychological
system, to such an extent that Gilles Quispel reports that “Jung told the Dutch poet R. Horst

577 Jung, 1921, CW6, §377.
578 Jung, LN, pp. 253-254.
that he had written" *Psychologische Typen*—whose very first nucleus was conceived in 1913—on the basis of “thirty pages” from *Liber Novus*. If that was true, Shamdasani points out that these pages most likely correspond to the three sections that constitute the “Mysterium”. What has not been highlighted yet is the close hermeneutical connection that these ideas reveal with Jung’s parallel reading of Dante, at the earliest time of their conception in the *Black Books*. A connection which this study identifies in two directions: Elijah (or Logos) that “sees” and Salome (or Eros) that “moves” or “sends on”.


581 Ibidem.
3.3. The Guide and the Soul

3.3.1. The Psychopomp: Dante’s Virgil and Jung’s Philemon

In Jung’s visions, the function of Elijah as “guide” or “master” anticipates in many respects the paramount role of Philemon. On January 26, 1924, Cary Baynes notes down this observation, following some previous discussions with Jung concerning Liber Novus: “There were various figures speaking, Elias, Father Philemon, etc. but all appeared to be phases of what you thought ought to be called ‘the master’.”\(^{582}\) Many years later, on June 7, 1955, he will write to Alice Raphael: “when I first encountered the archetype of the old wise man, he called himself Philemon.”\(^{583}\) Indeed, Philemon is first introduced in Liber Novus in Greek symbols, ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ, the “loving one”, with a name that bears the old Greek etymon philéin (“to love”) and phílēma (“kiss”). First appearing on January 27, 1914, approximately a month after the “Mysterium”, he is the magician of Liber Novus, encapsulating superior knowledge, wisdom, and insight. His paramount importance for Jung is such that he will famously carve a hidden Latin inscription in the Bollingen tower, reading Philemon sacrum Fausti poenitentia (“Philemon’s Sanctuary, Faust’s Repentance”). Analogies between Philemon and Nietzsche’s Zarathustra have been examined in depth by Gaia Domenici in Jung’s Nietzsche. Instead, what matters most for the present discussion is that Philemon’s role, as anticipated earlier, presents also remarkable analogies with Dante’s Virgil: just as Dante acknowledges Virgil in the first place as “lo mio maestro e ’l mio autore” (“my master, and indeed my author”, Inferno, I, 85), so Jung understands Philemon to be the master of the visions. And just as Virgil places Dante into “le segrete cose” (the “secret things”, Inferno, III, 21), so Philemon initiates the apprentice Jung into the “hidden things” of magic.

\(^{582}\) Cary Baynes, in Shamdasani, 2009, p. 213.

\(^{583}\) Beinecke Library, Yale University. Quoted in Jung, LN, p. 312, n.264.
Fig. 30. LN, Philemon.
Fig. 31. William Blake, 1824-1827, The mission of Virgil.
There are at least three main senses in which Dante’s Virgil can be considered a significant reference for Philemon. These are: the multiform function (1) of the “psychopomp”, in terms of guidance throughout the descent, but also and especially of intercession with the dead; (2) the pagan coloration that characterise both Virgil and Philemon, thus opening up a point of discussion concerning the relationship between the Christian and the ancient world; (3) the pivotal relationship of the psychopomp or “mana personality” with the feminine. Which, if largely absent in Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, at least according to Jung’s view, shapes instead at the very core the role of Virgil in the Commedia, whom is sent out by Beatrice to rescue the poet. In order to properly scrutinise the intertwined development of these three elements, one has to go back to the exact point in which Dante encounters Virgil for the first time in the Commedia. That is, in the middle of a desert. Curtius writes that the entire conception of the Commedia is based on Dante’s “spiritual meeting” with Virgil. In the realm of European literature, he adds, “there is little which can be compared with this phenomenon. [...] The tradition of the European spirit knows no situation of such affecting loftiness, tenderness, fruitfulness.”

This encounter occurs right at the beginning of the journey, when the poet finds himself in a state of utter bewilderment, in a waste land surrounded by wild starving animals. In that state of complete mental desolation, only insofar as Dante “looks up”, he becomes able to spot Virgil, the guide, appearing on the horizon to indicate an alternative path to take. On the basis of this touching encounter, Virgil assumes the function of making Dante “look up” and “see”, that is, he increasingly clears the poet’s vision out of the darkness in which he got lost. In 1952, in Symbols of Transformation, Jung significantly adds a passage to the original edition of Transformations and Symbols of the Libido describing the successful undertaking of journeys into the “underworld” (or “unconscious”) in terms of descents with eyes “wide open”, by contrast with the condition of those who, in the same context, walk with “eyes shut” into certain failure: “No one should deny the danger of the descent, but it can be risked. No

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one need risk it, but it is certain that someone will. And let those who go down the sunset way do so with open eyes, for it is a sacrifice which daunts even the Gods.” The image of a dangerous descent into darkness with “open eyes” is particularly suggestive. It evokes the state of mystical sight, if one thinks that the Greek etymological root of “mysticism”, i.e., *muo*, can be interpreted as the act of “shutting the eyes”, venturing beneath the surface of the visible world. This condition comes close to a meditational gaze, in which the subject, half-way between a walking (“open eyes”) and sleep state (“shut eyes”), becomes able to open the “inner eye”, corresponding to a precise point of visualisation that requires the meditator to inwardly “look up” at the centre of the mind. By following on through this analogy, the master Virgil helps Dante to acquire new sight into the invisible, like Elijah and Philemon do with Jung’s ‘I’. In both cases the initial guidance of the “master” is imperative, only to become less unavoidable with the growing independence of the disciple, a process of separation occurring through long and difficult stages. Virgil is Dante’s “loving” father. He allows the son to move out of Hell, and avoid being sucked down by the shadows of the dead. He intercedes for the poet between sensory and spiritual perceptions, as well as between chthonic and purgatorial realms. Most importantly, he is the intermediary for Beatrice, the supreme vessel of Dante’s transformative epiphany. “If Dante had been sent forth alone, without his *dolce padre*, without Virgil”, Mandelstam notices, “scandal would have inevitably erupted at the very start, and we would have had the most grotesque buffoonery rather than a journey amongst the torments and sights of the underworld!” The psychopomp is the instructor of the demons, the deity that permits the connection and transgression of thresholds and boundaries “as above, so below”. Since the ancestral association of this figure with Hermes, their distinctive characteristic is to escort the souls in their journey to the underworld. This symbol entails the image of someone who, on the basis of knowledge and previous first-hand experience of similar

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58: Jung, 1952, CW5, §553.

journeys, becomes the wiser, older, and braver guide of the hero into deeper, unknown, and often terrifying recesses of the mind. The image of the psychopomp largely occupies Jung in his writings, by later taking shape in one of the most notorious of the archetypes: the “old wise man” or “mana personality”. More closely to the context and language of *Liber Novus*, the 1925 seminar offers the following description of the psychopomp:

He is the man with prestige, the man with a low threshold of consciousness or with remarkable intuition. In higher society he would be the wise man; compare Lao-tse. He has the ability to get into touch with archetypes. He will be surrounded with mana, and will arouse other men because he touches the archetypes in others. He is fascinating and has a thrill about him. He is the wise man, the medicine man, the mana man.

Later on in evolution, this wise man becomes a spiritual image, a god, “the old one from the mountains” (compare Moses coming down from the mountain as lawgiver), the sorcerer of the tribe. [...] The same archetype reappears in Goethe as Faust and as Zarathustra in Nietzsche, where Zarathustra came as a visitation.587

“Mana” denotes, according to Eliade, a healing relationship with the sacred:

That mysterious but active power which belongs to certain people, and generally to the souls of the dead and all spirits. [...] But men and things only possess *mana* because they have received it from higher beings, or, in other words, because and in so far as they have a mystical sharing of life with the sacred. [...] Everything that is supremely, possesses *mana*; everything, in fact, that seems to man effective, dynamic, creative or perfect.”588

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From this perspective, Virgil represents Dante’s psychopomp, as explicitly observed by Jung in 1911. Yet he plays that role according to some specific traits that stimulate a few important points of confrontation with Liber Novus. In the first place, Virgil is historically the author of the Aeneid, the book that narrates the story of Aeneas, the Trojan hero and legendary ancestor of the Romans, including, among many other events, his Odyssean descent to the underworld. It is in relation to this fact that Virgil famously crafts the sibylline words “Facilis descensus Averno, / nocte atque die patet atri ianua Ditis. / Sed revocare grade superasque euadere ad auras; / hoc opus, hic labor est.” (“Easy is the descent to Avernus: / night and day the door of gloomy Dis stands open; / but to recall thy steps and pass out to the upper air, / this is the task, this the toil!”),590 which will be used by Jung as the motto for the second part of Psychology and Alchemy. Not only do these lines aptly summarise Virgil’s classical interpretation of the katabasis motif, but they also highlight a crucial aspect of Dante’s fundamental reception of the model of the Aeneid in the Commedia. It should be recalled in fact that it is the Virgilian journey to the underworld, and not the Homeric, which exerts a direct influence upon the Commedia.591 Virgil is not simply Dante’s “guide”. He is rather acknowledged as the “only” source of his visionary genius: “tu se’ solo colui da cu’ io tolsi / lo bello stilo che m’ha fatto onore.” (“It is from you alone that I have taken / The exact style for which I have been honoured”, Inferno, I, 86-87). For Dante, in fact, Virgil carries out the essential function of connecting the tasks of “descendere” (“descending to”) and “revocare” (“returning from”) the underworld, approaching those opposite psychic movements that trigger and balance the energy of the journey to “lower” and “upper” worlds. Thus Virgil’s wisdom and capacity to “see” establish a multiform point of conjunction between the past of Dante’s journey (i.e., the condition of mental obscurcation that led him into the forest) and the future (i.e., the deep

589 Jung, WSL, p. 78, n3.


process of mental purification that will conduct the poet to his reconciliation with Beatrice). So he reveals to Dante from the very start that this journey of transformation cannot but occur first of all by spending some necessary and very difficult time in Hell. Symbolically, this fact implies that the individual psychically melts within a receptacle of roaring Luciferian energy. The direction of this process points straight to the centre of the earth, thus indicating the forceful reconciliation of man with the chthonic side of life, recalling nature, animality, and primordial instinctual forces. So Dante’s Virgil leads his pupil to the deepest point of the earth, before being able to move on to the upper air. There is no possible advancement, without the connection between earth and air that Dante ultimately apprehends by following Virgil up to the holy mount of Purgatorio.

In light of this, if Jung’s Philemon shows in *Liber Novus* a remarkable closeness to Dante’s Virgil and Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, Virgil’s distinctive capacity to mediate between lower and upper worlds establishes the first noticeable difference between the Dantesque and the Nietzschean reference. The Zarathustra seminar contains some of Jung’s most extensive reflections on the motif of the “wise old man” (“he who knows what is to be done (in a difficult situation) and understands how to perform the magical rite.”) But the seminar also examines in depth the problematic aspects of Nietzsche’s conception of the “master” or “guru”. This consists of the fact that, in the mind of his creator and disciple, Zarathustra ends up belonging exclusively to the realm of upper air, with no ground beneath his feet. In other words, Jung argues, Nietzsche lifts up the image of the wise Zarathustra in an overly intellectual and idealised place, dramatically losing connection with everything earthly in his life: sensation, feelings, sexuality. Thus he becomes possessed by a power fantasy that he cannot fulfil. He begins to follow up this superhuman model thoroughly in the realm of thoughts (the “great wind” of Zarathustra), by sacrificing step by step his earthly side. Finally, he ends up identifying

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with this idealisation, activating in this way, at least according to Jung, a mechanism of “inflation”, otherwise summarised in psychological terms in the following manner:

An extension of the personality beyond individual limits, in other words, a state of being puffed up. In such a state a man fills a space which normally he cannot fill. He can only fill it by appropriating to himself contents and qualities which properly exist for themselves alone and should therefore remain outside our bounds.593

The self-inflating process resembles the feeling of being at the top of a mountain, in defiance of the humility and training that this task would entail. The inevitable psychological effect results, sooner or later, in a sense of extreme unexpected dizziness that causes one to fall from the imaginary peak. Nothing that is conceived to be too “high” does not just as well have too a “low” counterpoint somewhere. Differently, Dante’s journey with Virgil entails the opposite method of climbing. That of someone who begins to ascend the mountain of Purgatorio, not before his precious guidance has led him to explore the very foundations of this mountain (in fact, an abyss shaped like a reversed mountain), to its deepest degree. The Dantesque reference, therefore, introduces for Jung a significant difference of perspectives in comparison with Nietzsche’s Zarathustra. One escapes the earth to live purely in the air, at the risk of falling off to the earth again, due to the impossibility of the project. The other plunges into the earth and precisely by doing so finds an essential springboard to elevate themselves towards the heights of the sky. Even though the Zarathustra seminar notably takes place after Liber Novus, one can safely observe how the question of anchoring the spiritual “guidance” to the chthonic part, a motif of Dantean echoes, occupies an important place in Jung’s visions.

In the “Mysterium” scenario, the house of the prophet Elijah stretches along a point of intersection between a mountain and the foundation of a crater. The ancient hermetic

aphorism “as above, so below” accompanies Liber Novus as a mantra, having also the magic effect, among others, to protect Jung’s ‘I’ from the risk of being trapped in either dangerous side: the “above” of self-inflation and the “below” of a hellish self-destruction. Therefore Elijah’s house, the temple of the sun, is as firmly embedded within the foundations of the earth, as standing high above in the sky, with the shape of a rocky ridge that collects the light of the sun. Furthermore, the psychopomp is presented from the start as part of a syzygy, distinctively transmitting the characteristic of balance between masculine and feminine energies. It is in fact not only Salome that acquires novel spiritual sight from “above”, but at the same time and in equal measure the prophet Elijah that gains sensual strength, passion, and love, from “below”. This is repeated to an even deeper extent when Jung introduces the “loving” Philemon together with his beloved companion, by affirming that “the magician is called ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ and his wife ΒΑΥΚΙΣ.”

During their first encounter, old Philemon could not appear to Jung’s ‘I’ in a simpler manner. Not a trace of vanity or concealment of occulted powers accompany his figure. Not the palest note of dissatisfaction about his condition. Only a loving harmony with nature characterises the kindness of his humble gestures. He appears not interested in meeting strangers, visitors of any sort, and even less people seeking after the secrets of magic. But there is no resentment or grievance about this solitude. The ‘I’ discovers that the master lives in a place he would have never expected, a house in the countryside, “fronted by a large bed of tulips.” In a bucolic scene, with something of the atmosphere of Virgil’s Eclogues, Philemon works in his garden, whispering spells to the flowers and the fruits of the earth, like an old pagan man. Baucis calmly observes the work of her husband, as she has probably been doing “a thousand times” before, “somewhat more infirm every time” and “feeblter.” The delicate image of this experience becoming “weaker” each time makes shine

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594 Ibid., p. 314.
595 Ibid., p. 312.
596 Ibidem.
even more, against the fading of past memories, the living impression that the couple has been together since ever.\footnote{For the genealogy of Philemon and Baucis in Jung, see Jung, LN, p. 312, n264.} They represent from the outset an elevated version of the triptych that Jung's 'I' establishes with Elijah and Salome. In the \textit{Vita Nova}, something similar occurs.

Dante's "erotic pneumophantasmology", as Ioan Petru Culianu called it, causes us to enter into "a mysterious realm that our rudiments of medieval psychology are inadequate to explain."\footnote{Ioan Petru Culianu, 1987 (1984), \textit{Eros and Magic in the Renaissance} (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), pp. 22-23.} The narrator Dante faces the profound psychic enlargement of his personal vision into a polyphony of the mind, later to become a distinctive trait of the whole plan of the \textit{Commedia}. In the \textit{Vita Nova}, this amplification occurs on the one hand via the transformation of Beatrice into the inner image of love and on the other hand through the dramatic encounter of the protagonist with the "Lord of Love", or "Dictator of Love". This figure gives Dante's 'I' the commanding imperative to faithfully write down everything about his dreams and visions, by embracing the task of becoming a "poet of love". The "Dictator of Love" reveals himself to Dante's 'I' by conveying a radical shift of perspective: "I am like the centre of a circle equidistant from all points on the circumference, but you are not."\footnote{Dante, VN, XII, p. 16.} Following this point of reversal, the "Lord of Love", whose role Corbin compares to that of Zarathustra, the prophet of the "Lord of love", in Iranian Sufism,\footnote{Corbin, 1998 (1955-1956), p. 101.} appears to Dante in a vision and warns him with powerful words (this time in Italian): "I want you to write a poem in which you mention the power I have over you through her, and the fact that ever since you were a boy you have belonged to her." ("Voglio che tu dichi certe parole per rima, ne le quali tu comprendi la forza che io tegno sopra te per lei, e come tu fosti suo tostamente da la tua perizia.")\footnote{Dante, VN, XII, p. 17.} Therefore, the poet scribe, in the manner of the visionary who must learn how to translate the language of
the Gods, begins to write in a state of frenzy, to ease his mind and worship Beatrice in “the
temple of the heart.” Seized by the fire of poetic composition, he feels his tongue composing
poetry “by moving almost of its own accord”, 602 recalling the prophetic “My tongue *is* the pen
of a ready writer”, appearing in Psalms (45:1). 603 The flaming creative urgency that finds place in
the *Vita Nova* provides the background for the lines from *Purgatorio* that Jung records in the
*Black Books*. Later, the twofold function of poetic composition, the “dictation” and the
“enactment” of love, or, in other words, the tasks of “seeing” (or “understanding”) and that of
“living” (or “transforming”) the journey, reach their superior spiritual realisation in the
*Commedia*, through the two principal characters that accompany Dante’s experiences: Virgil,
the guidance, and Beatrice, the keeper of the “temple of the heart.” The interaction of these
functions with the protagonist stresses more than one point of comparison with the visions of
the syzygy in *Liber Novus*. Let us make a step further into Philemon and Baucis’s house:

I stand at the garden gate. They have not noticed the stranger. “ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ, old magician,
how are you?” I call out to him. He does not hear me, seeming to be stone-deaf. I follow
him and take his arm. He turns and greets me awkwardly and trembling. He has a white
beard and thin white hair and a wrinkled face and there appears to be something about this
face. His eyes are gray and old and something in them is strange, one would like to say
alive. “I am well, stranger,” he says, “but what are you doing here?” 604

Jung’s ‘I’ replies to Philemon that he has come to learn the “black art” of magic, given
that no books or professors “know anything more” in that field. The old man is puzzled by the
incomprehensible request of his visitor and frankly tells him that “there is nothing to tell”
about magic, even less to teach or to learn about it. He only admits that, in the past, he

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602 Ibid., XIX, p. 29.
604 Jung, LN, p. 312.
happened to have helped “people here and there who have been sick and disadvantaged.”  If something like “magic” really exists, it happens by itself and there is really nothing that the human mind can add to it, if not by “letting it happen.” Hence, any request of instruction about it is inappropriate, for the “secret” of magic, if a “secret” at all, is already manifested in the natural state of things. However, despite Philemon’s evident reluctancy to say any more, the ‘I’ insists and would like to hear something else. A path to follow, a rule to learn, a power to use, a model to imitate. “Comical fellow, how stubborn you are!”, Philemon exclaims in direct response to that. What follows is a long enigmatic discussion between the two figures about the nature of magical operations, forming a pivotal section of Liber Novus: “The Magician” (“Der Zauberer”). To begin with, the old man says that there is nothing to say about “magic”, for it is a practice, not an abstraction. Secondly, Philemon argues, it essentially operates through “sympathy”, a word which, however “ambiguous” may be felt by the ‘I’ at first glance, contains in its ancient Greek etymon the root of “compassion”, that is, the act of “feeling together” (in Latin, “cum-passio”, to “suffer” or to “feel with”). Furthermore, magic accords with what one cannot understand. Hence “magic” is not reason, but it is not either the contrary of reason, for it is beyond the contraries of “reason” and “non-reason”. Philemon’s discourse proceeds towards a progressive aporia of the mind. “Magic”, he continues, “happens to be precisely everything that eludes comprehension.” It is awakened by the suspension of judgement towards oneself and others. It is unleashed by the absence of judgment towards life. It is exactly as difficult to practice as it is to give up rational prejudices. It is not a purpose, an award, a form of power, nor is it, above all, a source of philosophical or religious solace. It is the “mind in action” that escapes any criteria of fixation. The ‘I’ finally gets irritated by Philemon’s yarn and protests that he feels terribly stupid, for he can no longer make sense of

605 Ibidem.
606 Ibid., p. 313.
607 Ibid., p. 312.
608 Ibid., p. 313.
his words. The magician smilingly suggests that perhaps “stupidity” is “progress on the way to magic”\textsuperscript{609} and it is certainly more useful in that regard than intelligence and knowledge. When Jung's ‘I’ gives up, for a single moment, his yearning for power and intellectual understanding, Philemon finally sees that the poor candidate may actually have some sort of good aptitude for (un)learning “magic”. The beneficial force of its manifestation, Philemon concludes, “doesn’t exactly meet the eye”,\textsuperscript{610} yet it is an invisible living force, neither occulted nor metaphysical, which is directly enacted when one attunes oneself with its awakening action. Ultimately, although for the whole conversation Jung and Philemon refer to the presence of this force with the word “magic”, one may guess that what they are really speaking of is “love”.

According to what is reported about Philemon in the pages of \textit{Memories}, the magician is described by Jung as a development of the “Elijah figure” and a “pagan” who “brought with him an Egypto-Hellenistic atmosphere with a Gnostic coloration.”\textsuperscript{611} He appears in a dream with a kingfisher which he cannot fully understand, which drives him to paint the dream-image in order to impress it upon his memories. In the following days, precisely when he is occupied with the painting, he reports to find a dead kingfisher in his garden, by the lake shore of Zürich.\textsuperscript{612} He connects the event to the magical appearance of Philemon. He conceives this psychic phenomenon as the “crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life.”\textsuperscript{613} He points out:

\begin{quote}
Philemon represented a force which was not myself. In my fantasies I held conversations with him, and he said things which I had not consciously thought. For I observed clearly that it was he who spoke, not I. He said I treated thoughts as if I generated them myself,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{609} \textit{Ibidem}.
\textsuperscript{610} Ibid., p. 314.
\textsuperscript{611} Jung, ETG, p. 186. (Tr. by R. and C. Winston).
\textsuperscript{612} \textit{Ibidem}.
\textsuperscript{613} \textit{Ibidem}.
but in his view thoughts were like animals in the forest, or people in a room, or birds in the air, and added, “If you should see people in a room, you would not think that you had made those people, or that you were responsible for them.” It was he who taught me psychic objectivity, the reality of the psyche. Through him the distinction was clarified between myself and the object of my thought. He confronted me in an objective manner, and I understood that there is something in me which can say things that I do not know and do not intend, things which may even be directed against me.\(^{614}\)

Psychologically, Philemon is interpreted as “superior insight”, embodied in his “mysterious” and “quite real” personality, similar to what “the Indians call the guru” and the ancients “psychopomp”.\(^{615}\) In the *Commedia* and *Liber Novus*, Virgil and Philemon are more experienced “seers” and “sorcerers” who instruct their pupils on a special type of vision (inner vision) with which they were acquainted long before. Both Virgil and Philemon (and Elijah), in fact, teach their disciples to learn how to properly “see”, with particular insistence on analogies and images related to the capacities of “observing”, “contemplating”, “gazing”, “looking in depth”, “penetrating”, “visualising”, “seeing within”. Whenever the authors do not look where they should, the guide advises them to take a better look or look in another direction. One should only think of the number of occasions in which Virgil reproaches Dante, for instance, by saying “Drizza la testa, drizza, e vedi” (“Hold up your head now, hold it up and see”, *Inferno*, XX, 31) or “Guarda, guarda!” (“Look out there, look out!”, *Inferno*, XXI, 23). After all, Dante’s journey begins with the act of raising his head and looking up, to end with the sublime act of gazing into the heavenly rose. The process of vision-awakening corresponds to the awakening of the visionary mind. Throughout this paramount transformation, the protagonist’s clouded vision is cleansed by the clarity of Virgil’s mind, whilst slowly, yet increasingly, moving on to an ever stronger disposition to see with “new eyes”, independently of the guide’s presence. A good

\(^{614}\) Ibid., pp. 186-187.

\(^{615}\) Ibid., p. 187.
example of this evolving motif appears at the exact half of the *Commedia* (the fiftieth Canto of one hundred in total, *Purgatorio*, XVI, the terrace of wrath). Literally surrounded by a blinding smoke, the pilgrim cannot see ahead. Thus he is forced to remain as close as possible to Virgil (who, on the contrary, can see in the dark), “come cieco va dietro a sua guida / per non smarrirsi” (“Just as a blind man goes behind his guide, / Not to lose his way”, *Purgatorio*, XVI, 10-11), by using the very same verb, “smarrirsi” (“losing the way”), that he adopted to describe the condition of bewilderment in the dark forest (*Inferno*, I, 3). In such a daunting context, as soon as Dante regains his sight, by succeeding at advancing through the dense cloud of smoke, for a clear process of counterbalancing forces, he fortifies his vision to a new and most notable extent, which allows him to venture into the second half of the journey, ever less reliant on Virgil’s help:

Ricorditi, lettor, se mai ne l’alpe
ti colse nebbia per la qual vedessi
non altrimenti che per pelle talpe,

come, quando i vapori umidi e spessi
a diradar cominciansi, la spera
del sol debilmente entra per essi;

e fia la tua imagine leggera
in giugnere a veder com’io rividi
Whenever Dante acquires new sight or switches over to a condition of mental brightening from one of darkness, he is immediately compelled by his guide to faithfully take note of the events in order to proceed further, just as the “Dictator of Love” urgently commanded him, in the Vita Nova, to utter poetry out of states of possession. Thus Virgil often pressingly verifies whether Dante has understood the significance of the experiences they have just gone through together. He makes sure that the poet has learnt the lesson, but at the same time, he firmly exhorts him not to slow down on the path. He alternates reproaches, warnings, concerns, hints, encouragement. He wants the disciple set free from his guidance, yet he knows that at first he cannot do without. He is pleased when he sees his improvement. He is amazed, when he sees him lingering on despondency or complacency. Thus he wakes him up, in a manner that cannot be clearer: “Vien dietro a me, e lascia dir le genti: / sta come torre ferma, che non crolla / già mai la cima per soffiari di venti.” (“Come on behind me, let those people talk: / Stand like a solid tower which does not shake / Its top whatever winds are blowing on it.”, Purgatorio, V, 13). Back to Liber Novus again, it can be similarly observed that Elijah and Philemon play an analogous role for Jung's 'I'. In both cases, the capability of “seeing more” or “seeing deeper” corresponds to an initiation into a new order of perceptions. A transmission of “mana” or “vision” occurs from master to disciple. As Virgil instructs Dante to “see” in a different way, so the masters of Liber Novus lead Jung's 'I' to the opening of the inner vision. In a prophetic guise that closely resembles the imperative tone of the “Dictator of Love”, Elijah tells the ‘I’, at the end of the “Mysterium”, that “other things will come. Seek untiringly, and

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666 Dante, Purgatorio, XVII, 1-9; 1987, p. 559. “Remember, reader, if ever in the mountains / You were caught in a mist, through which you could see / No better than a mole can through his skin, / How, when at last the thick and humid vapours / Begin to clear away, the ball of the sun / Comes in through them, though with great feebleness; / And your imagination will find it easy / To arrive at understanding how I saw / The sun again, just as it was ready to set.”
above all write exactly what you see.” Thus Elijah evokes once more that the impulse of seeking, the “fire” of the experiment, should be closely accompanied by the act of “writing exactly” about it, by following the “new form” of the visions as directly and spontaneously as possible. Like Virgil, Elijah plainly speaks here for the necessity that Jung’s ‘I’ understands at a deeper level the nature of his experiences. Elijah thus encapsulates the task of “seeing” and “understanding” from the perspective of a first fundamental stage of self-transformation. Like Virgil, he “leads the way towards the left” into darker places, when the ‘I’ asks him to “shed some light” over the mysteries. Similarly, Dante notices about his guidance: “‘l poeta / tenne a sinistra, e io dietro mi mossi.” (The poet / Kept to the left, and I followed him”, Inferno, XVIII, 20-21). Like Virgil, Elijah opens a path to “a very high summit” and the ‘I’ obediently “follows”. So Dante promptly does at the very start of his adventures: “Allor si mosse, e io li tenni dietro.” (“Then he moved forward, and I kept behind him”, Inferno, I, 136). Like Virgil as well, Elijah is concerned with Jung’s exact understanding of what he experiences, by inquiring: “What did you see? […] Do you understand that?” And like Virgil with Dante, Elijah scolds Jung’s ‘I’ when he becomes overly lazy, “What do you want here?”, or bold, “How impetuous you are!”.

These initial correspondences between Virgil and Elijah become properly accomplished with the appearance of Philemon. In Liber Novus, in fact, once the master-image evolves from Elijah to Philemon, the patterns of vision sharply develop as well into a richer and more complex dimension. The encounter with Philemon reiterates the function of the master in terms of making the disciple “see” the new goal and the meaning that is yet to come, by

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617 Jung, LN, p. 252.
618 Ibid., p. 248.
619 Ibid., p. 251.
620 Ibidem.
621 Ibid., p. 248.
622 Ibid., p. 252.
unleashing the subject’s visionary potential. Yet it does so in an original manner, one which dramatically turns the interpretation of “seeing” as a deeper “understanding”, into that of “seeing” as the proper opening of Jung’s inner eye. On February 1916, in the context of the “Sermons to the Dead”, a “dark form with golden eyes” approaches Jung’s ‘I’ “from the shadows of the night” and tells him the following:

I come from afar. I come from the east and follow the shining fire that precedes me, ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ. I am not your enemy, I am stranger to you. My skin is dark and my eyes shine golden. [...] You may call me death—death that rose with the sun. I come with quiet pain and long peace. I lay the cover of protection on you. In the midst of life begins death. I lay cover upon cover you so that your warmth will never cease.”

The ‘I’ is startled and full of fear. Then, as the mysterious dark one vanishes, Philemon looks at his disciple to fathom his thoughts and says, in a notably Virgilian manner: “Did you take a proper look at him, my son?” Since the ‘I’ is frightened and wavering, Philemon poses his hands over his eyes, opening the inner sight:

As he spoke these words, he touched my eyes and opened my gaze and showed me the immeasurable mystery. And I looked for a long time until I could grasp it: but what did I see? I saw the night, I saw the dark earth, and above this the sky stood gleaming in the brilliance of countless stars. And I saw that the sky had the form of a woman and sevenfold was her mantle of stars and it completely covered her.

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623 Ibid., pp. 354-355.
624 Ibidem.
625 Ibidem.
3.3.2. From Guidance to Freedom

In the parallel he draws between the *Commedia* and analytic work, Maeder too sketches out an analogy between Virgil and the experience of transference (“Transfert”). The “contact” and the “confidence” in the “spiritual guidance” of the analyst is in fact “the determining factor that allows the patient to *open their eyes* to discover their Hell and above all *to free* the psychic energies potentially contained in the nervous symptoms”.

In the enthusiasm which ignites the patient for his guide, the sacred fire of the ideal burns in its primordial manifestation, still insecure. We first search by groping out in the external world what a longer and more painful experience will make us discover, one day, in our heart. The emancipation from the guide is slowly accomplished. The outside guide is replaced with an inner guide, essentially transcendent.

Maeder brings to the fore a crucial question for the present discussion: the emancipation of Dante and Jung from their (inner) guides. A subtle characteristic common to *Liber Novus* and the *Commedia* should be noted at this point. In both these examples, the two protagonists of the adventures relate themselves to the psychopomp not only in terms of “disciple” and “master” or “student” and “guide”, but also and especially in terms of “son” and “father”. This is an exceptional fact, for the psychopomp is only rarely directly called “father”. It is a distinctive trait of the *Commedia* that resonates in *Liber Novus*. It can also be noted that Jung’s copy of the *Commedia* presents in more than one instance the underlining of the word “Vater” (“father”), as it is used by Dante. In the guise of “second fathers”, Virgil and Philemon are a source of both reproach and medication for their son-disciples, as well described in the following scene from Dante’s poem:

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627 Ibid., p. 47.
Una medesma lingua pria mi morse,
sí che mi tinse l’una e l’altra guancia,
e poi la medicina mi riporse;

cosí od’io che solea far la lancia
d’Achille e del suo padre esser cagione
prima di trista e poi di buona mancia.628

Virgil’s most recurrent epithets in the *Commedia* are “mio maestro” and “autore” (“my master and author”, *Inferno*, I, 85), “il poeta” (the “poet”, such as in *Inferno*, XVIII, 21, amongst many), “la mia scorta” (“my escort”, *Inferno*, XX, 26), “il duca mio” (“my guide” or “instructor”, as for example in *Inferno*, XIX, 121, *Inferno*, XXIII, 37, *Inferno*, XXVII, 33, *Purgatorio*, XII, 136). As the pilgrim proceeds along the journey, a subtle evolution of the relationship with the guide occurs. Virgil is no longer the demanding instructor who severely reproaches Dante for he lingers on the pain of the damned, shares their emotions and suffering or indulges too long in listening to their stories. He is not only the visionary and wise “escort” to the underworld, who makes clear the unclear, audible the inaudible, and visible the invisible. He has a novel and distinctive attribute. Indeed, he is a “father”, or better yet a “sweet” father, who acknowledges in his humble student, already in the first Canto of *Purgatorio*, the “son” who is now ready to follow in his footsteps, only to be free of them at an approaching time:

[...] e io sú mi levai

sanza parlare, e tutto mi ritrassi

al duca mio, e li occhi a lui drizzai.

628 Dante, *Inferno*, XXXI, 1-6; 1987, p. 304. “The same tongue which had first so stung me / That it brought colour to one cheek and the other, / After that gave me the remedy: / So I have heard that the lance of Achilles, / And his father’s, would first of all occasion / An evil gift but, after that, a boon.”
El cominciò: “Figliuol, segui i miei passi” [...]

A little later in *Purgatorio*, the mutual recognition of “father” and “son” is exemplified as follows:

Io er' in sazzo, quando cominciai:

“O dolce padre, volgiti, e rimira
com'io rimango sol, se non restai.”

“Figliuol mio”, disse, “infin quivi ti tira”,
additandomi un balzo poco in sùe
che da quel lato il poggio tutto gira.

Thus, suggestively, Virgil is the “dolce padre” who points out to the son the road for the ascent, a symbol of spiritual rebirth. Yet, he is the “sweet” father, it must be noted once and for all, insofar as Virgil essentially is, as Dante calls him in another occasion in *Purgatorio*, “more than a father”, thus transposing, with this sharp comparative, the role of the father-guide into an anagogic dimension:

[...]

lo più che padre mi dicea: “Figliuole,

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629 Ibid., *Purgatorio*, I, 109-112; 1987, p. 398. “[...] and without a word, / I rose and drew closer to my guide, / and it was on him that I set my eyes. / And he began: Son, follow in my steps; [...]” (tr. A. Mandelbaum).

630 Ibid., *Purgatorio*, IV, 43-48; 1987, p. 422. “I was exhausted when I began: / ‘O sweet father, turn round, and look, / I shall be left behind if you do not stop.’ / ‘My son’, he said, ‘drag yourself up there,’ / And pointed to a terrace a little higher, / Which on that side circled the whole mountain.”
Virgil accompanies Dante from the very beginning of the journey out of the dark forest, until the encounter with Beatrice (*Purgatorio* XXX), where the Roman poet leaves the scene to the illustrious Muse. Along this path, the protagonist moves from acknowledging the guide, in the first occurrence, as “my master” and “escort” (*Inferno*, I, 85), to separating from him, in the last of Virgil’s appearances, by calling him the “sweetest father”: “Virgilio dolcissimo patre, / Virgilio a cui per mia salute die’ mi.” (“Virgil, my sweetest father, to whom / I had given myself up for my own well-being”, *Purgatorio*, XXX, 50-51). This salutation occurs just the moment after Virgil has completed his mandate with Dante. Thus the transformation of Dante’s vision of the psychopomp occurs in two fundamental phases: from the acknowledgment of a “master” to the recognition of a “father” (a new and different type of guidance) and from the recognition of a “father” to the complete independence of the “son”, who at some point of the journey has to separate from the guide. Therefore, a remarkable metamorphosis characterises Dante’s relationship with Virgil. First, a respectful, timorous, distance. Secondly, a growing closeness. Finally, emancipation. In the process, Virgil evolves from “philosopher-poet” into “loving father”, significantly carrying out the expansion of the language of logos into the realm of eros, or, in other words, the reconciliation of the intellect with love. This distinctive characteristic can only be adequately understood when bearing in mind that Virgil always acts on the service of Beatrice, by representing only one half, however indispensable, of a substantially greater process of *unio oppositorum* (“union of the opposites”). Some analogous correspondences in *Liber Novus* must be highlighted in relation to this discussion. First of all, a connection between the role of the psychopomp and spiritual fatherhood already appears with Elijah. In the

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631 Ibid., *Purgatorio*, XXIII, 4-6; 1987, p. 614. “My more than father said to me: ‘My son, / Come now, for the time allotted to us / Should be bestowed more usefully than that.”
“Mysterium”, when Salome, presented as Elijah’s daughter, steps close to Jung’s ‘I’, seductively lays her arms around his shoulder, and horrifies him with these words: “You are his son, and I am your sister.”

Secondly, when later on, on May 3, 1916, after Jung’s acquaintance with Philemon, Salome and Elijah appear again in a dream. The prophet of the Old Testament reveals to the ‘I’: “I have become weak, I am poor, an excess of my power has gone to you, my son. You took too much from me. You went too far away from me. I heard strange and incomprehensible things and the peace of my depths became disturbed.”

The “strange and incomprehensible things” consist in a notable trace of pagan spirit which Jung’s ‘I’ directly learnt from the encounter with Philemon: “Old Gods have become new. The one God is dead—yes, truly, he died. He disintegrated into the many, and thus the world became rich overnight. And something also happened to the individual soul—who would care to describe it!”

Though announced by Elijah, the motif of the psychopomp in relation to spiritual fatherhood develops in depth with Philemon. In a similar manner to Dante’s Virgil, Philemon as well evolves from the role of distant secretive magician that reluctantly speaks to Jung’s ‘I’ in his garden, to an increasingly important presence that addresses him as “my son”, while being referred to as “father”. Shortly before the commencement of the “Sermons to the Dead” (in which mutual references “father” and “son” multiply), Jung explicitly brings forth this process:

These words disturbed me since I had thought before precisely to free myself from the God. But ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ advised me to enter even deeper into the God.

Since the God has ascended to the upper realms, ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ also has become different.

He first appeared to me as a magician who lived in a distant land, but then I felt his nearness and, since the God has ascended, I knew that ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ had intoxicated me and given me a language that was foreign to me and of a different sensitivity. All of this

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632 Jung, LN, p. 249.

633 Ibid., p. 357.

634 Ibidem.
faded when the God arose and only ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ kept that language. But I felt that he went on other ways than I did. Probably the most part of what I have written in the earlier part of this book was given to me by ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ. Consequently I was as if intoxicated. But now I noticed that ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ assumed a form distinct from me.\textsuperscript{635}

What distinguishes this anagogic type of father-guidance, in both Liber Novus and the Commedia, is that their superior wisdom is inescapably connected with the world of eros and love, typically represented, in a variety of symbolic traditions, by feminine figures. Accordingly, Philemon is the “loving” one and Virgil is the “sweetest” father: the teaching they embody has essentially to do with the art and practice of love. They are father-images who have transmuted their powerful dimension, engendering their authority through compassion. On one occasion in the Commedia, right down into the sixth “bolgia” of Hell, Dante uniquely compares Virgil no longer to a father, but to a mother concerned with the safety of her son:

Lo duca mio di súbito mi prese,

come la madre ch’al romore è desta

e vede presso a sé le fiamme accese,

che prende il figlio e fugge e non s’arresta,

avendo piú di lui che di sé cura,

tanto che solo una camicia vesta; [...]\textsuperscript{636}

\textsuperscript{635} Ibid., p. 339.

\textsuperscript{636} Dante, Inferno, XXIII, 37-42; 1987, p. 233; “My escort suddenly took me up, / Like a mother who is awakened by the noise / And sees flames leaping close to her; / She takes her son and flies, and does not stop, / Being more concerned about him than herself, / Even long enough to get into her shift;”
Similarly, Philemon is the “loving” solicitous magician, a “true lover” in the widest sense. He is Baucis’s faithful husband and the caretaker of the fruits of the earth. He rises as high in the spirit as he goes deep in the matter of things. Thus, as the instructor who binds together the realms of the “Above and Below”, he bends down to the earth in front of Jung’s ‘I’ and kisses her with this prayer: “Mother, may your son be strong.”637 This aspect suitably highlights the problematics of the identification or differentiation of the apprentice with the teachings of the master. In this respect, it can be observed that this motif evokes another important point of difference that the examples of Zarathustra and Virgil offer to Jung’s visionary material. As mentioned beforehand, Nietzsche’s controversy, at least according to Jung’s view, is caused by the fact that the German philosopher identifies himself with the teacher or master, i.e., Zarathustra himself. Later, in the Zarathustra seminar, the question is variously reiterated. For example, on June 27, 1934, he points out:

The daimon is the Superman, the thing that is greater than man, yet it seems to be in man. If you have some vision or premonition, you are tempted to assume that you are perhaps the wise old man yourself, and then one calls it an inflation. Nietzsche himself was in the condition for an inevitable inflation. That explains his almost pathological megalomania, which was criticized during his lifetime, that megalomaniac manner of speech was a considerable obstacle in his way; people thought he made tremendous assumptions. It was simply an inevitable inflation through the coming up of that figure and his identification with it.638

A similar passage appears on November 14, 1934:

637 Jung, LN, p. 352.
To encounter the old man, perhaps to be the wise old man, is such a great discovery and so sweet, that he doesn’t stop to ask questions. He just slips into it and is gone without noticing it.

When the archetype comes up and touches you, you are gone in a wink. [...] To identify with the archetype is unavoidable under certain conditions, however; and Nietzsche’s case was unavoidable. He did not know; it was his fate. In reading Nietzsche, one must always keep in mind that he was also a victim and inasmuch as he was a victim he falsifies the true function of the archetype. The old wise man never would have talked in this way if Nietzsche were not mixed up with him. There is a lot of unrealized sexuality in Nietzsche. He was taken out of his body and had not lived a proper life.639

What really matters when one encounters the symbol of the psychopomp, Jung argues, is neither embracing its eventful power nor denying it, were this to be possible, but rather detaching ourselves from it. A sufficient degree of detachment permits one to enact a dialogue with these inner figures, which inspires at the very bottom the experiences of many visionaries. The attachment to the image provokes instead that dangerous process of identification with the superior character of the guru which Jung recognises so widely in Nietzsche’s fate. Contrary to this risk, Dante’s relationship with Virgil optimally represents a case of successful detachment and differentiation between the author and the symbol, as pointed out by Maeder. Jung himself suggests a comparison of this sort between the two models, precisely in the Zarathustra seminar. He claims that, if one were able to find in any place in Thus Spoke Zarathustra a passage in which Nietzsche’s ‘I’, the narrator, says “I met Zarathustra, I saw him,” or “He spoke to me”, then one would know that “he made a difference between himself and Zarathustra, and only then could he realise Zarathustra’s teaching.” In that case, “the whole thing would have taken an entirely different course; we would behold an entirely different spectacle, and not the tragic fate brought about through that identification. [...] That is, of

course, the problem." But that differentiation does not occur, provoking in this way, in Jung’s view, Nietzsche’s falling apart. Differently, he continues in the context of the same discussion, Dante is an excellent “example” of an opposite fate than Nietzsche’s, precisely because the Italian poet “makes a difference between himself and the dynamis; he is not identical with the psychopompos. Virgil is to him of course this same archetype, but it is a different kind of teaching. It is the message of the Middle Ages.” Though taken from a later phase of Jung’s writings, a comparison between Nietzsche and Dante in these terms evidently captures an important enigma of Liber Novus. The observations of the Swiss psychologist find confirmation in the development of the story that inspires the pages of the Commedia. It is true, as Valli has observed, that “in all significant passages” of the poem “Dante is embraced and carried by Virgil.” Or that, as Borges stresses, Dante is able to distinguish himself from the fate of the Dantesque Odysseus precisely because of the presence of Virgil. Yet there is always a dialogue between the two, a substantial differentiation of characters, from the start to the very end. Virgil’s help encapsulates in fact that kind of fundamental sustenance which makes the son free from the father’s guidance, but at the right time. That is, when the disciple is sufficiently prepared to encounter Beatrice and, through her, the mystery of love. Thus, in addition to what has been already commented thus far, one can observe the evolving trajectory of Dante’s growth in relation to Virgil’s guidance, in many occurrences. Let us limit ourselves to consider now that at the beginning of their adventures, it is Virgil, in almost all episodes, who speaks for Dante, by interceding for him with the peoples of the underworld. The poet, by his own admission, mostly replies “as he required me to” (Inferno, XIX, 63), to the sincere satisfaction of his instructor, who “listened with such contentment on his lips / to the sound of the true words I uttered.” (Inferno, XIX, 121-123). Yet the more they advance, the more

640 Ibid., p. 203.
641 Ibid., p. 204.
642 Valli, 1925, p. 113.
frequent the occasions in which the pilgrim takes the lead and begins to speak for himself, by pleasing the master even more, until the point he eventually gets him to smile (*Purgatorio*, XII, 136). Following on from this, in *Liber Novus*, the differentiation between Jung ‘I’ and the voices of the visions, above all that of Philemon, represents a crucial motif of the whole experiment, which at bottom corresponds to the interaction between the personal ‘I’ and the multiform richness of psychic multiplicity. It is safe to say that, as observed by Shamdasani, a fundamental part of Jung’s critical interpretation of his fantasies consists in this process of differentiation (especially from Philemon’s voice), making of the experience of the visions a proper *Commedia* of the mind. If the voices were not differentiated, the experiment would result in the magnification of the reasons and categories of the ego. In the opposite situation, the perspective of the I-ness is placed within a process of self-overcoming that develops, such as in the typical structure of medieval spiritual diaries, into a dialogue with the soul. The differentiation between author and psychopomp can be observed in action through the development of the “Sermons to the Dead”. In the “Magician” section, Jung already refers to Philemon as a “teacher and friend of the dead”, two characteristics that perfectly suit Virgil too. In the *Sermones*, beginning on January 30, 1916, the loving magician fulfils this description to the full. He acts at once as the point of encounter and protection between the ‘I’ and the dead. Virgil plays the same role in the *Commedia*. He opens “the mouth of the dead”, as Hillman phrases it. Yet he does so, Shamdasani notices, in a markedly

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644 Virgil smiles to Dante also in *Inferno*, IV, 99 and *Purgatorio*, XXVII, 44. He smiles too in *Purgatorio* XXVIII, but not towards Dante.


646 On *Liber Novus* and the “Seven Sermons to the Dead” see Christine Maillard, 2017.

647 Jung, LN, p. 316.

compensatory manner, that is, by stressing “precisely those conceptions that the dead lacked”, like the chorus in ancient Greek dramas: 649

I turned to ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ and said, “My father, you utter strange teachings. Did not the ancients teach similar things? And was it not a reprehensible heresy; removed equally from love and the truth? And why do you layout such a teaching to this horde; which the night wind swirled up from the dark bloodfields of the West?”

“My son,” ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ replied, “these dead ended their lives too early. These were seekers and therefore still hover over their graves. Their lives were incomplete, since they knew no way beyond the one to which belief had abandoned them. But since no one teaches them, I must do so.” 650

In this way, Philemon, the instructor of the dead, provokes the radical enlargement of the psychic horizons of the ‘I’, by leading him to come to terms with those collective and autonomous portions of the mind which the dead encompass. In Memories, Jung associates the “mythic land of the dead, the land of the ancestors” (“Totenland”) with the collective psyche. 651 A journey to the underworld means establishing a relationship with the “collectivity of the dead”, the voices of the “Unanswered, Unresolved, and Unredeemed.” 652 The Sermones directly enacts Jung’s encounter with this realm, coming significantly close to the tradition of ancient Books of the Dead, with which he was familiar, either at that time, like the Egyptian Book of the Dead, or later, such as the Bardo Thödol (the Tibetan Book of the Dead). Maillard has pointed out a few elements of comparison between the Sermones and the Books of the Dead: the elements of solar eschatology, the presence of the guide, the soul’s travelling in realms in-

650 Jung, LN, p. 348.
651 Jung, ETG, p. 195.
652 Ibidem.
between, the initiatory teaching, and even the numerological significance of the number seven. Amongst all the “conceptions” that the dead lack, in the Sermones, one stands out and summarises them all. It is the revelation of the “terrible Abraxas”, the hidden protagonist of Jung's self-explorations, the deity of Gnostic roots that unifies all opposites and compensates for the one-sidedness of the Christian image of God. Abraxas is “splendid as the lion in the instant he strikes down his victim”, “as beautiful as a spring day”, “Priapos”, “the hermaphrodite of the earliest beginnings”, the “holy begetting”, “love and its murder”, “the saint and his betrayer”, the Lord that reconciles the “brightest light of day” with “the darkest night of madness.” Before such a tremendous appearance, the ‘I’ turns to Philemon, in dismay: “How, Oh my father, should I understand this God?”, to which follows the answer: “My son, why do you want to understand him? This God is to be known but not understood. If you understand him, then you can say that he is this or that and this and not that. [...] The God whom I know is this and that and just as much this other and that other.” The revelation of the serpent-like nature of Abraxas, the God of “LIFE”, makes the “incomplete” dead “howl” and “rage”, claiming that Philemon is a “pagan” and a “polytheist”.

However imprecise and historically biased the word itself may be, “paganism” is another challenging point of comparison between Philemon and Virgil. In light of the fact that in Memories, as noticed beforehand, Jung essentially calls Philemon a pagan with Egypto-Hellenistic traces, the importance of this particular characteristic of the magician in Liber Novus cannot be stressed enough. Undoubtedly, the role of pagan symbolism and ancient wisdom occupies a remarkable place in this context. The matter is discussed by the author in a rich and variegated manner. After the “door of the Mysterium” has closed behind the initiate, for example, Liber Secundus, the second part of Liber Novus, opens with the dialogue between

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654 Jung, LN, p. 350.
655 Ibidem.
656 Ibid., p. 351, n106.
the ‘I’ and the somewhat eccentric figure of “The Red One”, a devil and an exact counter-type to the anchorite of the desert, Ammonius. “The Red One” brings pagan joy to Jung’s ‘I’, celebration of nature, and the Nietzschean warning that, against the “Spirit of Gravity” through which “all things are ruined”, it is better to learn how to dance through life, by saying “yes” to everything she brings up. However, the pagan spirit that the “Red One” advocates assumes in this scene an almost comical dimension, which drives the ‘I’ to tell his visitor that he is probably “no real pagan, but the kind of pagan who runs alongside our Christian religion.” Even if delivered in a mockery, the comment reveals how the question of paganism in Liber Novus develops at first glance through a close confrontation with the Christian mindset. Interestingly, a few nights afterwards, the situation is reversed, when Jung’s ‘I’ encounters the monk Ammonius, who in his turn, by representing the opposite half of the “Red One”, fearfully recognises in the ‘I’ himself a “pagan”, if not even an emissary of Satan. The two opposite circumstances in which the ‘I’ ends up in Liber Novus reflect Jung’s contrasting attitude towards the forgotten importance of the ancient pagan mindset. Thanks to the appearance of Philemon, such demand becomes an essential reference, one which ultimately is “pagan” and “not pagan” at once, by entailing both a reconciliation with religious antiquity and the search for a profound renewal of contemporary Christian imagery, which in itself establishes an important line of connection with the Commedia. Yet Philemon, the “loving” old man, decidedly shows more than a trace of pagan origins. His figure in Liber Novus, one should remember, is partly based on the accounts of Philemon that appear in Ovid’s Metamorphoses and Goethe’s Faust. In Ovid’s version of the myth, Zeus and Hermes, disguised as ordinary mortals, go wandering in Phrygia, searching for a place to rest. They are rejected by all the people they visit in the village, except for the old loving couple, Philemon and Baucis,

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658 Ibid., p. 259.
659 Ibid., p. 272.
that, although being very poor, give all they have to the Gods. Profoundly impressed by their generosity, when Zeus and Hermes decide to destroy the ungrateful village with a flood, they save the couple by turning their house into a splendid temple. Then, as the Gods ask them how they want to be repaid for their kindness, Philemon and Baucis reply that their only wish is to become priests and guardians of the shrine. In addition to gladly fulfilling this desire, Zeus and Hermes honour the hosts by transforming them, at the moment of their death, into a linden and a oak tree entwined with each other, a symbol of the enduring love the couple share, remembered by Pound in the short poem *The Tree*: “[…] That god-feasting couple old / That grew elm-oak amid the wold. / Twas not until the gods had been / Kindly entreated, and been brought within / Unto the hearth of their heart’s home / That they might do this wonder thing;” The pagan genealogy of Philemon and its direct connection with ancient wisdom reveals itself in the first place by his role as a servant of the Gods, as acknowledged by Jung’s ‘I’ in the encounter with the magician:

Truly you are the lover who once took in the Gods as they wandered the earth when everyone else refused them lodging. You are the one who unsuspectingly gave hospitality to the Gods; they thanked you by transforming your house into a golden temple, while the flood swallowed everyone else. You remained alive when chaos erupted. You it was who served in the sanctuary when the peoples called out in vain to the Gods. Truly, it is the lover who survives.665

Philemon is the “lover” and host of the Gods. He is the spiritual “master of the garden”, who works in deep closeness to the chthonic world, evoking animality, matter, and instinctual primordial forces. He is presented, from the first moment, as Baucis’s husband, by living in peaceful accordance with the realm of sexuality, feelings, and compassion. He is a magician,

665 Jung, LN, p. 315.
whose magic, in a properly ancient manner, is a “way of living” in harmony with nature and its continuous transformation. What is more, Philemon is the pagan herald of Abraxas, who attempts to complete the Christian image of God together with its forgotten half, thus begetting the enigmatic birth of a new “divine child”. In parallel to these traits, in 1921 in Psychological Types, Jung asserts, while discussing the Goethean figure of Faust, that the symbol of the wise old man in the West inevitably carries the signs of a primordial “paganism”:

The magician has preserved in himself a trace of primitive paganism; he possesses a nature that is still unaffected by the Christian dichotomy and is in touch with the still pagan unconscious, where the opposites lie side by side in their original naïve state, beyond the reach of “sinfulness” but liable, if assimilated into conscious life, to beget evil as well as good with the same daemonic energy (“Part of that power which would / Ever work evil yet engenders good”). He is a destroyer but also a saviour, and such a figure is pre-eminently suited to become the symbolic bearer of an attempt to resolve the conflict. Moreover the medieval magician has laid aside the classical naïveté which was no longer possible, and become thoroughly steeped in the Christian atmosphere.\(^662\)

Therefore, “paganism” evokes in short what Jung describes in this context as the natural closeness of the mind to the “daemonic energy” of psychic opposites. The wise guru or psychopomp, with his instructive function, embodies this particular power and leads the apprentice on a similar path. What the Christian theological understanding, according to Jung, more radically splits in terms of good and evil, this or that, the ancient mind knows as something intrinsically unified, as this and that. Thus the psychopomp, like Philemon, reveals a profound connection with this aspect of paganism, insofar as he authentically encapsulates the intuition of the union of opposites that underlies the equilibrium of psychic energy. On this basis, if the psychopomp has in itself such a significant trace of primordial spirit, one cannot

\(^{662}\) Jung, 1921, CW6, §316.
but immediately notice that, among the examples of Western psychopomps, the one that
certainly stands out is Dante’s Virgil. As commonly known, Dante chooses the Roman mentor
as his guide because of poetic reasons, such as the mastery of narrative that forms the sixth
book of the *Aeneid* (in which the protagonist, Aeneas, descends into the underworld . . .), no
less than religious ones, above all the fact that he is a heathen, whom Dante locates in the
Limbo and will have to give way to theology (Beatrice), when his help is over. As for the
current discussion, what matters most of all is that, for Dante, Virgil, as a guide of markedly
pagan traits, subtly epitomises the process of integration and confrontation between Christian
and ancient world. Virgil is the poet of the Empire par excellence, who, in antithesis to
Lucretius’s epicurean beliefs, claims in the *Aeneid*: “Tu regere imperios populos, Romane
memento / (hae tibi erunt artes) pacique imponere morem, / parcere subiectis et debellare
superbos.” (“Remember thou, O Roman, to rule the nations with thy sway—this shall be thine
arts—to crown Peace with Law, to spare the humbled, and to tame in war the proud!”, VI,
851-853).663 In the Middle Ages, the vision of Virgil as a magician was so widespread as to spark
controversies in theological circles no less than among common people, where the divinatory
practice of *sortes virgiliane* (“casting of lots”) was popular. Reghini claims that when one reads
the *Commedia*, one is utterly drawn into the atmosphere of pagan mysteries, as evoked by the
presence of Virgil, who in the capacity of an old initiate of archaic Mediterranean rites, guides
a new adept into a profound experience of palingenesis.664 Yet, alongside these references, the
medieval characterisation of Virgil as a pagan magician and initiate is also frequently associated
with a concurrent Christian element, which makes the present parallelism with Philemon an
even more intriguing motif to examine. In the Middle Ages, in fact, an old popular myth, with
which Dante is familiar, depicted Virgil as a virtuous pagan that prophesied the future advent
of Christianity. Besides a certain tenderness recognised in his works, the story arose due to the

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663 Virgil, H. R. Fairclough (tr.), 1916, pp. 566-567.
664 Reghini, 1921, in Id., 1986, pp. 151-158.
content of Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue, which announces the birth of a boy-saviour. Though originally intended simply for the birth of Asinius Pollio’s son, the poem becomes interpreted in a Messianic vein by later Christian writers. The wide popularity of this myth in the Middle Ages makes of Virgil, especially in Dante’s mind, an unparalleled point of contact between ancient mysteries and Christian knowledge. In other words, Virgil becomes both a pagan magician and a quasi-Christian poet. Jung himself, in a late interview at the Basel Psychological Club in 1958, refers in details to this legend, by calling Virgil a man “who knew how to mythologise”:

If you recall Virgil’s 4th Eclogue, you will see that the child who ushers in the coming age is a bringer of peace, a savior, who was naturally interpreted by the Christians as Christ. The date of Virgil’s poem is prechristian. For him it was certainly the birth of Augustus that was meant. At that time there was a tremendous longing for redemption in Italy, because two thirds—please note—two thirds of the population consisted of slaves whose fate was hopelessly sealed. That gave rise to a general mood of depression, and in the melancholy of the Augustan Age this longing for redemption came to expression. Therefore a man who knew how to “mythologize,” like Virgil, expressed this situation in the 4th Eclogue. Thanks to this prophetic gift he is also the psychopomp in Dante, the guide of souls in purgatory and in hell. Afterwards, of course, in the Christian paradise, he had to surrender this role to the feminine principle [Beatrice], and this is naturally highly significant in view of the future recognition of the feminine figure in Christianity.665

Regardless of the legendary aspects of the story, what is particularly interesting about Jung’s reference to Virgil’s prophetic gift is the sense of a profound call for spiritual and cultural renewal. This mythological element inspires at the bottom Dante’s visions as well, in a time, the late Middle Ages, in which, as Jung observes, an ongoing spiritual transformation was

affecting the core of the Christian world. When the *Commedia* is interpreted against this background, as the story of a Christic rebirth within an epochal change of the Christian spirit, a significant thematic closeness with the urgency of spiritual transformation which appears in *Liber Novus* through the compelling demand of “becoming Christ” emerges. The guides that instruct this process of self-regeneration, Virgil and Philemon, share that degree of “primitive paganism” that can reconnect the Christian imagination to the principles of magic, nature, and sexuality. Yet, in order to succeed in this process of transformation, another compelling element has to be given a central place: the “soul”.
Fig. 32. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1864-1870, Beata Beatrix.
Fig. 33. Sandro Botticelli, 1480–1505, *Dante and Beatrice*.
3.3.3. The Lady of the Mind: Dante’s Beatrice and Jung’s Soul

After having examined the correspondences between Virgil and Philemon concerning the function of the psychopomp, it is now time to turn to the other essential part of the syzygy, the feminine principle, suggesting also in this respect a few lines of comparison between Liber Novus and the Commedia. If the separation between Dante and Virgil is possible, permitting in this way the advancement of the poet, this event occurs, as said beforehand, because Virgil is explicitly “sent on” to Dante, from the start, by Beatrice. As the guide himself says to the poet, Beatrice is in fact a “spirit more worthy than I am”: “With her I will leave you, when I depart.”666 Virgil’s observation describes an opposite scenario to the case of Zarathustra. In Nietzsche’s work, Jung argues, the problematic of the idealisation and identification of the protagonist with the wise guide derives from the fact that there is no feminine counterpart to the psychopomp. In other words, Nietzsche’s ‘I’ becomes inflated because he has thoroughly lost connection with instinctual forces, feelings, and ultimately with love. The “spirit” or logos has not given in to the law of “eros”, turning into pure will to power. Commenting on the scene in which Zarathustra dances “as Salome”, Jung highlights the problem in this way: “It all comes from the fact that we have no anima in Zarathustra. [...] We have here the most perverse phenomenon, the wise old man appearing as identical with Nietzsche himself without the anima. So it is quite unavoidable that Zarathustra sometimes shows symptoms of being the dancer, the anima.”667 On the contrary, the Commedia presents the psychopomp as unified with the feminine counterpart from the earliest moment of their appearance. Not only does this aspect represent a distinctive trait of Dante’s visionary experiences, but it also suggests a substantial point of alignment with Liber Novus, in which the “Magician” is called both Philemon and Baucis, his wife.668 The exact moment in which Dante separates from Virgil and

666 Dante, Inferno, I, 122-123; 1987, p. 50: “Anima fìa a ciò più di me degna: / con lei ti lascerò nel mio partire.”


668 Jung, LN, p. 314.
meets Beatrice again (*Purgatorio*, XXX, 46-54) is such a powerfully suggestive sequence that Frédéric Ozanam considers it the primal nucleus of the entire *Commedia* and Borges sees in it no less than “one of the most astonishing” scenes that “literature has achieved.” This is the moment in which Dante’s deepest desire comes true: to encounter Beatrice again. When this finally happens, all the readers that have breathtakingly followed the twists and turns of the protagonist until this passage feel deep in their hearts what the poet now admits. That, at the novel sight of Beatrice, no drop of blood is left in his body which is not trembling, “recognising” in that precise instant “i segni de l’antica fiamma.” (“The signs of the ancient flame.”) The expression, modelled after the Virgilian “agnosco veteris vestigia flammae” (*Aeneid*, IV, 23), still now can designate in Italian language the occurrence of “falling in love”. Beatrice, the spark of Dante’s love from his juvenile age, appears again to the mind of the poet, and even if the object of love has transmuted into another dimension, the “flame” of the experience of love belongs in the same fire, as Dante acknowledges. No matter how invisible its form, Beatrice makes the illuminating force of love visible to the poet’s mind. And despite some calling her a glorious literary invention and others a crystallised metaphysical allegory, the reality of her subtle presence transcends by far the limits of literature. As Dante presents her, in fact, Beatrice has never been so shockingly real as she appears in this moment to the poet’s mind. Yet she is now real in a sur-real sense, that is, in the capacity of the messenger of a superior dimension of the real, that of visionary perceptions. Following this encounter, Beatrice will lead the poet further on, out of Purgatory and through the nine skies of Heaven, becoming increasingly luminous and beautiful at each threshold, until conducting the poet in his ecstatic epiphany in front of God. But possibly in no other passage as clearly as in the end of *Purgatorio*, does one partake so spontaneously in the intersection of human and divine facets

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that characterise the mystery of Dante’s love. The vision is not yet melted into the Empyrean light that, by illuminating Dante’s eyes, will also blind them from any further possible memory. Differently, the flame of divine light is in this passage still filtered by the fallible surrender of Dante’s enamoured mind. The scene is impregnated by what Auerbach called the visionary realism of Dante Alighieri. And it can be seen here that behind the whole construction of the poem, the final mystical ecstasy; the mathematical precision of the author, the countless mythological and historical vicissitudes, the characters and their stories, the progression of the journey, the hermeneutical implications, the philosophical and theological systems, the illustrious glory to which the work will be destined for centuries, among endless disputes, commentaries, and interpretations—that behind all this, the episode that everything originated from bears the unmistakable signs of an experience of love. And Dante’s love is truly a radical impossibility. It is a mysterium “tremendum” and “fascinosum”, as Rudolf Otto famously referred to the experience of the “numinosum.”

An unfathomed merciful mystery that attracts and fascinates beyond understanding, while at the same time disrupting with an overwhelming awe. Therefore, facing the eventful return of Beatrice, Dante is once more tremendously bewildered. “Donna m’apparve.” (“A lady came to me”, Purgatorio, XXX, 32), the poet says. “Per occulta virtú che da lei mosse, / d’antico amor sentí la gran potenza.” (“Through the secret virtue which went out from her, / Felt the great power of the ancient love”, Purgatorio, XXX, 38-39). Frightened, he turns again towards the psychopomp, like a “child” who runs to their mother, gripped by terror of life. In doing so, the poet moves again to the left and calls Virgil, for a last time, “dolcissimo patre.” (“My sweetest father”, Purgatorio, XXX, 50). But the father at this point cannot say or do anything more for his son. His task has been fulfilled.

and the separation must occur. A greater presence and power is at stake and there is only one thing that now Dante can really do, in the true spirit of the Fedeli d’Amore: embracing the path of eros and love that Beatrice heralds before him. In this way, going to the left, which has been once the abode of the “sinister” unknown, becomes the side of the heart and the disposition to feel. Let the text of this turning moment speak again for itself:

Tosto che ne la vista mi percosse
l’alta virtú che già m’avea trafitto
prima ch’io fuor di püerizia fosse,

volsimi a la sinistra col respinto
col quale il fantolin corre a la mamma
quando ha paura o quando elli è afflitto,

per dicere a Virgilio: ‘Men che dramma
di sangue m’è rimasto che non tremi:
conosco i segni de l’antica fiamma’.

Ma Virgilio n’avea lasciati scemi
di sé, Virgilio dolcissimo patre,
Virgilio a cui per mia salute die’mi;

né quantunque perdeo l’antica matre
valse a le guance nette di rugiada
In *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Jung claims that the unfolding of visionary experiences is typically regulated by “two archetypes”: the “wise old man” that personifies “meaning” and the “anima” that expresses “life”. In the context of the mysteries, the integration of psychic forces, or “union of opposites”, is referred to in terms of ὄν and ousía: an everlasting Olympian principle of unchangeable presence (Logos) and a characteristically feminine, life-affirming, force of becoming and transformation (Psyche). Similarly Dante moves on in his adventures, inspired by the scribal duty of inner dictation which he learnt from Virgil and the fire of love which Beatrice awakens and treasures. The principle of logos provides him with the task of seeing and understanding, the principle of eros with the energy of progression and self-transformation. Where the superior sight that induces the poet to undertake his visionary journey is carried out by Virgil, the psychic energy that makes the journey possible is encompassed by the spiritual mediumship of Beatrice. Hence, in a similar manner to that in *Liber Novus* in which Jung distinguishes between “forethinking” that sees and “pleasure” that moves, Beatrice introduces herself to Dante with these words:

I’ son Beatrice che ti faccio andare;
vegno del loco ove tornar disio;

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673 Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXX, 40-54; 1987, p. 679; “The moment that, as I looked, I was struck / By the high virtue which had already stabbed me / Before I was out of my boyhood, / I turned round to my left, with that trust / With which a child runs to his mother, / When he is afraid or in trouble, / To say to Virgil: ‘Less than a drop of blood / Is left in me, that is not trembling: / I know the signs of the ancient flame.’ / But Virgil had taken himself away from us, / Virgil, my sweetest father, to whom / I had given myself up for my own well-being; / Nor was all that our ancient mother lost / Enough to keep my cheeks, although washed with dew, / From turning dark with tears, and I wept.”

Love makes Dante move on. That love which “prompted” Beatrice to rescue the bewildered pilgrim through an act of compassion and grace. That love which turns the impossible plan to meet Beatrice again into a real possibility of the mind, at the cost of traversing every corner of Hell. Love is for Dante that supreme mediating force between outer events and inner reality, and since for the visionary poet what is imagined is real, the imagined reality of his love for Beatrice knows no limits of time and space. Beatrice, Borges writes, “existed infinitely for Dante”, whereas we know almost nothing about her feelings for Dante.

Now that Virgil has left the scene, the experience of the syzygy, the union of opposites, essentially regards Dante and Beatrice. The Florentine poet is urged to surrender to the art of love, without further ado. The fact that Virgil disappears is surely because, besides being a heathen, psychopomps and masters can teach no more about the practice of love. When it comes to the things of Eros, in fact, it is Diotima, in Plato’s Symposium, who instructs Socrates on things he cannot know about. Facing this reversal, Dante’s enamoured mind exemplifies a paradigmatic characteristic of Western visionaries. That the experience of love can be so little related to the finite objectivity of love, as so more significantly to the potentially infinite capacities of loving. The impression of an image or memory of love into the poet’s heart is made real again through the ex-pression of the poetic gestation, impregnating that original image through a space of creative transformation. Another visionary of Dantesque lineage, Rilke, will reiterate this view by intending love as the supreme work of the poet and affirming the superiority of the condition of loving to the condition of being loved. In a note written in the margin of the manuscript of the Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge, the Bohemian-Austrian

 amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare.675

675 Dante, Inferno, II, 70-72; 1987, p. 55. “For I am Beatrice who send you on; / I come from where I most long to return; / Love prompted me, that Love which makes me speak.” (tr. A. Mandelbaum).

Dante’s re-encounter with Beatrice makes the poet plunge into this paramount change of perspective. The intrinsic relationship of this experience with the poet’s worshipping of the woman is a common motif that, as it has been diffusely observed before, notably transcends the cultural boundaries of Western literature. In the Christian framework in which Dante operates, traditional representations of both erotic and mystical union are essentially feminine, though they often suffer the blows of the dualistic splitting between flesh and spirit. In the tradition of the ancient mysteries, the “vessel” into which the candidate “descends” in order to be transformed into a new being, is an analogy of the feminine womb of the earth that gives birth to the “new son”. The feminine energy comes to represent in this context the ultimate receptacle of the transformation of the individual. The subject’s particular vibrational energy resonates with the universal vibrational energy of nature, in a climax (“embrace”) of body and mind. Analogously, in a panoply of examples from mythology and fairy tales, a feminine or maternal image conveys the alpha and omega of the story, binding the beginning and the conclusion of the journey of the hero, or better yet, encircling the adventures of the protagonist as an everlasting ouroboros. In Western poetic examples, two of the greatest occurrences of the feminine are Dante’s Beatrice and Goethe’s “Eternal Feminine”, appearing in the second part of *Faust*. In a famous essay in *Writings in Time of War*, Père Teilhard de Chardin draws on both references, entitling his work “The Eternal Feminine”, while dedicating it “to Béatrix.” Chardin speaks of the irresistible attractive power of the “Essential Feminine” as the “Gateway of the Earth, the Initiation”, letting this force speak by herself:

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In me is seen that side of beings by which they are joined as one, in me the fragrance that makes them hasten together and leads them, freely and passionately, along their road to unity.

Through me, all things have their movement and are made to work as one. [...] I am the essential Feminine. [...] I am the single radiance by which all this is aroused and within which it is vibrant.

Man, nature’s synthesis, does many things with the fire that burns in his breast. He builds up power, he seeks for glory, he creates beauty, he weds himself to science. And often he does not realise that, under so many different forms, it is still the same passion that inspires him—purified, transformed, but living—the magnetism of the Feminine. [...] For the man who has found me, the door to all things stands open.678

Erich Neumann, in a classical work in the field of analytical psychology, The Great Mother, identifies two fundamental aspects of the feminine: the “elementary” and the “transformative” qualities.679 The “elementary” character designates the “aspect of the Feminine that as the Great Round, the Great Container, tends to hold fast to everything that springs from it and to surround it like an eternal substance.”680 In terms of psychic energy, “the elementary character of the Feminine and its symbolism express the original situation of the psyche, which we therefore designate as matriarchal.”681 Simultaneously, the “transformative” quality denotes the inherent “dynamic movement” of the psyche that “drives towards motion, change, and, in a

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680 Ibid., p. 25.
681 Ibid., p. 28.
It is “the vehicle par excellence” of self-transformation, “the mover”, the supreme “instigator of change, whose fascination drives, lures, and encourages the male to embark on all the adventures of the soul and spirit, of action and creation in the inner and the outer world.” Beatrice is the supreme transformative mediumship of Dante’s creative journey. The feminine quality of her function reflects the worshipping gaze of those who rediscover life with the shining eyes with which a young enamoured knight looks at the bride. The adventures of the soul thus become the knight’s trials and preparation to encounter “her”, in all her possible manifestations, a process which corresponds to the awakening of the inner disposition to love. Whenever love arises, the Persian mystics say, the “obscure tyranny” of the “ego” falls apart. The flame of the heart can shine and its natural radiance invests everything surrounding it. Thus spiritual symbols of the feminine generally imply the subject’s transformative union with life through acts of love. The worshipping of what Corbin refers to as the “Creative Feminine” is also often symbolically depicted in terms of a “mystical marriage”: a subtle mental alignment with life that eradicates the temptations of the “I” to subjugate “her” to its own purposes. Within this debate, Jung’s particular contribution to the study of the feminine and its symbolism stands out as one of the most representative modern accounts of this line of thought. Corbin conceives this aspect to be the distinctive trait of Jungian psychology. He justifies this standpoint by pointing to Jung’s special merit of having given psychic reality to the fundamentally transformative capacity of the soul. One of its most notorious expressions in Jung’s writing takes shape in the psychological concept of the “anima” archetype. As pointed out by Shamdasani, the genealogy of the “anima” reveals direct similarities with Avalon’s interpretation of the “Inner Woman” in The Power of the Serpent (she

682 Ibid., p. 29.
683 Ibid., p. 33.
685 See Ch. 1, n 217.
“who shines like a chain of lights” or a “lighting-flash” in the centre of the body). Dante’s analogous image of the “donna della mente” (the “lady of the mind”) perfectly depicts this archaic symbol. However, extensive psychological discussion around the concept of the “anima” has often completely ignored the roots of Jung’s experience and elaboration of this idea. “Anima” is the Latin word for “life”, “soul”, “vital principle” and derives from the ancient Greek word “ánemos” (“wind”), having in common the Proto-Indo-European root (*h enh-), “to breath”, “to blow”. “Anima” is for the ancients the “breath of life” that characterises animals (in which the word clearly resounds), humans, and all sentient beings. The “anima” evokes the Greek psyche (“life”, “breath”), another feminine word which in its primitive sense had very little in common with the modern rationalisation of terms like “psyche” or “consciousness”. Centuries after, in an essay appearing in 1904, “Does Consciousness Exist?”, William James suggests that the “fictitious” entity out of which philosophers have constructed the “entity known to them as consciousness”, the Cartesian “I think”, consists chiefly of an intellectualisation of the “stream of breathing”, the “I breath”, the “breath of life”. In contrast with this direction, the primordial “breath” of the “anima” acquires with Jung new life and strength, with the term itself being used either for “soul” or for man’s “unconscious” feminine. In the German text of Psychological Types, the Latin “anima” is twice used in Jung’s list of “Definitions” to describe the inner world of man, common to both sexes, otherwise referred to as “Seele”. She is, in other words, the way “one behaves in relation to one’s inner psychic processes.” “I call the outer attitude, the outward face, the persona; the inner attitude, the inward face, I call the anima.” An underlying drive for equilibrium characterises the relationship between the “anima” and the “persona”, both referred to as “soul-images” or


688 Jung, 1921, CW6, § 803. See also Jung, (1916), CW7, §§511-521.
“subject-imagoes”. “My experience confirms”, he observes, “the rule that [the anima] is, by and large, complementary to the character of the persona. The anima usually contains all those common human qualities which the conscious attitude lacks. [...] Everything that should normally be in the outer attitude, but is conspicuously absent, will invariably be found in the inner attitude.” The complementary character of the “soul” drives Jung to a further specification, which brings forth the second use of the term “anima” in his psychological model. In fact, since the complementary rule also affects its sexual character, a man has a specifically feminine inner counterpart, thus called “anima”, and a woman a typically masculine one, thus called “animus”, with significant implications regarding “conscious” and “unconscious” content.

During the years of his experiment, Jung repeatedly tackles the “anima” problem in close relation to the Middle Ages and in particular to Dante’s chivalric search for the soul. In 1921 in Psychological Types, the motif is examined in depth in the section “The Worship of Woman and the Worship of the Soul”, which begins from a central assumption. What the Christian mind identifies with the “worship of God” and Buddhism with the “worship of the self”, corresponds with what Dante and medieval psychology symbolise as the “worship of woman”. That “worship of woman”, in Jung’s view, essentially meaning “worship of the soul”, is a correspondence which finds in Dante’s journey to Beatrice its unsurpassed expression. In the “heroic endeavour” of the Florentine poet, the image of Beatrice is in fact “exalted into the heavenly, mystical figure of the Mother of God—a figure that has detached itself from the object and become the personification of a purely psychological factor, or rather, of those unconscious contents whose personification I have termed the anima.” A similar process of transformation from objective love for a woman to a visionary worshipping of the soul-image

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689 Ibidem.
690 Ibid., §805.
691 Ibid., §375. See Chapter 1, “The Esoteric Dante”.
692 Ibid., §377.
can be traced as well, Jung observes, in medieval prayers to the Virgin Mother (surfacing again in Faust’s prayer to the “Queen of Motherhood”) and in the adventures of the Shepherd of Hermas. The sublimation of erotic passion into psychic energy for self-transformation is epitomised by the symbol of the vessel, the earthly womb, the receptacle of life, which Neumann later acknowledges as the “central symbol” of the “anima”, “perhaps mankind’s—man’s as well as woman's—most elementary experience of the Feminine.”

Through the symbol of the vessel, Jung argues, the worship of woman conveys also a significant Gnostic coloration (Sophia). The extra-Christian and non-Biblical elements of this archaic image in fact heralds the affirmation of the feminine element into the spiritual heritage of the West. Thus, he continues, “it is not inconceivable that we have in the symbolism of the vessel a pagan relic that proved adaptable to Christianity”, especially in light of the fact that “the worship of Mary was itself a vestige of paganism which secured for the Christian Church the heritage of the Magna Mater, Isis, and other mother goddesses. The image of the *vas Sapientiae*, vessel of wisdom, likewise recalls its Gnostic prototype, Sophia.”

On this basis, he interestingly brings to the fore the psychological relations between worship of woman and the medieval quest for the Holy Grail. The connection is established upon the common central idea of the “holy vessel”, once more highlighted as a “thoroughly non-Christian image”, a “genuine relic of Gnosticism, which either survived the extermination of heresies because of a secret tradition, or owed its revival to an unconscious reaction against the domination of official Christianity.”

The parallelism is intriguing, when one considers how this view comes close to what the symbolist interpreters have to say about Dante’s Beatrice, as examined in the first Chapter of this study. Whether for the secret activities of the Fedeli d’Amore or for a natural process of reaction to the moral and political constrains of orthodox religion, Beatrice

693 Ibid., §394; Neumann, 1955, p. 39.
694 Ibid., §398.
695 Ibid., §401.
announces the poetic powers of the feminine and the tremendous individual and collective process of spiritual transformation that came about with it. In this regard, though direct historical connections can be hard to infer, the quest shared by the knights of the Holy Grail and the “spiritual knight” Dante reveals significant similarities, starting from the radiating force of their adventures: the soul. For Jung, the “mysterious something” that “inspired the knightly orders (the Templars, for instance), and that seems to have found expression in the Grail legend, may have possibly been the germ of a new orientation to life, in other words, a nascent symbol.”696 The blossoming of this symbol, in essence, is the birth of the “anima” in the mind of modern man. An entire spiritual chivalry sets out on a journey for her in the Middle Ages. The knights of the Grail, for example, that embark in all sorts of impossible adventures for a mysterious holy vessel that provides spiritual regeneration. The German mystic Meister Eckhart, in which Jung recognises the same “psychic orientation” that inspired the singers of the lore of the Grail and who celebrates the natural powers of grace, a feminine force, over the mind and the heart of man.697 And finally the visionary poet Dante, who gave the most celebrated account of the same well trodden quest, following the image of Beatrice into Hell and back to offer her his love, with such profound dedication that generation after generation of readers are still bewitched by the intuition of some numinous agitation, at hearing the sound of the name “Beatrix”. Many centuries later, facing the spiritual transformation of modern times, Liber Novus advocates the rescue of a “piece of the Middle Ages within ourselves”, thus taking side within the ranks of this same spiritual chivalry. This fragment of the Middle Ages has evidently nothing to do with the dark blots of that time, or with hardly comparable social, political, and religious circumstances. It has instead to do with “Her”, the transformative quest for the “anima” that makes of Liber Novus an experiment “on

696 Ibid., §409.
697 Ibid., §410.
the service of the soul”, as essentially “on the service of the soul” and the feminine were the chivalric adventures of the knights of the Middle Ages.

3.3.4. On Love

In the records of Liber Novus, the word “anima”, as in Jung’s specific psychological use, does not technically appear, except of a couple of mentions in the Black Books in the 20s. The “anima” sensu stricto, in fact, belongs to a different vocabulary from that of Jung’s experiment, in which later Jungian psycho-terminology finds little or no place at all. Nevertheless, the “Seele” or the “anima” sensu lato, the “soul in the primitive sense”, with its fundamentally feminine symbolism, is a direct protagonist, if not the primary hidden character, of Jung’s book of visions. One cannot emphasise enough the complete absence of a ghostly concept such as the “unconscious”, in Liber Novus, in contrast with the all-encompassing experiential dimension of the “soul”. As noted at the commencement of this study, the process of writing down the material for analysis was essentially described by Jung as “writing letters to my anima”, that is, “a part of myself with a different viewpoint from my own.” In this way, one can objectify the inner counterpart, the soul-image, by giving rise to a direct procedure of inner dialogue and active imagination, a firsthand observation of mind, an experiential training in creative thinking and self-transformation. Thus Jung always stressed the importance, for his pupils and students, to “write letters to the anima”, according to the language and method in which each one finds the soul’s voice speaking most distinctly. By letting the soul speak, her power is transformed too. The subject stops claiming victory over life and life returns the favour, in a karmic process. The task of such discussions, Shamdasani points out, consists of becoming increasingly aware of the underlying psychic processes reflected in the soul-image. “This process of integration of the anima” represents no less than “the subject of Liber Novus and the

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698 Jung, LN, p. 199, n56.
699 See Ch. 1, n84.
Black Books.” According to Jung, the soul takes on the voice and the appearance of a “She”. As the spiritual pilgrim Dante returns to Beatrice after many years of wandering, Jung’s ‘I’ claims to have come close again to his soul-bride “like a tired wanderer who had sought nothing in the world apart from her.” He does not claim to discover or find the “anima”. Rather, in a Dantesque fashion, he “returns” to her through a mind-purifying practice. He says that he “spoke” and “thought” and “knew many learned words” for her. He says that he “judged her” and “turned her” into a scientific object. So he did not consider that “my soul cannot be the object of my judgment and knowledge; much more are my judgment and knowledge the objects of my soul.” A dramatic inversion occurs. The ‘I’ becomes the servant of the soul and his capacities to love her are the sole measure of his freedom. Through love, the supposedly autonomous existence of the ‘I’ disappears altogether, unleashing the “mysteries” of what we call “divine”. No other way is possible for man to experience it, if not on the way to the soul, the “mind in action”, the way of life. So Jung’s ‘I’ abandons the language of science, power, and knowledge, to speak words of love to her, the only kind of word that may reach the soul. With a similar deference to that which characterises Dante before Beatrice, the ‘I’ praises his “almost forgotten” soul to give him her hand and continue the journey together, for “life has led me back to you”, and only “with you” “I will wander” and “ascend to my solitude.” Jung’s journey will in fact be characterised by many following encounters with the soul. The paramount importance of this symbol results from the distinctive connection of the Black Books and Liber Novus with the ongoing events in Jung’s life. As observed beforehand, without Toni Wolff on his side, there would have been an entirely different story of Liber Novus, if a story at all, as records attest and current developing

701 Jung, LN, p. 233.
702 Jung, LN, p. 232.
703 Ibidem.
704 Ibidem.
research confirms more and more so. Toni Wolff truly enacts the qualities of a Beatrix at the heart of Jung’s Commedia. As summarised by Lance Owens, the “mystery of the soul” was essentially opened to Jung "by love for a woman."\textsuperscript{705} On November 14, 1913, the ‘I’ calls out to the soul again: “Who are you, child? My dreams have represented you as a child and as a maiden. I am ignorant of your mystery. Forgive me if I speak as in a dream, like a drunkard—are you God? Is God a child, a maiden?\textsuperscript{706} Black Book 2 continues as follows: “And I found you again through the soul of the woman.”\textsuperscript{707} The direct connection between biographical and symbolical layers, between “worship of woman” and “worship of the soul”, places the experiential aspect of Jung’s journey right at the core of any related analysis. What the Swiss man notices with regard to Dante’s and Goethe’s visions—that an episode of love stands at the roots of a visionary experience—similarly applies to the background of Liber Novus. Active imagination furnishes him with a practice of self-transformation, the “form” of the experiment. Yet the fuel of the practice resolves in love. This love, though ultimately unfathomable for Jung, is not purely confined to the sensual or romantic realm, but also never rarefied into a Platonic abstraction. Through the imagery of the soul, this love is the deepest mark of psychic energy, the ultimate possibility of man’s direct communion with life. The multiform expression of the soul in Liber Novus takes shape in many different directions. In some of these occurrences, she is, in fact, “a maiden”, the inner bride. In a similar occasion, she is the young daughter of an old scholarly man, being held in captivity in a castle. By acknowledging her “reality”, the ‘I’ releases her from the prison in which she was kept, the maze of abstractions that caused people to perceive her just as a “fantasy”.\textsuperscript{708} Once more, Jung’s recognition of the psychic reality of the “anima” heals his vision of her. Now her face is beaming, she is beautiful, Lance Owens, 2015, \textit{Jung in Love: The Mysterium in Liber Novus} (Los Angeles/Salt Lake City: Gnosis Archive Books), p. 51.

\textsuperscript{705} Jung, LN, p. 233.

\textsuperscript{706} Ibidem, n49.

\textsuperscript{707} Ibid., p. 262.
a “deep purity” rests in her look, and a “profusion of red roses” appears where she stood.  
Another scene, “The Sacrificial Murder” (“Der Opfermord”), presents the soul in an entirely different context. The ‘I’ is confronted by the unbearable vision of a murdered young girl, horribly covered in wounds and blood.  
A woman, hidden by “an impenetrable veil”, like the High Priestess, calmly stands next to the body of the young girl. She instructs the ‘I’ into a ritual act that horrifies him as “absolute madness”: to remove the liver from the girl and eat it, thus sharing the deed of the murderer. As soon as the ‘I’, in terrible pain, reluctantly accomplishes the symbolical act, the woman throws her veil back and shows herself as a “beautiful maiden with ginger hair.” “I am your soul”, she finally reveals to the ‘I’ in dismay.  
In esoteric symbolism, the veiled High Priestess often embodies the occulted vision of the mysteries, with which the candidate can become familiar after long trials. In this case, the veil represents Jung’s obscured vision of the soul, suddenly purified by the un-veiling recognition of the real nature of her companionship. The “liver” that one must eat, symbol of the “seat of life” as remembered by Jung in Memories, hints also at the art of divination and the healing powers of imagination, as transmitted by the ancient haruspices, who practiced the reading of omens through the inspection of the entrails of sacrificed animals, in particular the livers (“hepatomancy”). A few nights after, the soul alarmingly speaks again to the ‘I’, with the voice of life, reminding him to welcome chaos and madness in a friendly manner, without becoming victim to the imposition of rules, teachings, and philosophies. Throughout these wondrous apparitions, the ‘I’ learns to increasingly give in to the riddles of the soul. “Will you accept what I bring?”, she asks in the scene “The Three Prophecies” (“Die drei Prophezeiungen”). “I

709 Ibid., p. 263.
710 Ibid., p. 290.
711 Ibidem.
713 Jung, LN, p. 298.
714 Ibid., p. 305.
will accept what you give. I do not have the right to judge or to reject”, the ‘I’ emblematically replies. Thus the soul will indiscriminately conduct the ‘I’ to experience both the healing and the dreadful destructive facet of its force, the supreme point of contact between superior meaning and absurdity, creation and destruction, as represented in Goddesses such as Hecate or Kali, or archetypal figures like Lilith. In this sense, the soul challenges the ‘I’ to the most difficult test, commanding him to pour psychic blood for the sake of the dead and thoroughly accept the powers of darkness. Only through a proper understanding of the union of the Below with the Above, in fact, can the soul bring to man the “breath of life”, magic and animality. Thus, in the section “The Magician”, she appears again in the elemental form of the serpent, the quintessential magical animal in which the opposites abide. A little later, the serpent bringer of wisdom turns into a small white bird which soars into the clouds and lays in Jung’s hands a golden crown, with three letters incised within: “Love never ends.” In the third part of Liber Novus, Scrutinies, the essentially mercurial nature of the soul is illustrated further. Through the voice of Philemon, the dead learn in fact that the serpent conveys the daimon of sexuality and the bird the daimon of spirituality, one and the same in their essential provenience, yet opposite in their manifestation. The soul unites the earth with the celestial counterpart, just as Beatrice reconciles, with Virgil’s precious help, Dante’s journey to the underworld to the heavenly ascension. Analogously, the soul reconciles eros, or libido in the primitive sense, with spirituality, or loving force. Without the acknowledgment of the former, there is no energy. Without recognition of the latter, there is pure chaos. Thus Jung provides the following cosmological sketch of the demons of the soul:

My soul where did you go? Did you go to the animals?

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715 Ibidem.
716 Ibid., p. 323.
717 Ibid., p. 325.
I bind the Above with the Below. I bind God and animal. Something in me is part animal, something part God, and a third part human. [...] 

If I am not conjoined through the uniting of the Below and the Above, I break down into three parts: the serpent, and in that or some other animal form I roam, living nature daimonically, arousing fear and longing. The human soul, living forever within you. The celestial soul, as such dwelling with the Gods, far from you and unknown to you, appearing in the form of a bird. Each of these three parts then is independent.

Beyond me stands the celestial mother. Its counterpart is the phallus. Its mother is the earth, its goal is the heavenly mother.

The celestial mother is the daughter of the celestial world. Its counterpart is the earth.718

When “eros” encounters “logos”, reason turns into intuition. Philemon becomes the “lover of the soul.” At the same time, this refined “logos” constantly returns to “eros” in the form of the intuitive awareness of the multiple demons that energetically regulate life. With the reconciliation of these forces in love, the vessel of the soul turns the emergence of visions into a “book of rebirth”, in which the life and practice of the Swiss psychologist show an eventful concordance. Common to all the different faces with which the soul appears to the ‘I’, in fact, is the evidence that Jung is compelled to learn a practice of love. The “knowledge of the heart”, he notes in “Soul and God”, comes very close to Philemon’s understanding of magic. It “is in no book and is not to be found in the mouth of any teacher”, for “the soul is everywhere that scholarly knowledge is not.” The only way to attain “knowledge of the heart”, therefore, is to live one’s life to the full.719 In the 1925 seminar, he extensively relates the feminine principle to the appearance of Salome, by calling her, in psychological terms, a paradigmatic example of the “anima” in her primordial manifestation.720 However, as this study illustrated, when one

718 Ibid., p. 370.

719 Ibid., p. 233.

deals with the *Black Books* and *Liber Novus*, one must remain as close as possible to the language and symbols of these experiments. Hence one is faced with an enigma: which term or symbol may aptly stand in for the absence of Jung’s later psychological use of “anima” and “Seele”? We may inevitably realise that the most appropriate word for what we are referring to is *love*.

“Love” appears hundreds of times in *Liber Novus*. In its first appearance, on November 15, 1913, it is directly addressed to the soul and already framed in terms of the key question that will follow throughout: “I must learn to love you.”\(^7\) “Love” is then the capital word of the “Mysterium”, the puzzling term that connects the ‘I’ to Elijah and Salome (“Must I love Salome?”). “Love”, in general, is a most frequent word in Jung’s records in between November 1913 and April 1914, in which a large part of the *Black Books* and *Liber Novus* is composed.

“Love” is the word of Philemon, the “loving magician”, and Baucis, the sublimation of the instinctual force of Salome into the silent drive of compassion. “Love” is the word that can also substitute the term “magic” in most of its occurrences in Philemon’s instruction of the ‘I’ about the learning of magic (“The Magician”). But “love” is also the word (“Amor”) that inspires those verses from Dante’s *Purgatorio* which appear at the core of the *Black Books*: “I am one who, when love / Breathes on me, notices, and in the manner / That he dictates within, I utter words. / And then, in the same manner as a flame / Which follows the fire whatever shape it takes, / The new form follows the spirit exactly.” (Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXIV, 52-54; XXV, 97-99).

“Love” announces, in these lines, Dante’s belonging to the visionary tradition of the Fedeli d’Amore (the Poets of Love). “Love” makes Dante embark in the impossible resolution of a journey to unexplored abysses of the mind, in search of his beloved. “Love” is for Dante the brave loyalty to the “sweet father” Virgil and the worshipping of the beloved Beatrice, image of the “Eternal Feminine”. “Love” is the synonym for the divine radiance of the mystical rose and the very last subject of the entire *Commedia*: “l’amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle” (“The love which moves the sun and the other stars”, *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 145). That love which led the lost

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\(^7\) Jung, LN, p. 235.
man in the desert to take another path, also turns the echoes of madness that opened *Liber Novus* into a path towards the most creative phase of Jung’s life. “Love” is, in short, the *prima materia* and the Ariadne thread of *Liber Novus* and the *Commedia*, comparable journeys of rebirth “on the service of the soul.” (An expression which, though unnoticed thus far in this context, have the same meaning of *psycho-therapy*, formed by *psyché*, “life” or “soul”, and *therapeúo*, “to serve”). Most importantly, in conclusion, “love” is an enigma. Or better yet, the enigma about which even “high imagination failed” (*Paradiso*, XXXIII, 142) and nothing more can be uttered. In 1922, at the core of *Liber Novus*, Jung speaks in this way to the students of the Zürich University: “Love will reward us only when we do [...]. Never ask what a man does, but how he does it. If he does it from love or in the spirit of love, then he serves a god; and whatever he may do is not ours to judge, for it is ennobled.”722 Years later, in the very last page of *Memories*, he notes that we are all “in the deepest sense victims and instruments of a cosmogonic ‘love’.” (“kosmogonen ‘Liebe’.”) “I do not use” the word “love”, he continues, “in its connotations of desiring, preferring, favoring, wishing, and similar feelings, but as something superior to the individual, a unified and undivided whole.” Despite “man can try to name” love “showing upon it all the names at his command,” he will involve himself in “endless self-deceptions.” If “he possesses a grain of wisdom, he will lay down his arms and name the unknown by the more unknown.”723 Possibly for a similar reason, at some point in January 1914, Jung lays down his pen and allows someone else, Toni Wolff, to write something inside his secret notebooks. It is the commencement of *Black Book 4* and Toni Wolff notes down another verse from Dante’s *Commedia*. This time is the sixth line of the third canto of the *Inferno*, part

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723 Jung/Jaffé, ETG, p. 356. (Tr. by R. And C. Winston).
of the inscription above the gate of Hell: “LA SOMMA SAPIENZA E ’L PRIMO AMORE.”

(“THE HIGHEST WISDOM AND PRIMAL LOVE”, Inferno, III, 6).724

Only through love, Hell can be traversed.

724 Jung, BB4, p.203. In this passage Dante refers to the three aspects of the trinity: the “divine authority” (“la divina podestate”) and, indeed, the “highest wisdom” and the “primal love”. “Love” comes therefore to indicate the Holy Spirit, the third element of the trinity which Jung later frequently associates, in fact, with the primordial characteristics of feminine symbolism.
Fig. 34. William Blake, 1824–1827, *Dante and Beatrice in the Constellation of Gemini and the Sphere of the Flame.*
Epilogue

As stated at the commencement of this work, the main inspiration of this research consisted in exploring a terrain of confrontation between psychology and visionary texts, through the lens of the untold encounter between Jung and Dante. The first part of the work (Chapter 1) thus illustrated the hermeneutical implications underlying this objective, by establishing a parallelism between the roots of Jung’s multilayered constructivist approach and Dante’s anagogic or spiritual method. The following sections (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) explored a number of significant historical, textual, thematic, psychological, and symbolic correspondences between the *Commedia* and *Liber Novus*. On a comparative basis, this study has continuously intersected an in-depth close reading of these texts with an amplification of its symbolical-analytical patterns, through a thematically designed investigation of motifs varying from the subterranean visions of the underworld to the restorative powers of the soul. By envisioning the *Commedia* primarily in terms of a medieval “book of visions” or “meditation book”, this research has conveyed a novel way to highlight a key feature of Jung’s own “book of visions”, *Liber Novus*, which has barely been touched upon before, however important it appears in its indebtedness to the spirit of the Middle Ages. In parallel, Jung’s interpretation of Dante as a prominent figure within the Western tradition of so called “visionary works” led to primarily draw on the works of figures such as William Blake and Swedenborg as the best critical companion to illuminate the intertextual correlations between *Liber Novus* and the *Commedia*. The word “visionary” has ultimately imposed itself as an appropriate non-reductive characterisation of the role of creative imagination within narratives of visions and inner travelling such as those of Jung and Dante. Overall, the question of “Jung’s Dante” opens a new path for accessing *Liber Novus* and the genealogy of Jung’s ideas, as well as for taking into account innovative and cross-disciplinary aspects of the studies on the psychological poetics of imagination. If the Swiss thinker considered the *Black Books* and *Liber Novus* the core of
everything he developed later scientifically, this was possible because the difficult time he spent engaged in his self-explorations eventually led him to a wider and longer process of renewal and psychic transformation. It is in this respect that Dante’s example positions itself in a unique place within Jung’s similar interests. Unlike many other frequently quoted cases, in fact, such as Nietzsche, Hölderlin, Gérard de Nerval, Silberer, in which Jung recognised the dangerous outcome of sailing for the underworld, the model of the *Commedia* points instead at the opposite direction: a resolution exemplified by Dante’s equilibrium between “lower” and “upper” layers of the mind. The *Commedia*, in other words, furnishes the author of *Liber Novus* with the blueprint of a story of rebirth, which acts as a model of confrontation for the profound urgency of inner change underlying the multifaceted stages of Jung’s experiment. As noticed throughout this study, the text of *Liber Novus* has much of Dante’s infernal and purgatorial fatigue, but not so much of the starry lights of Paradiso, which find a place instead in Jung’s later illustrations, as revealed, for example, by the image of the “window opening on to eternity”, which he described as a “luminous flower in the center, with stars rotating about it. Around the flower, walls with eight gates. The whole conceived as a transparent window.”

Yet already on the textual level of *Liber Novus*, the evocation of Dante’s entries from *Purgatorio* at the core of the *Black Books*, with their reference to the purifying force of fire and love, unavoidably summon an important symbol of catharsis. They indicate an orientation, a directionality of that transformation which, if announced in *Liber Novus* through the motif of the rebirth of God in the soul, takes full expression through the process which, for Jung, began with his work, but matured beyond it. The Dantesque flame ignites the thin line of continuation between the dark tones of Jung’s work and the following transformation which emerged out of it, the new colours of life which the paintings and illustrations of *Liber Novus* began to announce by taking shape in a mandala form. And precisely Jung’s increasing involvement with mandala symbolism during and after *Liber Novus* offers a significant

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725 Jung, LN, f. 159, p. 318, n296.
parallelism with the orientation of this complex journey. On January 2, 1927, he has a dream set in Liverpool, known as the “Liverpool dream”, which will in fact inspire the “window opening on to eternity.” In this dream, he sees a Swiss man on an island “with a magnolia tree stands covered with red flowers illuminated by an eternal sun.”

Commenting on this vision in *Memories*, he observes that this important image revealed at the time, after years of disquiet and self-explorations, the realisation that “the goal had been reached. One could not go beyond the center. The center is the goal, and everything is directed toward that center. Through this dream I understood that the self is the principle and archetype of orientation and meaning.”

The *Commedia* and *Liber Novus*, although in significantly different ways, recount their author’s experience of inner self-regeneration, pointing towards the mandala-like flowering of a psychic impersonal centre. In both cases, this transformative event is encompassed by a liminal journey into a subtle order of perceptions, which Corbin called the “mundus imaginalis”: a central source of healing and creative possibilities of the mind. By taking into account the correspondences between Jung’s and Dante’s explorations of this realm, this work has offered an answer to the key question from which it started, establishing the key role of Dante in Jung’s personal visionary experiment and later psychological system, while exploring the Jung-Dante encounter against the background of the category of “visionary works”, as Jung phrased it. In parallel, this research has offered an original perspective within Dante scholarship, by connecting Jung’s particular interpretation of the Florentine poet to the cultural debate of the early twentieth century, especially in relation to the symbolist reading of Dante. This thesis has shown that engaging with the *Commedia* in the light of its presence in Jung’s work can bring to the fore aspects of Dante’s work usually not engaged with by scholars, especially in relation to unconventional forms of imaginative interpretation that may have been neglected or undervalued before. Although this approach has been presented in this

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726 Jung, LN, p. 218.
context only in an embryonic form, calling for future explorations, it has refreshingly enabled this work to valorise the possibility of actualising the *Commedia* in terms of a practice of meditation and active imagination, in close relation to Western spiritual traditions. At the same time, despite the importance given by this thesis to the role of creative imagination between Jung and Dante, this thesis has since the start envisioned this approach as only one of the many fruitful possibilities in which to read the *Commedia*, giving preference to it as the one that most closely and provokingly attunes with the nature of Jung’s experiences in *Liber Novus*. With a certain proximity to Jung’s views, the unorthodox Canadian psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke considered Dante’s quest for Beatrice an excellent example of the journey into “cosmic consciousness” with which “illumined individuals” like Dante and Buddha take part in. Bucke’s description of “cosmic consciousness” comes close to Jung’s more famous reception of Lucien Levy-Bruhl’s notion of “participation mystique”, a primordial psychic state in which subject and object, man and nature, are undifferentiated. However, before Jung, Bucke, and the advent of modern psychology, the *Commedia* itself provided an outstanding poetical image of “participation mystique”, when, at the very start of his ascent to Heaven, Dante refers to his experience of melting with the universe as the surrendering of individuality to the luminous waters of “lo gran mare dell’essere” (“the great sea of Being”, *Paradiso*, I, 113).

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1898 > Jung receives a copy of Dante's *Commedia* from his aunt.


1911-1912 > *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido* (WSL, p. 78).

1913-1932 > *Black Books*

1913-1959 > *Liber Novus*

February 15, 1918 > Letter to Alphonse Maeder (unpublished material).

1921 > *Psychological Types* (CW6, §321, n34; §§376-378; §408; §410).


1928 > “The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious” (CW7, §232).


1930-1934 > *Visions: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1930-1934 by C. G. Jung* (June 24, 1932; March 9, 1932; June 14, 1933; October 11, 1933).


November 7, 1932 > Letter to Werner Kaegi (*Letters*, p. 102).


1933 > *The Berlin Seminar* (unpublished material).

1934-1939 > *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1934-1939* (October 31, 1934; February 12, 1936; May 19, 1937; May 26, 1937; June 23, 1937).

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729 A detailed discussion of the chronology of Jung's references to Dante in his works can be found in Tommaso Priviero, 2020, “A Historical Study of Carl G. Jung’s Psychological Understanding of Dante”, in *European Yearbook for the History of Psychology*, 6, pp. 63-96.
1935 > “The Tavistock Lectures” (CW18, §221).


1936-1940 > Children’s Dreams: Notes from the Seminar Given in 1936-1940 by C. G. Jung (p. 81; p. 174; p. 178; p. 188; p. 196; p. 203; p. 429).


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1939-1941 > Lectures at the ETH (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule) (March 3, 1939; January 19, 1940; February 28, 1941; July 4, 1941).

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1943/1948 > The Spirit Mercurius (CW13, 284).

1944 > Psychology and Alchemy (fig. 19; fig. 69; fig. 83; §235, n115; §315).

1945/1954 > “The Philosophical Tree” (CW13, §389; §410, n1; ).

1945 > Lecture on Gérard de Nerval’s Aurélia (2015, p. 52; p. 90).

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1948 > “The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales” (CW9i, §425).

1950 > “Concerning Mandala Symbolism” (CW9i, §652).

1952 > “Foreword to Werblowsky’s ‘Lucifer and Prometheus’” (CW11, §468).

1955/1956 > Mysterium Coniunctionis (CW14, §493; )

1959 > Foreword to Brunner’s “DIE ANIMA ALS SCHICKSALSPROBLEM DES MANNES” (CW18, §1279, n.4).
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