

**ON THE SERVICE OF THE SOUL:  
C.G. JUNG'S *LIBER NOVUS* AND  
DANTE'S *COMMEDIA***

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*PHANÉS* • VOLUME 1 • 2018 • PP. 28–57

<https://doi.org/10.32724/phanes.2018.Priviero>

**ABSTRACT**

Approximately nine years have passed since the publication of Jung's *Liber Novus* [New Book]. This event has dramatically changed the study of Jung's life and work, setting forth an exceptional number of paths to explore within the history of Jung's thought. Many of these have not been undertaken yet and call for fresh research. Jung's inspiring understanding of Dante's *Commedia*, embedded within Jung's in-depth fascination for the Middle Ages in *Liber Novus* is certainly one of these. This paper represents a first effort to delineate how Jung's approach to Dante has been crucial to the elaboration of *Liber Novus* at historical and hermeneutical levels.

**KEY WORDS**

C.G.Jung, *Liber Novus* (The Red Book), complex and analytical psychology, Dante Alighieri, visionary works

*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. Ezra Pound (1970:126).*

The way in which the masterpiece of Italian medieval poetry, after six centuries, has come to exert a primary role in C.G.Jung's *Liber Novus* [New Book], is a multifaceted subject matter. Besides the legendary prophecy according to which Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) *Commedia* [*Divine Comedy*] would be understood only after nearly seven centuries from its composition (c. 1308-1320), Shamdasani offers in the only extant publication on the topic (2016) a more stable point of departure for exploring the field: 'It is clear that the *Divine Comedy* has inspired Jung in his journey both from an existential and a literary angle' (Shamdasani 2016:46). I intend to prove and develop further this point of departure, by taking Jung's understanding of Dante as a springboard from which to examine Jung's personal and theoretical concern about the nature and meaning of visionary experiences.

The role played by Dante throughout the years of Jung's self-experimentation and later, can be traced by following the intersection of three axes of interpretation: historical, hermeneutic, and symbolic. The first level intends to illustrate Jung's encounter with Dante through a particular historical evolution having *Liber Novus* as its divide. The second level clarifies how the *Commedia* furnishes Jung with a primary hermeneutical inspiration for the successful undertaking of his journey. The third level introduces an intellectual discussion contemporary to *Liber Novus*, which, based upon the tradition of the esoteric reading of Dante's *Commedia*, sees Jung coming into close proximity to fellow researchers exploring the roots of symbolic thinking and creative or poetic imagination.

The results of this intersection form the basis of this paper, which I intend to divide into two parts. This choice aims to echo at once the dynamic structure of Dante's *Commedia* and the progression of Jung's

experiment. The first part reflects a moment of bewilderment corresponding to Jung's vision of Hell; the second a moment of psychological renewal corresponding to Jung's attempted foundation of a hermeneutics of visions.

As to the content, in the first section I will begin by focusing on Jung's understanding of Hell in *Liber Novus* via its relationship with the model of Dante's *Inferno*. I will place the emphasis on three major characteristics of Dante's descent to Hell (Christian, medieval and esoteric) that are especially relevant for Jung's experiment. This will allow me to establish Dante's particular place within Jung's category of 'visionary works', while following the development of Jung's theory of dreams and mythological thinking occurring during the turn from *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido* [*Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*] to *Liber Novus*. In parallel, I will highlight a line of interpretation within Dante studies that considered the symbolism in Dante's *Commedia* in a similar cultural vein to Jung's inspiration for *Liber Novus*. Personal research in this direction will allow me to demonstrate a historical connection between Jung and the esoteric reading of the *Commedia*.

In the second section, I will attempt to move out of Hell and illustrate the way in which Dante's hermeneutics has inspired Jung to progress in his journey. I will prove this by examining closely a few relevant passages from *Liber Novus* and by taking into account the entries from Dante's *Commedia* to which Jung refers at the beginning of his experiment in 1913. This will furnish me with the material for developing parallels between Dante's *Commedia* and Jung's *Liber Novus* at both literal and symbolic levels. In particular, I will advance a confrontation between the symbolic representations of masculine and feminine principles in Dante and Jung, through a close analysis of the episode of Jung's encounter with Elijah and Salome occurring in *Liber Novus*.

## **PART I**

### **Into Hell**

Shortly before the undertaking of the experiment that became the basis of *Liber Novus*, Jung was the first president of the then newly founded International Psychoanalytical Association (1910), 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 Jung's career culminated in the publication of *Wandlungen und Symbole der*

*Libido* (1911-1912), a comparative study of the myth-creating function of the mind encompassing an exceptional amount of mythological and anthropological material, previously assembled by Jung in a voluminous private collection. Among the variety of symbols, dreams and mythologies discussed extensively there by Jung, the work focuses on the psychological understanding of the hero, representing the birth of the individual out of the powers of nature. As pointed out by Jung in the 1925 Seminar, 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 (Jung 2012:30).

At the end of the work, Jung feels extraordinarily engaged with the ancestral material he raised through his study, and driven by the fear of being overwhelmed by its psychic stream.

In a first moment, significant dreams reveal to Jung a profound psychological transformation of his work and life, beyond his capacities to understand it. Later, this critical moment is brought to light by inner voices, hallucinatory episodes and waking visions of an apocalyptic nature, beginning on a train journey to Schaffhausen in October 1913 (Jung, RB:198). In a period stretching from 1913 to the late 20s, Jung's reaction to this tangled situation is to embark on a process of self-exploration, which resulted in a unique overcoming of conventional boundaries between psychology, visionary literature, visual arts and esoteric practices. The records of this effort coalesce into *Liber Novus*, and represent in Jung's own words, 'the most difficult experiment of my life' (Jung, RB:198).

The origin of Jung's journey 'on the service of the soul' (RB:234) triggers the very opening lines of *Liber Novus*, where Jung remarks that in the fortieth year of his life the desire for 'honor, power and every human happiness' suddenly ceased and 'horror came over' him (Jung, RB:232). The passage echoes a biblical line from Isaiah 38:10, 'Ego dixi in dimidio dierum meorum: vadam ad portas inferi',<sup>1</sup> which inspired the illustrious beginning of Dante's *Commedia*, arguably a more familiar reference to the modern Western reader:

Half way along the road we have to go,

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<sup>1</sup> 'I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave' (Carroll and Prickett 2008:799).

I found myself obscured in a great forest,  
 Bewildered, and I knew I had lost my way  
 (Dante 2008 [c.1308-1320]: 47, *Inferno*, I,  
 1-3).

The motif of the thirty-five years' 'radical mental changing' (*Lebenswende*), which the ancient Greeks called *metánoia*, occupies Jung in a variety of his scientific works. Jung's most recurrent examples are Dante, Nietzsche, Christ, Zarathustra, but, surprisingly, not Buddha Shakyamuni. How Jung's mid-life turning point, as presented in *Liber Novus*, entails a Dantesque connotation more than any other, can be understood through a careful observation of the psychological and symbolic background of the first lines of Dante's *Commedia*.

Let us briefly review the story. In his juvenile years, Dante falls in love with a woman from Florence whose name is Beatrice Portinari, and whom Dante met for the first time at the age of nine. In the *Vita Nova*, Dante describes his lifelong love for Beatrice and recounts the tremendous suffering caused by her death, followed by the determination to 'write of her that which has never been written of any other woman' (Dante 2008 [c.1292-1294]:84). Contrary to this intention, however, in the following years Dante commits himself to philosophical work and controversial political vicissitudes, completely abandoning his promise. It is only around the thirty-fifth year of his life that Dante experiences a threatening state of despair that he describes as finding himself in a *selva oscura* ('dark forest'). Hence, he decides to embark on a journey to find the beloved Beatrice in a different realm from the corporeal. For her sake, he ventures with the help of the Roman poet Virgil into the worlds of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, corresponding the three parts of Dante's *Commedia*.

Dante takes as a model for his own existential crisis the *metánoia* of Christ (Dante 1990 [c.1304-1307], *Convivio*, xxiii, 10), whose crucifixion at the age of thirty-three is narrated in the New Testament, and is supposed to have happened at the stroke of noon on Good Friday. So it is recalled in Jung's *Liber Novus*: 'This is really Good Friday, upon which the Lord died and descended into Hell and completed the mysteries' (Jung, RB:304). In the *Commedia*, the commencement of Dante's journey in the forest (Friday) reflects the beginning of the passion of Christ, whereas the days of His death (from Friday to Sunday) mirror Dante's visit to Hell. Interestingly, both Jung and Dante refer to the left as the side of the descent to Hell. Dante's circular journey to the dead occurs by keeping to the left and Jung refers to the visions from the left, as the side of the 'unholy, unknown or

inauspicious' (Jung, RB:249, n190, n197). Even Dante's Ulysses, when leaving Penelope to cross the sea toward the Southern Hemisphere, enters the open sea leaving behind Ceuta and Seville, and turns toward the left.

Christ's *katábasis* to Hell is traditionally mentioned in the *Symbolum apostolorum*, which says that after his death Christ 'Mortuus, et sepoltus, descendit ad *inferos*, tertita die resurrexit a mortuis [*Italics added*]' (2005:90).<sup>2</sup> The Christian understanding of the passage introduces a theological distinction between '*Inferno*' ('Hell'), which allegedly indicates the sinners' fate in the afterlife, and '*inferos*' ('hell'), which alternatively represents the land 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.

Hence, '*inferos*' is supposedly the place into which Christ descends for three days, albeit unlike the cases of Odysseus or Aeneas, no details are provided in the Christian canonical texts concerning the events occurring during his visit. For the benefit of the curious, however, Christ's descent into Hell is described in great detail in several apocryphal gospels and in particular in the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the earliest extant paleo-Christian description of Hell. The *Apocalypse of Peter* is widely accepted by Christian writers throughout the history of Christianity, and above all, this text supplies in large measure the pandemonium of demons, tortures and visions described in Dante's *Inferno*, where the combination of Christian and ancient representations of Hell attains its medieval apogee (Shamdasani 2016; James and Elliot 1993:594-595). Presenting a radically different conception of the experience of evil from the theological doctrine of *privatio boni* ('absence of good'), the apocryphal works are an abiding interest in Jung's intellectual research concerning the meaning and experience of Christianity (Jung, RB:243, n135). The model of Dante's journey offers him a significant counterpart to the apocryphal writings, whilst binding the apocryphal content to the mind-set of the Middle Ages, where the lost piece of European religious experience has, according to Jung, to be rediscovered. This parallel is most explicitly developed by Jung in his writings about alchemy, where he juxtaposes Dante and the apocryphal Christ, as analogous examples of necessary descents into Hades, where the hero recognises and accepts the evil counterpart, wins back the power of darkness and gains a state of inner renewal (Jung 1936, CW12:§61, n2).

In *Liber Novus*, a remarkable passage indicates Jung's own *metánoia* as being conceived along similar premises:

<sup>2</sup> 'Descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the Dead'. See 2005. 'Apostles' Creed', *Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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 (Jung, RB:243).

Hades in *Liber Novus* forms a precinct to host the threatening side of Jung's psychic exploration, a completely reversed order of reality opening the author's first dreadful glimpse of deeper levels of the mind. The movement forward to the 'rise to heaven', or a psychological illumination, would be impossible to the apocryphal Christ as it would be for Dante, Jung argues, if, before ascending to the nine skies of Paradise he had not plunged, level by level, through the nine circles of Hell.<sup>3</sup> As pointed out convincingly by Maud Bodkin,

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 (Bodkin 1951 [1934]:136).

As much as Dante's *Inferno*, Jung's Hell also 'has levels' (Jung, RB:265) and a distinct medieval appearance, illustrating the understanding of Hell not as an after-place of punishment and regret arbitrarily fixed in a dogmatic meaning, but as a transformative condition of psychic purification.

### Visionary Works

Jung's approach to Dante demands the discussion of those peculiar works of art that, according to Jung, incorporate under the aesthetic guise a substantial closeness to primordial psychic experiences. Jung defines them as 'visionary works' (Jung, 1930/1950, CW15:§139) and distinguishes between a 'psychological' and a 'visionary' faculty of imagination. The 'psychological' appears characterised within

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<sup>3</sup> Dante's Hell is depicted as nine concentric circles located within the Earth. Correspondingly, Dante's Paradise is depicted as a series of nine concentric spheres or skies surrounding the Earth.

the limits of the intelligible and familiar, as deriving mainly from man's conscious life. On the contrary, while dwelling on preferred examples such as Dante, William Blake, Gustav Meyrink, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* and the second part of Goethe's *Faust*, Jung's category of the 'visionary' indicates a forceful stream of inspiration where

the experience that furnishes the material for artistic expression [...] derives its existence from the hinterland of man's mind, as if it had emerged from the abyss of prehuman age, 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 (Jung, CW15:§141).

Exceeding no less the sense of aesthetic criteria than of psychological commentaries, the shattering power of a Dionysian experience of this sort, Jung continues, 'arises from timeless depths and [...] bursts asunder our human standards of value [...], a terrifying tangle of eternal chaos, a *crimen laesae majestatis humanae*', or 'a revelation whose heights and depths are beyond our fathoming, or a vision of beauty which we can never put into words' (Jung, CW15:§141). Jung argues in a similar vein that the visionary content is as well the true inspiration of Dante's poetic material:

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 (Jung, CW15:§143).

Similarly, Dante himself, 'who is certainly better qualified than anyone else to inform us of his own intentions' (Guénon 2001 [1925]:2), indicates to his protector Cangrande Della Scala (Jenaro-MacLennan 1974, Ep, XIII, 7-10) how the *Commedia* entails a precise heterogeneity of senses: literal, allegoric, moral, and anagogic, otherwise gathered in literal and allegoric, or, to put it with René Guénon (1925), 'apparent' and 'hidden' levels of interpretation. In the Middle Ages, the subdivision into layers of meaning was applied exclusively to the study of the Holy

Scripture under the religious authority of the Church. Dante's indications transfer for the first time this competence to the secular experience of the poet and ascribe the *Commedia* to the genre of a 'sacred poem', as his author first indicates in Paradise, XXV, 1 (Dante 2008:459). The extraordinary historical importance of this event deals with establishing the place of poetic works within the tradition of Christian sacred literature. In this regard, Dante's *Commedia* questioned in a unique manner the barriers between poetic and religious discourse, assigning to the poet a favorite role in spiritual matters. This discussion has persistently characterised the study of Dante's work and is still echoed in contemporary literary criticism. Harold Bloom, among others, sees the *Commedia* as a primary sacred text within the European canon, zealously remarking that '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' (Bloom 1994:76-104).

The medieval distinction into layers of interpretation is crucial to the unconventional, symbolist reading of Dante's journey arising in the very early decades of the twentieth century within Dante studies. The cross-disciplinary search for a new epistemology, which elevates the faculty of imagination as the leading source for self-knowledge goes, at the time, hand in hand with a new and consistent emphasis on Dante as the master visionary of European literature. The symbolist reading takes the imagery of Dante's journey as the inspiration of a majestic pilgrimage to the lower and upper worlds of the mind, presenting significant analogies with Jung's own account of 'visionary works', and in a close cultural spirit to the composition of *Liber Novus*.

The symbolists dismiss both literary and transcendently oriented readings of the *Commedia*, which, according to them, make of Dante's journey to the muse and lost beloved Beatrice no more than a literary, yet illustrious, creation inserted within a morally oriented, yet exceptionally refined, theological construction. This approach remains, the symbolists argue, substantially foreign to the *raison d'être* of Dante's visionary poetry. Therefore, instead of framing Dante's visions as a glorious literary text of Christian revelation, the symbolists retain Dante's work as the result of a spiritual self-experiment, at once symbolic and existential, elicited by the psychic mediumship of Beatrice's love.

Starting with the works of Eugène Aroux (1854) and Francesco Perez (1869), the crucial texts of the symbolists appear in a period of time stretching from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth (Rossetti 1887; Pascoli 1898, 1902, 1912; Guénon 1924, 1954; Valli 1928; Cerulli 1949; Corbin 1955). In 1928, the Italian philosopher Luigi Valli

(1878-1931) writes *Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei Fedeli d'Amore* [*The Secret Language of Dante and the Poets of Love*], arguably the most influential book within the symbolist literature on Dante. In short, Valli's thesis is that the poetry of love in the Middle Ages celebrates under the names of different historical women, such as Beatrice for Dante, Giovanna for Guido Cavalcanti or Laura for Petrarch, a higher experience of wisdom channelled by the inner feminine revealing itself through poetry. The perennial tradition of the divine feminine, in Goethe's *Faust* 'das Ewig-Weibliche' (the 'eternal feminine'), ascribes to the symbolic guidance of the inner woman the role of the erotic medium and spiritual vehicle, permitting the reawakening of divinity in the human soul. In the context of the Middle Ages, this tradition intermingles largely with the parallel tradition of the mystery of the Grail. Valli concludes that Dante and the poets of love would disguise an esoteric research under a literary form, in order to communicate to each other the results of their quest for wisdom and spiritual elevation.

Valli's thesis becomes soon especially appreciated beyond the boundaries of Dante scholarship. It is largely commented on by a variety of intellectuals who share the view of Dante as a master of Western spirituality (Dante 'Shakya of the West', according to the Italian poet Giovanni Pascoli), and who conceive the *Commedia* as a primary reading within the research concerning the esoteric or visionary tradition in European culture. René Guénon dedicates an entire project to this argument (1925), in addition to a variety of consistent references throughout his writings. Henry Corbin criticises a few aspects of Valli's visions, yet he maintains the leading points of the symbolist angle and juxtaposes them with the sources of Sufi and Persian metaphysical poets (1955). Julius Evola even extends Valli's ideas by establishing a parallel between the visionary experiences of Dante and the Italian poets of love in the Middle Ages, and tantric aspects pertaining to the Eastern spiritual current of Shaktism (1958). Ezra Pound comes to know of Valli thanks to his friend from the London's Theosophical Society, George Robert Stowe Mead (Pound 1993:55). Despite Pound's general negative response to Valli's theory (but not to the tradition of the esoteric reading of the *Commedia*), he returns to him repeatedly, granting his work the merit of a major historical contribution to the visionary understanding of Dante's life and poetry (Pound 1954).

Hence, as I was exploring Jung's library in search for information concerning his understanding of the *Commedia*, coming across Valli's book as the only major commentary on Dante which Jung possessed, was more than an exciting finding. Jung had a copy of Valli in German translation (*Die Geheimsprache Dante und der Fedeli d'Amore*, 1930)

and favourably refers to the work on various occasions. In a letter to Werner Kaegi (*Letters*, November 7, 1932, vol.1:102), Jung depicts Valli's work as an accurate illustration of the psychic 'backdoors of the Renaissance'. Furthermore, Jung uses Valli's book to discuss the significance of the mystic rose in medieval symbolism (Jung, CW12:§235, n115), which according to Valli was at that time a widespread symbol known 'from Hindustan to the Loire' (Valli 2014 [1928]:475). This comparative perspective is familiar with Jung's standpoint, and in his lectures at the ETH, Jung advances a discussion concerning mandala representations, where Dante's contemplation of the rose in the Empyrios is juxtaposed to the sacred lotus of Buddhist symbolism (Jung 2018).<sup>4</sup>

This finding is meaningful at both historiographical and hermeneutical levels. Since no references to Dante are present at all in Jung's published works prior to *Liber Novus*, and a number of about thirty appear after *Liber Novus* (excluding the references in the unpublished works), Jung's interest for Dante may be observed along three main chronological moments: (i) two entries copied together by Jung from Dante's *Purgatorio* appear in the earliest draft of *Liber Novus*, the *Black Books*, indicating a first reading of the *Commedia* in 1913 (Jung, RB:202, n93); (ii) the different layers of *Liber Novus* echo Jung's intent to develop a hermeneutical method in close analogies to Dante's idea of the plurality of senses of interpretation. At the same time, Dante and Eckhart occupy a primary space of discussion in the fifth chapter of the *Psychologische Typen*, 'The Type Problem in poetry' (Jung 1921, CW6:§§ 375-433); (iii) from the reading of Valli onwards (1930), Jung's turn to alchemy goes with the beginning of an intellectual period where Dante becomes an increasing interest in Jung's late scientific works.<sup>5</sup>

### The Remains Of The Hero

Intriguingly, in one of the earliest commentaries on Dante's *Inferno* ever written (late XIII AD - XIV AD), Guido Da Pisa suggests a singular, dreamlike reading of Dante's journey: 'half way along our life, that one of sleep state, he finds himself in a dark forest' (Da Pisa 1974). Da Pisa associates the visionary way of dreaming and reverie with the opposite domain of waking up,

<sup>4</sup> The Empyrios is according to Catholic Medieval theology the uppermost among the heavenly skies, where the physical perception of the divine would be manifested.

<sup>5</sup> Of the same period, Jung's library enlists also V. Ocampo's *De Francesca à Béatrice. A travers la Divine Comédie* (1926) and H.F. Dunbar's *Symbolism in medieval thought and its consummation in the Divine Comedy* (1929).

and the hero (Dante's 'I') with a *mental traveller* (Blake, 2004 [c.1801-1803]:499), reawakened into the complete reversal of his own being.

Jung's characterisation of a primordial experience of 'contrasting light and darkness' sparking the inspiration of 'visionary works' such as Dante's *Commedia*, echoes what Shamdasani points out to be at the roots of the relationship between the history of modern psychology and the theory and practice of Jung's complex psychology (Shamdasani 2003). The psychic research on subliminal experiences as conducted in the works of William James, Théodore Flournoy and Frederic Myers, conveys essentially an epistemological 'reversal of hierarchy between sleep and waking' (Shamdasani 2003:129), where a symbolic, mythopoeic function of the mind comes to dethrone the alleged superiority of waking or habitual consciousness. The subliminal content is taken as a psychic creative functioning occurring under the *limine* (threshold) of empirical perceptions, an unseen activity channeling the primary functions of the mind and acting as a guidance for the supra-liminal personality. Alongside his crucial reading of Schopenhauer's opposition of the mind to the blind creating will (Jung 2012 [1925]:4-5), Jung builds up the substance of this research and accords to the subliminal psychic material as occurring in dreams the principal function of a biological compensation or a healing correction against the one sided demands of the ego (Shamdasani 2003:129). Therefore, dreams, ecstatic experiences and multiple psychic phenomena as described in the séances do not point in a purely subtractive way to a distortion of waking perceptions to be restored in the ego toward practical ends, but rather they show the individual the way to higher possibilities of creative and transformative powers. Nevertheless, if the reversal of one's waking psyche is indicated by the dream or by altered states of personality only in a fragmentary way, the active embrace of a visionary self-experimentation takes it to its full potential, resulting into two opposite tensions. One is the dreadful reversal of all will to power, honours, wish fulfilments and demands of the individual, the sort of sickness-initiation as outlined by Jung at the undertaking of *Liber Novus* and corresponding to the psychic isolation that encloses the vision of Hell. Again referring to Dante's journey, Bodkin illustrates it in this way:

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 (Bodkin 1951 [1934]:127).

The other tension is the drive to live the experience of psychic reversal all the way to its opposite side, enacting an upward movement or an inner transformative process leading to a psychological awakening. At a symbolic level, the first tension is outlined by the struggle of the hero to sacrifice the individual will to subjugate life. The second tension entails the sacrifice of the hero as such, heralding a new participation of the individual in life.

In *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*, the hero has a burden to sacrifice, essentially represented by the infantile attachment of the son or the ego to the maternal womb. In *Liber Novus*, Jung develops substantially farther the psychological implications of the sacrificial act, due to his own direct involvement with the making and the experience of the sacrifice. At the doors of the mysteries, the hero in Jung endures an intrinsic psychic conflict stemming from an equivocal relation of the individual and the universal, or an at once willing and unwilling demanded sacrifice of the individual to the cosmos.

In the 'Prologue' of Jung's *Liber Novus*, the 'spirit of this time' (*Geist der Zeit*), blinded guardian of the use and values of human pride, speaks to Jung of the sacrifice underpinning his journey to the soul as 'madness' (Jung, RB:230). On the contrary, the 'spirit of the depths' (*Geist der Tiefe*), which 'from time immemorial and for all the future possesses a greater power' (RB:229), speaks to him of sacrifice as wisdom, reading: 'No one can or should halt sacrifice. Sacrifice is not destruction, sacrifice is the foundation stone of what is to come' (Jung, RB:230).

On December 18, 1913, Jung engages in the vision of the murder of Siegfried ('Murder of the Hero', RB, ch. vii). Jung sees himself shooting the German hero and interprets it as the frightful attempt to sacrifice his superior psychological function as an intellectual and a man of science, or in his own words 'my power, my boldness, my pride' (Jung, RB:242). However, the sacrifice of the hero as detailed in the episode of Siegfried is to Jung rather the point of departure than a culmination of his sacrifice to the 'spirit of the depths'. A greater riddle now arises upon the remains of Jung's hero: how can one go into Hell 'without becoming Hell oneself' (Jung, RB:240), as it might have happened to Nietzsche, Jung would have argued, but possibly not to Dante? How can Hell be experienced without the explorer of Hell being overpowered by what the 'spirit of this time' would identify as madness?

## PART II

### A Way To Light

At the gates of Hell the dilemma is that ‘ducunt volentem fatam, nolentem trahunt’,<sup>6</sup> as Seneca phrases it to Lucilium, or ‘some turn away from it, others plunge into it. If we do not see a thing Fate does it to us’ (Jung, RB:232, n32):

No one should deny the danger of the descent, but it *can* be risked. No 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 (Jung, 1952, CW5:§553).

In *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido* (1911-1912) Jung comments largely on the psychological meaning pertaining to the risk and necessity of descending into the underworld. He presents cases drawn from Eastern and Western mythological traditions, such as Theseus and Vishnu, as well as cases of poets and philosophers, such as Hölderlin and Nietzsche. Jung argues that all of these cases represent failed or blind descents into Hell. In other words, he conceives them as examples of a regression of psychic energy that, springing from a lowering of consciousness, eventually takes the subject to a disintegration of the conscious personality or a condition of ‘madness’.

In 1913 Jung’s experiment places himself in front of his own *saison en enfer*. More urgently than a way down to Hell, Jung above all chases a way up out of it, a *via nova* (New Way) to win back Hell towards a reversed order of psychological and spiritual renewal. It is in this respect that Dante’s *Commedia*, unlike the ‘blind’ cases mentioned in *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*, is able to equip Jung with a Bardo ship to safeguard the descent to the darker recesses of the mind.

In *Liber Novus*, Jung appears to use a very similar symbolic repertoire as Dante. A large extent of Jung’s material resembles imagery and content of Dante’s *Commedia*: the identity of the soul, the function of the guide, the function of shadows and ghosts, the devil and the integration of the evil counterpart,<sup>7</sup> the ambivalence of fire symbolism

<sup>6</sup> ‘The fates lead the willing and drag the unwilling’ (Seneca 2014: 233, Ep. 107, 11,5).

<sup>7</sup> After *Liber Novus*, Jung consistently draws upon Dante’s *Commedia* to describe the encounter and psychological assimilation of the evil side. In particular, cf. *A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of Trinity* (Jung, 1942/1948, CW11: §252), *The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales* (Jung, 1945/1948, CW9: §425), *The Psychology of the Transference* (Jung, 1946, CW16: §403) and *Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon*

(purification and transformation), the conical form of Hell, the guidance of the feminine principle, medieval imagery, Christianity, madness and divine folly. Yet the blueprint upon which all of these themes rest in *Liber Novus* is in the first place a Dantesque inspiration for a psychocosmology of the opposites, where each element of regression (or *katábasis*, lit. ‘descent’) is successfully counterbalanced and regenerated by an upward element of psychic progression (or *anábasis*, lit. ‘ascent’).

Although Henri Ellenberger was probably not aware of the fact that Jung actively read Dante at the time of *Liber Novus*, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* contains an excellent note regarding the psychological reception of this idea:

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 (Ellenberger 1970:713).

Apart from Jungian terminology *stricto sensu*, these lines aptly illustrate the substance of Jung’s encounter with Dante.

The means of living and overcoming Hell, as outlined in Dante’s *Commedia*, are experienced in *Liber Novus* via the establishing of a science of the visionary material, or a constructive hermeneutics which prepares for an essential part of Jung’s later psychotherapeutic model. To frame it in Dante’s language, this possibility seems to arise from pursuing a continuous creative conversation between the angles of the *viator* (the traveller) and the *auctor* (the author), which Jung ascribes to a mythopoeic and a scientific mode of thinking respectively. Where the intuitive discourse of the traveller describes the experience of living the visionary journey, the constructive discourse of the author recounts the composition of a new science about that journey.

### **Dante In The *Black Books***

The most significant indications regarding Jung’s understanding of Dante are given on December 26, 1913, when Jung copies in the *Black Books* two lines from Dante’s *Purgatorio*. The

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(Jung, 1942, CW13: §177).

first is Dante's celebrated submission to the 'dictator of Love':

I am one who, when Love  
Breathes on me, notices, and in the manner  
That he dictates within, I utter words (Dan-  
te 2008:303, *Purgatorio*, XXIV, 52-54).

The second is part of a passage concerning the nature of the soul and the intellect:

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 2008:309, *Purgatorio*, XXV, 97-99).

Especially in their appearance together, the entries provide a remarkable poetic synthesis of the making of Jung's *Liber Novus*. The content of the entries indicates in the first place Jung's urgency for 'uttering words', echoing in a prophetic tone the burden to turn the 'dictation within' into a new form that untangles the enigmatic visionary stream. At the same time, the entries present the visionary *himself* as caretaker of the flame, as he is of the same substance of the imaginative fire, being transformed by the medium of imagination into the primary object of a sacred experience. For the sake of Jung's journey, the contact with the 'spirit of the depths' demands a house, a holy precinct, where the encounter of the *viator* and the *auctor* mediates the opposite poles of the experiment, the 'katabasis eis andron' ('descent into the cave') and the 'anandromè eis to voeron eidos' ('new tension towards the intelligible form'). This psychic, liminal space appears significantly close to a theory of the subtle energies of the mind which the French orientalist Corbin later adapts from the ancient Islamic notion of *mundus imaginalis* ('imaginal world'). The *mundus imaginalis* is for Corbin 'an order of reality corresponding to a precise order of perception' (Corbin 1972), where the latter describes mental states of increasing illumination derived from articulated techniques of introspection and symbolic thinking. According to Corbin, the individual can penetrate subtle degrees of mental energies, which, thanks to the imaginative faculty, can be used for healing or transformative purposes. Historically, Jung's appreciation of Corbin's principle of *mundus imaginalis* is impossible to establish. Corbin develops this notion a few years after Jung's death, and even during Jung's lifetime he feels their approaches are

not the same, separated at bottom by differing outlooks on metaphysics and psychology. However, fascinating hermeneutical analogies are also evident. Corbin recounts on more than one occasion how Jung's model of the mind is familiar to some trajectories of his research, as expressed for example in a *Post-scriptum biographique à un entretien philosophique*:

Throughout his research, Jung seized upon the idea of a 'world of subtle bodies'. The intuition was profoundly correct [...] A middle world where the spirit is corporalised and the bodies are spiritualised. This is precisely the '*mundus imaginalis*' (Corbin 1981:48-49).

However Jung may have reacted to this claim, Corbin's description of journeys into the *mundus imaginalis* such as Dante's *Commedia* or the Islamic visionary recitals and Jung's account of 'visionary works' share the same inspiration of dealing with visionary texts based upon the author's exceptional imaginative experience and accompanied by the author's own, implicitly prescriptive hermeneutic. This is the key of interpretation proposed by Dante in his letter to Cangrande and also the experience Jung comes to live in *Liber Novus* and transforms into the foundation of a new psychological model. Thus establishing an intertextual and symbolic relation, Jung approaches the *Commedia* as Dante's personal journey into the depths, and he takes the poet's adventure of the soul as illustrious guidance for his own self experiment in an analogous terrain.

As a rule, at the beginning of journeys of such nature, the protagonist finds himself in a state of utter psychic bewilderment. In the case of Dante's *Commedia*, the poet is forsaken in a barren desert and menaced by a triad of fearsome beasts. The obstacle pushes Dante back into the dreadful forest where he began his adventure. However, thanks to a precise optical turning— 'I looked up and saw' (Dante 2008:47, *Inferno*, I, 16) —, the poet can notice the appearance of a guide behind the triad. As much as Dante's 'looking up' at Virgil (sent on by the muse Beatrice), Jung's willing descent with open eyes contrasts with the exposure to a blind journey into Hell and allows the possibility of bringing the dark matter to light.

In *Liber Novus*, Jung's encounter with the prophet Elijah, and especially with Philemon, present very similar traits to the multifaceted role played by Virgil in Dante's *Commedia* (Shamdasani 2009:202). As Dante conceives Virgil as 'my master and my author' (Dante 2008:49, *Inferno*, I, 85), so Jung understands Philemon to be the 'higher author' of his visionary material. As a guide, magician and psychopomp, Virgil bears the primary function of initiating the apprentice Dante into the

mysteries. Firstly, he prevents Dante from the identification with Hell and the risk of being sucked down by the shadows of the dead. Furthermore, he mediates for Dante between the spiritual realm and sensory perceptions. Most importantly, he is the intermediary for Beatrice, the vessel of Dante's transformative epiphany. All in all, to put it in Osip Mandelstam's words—which can be valid as well for Jung's relationship with Philemon:

If Dante had been sent forth alone, without his *dolce padre*, without Virgil, 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! (Mandelstam 2002 [1933]:50).

By showing Dante the way to the gates of the grave, the appearance of Virgil conveys the first changing attitude of the poet's mind: 'Then he moved forward, and I kept behind him' (Dante 2008:51, *Inferno*, I, 136). Under the guidance of Virgil, Dante moves on through his adventure, inspired on the one hand by the duty of 'dictation', or the masculine, static principle of notation, and on the other hand by the imaginative fire of Love, or the feminine, dynamic principle of progression. Where the superior sight that induces Dante to undertake his journey is carried out by Virgil (and by Philemon for Jung), the energy that makes possible for him the advancement throughout the journey is carried by the *anima*, the soul or the inner woman (Jung 1996 [1932]:22), thus gloriously speaking through the voice of Dante's beloved woman:

[...] 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 (Dante 2008:53, *Inferno*, II, 70-72).

In 1921, in *Psychologische Typen*, Jung considers in the fifth chapter the relationship between the notion of soul in the Middle Ages and the subsequent evolution of religious experience in the Christian world. Jung refers there the birth of modern European individualism to Dante's worship of Beatrice in these terms,

It began, it seems to me, with the worship of the woman, which strengthened the man's soul very considerably as a psychological factor, since the worship of woman meant worship

of the soul. This is nowhere more beautifully 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 (Jung, CW 6: §§376-377).

### The Unity Of Opposites

Jung's entries from Dante in the *Black Books* appear next to the dramatic sequence that stems from Jung's first encounter (December 21, 1913) with the 'figure-events' Elijah and Salome, the prophet of the Old Testament and the stepdaughter of King Herod.

In the 1925 Seminar, Jung recounts that the technique of inner exploration that he has developed takes him then to catch sight of a 'cosmic depth' (Jung, RB:246, n161). On the third night after the vision of Elijah and Salome, Jung experiences a deep conflict between an exceptional longing to continue his experimentation and a resistance about going down, resulting in the forceful release of new, cryptic imaginative material (December 25, 1913). In a first moment, Jung sees himself standing before walls enlarging into a huge mountain taking the form of the house of the prophet Elijah (Jung, RB:252). Then, Jung sees the image of the removal of Christ's cross mingled with symbols of the Mithraic mysteries—the 'I' then becomes the subject of a stunning moment of initiatory deification. Jung's 'I' stares at a serpent wounding itself around his body and feels his resistance to Salome's worshipping of him as Christ (Jung, RB:252). Eventually, the revelation of the sighted Salome and the falling of the serpent from the body of Jung's 'I' push Jung to an ecstatic resolution of the mystery play.

The sequence aptly condenses the motif of psychological regression and progression through the representation of a correspondence between the images of the crater and the mountain where Jung finds Elijah's house. In *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*, Jung associates the crater with the spatial symbolism of caves, sanctuaries, cathedral, grave, catacombs, dark galleries, and vessels of inner transformation. To the European mind, the motif of the underworld journey is traditionally put in relation with the initiation of the hero at the entrance of a cavern, as transmitted by Plato in the image of Tartarus, by Homer in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, or by Virgil through the illustration of Aeneas' descent to the cavern of the Sybil. In Dante's *Commedia*, as portrayed in Botticelli's celebrated illustration of Dante's *Inferno*, the conical form of Hell is a crater caused by Lucifer's fall to the centre of the earth, filled with horror

of darkness and void, and the increasing spiritual torment of the poet.

The crater exemplifies the very first level of the journey of death and rebirth, where the individual experiences a descent to the recesses of the human soul and a chthonic reunification with matter. Jung's mystery play is also based upon this symbolism, as commented by Jung in both the first layer of *Liber Novus*, 'I am standing in the rocky depth that seems to me like a crater' (December 22, 1913) (Jung, RB:248), and the second, '[t]he scene of the mystery play is a deep place like the crater of a volcano. [...] He who enters the crater also becomes chaotic matter, he melts' (Jung, RB:247). In relation to the technique adopted in *Liber Novus* for letting the flux of imagination to grow within himself, Jung refers repeatedly to the image of a creative penetration of the stone-like walls of the depths. What in *Liber Novus* is indicated as the falling into the inner or hidden things, or as 'experiencing the mysteries' (Jung, RB:251), becomes in the 1925 Seminar the more technical description of the 'boring through' method:

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—[...]. 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 (Jung 2012 [1925]:51).

The boring dynamism brings to light an enigmatic knot of symbolic representations from those layers of the mind where, according to Jung, the collective side of the psychic functioning abides. The approximation to the catacomb or grave is where either the individual is threatened at the risk of being shattered by the unification with the matter, or by 'digging a hole' he generates a reversed motion towards an expansion of the individual within the universal. In so doing, such as Dante's climbing over the legs of Lucifer at the very bottom of Dante's *Inferno*, Jung's journey can be energised towards an opposite direction, as established in the correspondence of the images of the cave and the mountain in the context of Jung's vision at the doors of the house of Elijah: 'The walls enlarge into a huge mountain and I see that I am below on the foundation of the crater in the underworld' (Jung, RB:252)

The symmetry of this construction resembles closely the Gnostic symbolism of the reversed cones,<sup>8</sup> which still in the 1925 Seminar Jung connects to the structure of Dante's *Inferno*, in a singular alignment with

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<sup>8</sup> As for the development of Jung's interest for Gnosticism and its reflection in *Liber Novus* see Jung 2012 (1925):69, n9.

the symbolist interpretation of Dante's sources,

Elijah said that it was just the same below and 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 [...]. So I assume that Dante got his ideas from the same archetypes (Jung 2012 [1925]:104-105).

But not only does this have to do with the symmetrical pattern of Dante's Hell and Heaven, as pointed out by McGuire (McGuire, quoted in RB:252, n210). More precisely, the combination is visualised in the *Commedia* through the correspondence of Lucifer's fall to the bowels of the earth and the mountain of *Purgatorio*,<sup>9</sup> where Ulysses, Dante's *alter ego* in Hell and caretaker of the 'ancient flame' (reason or human science, see Dante 2008:157, *Inferno*, XXVI, 85), is sacrificed to the greater flame encompassed by the poet's worship for Beatrice (wisdom or divine science).<sup>10</sup> The closeness of Jung's passage (21-25 December, 1913) to this correspondence and the objective indication given in the *Black Books* by the entries from *Purgatorio* motivates a further remark. At the end of Jung's vision, Salome appears to him in 'wonderstruck devotion' (Jung, RB:252) and Jung, tears falling from his eyes, perceives that 'My feet do not touch the ground of this earth, and it is as if I were melting into air' (Jung, RB:252).

When Dante and Virgil reach the end of Hell in the *Commedia*, they have to climb Lucifer's legs 'into air' in order to begin to raise up to the opposite pole of the journey, chiselled in the 'sweet colour of oriental sapphire' (Dante 2008:199, *Purgatorio*, I,13) that fills the dawn rising up on the mountain of *Purgatorio*.

The whole passage furnishes a distinct symbolic illustration of an underpinning motif of *Liber Novus*, that is Jung's elaboration of the Heraclitean principle of *unio oppositorum*, or 'unity of opposites', according to which the existence of any situation in life depends on the constant change and compresent tension of two opposite conditions, co-

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<sup>9</sup> The mountain of *Purgatorio* is placed by Dante at the antipodes of Jerusalem as a result of the conical abyss formed by Lucifer's precipitation.

<sup>10</sup> Dante invents an original version of Ulysses' story (*Inferno*, XXVI, 49-142), in which the Greek hero takes a long journey beyond the Hercules' pillars and when he comes to sail by a giant mountain (the mountain of *Purgatorio*) a storm breaks and sinks the ship, provoking Ulysses' death.

substantiating each other, whether intended at empirical or symbolic levels.<sup>11</sup>

In this context, Jung's search for a way of renewal in *Liber Novus* appears triggered by the elevation of the erotic principle into a vessel of spiritual rebirth, as the transformation from the blind to the sighted Salome gives evidence to in the sequence described. In Dante's *Commedia*, this is in a similar vein indicated by the transposition of the beloved woman into an illuminated condition of the mind, to be conceived through the indications of the guide Virgil and worshipped through the extension of the loving capacities of the poet. In 1921, Jung comments on the transformation of the image of Beatrice in Dante's *Commedia* in this way: 'a figure that has detached itself from the object and become a purely psychological factor, or rather, of those unconscious contents whose personification I have termed the *anima* (Jung, CW6: §377).

Jung's standpoint appears here consistent with the phenomenology of Dante's love for Beatrice, from the juvenile promises following her departing and concluding the *Vita Nova* to the visions of the *Commedia*. In contrast with the prevalent intellectual motivation of Dante's philosophical writings, the *Commedia* presents an inversion of the relationship between the opposite tensions of logos and eros. The figure of Beatrice is now an elevated image of Dante's soul, or what Jung calls a 'purely psychological factor'. The domain of reason (Virgil) eventually becomes the servant of love (Beatrice).

Correspondingly, the couple Elijah and Salome represents in *Liber Novus* the earliest of Jung's representations of the syzygy of logos and eros. They are unified in the 'Mysterium Encounter' through the third principle of the serpent, which symbolises the 'introverting libido' (Jung 2012 [1925]:100) that is necessary to invigorate the visionary process. Jung points out in the 1925 seminar that Salome, as the *anima*, is the instinctive and erotic element that binds the mind of the individual to the force of the irrational. At the same time, Elijah, as the prophet, is the cognitional and foreseeing element that compensates this force, making out of the irrational the shape of a wisdom higher than reason. The polarity of the pairs of opposites thus represented echoes an abiding symbolic tradition, which bears the fundamental idea that every manifestation of life 'takes place through a twofold condition of principles, in the same way that animal procreation takes place through the union of male and female' (Evola 1991 [1969]:118). Plotinus ascribes the manifestation of this polarity to intellect and nature, to being as form and stability (*ous*) and life as the substance of becoming (*ousia*), or in other words, an everlasting male principle of unchangeable

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11 As for Jung's discussion of this topic, cf. lecture 10 and 11 from the 1925 Seminar (Jung 2012 [1925]:79-97).

presence and an everlasting female principle of undifferentiated matter.

Similarly, the conjunction of opposites through the figures of Elijah and Salome can be interpreted in Jung as the principle of *logos* that 'sees' (Elijah) and *eros* that 'sends on' (Salome): 'Forethinking is not powerful in itself and therefore does not move. But pleasure is power, and therefore it moves' (Jung, RB:247). Throughout Jung's self-exploration, the movement towards the unity of the opposites resounds as a persistent inspiration. But it is possibly in no place more sharply described than in a passage from Jung's encounter with Philemon and his wife Baucis, where the combined image of Elijah and Salome is taken to a higher level of representation: 'I must unite the two conflicting powers of my soul and keep them together in a true marriage until the end of my life, since the magician is called ΦΙΛΗΜΩΝ and his wife ΒΑΥΚΙΣ' (Jung, RB:314).

The masculine and feminine principles, Jung also argues, are 'one in the symbol of the flame' (Jung, RB:254), which the growing energy of the psychic journey carries out through the creative efficiency of imagination, as the unifying flame 'follows the fire whatever shape it takes'. The mental travellers who access the fire of imagination, gradually awaken the *scintilla* they stand in communion with, as echoed in a favourite passage quoted by Jung from the apocryphal apothegms of Thomas, 'Who is near unto me, is near unto fire' (Thomas 82, quoted in Jung, CW12§157). The flame is the trigger of visionary states of the mind, binding the two major properties of this element, purification and brightening elevation, by taking the individual into a hypnotising journey in a circle of fire considered by the Pythagoreans to be the agency of divinity and love.

Nevertheless, exploring *Liber Novus* reveals in the first place to the reader the restless, serpentine pathway of Jung's experimental hermeneutics. Jung describes repeatedly moments filled with illuminating intuitive perceptions, followed by new tormenting visions of Hell. Alongside the struggle to lead the visionary material to a new procedure of understanding, the 'new form follows the spirit' without the former ever being crystallised in a state of quiescence. In other words, the movement forward into the underworld journey compels the author to a creative relationship with the symbolic material, which cannot exhaust it anymore into the values and hopes of ordinary consciousness, but calls on the contrary for keeping the appearance of symbols alive as events and living correspondences. In order to intersect the visionary in Jung with the psychologist, therefore, the mentor Elijah speaks to Jung's 'I' with similar intents to those of Virgil to Dante in the adventure of the *Commedia*: 'Other things will come. Seek untiringly, and above all write exactly what you see' (Jung, RB:252).

As to the direction of this research, Jung provides at the end of *Liber Secundus* an information of remarkable historical precision: ‘I must catch up with a piece of the Middle Ages—within myself. We have only finished with the Middle Ages of—others’ (Jung, RB:330). If the European mind, half-way through her life, has lost a piece of her soul that the modern man needs to discover again, this must happen, Jung argues, through a new exploration of the medieval spirit. Thus carrying a special contact with this piece of the soul, Dante’s *Commedia* becomes inevitably a meaningful reference for Jung’s journey, which around the fortieth year of his life Jung called *Liber Novus*, echoing the inspiration (and the title, yet in a way that cannot be proven historically) of Dante’s *Vita Nova*: ‘Here begins a new life’ (Dante 1992 [ca. 1292-1294]:3).

## CONCLUSION

Similarly to what was pointed out in Bodkin’s foreword to her *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination* (Bodkin 1934:x), the inspiration of this paper is also underpinned broadly by searching for a common terrain of study between psychology and visionary literature.

From the material presented, I aimed to demonstrate the fresh contribution that stems from bringing these terrains into closer and permeable relation. This is possible, I argue, when a psychological reflection on a visionary text is not confined only to the purposes of psychological commentaries, and a critical reflection on the same material is not limited exclusively to the tools of literary methodologies or conventional aesthetic categories. The resulting attempt is to examine the imaginative production communicated by visionary experiences, on the one hand by analysing their underlying patterns of objectification, on the other hand by performing them again through expanding the basis of the analysis via the establishing of further symbolic correlations. Within the history of Jung’s thought, this hermeneutical approach results particularly flourishing when it is observed within the cultural moment of *Liber Novus*. Previous demarcations between scientific and aesthetic understanding ended up being challenged at bottom, conveying a fertilising experimental contamination. Historically, psychology itself was the ‘dream of a science’ (Shamdasani 2003). If from a reductive perspective, this could be considered the failure of psychology to become a science, from a constructive standpoint the psychologist as the abnormal scientist became the explorer par excellence of disciplinary cross-fertilisations.

Jung's place within this terrain appears far-reaching at both biographical and theoretical formulations. *Liber Novus* describes a unique experience of contact between an individual and a collective side of a cultural and spiritual quest. Jung's later account of 'visionary art' indicates the consistent attempt to recognise a tradition of visionary writing and practice, based upon an original psychic inspiration of a similar primordial nature. Having been Dante present for Jung at both of these levels—during the composition of *Liber Novus* and within Jung's subsequent references to the corpus of the 'visionary works'—I have utilised Dante as a bridge to understand the connection between different moments of Jung's thought.

To survey briefly the main course of this paper, I have argued in short that Jung's understanding of the model of Dante's *Commedia* is a relevant and dynamic key to access the content of Jung's *Liber Novus*. Throughout the inquiry, this approach entailed in the first place a literal level of discussion. I have addressed this aspect by establishing analogies between Dante's and Jung's repertoire of type-images, such as the descent to Hell, the sacrifice of the hero, and the function of the guide in relation to search for the soul. But the course of this paper also entailed a symbolic level of discussion. I have taken this aspect into account by considering the way in which Jung's development of a constructive or anagogic view finds in Dante a suitable hermeneutical model. In so doing, I aimed on the one hand to carry out a historiographical motivation of research, which can be evinced especially through the analysis of Jung's connection to the esoteric reading of the *Commedia*, and the attempt to focus on the language of *Liber Novus*. On the other hand, I have attempted to connect and expand this basis by locating further intersections of symbolic forms on the passages under consideration, and utilising them as a key to understanding the existential states experienced by Jung.

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#### ABBREVIATIONS

RB = *Liber Novus* = *The Red Book: Liber novus*. Edited and Introduced by Sonu Shamdasani, Translated by Mark Kyburz, John Peck, and Sonu Shamdasani. New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company.

WSL = *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido. Beiträge zur*

*Entwicklungsgeschichte des Denkens* (1911, 1912) = 1917. *Psychology of the Unconscious. A study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido*. New York: Moffat, Yard & Company.

Jung 2012 [1925] = 2012 [1925]. *Introduction to Jungian Psychology: Notes of the Seminar Given by Jung on Analytical Psychology in 1925*, original edition edited by W. McGuire, revised edition edited by Sonu Shamdasani. Princeton: Bollingen/Philemon Series, Princeton University Press.

CW = 1953-1983. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*. Ed. Sir H. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler, tr. R.F.C. Hull. Princeton: Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 21 vols.

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