



The *Comedia* as journey and vision in Romano Guardini's interpretation*

Gennaro Cicchese

Key Words: Travel – Vision – Light – Cosmic Reality – Heavenly Reality – Dante – Jung

Citation: Cicchese G..(2021). *The Comedia as Journey and vision in Romano Guardini's Interpretation*

doi.medra.org: 10.48237/LIJ_047

lijedizioniretlis03072018

Copyright:©LIRPA-International Journal

Funding: None

Competing interests: None

Corresponding author:

Cicchese Gennaro

Abstract: This essay briefly retraces the Dante studies of the philosopher and theologian Romano Guardini, focusing in particular on Dante's journey in his "Comedia", which manifest itself as a vision. Starting from the sense of loss in the "selva oscura" (dark forest), the refinement of his own person is achieved in his journey to the afterlife through Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso (Hell, Purgatory and Paradise). Driven by the grace, Dante meets the celestial reality through which he rediscovers and reinterprets the cosmic and human reality. After the bewilderment and the darkness, through the journey and the vision, with his work Dante gives back to the earthly world, the lost light and splendor. Guardini also mentions Jung and his notes to *The Secret of the Golden Flower. A Chinese Book of Life*.

Introduction

Romano Guardini's¹ passion for the *Divina Commedia* is well known, instilled by his family since he was a little boy then merged into various essays and university courses², held in German universities. Thus, it is not a hazard if he has added this nice dedication to his "*Studi su Dante*": "In memory of my father from whose lips I caught, as a child, the first lines of Dante"³.

* The English translation was edited by Madame Sonia Boutari.

¹ Born in Verona on February 17, 1885 and died in Munich on October 1, 1968, he is one of the most significant Catholic philosophers and theologians, pedagogues and interpreters of literature of the twentieth century (cf. Gerl-Falkowitz, Hanna-Barbara (1985, 1988). *Romano Guardini. La vita e l'opera*, Morcelliana: Brescia).

² Guardini, R. (2012). *La Divina Commedia di Dante. I principali concetti filosofici e religiosi*, a cura di Oreste Tolone. Brescia: Morcelliana. This is an unfinished work which, as the curator writes, "in the intentions of the author, was to bring to completion a path of over twenty years of in-depth studies dedicated to the figure of Dante Alighieri and in particular to his Comedy" (*ibid.*, p. 7).

³ Guardini, R. (1986). *Studi su Dante*: Brescia, Morcelliana. It contains two essays: *L'angelo nella Divina Commedia di*



About Dante's poem, so many things have been written: even the popes (Leo XIII, Pius X, Benedict XV, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI) up to Pope Francis⁴.

In a very clear way, the current Pontiff encourages us, starting from the first lines of his apostolic letter *Candor Lucis*, written on the seventh century of Dante's death, urges not simply to read, comment, study and analyze Dante: «Rather, he asks to be heard and even imitated; he invites us to become his companions on the journey. Today, too, he wants to show us the route to happiness, the right path to live a fully human life, emerging from the dark forest in which we lose our bearings and the sense of our true worth»⁵.

It is also worth stopping on what Saint Paul VI, inspired and educated, has punctually written in the apostolic letter "*Altissimi Cantus*" for the seventh century of Dante's birth date:

«Dante's Poem is universal: in its immense breadth, it embraces heaven and earth, eternity and time, the mysteries of God and the events of men, sacred doctrine and profane disciplines, science drawn from divine revelation and that drawn from light of reason, the data of personal experience and the memories of history, his age and the Greco-Roman antiquities, while it can well be said that it is the most representative monument of the Middle Ages. In its content it treasures Eastern wisdom, the Greek logos, Roman civilization, and in synthesis the dogma and the precepts of the law of Christianity in the elaboration of its doctors. Aristotelian in the philosophical conception, Platonic in the tendency to the ideal, Augustinian in the conception of history; in theology he is a faithful follower of St. Thomas Aquinas, so much so that the Divine Comedy is, among other things, in fragments, almost the poetic mirror of the "Summa" of the Angelic Doctor. While this is true in general terms, it is equally true that Dante is open to profound influences from Saint Augustin, Saint Benedict and the "Victorini", Saint Bonaventura, and is not devoid of some apocalyptic influence from Abbot Joachim of Fiore, since it usually reaches out to things that are dawning or that, not yet born, are in the womb of the future»⁶.

It seems to us a good synthesis of the *Comedia*, which Boccaccio was the first to define as "*divina*", consecrating Dante as the father of the Italian language. It certainly is the greatest written work in the Italian language and, one of the best masterpieces of the world literature (Bloom 1994).

Getting ready on Dante

In the prelude of his "*Studi su Dante*", Guardini underlines the importance of a philosophical approach in order to understand in a deep way, Dante's masterpiece. "*Since 1930, I have been busy with the largest problem of the philosophical and Christian world image offered by the Divina Comedia, which on its own, would give to the interpretation of the poem its real foundation*" (Guardini 1986, p. 11).

Dante, pp. 9-130; *Paesaggio dell'eternità*, pp. 131-372.

⁴ See the message of the Holy Father Francis to the President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, on the occasion of the celebration of the 750th anniversary of the birth of Dante Alighieri (4 May 2015). See Bibliography.

⁵ See the Apostolic Letter *Candor Lucis Aeternae* of the Holy Father Francis, in the VII centenary of the death of Dante Alighieri (25 March 2021). See Bibliography.

⁶ Apostolic letter in the form of "Motu proprio" of the Holy Father Paul VI *Altissimi Cantus*, for the seventh centenary of the birth of Dante Alighieri. See Bibliography.



Moreover, in a kind of subjective epilog to these studies, he shares his exhaustive research experience to get closer to the *Sommo Poeta*, and retraces his investigation and discovery path.

«It is difficult to see the large form because it is, indeed, large. Therefore, meeting it may only be the result of a long experience. Before it concedes itself, you must spend a long time to conquer it (...). I say so because of my personal experience and I would like to tell how I have found my way to Dante's Divina Commedia. Twenty-five years ago, precisely, I was still a student, one of my professors asked me if I had read Dante, and since I da to answer in a negative way, he said to me, smiling, that studying the theology, speaking Italian and not having read Dante, was almost a sin. He said "almost a venial sin", since he was a professor of moral theology and he liked accuracy» (Guardini 1986, pp. 367-368).

Therefore, a few years later, Guardini tries another approach to Dante and, more precisely to his work "Vita Nuova" ("new life"), but, as he has personally said, it remained tightly closed, like a person who remains closed and unapproachable until he does not take the initiative, on his own, to open up in a conversation or an encounter. In fact, it is through a personal encounter, with the creation of a new friendship, that Guardini understands that this is a real experience of the "vita nuova", even if both levels are different.

«But the knowledge fertility depends a lot on the fact that, through the qualitative similarity, you learn how to find access to a bigger phenomenon moving from a smaller one. At this point, I knew one thing: the interior event of the Vita Nuova corresponds to an accurate truth and that, Dante's Divina Commedia remains impenetrable until the soul of his youth work is not understood. But frankly speaking, I did not yet reach the masterpiece» (Guardini 1986, pp. 368-369).

But even in front of the apparent block when approaching Dante, Guardini moves ahead learning and accumulating, step by step, an experience that he puts aside. In a *crescendo* of study and understanding, the German theologian discovers and better learns what *knowledge* and *spiritual light* mean and, how these are present in Platone, Agostino and Plotino, and finally, in the Christian doctrine of the transfiguration:

«First of all, I learned what knowledge meant to the middle Ages: not research in the modern meaning but contemplative penetration of the world and construction of the existence image. Then, what the concept means, more precisely, the phenomenon of the spiritual light which, emerges from a specific intellectual and contemplative experience. Such intuition stayed theoretical at the beginning; but I felt that there had to be something else until, almost fifteen years later, I went to Engadina and noticed its light (...), the October sweet light of Allgäu and even more, that hot gold that flowed from the hills of Veneto into Tiziano's paintings. Anyway, I then understood something about Plato that could not be found in any book, except in his owns; but even in his books, you notice it only after having seen the clear light I mentioned about and there, my heart was overwhelmed, what is in the heart is at the same time in the most intimate part of the spirit. I have also understood something about Plato and Agostino, since that brightness also lives in them, even if in a different way. And when I saw how such light was around the trees, the leaves, the branches, their forms; how it transfigured the mountains in the late afternoon, when everything changes, then I felt which affinity exists between the light and the transfiguration doctrine» (Guardini 1986, p. 369).



The difficulty of conceiving reality depends precisely on the approach that one has towards it, so there are authors who start from the specific to get to the universal and, the other way around:

«There are those who move from concrete reality and gradually penetrate the universal. Others must follow the opposite direction and, I belong to these. Only over the course of many years, I have been able to get from the ideas to the things, to the concrete man; but obviously, all this has then been achieved in a particular depth. Until, finally, I discovered the wonder of reality in fact: of what there is no reason why it should be but that exists and, affirms itself in the face of the possibility always looming of not being able to be. And it was also necessary to see how, in such reality existing there which, is "casual" – but the expression is profane; it must be said that this is a "gift", given by the free munificence of the living God – might radiate the authentic. Not above, not outside of it but in it». (Guardini 1986, p. 370).

Another important element is the reading of Erich Auerbach's essay, which title is "exciting", *Dante Dichter der irdischen Welt* (1929)⁷ and whose contents has been, for Guardini, higher than the expectations.

«Dante was designated as the Christian poet in its deepest meaning. By "Christian", they meant a mentality that does not identify the concrete with the purely empirical but associates it to the Absolute-Eternal; and on the other side, it does not resolve existence in the ideal, but it keeps it through history. The prerequisite to all that is God's Incarnation; and what decides about the Christian quality of a thought is that it welcomes in it such fact – really factum, action and truth together – as its rule. Then it appeared clear to me how Dante is the poet that conducts man to the eternal, the world, the story, the whole existence but without dissolving the final form. It is transformed but it remains as is » (Guardini 1986, pp. 370-371).

And even though it opened a door over Dante's work, Guardini is still far and remains on the doorstep, unable to get in "since it was about the beyond, another world of the saint sphere of God's open presence. That sphere did not want to be seen; just the real density of the forms did not allow it" (Guardini 1986, page 371).

Then, finally, the guardinian's fatigue gets transformed in a sacred inspiration and, a new reading takes him to the heart of Dante's poem through a decisive intuition:

«Then someday I read that the pilgrim is full of anxiety in the forest with a dead-end; that he wants to climb the mountain lightened by all the hopes but cannot make it because the forest is keeping him from. The hell animals attack him, the wolf of greed will jump down his throat in a moment, but all that does not happen! The beast is jumping but does not get to the prey and the horror is just there. Where is it possible? I was asking myself In a dream. Over there, everything is what it is, while still different, catchable but arcane and foreign! But then the thought run on. No, it is not the dream but the vision!» (Guardini 1986, p. 371).

⁷ Cf. Auerbach E. (1999). *Studi su Dante*, prefazione di Dante Della Terza. Milano: Feltrinelli. ("Dante poeta del mondo terreno"), pp. 1-161.



Thus, Guardini discovers that the vision is a key of interpretation for the *Comedia* that you cannot do much without: «*It was the precondition, the point from which you had to look, to feel: from the way of seeing of the vision. The forms kept all of their precise outlines, but they entered in the atmosphere of another state. It was all clear, yet it belonged to the afterlife*» (Guardini 1986, p. 371).

That psychological premise, thanks to the conversations full of enthusiasm with another person who lived entirely for Dante, becomes a start for Guardini's understanding of the work: «*Dante says: I saw. Such word is demanding. His poem must be considered as contemplated, as a visionary image that comes from a huge experience*» (Guardini 1986, p. 372).

And it is right here, at the end of this research path, accompanied by heuristic experiences but also by serendipity, that Guardini gets to the key point of Dante's lively understanding and, at the same time, opened to an ever deeper interpretative richness: «*Then all the waiting factors joined together, accumulated over many years. The particular tone of the person for whom I said, the phenomenon of the high light, the earthly concreteness preserved in the Absolute and Auerbach's book, the visionary element as a psychological and objective presupposition: all these elements entered into synthesis*» (Guardini 1986, p. 372).

However, it is not enough. Guardini also combines this with a further experience, of artistic and contemplative origin, acquired in front of the Isenheim altar of Grünewald, which shows him how deeply religious experience can become creative action, also historical and political, as manifested for example in the lives of the saints, that is, the idea

«of the own nature of art that arises from mystical experience. The idea that the purest religious experience can lead to historical action, rather political action, is confirmed: in a Bernardo di Chiaravalle and even more extraordinary in a Catherine of Siena. The mystery of that love which is at the same time light and ardor, in such a way that the heart is spirit and the spirit pulsates in the blood: in Francis of Assisi a living existence, in Augustin powerful thought, in Pascal the experience of values in a conscience criticism, philosophia and theologia cordis. And more» (Guardini 1986, p. 372).

As Guardini mentions, and as other commentators also observe, including Oreste Tolone, *Vita Nuova* «*constitutes the preamble to the Divina Commedia and this is not only from a historical point of view (...) but also and above all from a human point of view*» (Guardini 2012, p. 80).

This work is a prose report interspersed with a series of poems and inspired by his relationship with Beatrice. Dante finds motivation and inspiration, to create something bigger and "visionary": «*After this sonnet a wonderful vision appeared to me, in which I saw things that made me propose not to say more about this blessed one, until I could no longer speak of her worthily*»; and to the silence to which Dante consecrates himself, he adds a prayer to God to offer him many more years to be able to say about her «*what was never said of any*» (*Vita Nuova*, XLII 1-2).

«*These words – writes Tolone – say that his relationship with Beatrice, born from his first youthful experience, (...) is now determined by a new experience, a "wonderful vision". (...) Here obviously lies the root of the Divina Commedia*» (Guardini 2012, p. 88).



From the journey to the vision

Let us now try to enter the deeper sense of the *Comedia*, which, as well known, is the daughter of a great vision and a great journey. What is a journey? The *Enciclopedia filosofica* writes:

«Movement through space and time, travel is always a "path" in oneself as well as in places of transit and visited ones. It implies displacement, wandering, the experience of the beginning and the end, the meaning of the goal and the sense of knowledge. Journey, therefore, of the ego with itself and beyond itself; journey into and of knowledge; journey, again, as departure, arrival, return, as a way, path and route, as a case or project, nomadism or direction, pilgrimage or research. In it reside the possibility of meeting, the adventure of cultural exchange, the contamination of knowledge, cultures, ideas. The idea of travel transforms the individual into a man who possesses the "freedom of reason" and, with it, he feels – as Nietzsche observed – "nothing more than a walker, not a traveler directed to a final destination"» (Gennari 2006, vol. XII, p. 12109).

To understand the meaning of the travel, José Saramago – literature Nobel Prize in 1998 – helps us, by writing at the end of his book *Viaggio in Portogallo*:

«The journey never ends. Only travelers end up. And they too can be prolonged in memory, in remembrance, in narration. When the traveler sat on the sand of the beach and said: "There is nothing else to see", he knew it was not true. The end of a journey is only the beginning of another. We must see what we have not seen, see again what we have already seen, see in the spring what we have seen in summer, see during the day what we have seen at night, with the sun where it rained the first time, see the green crops, the ripe fruit, the stone that has changed its place, the shadow that was not there. We must return to the steps already taken, to repeat them, and to trace new paths alongside them. We have to start the journey again. Always. The traveler immediately returns» (Saramago 1999, p. 457).

With wisdom and depth, the Portuguese writer explains, "the journey never ends", both because there is always something to see and because you can go back to see what you have seen in different ways and times and, perhaps even with new eyes and ways. Moreover, is not travel the metaphor of life? Life is a journey. Leaving, travelling, going back, leaving again. Retracing your steps and opening new paths. We recall Francesco De Gregori's song *Viaggi e miraggi (Journeys and Mirages)*: "Behind a mirage there is always a mirage to consider / as indeed at the end of a journey / there is always a journey to start over". However, if the mirage is not a mirage but a vision, what happens?

Travel and vision are symbols of regeneration and of conversion ("archetypes" in Jung's language). The journey, in fact, is not only knowledge of external realities (places, cultures, different languages), but also a path of self-knowledge. The journey is, in fact, also a psychological phenomenon and, in its phases (departure, route and arrival), it conveys the idea of the cyclical nature of life and its dynamism. It is an individual, interior experience, which recalls the circularity of life: birth, adolescence, adult stage and death.



Reading is also traveling. Anyone who reads the greats of literature knows that their works are like oases, to drink from in the desert of the trials of life, to which one can return every time to leave recharged and enriched, but also changed and renewed. This also happens in Dante and in his masterpiece, which, among its fundamental characteristics, has that of daring to approach man to God, humanity to the Trinity, in an incredible experience of deep communion.

The Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar analyzed the *Commedia* in its meaning as an image of the world, which stands on the crest between ancient and medieval cosmology and the new awareness that man assumes of himself, of his own destiny, of history. The center of meditation is the interpretation of Dante's eros, of his love for Beatrice who, taken in all its spiritual consequences, goes beyond the boundaries of the human and immerses the poet with his personality in the world of human communion with the Christian Trinity (cf. Balthasar, 1973).

Universally considered an expression of medieval and Christian culture, filtered through the lyric of the *Dolce stil novo*, the *Commedia* is an allegorical instrument of human salvation, which is concretized in touching the dramas of the damned, the pains of Purgatory and the celestial glories, allowing Dante to offer the reader a glimpse of morals. To do this, the author uses the parable of the journey, already used by the greats of the past in epic works (*Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*, etc.). Since ancient times, man has felt this need for "travelling", a symbol of the search for truth, spirituality, immortality, adventure, well-being and peace. From Ulysses to Aeneas, to the fantastic journeys of Gulliver, to the wanderings of the Jewish people, in search of the Grail, there are many examples in literature, in history, but also in everyday life, of the instinct that turns a man towards the unknown, snatching him from certainties and affections. However, here the journey takes on an existential character and Dante delves into the depths of human experience and the mystery of the afterlife, facing the descent into the bowels of the earth. Then he climbs a mountain, finally he crosses the different celestial spheres up to the Empyrean, a region that cannot be represented with cosmological categories, an "empty space", the end of the path, where complete satisfaction is achieved:

«So, the Empyrean is nothing and however it is something, it is the unattainable reality of the limit, of the delimited, beyond which there is nothing. At the same time, it has a religious character: it is the place of God, absolute transcendence and that is the starting point of the divine energies directed towards the earth. On the other hand, it is the arrival point of the creaturely movement of return, the place of perfection and bliss, the true sky» (Guardini 2012, p. 132).

The poem begins with Dante who finds himself in a horrid forest, at the foot of a mountain flooded with the full splendor of light. From a human point of view, we start from a situation of complete loss: the man Dante recognizes that he has lost himself and does not find any way out. At that point, the figure of Virgil the poet appears, reporting that Beatrice sent him, warned by the Virgin Mary herself. Virgil leads him to hell, where he encounters the different stages of evil, especially the insidious and stubborn one that has taken possession of the most intimate feelings and therefore is no longer forgiven. It is there where Lucifer, the fallen angel betraying the trust and laws of God, becomes Satan and is imprisoned in the ice of despair. From the body of Satan onwards the path takes place in the opposite direction, through a narrow and dark tunnel in the depths of the earth to reach the other side, up to the open air. There, they are found at the foot of a mountain, which stands on an island,



the Purgatory. This is the place of purification, on whose steps is expiated the evil which survives in men, despite their will is good, and which can therefore be forgiven. Rising to the top, the blame is progressively reduced. They climb to the top, or more exactly on a high plain above the sea. There is a place full of beauty, which was once the earthly Paradise, moved here. While Virgil disappears, Dante meets Beatrice who raises him from sphere to sphere – they are degrees of increasing value – upwards and outwards in a sort of “ecstasy”, until reaching the *Empyrean*, the place of absolute transcendence (cf. Guardini 2012, pp. 133-134).

The German theologian highlights three reasons that concern the existential nature of the journey (cf. Guardini 2012, pp. 136-141). The first is that Dante is involved not as a mere spectator who explores or goes in search of adventures, but as a protagonist, totally involved in the history, and takes part in salvation and damnation: «*What is this participation based on? Above all on the dominant motif that lies deep in the human soul and that he finds both in sagas and in fairy tales, as in the psychology of the unconscious: that is, that the ultimate meaning of life cannot be learned from life itself, but only from its afterlife, from the world of death*» (Guardini 2012, p. 136).

Guardini alludes to the medieval tradition, which tells of journeys to the afterlife and other apocalypses: for example, *The Legend of saint Brendan*, in which the Irish monk wanders for seven years in search of Paradise. It recalls Homer and the *Nekyia* (*Odyssey*, XI), a rite through which ghosts or souls of the dead were called back to earth and questioned about the future, which today we would define “necromantic”. Then he mentions Virgil and Ulysses’ journey to hell (*Aeneid*, VI). And finally, to Faust’s descent to the Mothers when, in the second part of the tragedy, act one, Faust descends with a magic key into the *Dark Gallery*, into the kingdom of the Mothers, mysterious and solemn beings who guard the immutable and eternal essences of things. However, Dante does more:

«*Dante provides it with the most grandiose poetic form. At the basis of this idea lies the experience whereby the man who lives on earth is entangled in desire, anguish, love and hatred, work and possession; he is blind and does not see reality, he dreams of it. Only when he awakens from the dream, that is, in death, does he see what he really is. He sees himself – put also in comparison, the mythical motif of the follower spirit [Folgegeist], which is not “the soul” as we understand it, but once again the whole man, but in his specificity. This spirit relentlessly follows the man, so he is never visible to himself. At a certain moment it appears in front of him, goes to meet him: then man sees and encounters himself. But this is death. Only from death, therefore, does man come to know what he is* » (Guardini 2012, pp. 136-137).

Death becomes the condition of truth, and reveals the human reality that we can only understand from the outside, from the beyond: «*the world beyond death teaches him about life, the world of eternity teaches him to understand temporal world and to dominate it*» (Guardini 2012, p. 137).

A second reason, similar to the first, that the German theologian offers us is the following: «*In specific moments, in which man has lost the right relationship with himself, the shortest way to this self passes through the distance from the world (...) Then the true return-to-self of the person takes place precisely through an act of detachment from oneself [Selblosigkeit], realized in any form of self-denial; for a job, a man, an idea; that is, the man becomes the more perfect, the less he thinks of himself*» (Guardini 2012, p. 137).



This situation pushes our author to broaden the horizon also in the psychological field, implementing a profound and lucid reflection:

« The self-psychology [Selbersein] rests on the polarity between “away from oneself” and “coming back to oneself”. The simple stay-with-oneself shrinks (Kleist, The puppet theater). Moving away, therefore, opens up a space in which, so to speak, the self can emerge freely from the bottom ... On the other hand, however, it remains true that mere moving away is distracting. So, reflection restores the seriousness of the self» (Guardini 2012, p. 138).

The third and final reason lies in the particular relationship between subject and object, the latter understood as a mirror of the self, and the particular correspondence between man and world, for which it is stated that the human being is a microcosm:

«The self sees and dominates itself only in the object. This is why experience is ineffective as a starting point. “Life” means “to live something”. It is not life that must be at the center, but what one lives on; exactly in this way, life itself is realized. Thus, also between the self and the world there is a singular correspondence, expressed by the ancient idea of microcosm. The “thing” that lies on the outside and the internal process of experience, in which subjective existence is realized, corresponds to each other. We must then add that trait that characterizes man’s uniqueness: that he is that essence that can be interpreted through all things just as all things can be questioned and interpreted through him» (Guardini 2012, p. 138).

Here, in the background, we can glimpse the Aristotelian-Thomist anthropological conception of the *anima quodammodo omnia* (of the soul and therefore of man, in a certain way the measure of all things). All this goes back to the symbolism that underlies the whole *Comedia* and that unites, for example, the sun above me to what is solar in me, according to the beautiful poetic expression: *«If the eye was not solar / how could we see light?» (Goethe 1999, p. 14).*

The journey takes place in hell, in the symbolism of depth, in Purgatory in the ascent to the mountain, and in Paradise, flying among the celestial spheres, creation of light and energy: *«The deepest abyss of evil lies in the center of the earth and therefore at the center of the world» (Guardini 2012, pp. 139).* Nevertheless, to the optimistic naturalists, who preach human goodness, the Poet reminds that corruption is not an external fact: *«I have seen that the deeper we go, downward, and with greater insistence, the greater the evil becomes. Evil does not reach man from the outside, but from the inside» (ibid., p. 140).*

The Mount of Purgatory is built according to the order of good: from bottom to top. Moreover, with regard to the themes of light and of “ecstasy”, one glimpses the strong Platonic influence, which is also immense human wisdom and psychological end: *«The most profound affirmation of Platonic philosophy says: what is proper to me is beyond me. To find myself I have to rise above myself (ibid., p. 140) ».* Here, you cannot find solutions in the manner of the Baron of Munchausen (who claimed to have pulled himself out of the quicksand by the hair), but one must resort to grace.



The visionary element in the *Comedia*

The meaning of "vision" must be included in a historical-conceptual path of our Western civilization, which, according to what the *Enciclopedia filosofica* states, above all means:

«Questioning the reasons that led to affirm, but also to deny, the primacy of sight over the other senses. In this regard, it has often been insisted on the existence of an authentic "optical paradigm" that would govern the entire western gnoseological tradition. Somebody has supposed that within the term "philosophy" the centrality of the reference to "light" would be witnessed and, consequently, to "sight" (in sophōs, wise [hence the abstract sophīa], in fact, as in the adjective saphēs [clear, manifest, evident], the meaning of phāos, the light)» (Petrosino 2006, vol. XII, p. 12183).

It is interesting here to quote an author who has worked fruitfully on the subject, highlighting the vital relationship between sight and thought, based on the ability to go beyond, to see far:

«Vision and hearing are the "media", by excellence, for the exercise of intelligence. Vision finds help by the sense of touch and by the muscular sense, but the sense of touch alone cannot compete with vision, mainly because it is not a sense capable of receiving information from some distance (...). Therefore, sight is the primary "medium" of thought» (Arnheim 1974, pp. 23-24).

Enriched by these elements, we try to resume the journey undertaken to identify, in the wake of Guardini, the visionary element in the *Comedia*. We may ask ourselves: what is that "dark forest" in which Dante finds himself in the middle of his life? We follow Fabio Ciardi who, in a recent essay, confirms the heuristic and ascetic path of the journey and the contemplative mysticism that leads Dante to the vision of the Trinity, through a series of human mediations, in particular of an all-female "trinity" constituted by Virgin Mary, Saint Lucia (patroness of sight-light) and Beatrice:

*«How many interpretations throughout history! Until the last, very recent, which starts from a comment on the Pentateuch written by the early medieval monk, Bruno di Segni, who talks about the difficulty he encountered in commenting on the book of Exodus, overcome thanks to God's help "that up to here led me on the straight path, as I believe, through this very dense dark forest"; a forest that he defines as "harsh" and "bitter". In the letter XIII with which he dedicates the Cantic of Paradise to Cangrande della Scala, Dante explains the purpose of his *Commedia*. It consists in "pushing away those who live this life from the state of misery and leading them to a state of happiness". It is the itinerary, of Dante and of all humanity, from misery - the dark forest - to happiness: the dwelling in the Trinity. This is why he calls his work "comedy". Unlike the tragedy that "begins with the narration of difficult situations, but its subject ends well", the comedy "at first is scary and fetid because it deals with Hell, but has a good, desirable and welcome ending, because it deals with Paradise ". You seem to hear Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, which the poet knows well. Dante, and with him the humanity, at the beginning of his "comedy", is therefore in a situation of sin, darkness, moral decay and error, he is unable to get out of it because the road is blocked by an "obstruction". And here is Mary, the "gentle woman", who devises a plan to save the man. An articulated plan, made up of mediations: she speaks with Lucia, who in turn speaks with Beatrice, who in turn speaks with Virgil, who rushes into the dark*



forest from which he draws Dante to safety "by the high and sylvan path" ("per lo cammino alto e silvestro") (Inferno II)» (Ciardi 2021, pp. 3-4; cf. D'Onofrio, 2020).

What is Guardini's interpretation of the incipit of the *Comedia*? Investigating the theme "Vision and eye in the Divina Comedia" (Guardini 2012, pp. 161-165), he proposes the following idea:

«We therefore assume the following hypothesis: Dante, in a moment of serious personal crisis, has had a visionary experience. He is shown things and together with that, he is given the organ to understand them. In this experience, the meaning of existence in general and of his own, in particular, became clear to him, and he made a personal decision that could determine his future life. He achieved the ethical-religious control of his own person, thanks to which Beatrice was returned to him and her mystery, already foreshadowed in the Vita Nuova, was revealed to him (ibidem, pp. 161-162).

And here, the German theologian enriches his exploration of Dante's itinerary with a further and dense reflection, which approaches the radiant look of Beatrice to the welcoming one of the Poet:

«What events lead to, is Dante's wandering but even more, his watching. It is often as if all of his personality was concentrated in his eye – just as in Beatrice's eyes and smiles always respond to the whole person. In the polarity of these two pairs of eyes are based, I would like to say, the epic-visionary space in which the events of the Divina Commedia take place. Beatrice's eye is the radiant eye; in it, the vision on its gift side is concentrated as a revelation. Dante's eye is receptive, welcoming» (ibidem, p. 163).

According to Guardini, Dante's eye, purified and enhanced in power by the light of the objects and people who come to meet him, is the true protagonist of the Poem:

«The inner story of the Divina Commedia is largely the story of Dante's eye. The trend is always this: something comes to meet him. Dante looks but he does not succeed, or cannot see it because his eye is not yet capable of it. As a result, either a truce is granted to him, or a light breaks out from what comes to him. Thanks to it, the eye becomes of a higher power, and sees. The eye grows with the object, it constitutes itself in it ... Through the power that comes from the object of revelation, the eye reaches a higher correspondence with the situation. This is the pattern of events. They present themselves with such authenticity, so totally free of tears and violence, that it is gladly admitted that they are neither theoretically constructed nor aesthetically imagined, but that at the base there is a first experience» (ibidem, p. 163).

This last consideration makes us think of an original experience that can be enjoyed, for example, in some key verses of the final songs of Paradise (XXX, 46-60; XXXIII, 109-114), where reference is made to the memory of what has been seen, that Guardini comments as follows:

«In favor of the authenticity of the vision, it seems to favor the way in which memory, the "high mind" or "high fantasy", recalls the view. I don't know if we can continue to build the process of remembering with such naturalness, starting from the simple poetic figuration. (...) The poem is at the end. Dante was allowed to see the Most-High (Par., XXXIII, 55-63), the mystery of the one and triune life of God» (ibid., pg. 163-164).



According to Guardini, travel and vision go hand in hand in Dante's journey as an icaastic confirmation at the end of his notes in "Introduction to a course on Dante" (Guardini 2012, pp. 557-563): "Character of the journey: vision" (*ibid.*, p. 563). In addition, summarizing the unconscious reasons for this journey, it highlights the psycho-anthropological path of self-knowledge that passes, paradoxically, from a clear and voluntary distance from oneself:

«First of all, the ancient idea of gaining the supreme knowledge of what is earthly, starting not from the earth, but from beyond Ulysses, Aeneas, Faust. In addition to this, the principle unconsciously at work: that the way to one's neighbour, that is to say, to one's self, has to be the most distant [here Guardini adds a clarification note in the margin: it needs maximum distance]» (*ibid.*, p. 562).

We find further confirmation and in-depth analysis in the essay «*The visionary element in the "Divine Comedy"*» (Guardini 1986, pp. 135-169). Here returns the idea that the journey marks the beginning of a new life, made possible by the encounter with the world of the afterlife (from the classics of Homer and Virgil to Goethe's Faust). It has its own reason, not only in the archaic dimension and, we would dare to say archetypal, but also in that of the more recent psychology of the unconscious:

«The reason indicates that the dead know more things about life than the living and, that therefore the man, in decisive moments, cannot find the necessary directives in himself, but must seek them beyond himself. This thought finds scientific confirmation. In fact, the psychology of the unconscious says that the field of immediate life, of conscious existence, cannot, in certain crises, be understood and dominated from the outside, but only if the man descends into the depths of the cosmos of his personality, in the unconscious, where he gets to know the roots of his conflicts, the preliminary sketches of his life possibilities» (*ibid.*, p. 137).

So, if what Dante learns is wisdom coming from the afterlife that illuminates his path, his existence and the ordering of the world, what is the way of looking, accompanying and engaging that the poet requires from whoever listens to him or reads him? This presupposes the Greco-Roman vision of the afterlife, dear to Dante, which saw in it «*something given and full of meaning, as in nature, a kind of second-degree nature*» (*ibid.*, p. 138). We do not dwell on the Odyssey, which Guardini takes up and analyzes on the profile of the "victory" of the Olympic gods over the subterranean divinities, breaking the spell of the hitherto dominant lower world (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 138-143). Instead, we ask ourselves, following Guardini: «*But how is it possible, then, that" the afterlife "is made present for the reader? (...) As a rule, we do not seem to realize that this is one of the prerequisites for the creation of Dante's work*» (*ibid.*, p. 144). It is not, in fact, a journey into the "here", on earth, perhaps a little more extraordinary and fantastic, as some interpreters would like; but these are new structures and figurations that the Poet expresses with symbols (for example the sun, symbol of life) and dreams: «*In a dream. There, one thing is both real and apparent, it happens and it does not happen*» (*ibid.*, p. 145); «*But whoever dreams is in agreement with what there, from the intimate essence of things, speaks to him*» (*ibid.*, p. 146). But it is not enough to say that the condition expressed by the Poet is that of a dream. It is too short and it seems absurd for Guardini that «*the content of a grandiose poem can be said to consist of dreams. There is another way to experience vitally and to look, which*



shares with the dream the possibility of freely disposing of the material of reality, but which has a significant weight greater than the dream, and that is vision» (*ibid.*, pp. 146-147). Moreover, after citing the finale of *Vita Nuova* (XLII), with Beatrice's admirable vision, Guardini relaunches his interpretative hypothesis:

«But I believe that a deeper understanding can be reached, if we admit that Dante has had a visionary experience, in which the essence of the world, the meaning of history and of his personal existence were disclosed to him. (...) Whichever way we want to consider this hypothesis, the reader must, in any case, think that everything that appears in the poem is contemplated through a vision. Everywhere the form is earthly, but it finds itself in a condition willing to welcome a deeper process, so that this can be expressed in it» (*ibid.*, pp. 147-148).

The visionary power and its way of operating are evident in the description of the "mystical rose", in which Dante's journey ends (Par. XXX, 38-126; XXXI, 1-26). Guardini writes:

«And now a visionary process of maximum intensity begins. The theme of the Divine Comedy consists in the story of a pilgrimage, which however takes place in the vision. This, in turn, does not consist in a purely objective seeing, but in being grasped by the significant power of what is seen, in an opening of the spirit, in a transformation of the personality by virtue of the object of its contemplation. But whoever looks, sees things that are above him, and not only according to a difference of degree, but absolutely, since they constitute the world of what is eternally accomplished. He therefore cannot grasp them with his natural organs, but he needs to be enlightened» (*ibid.*, p. 153).

The internal process of the *Comedia* is, as we have already seen, the same evolution of Dante's eye, an eye that often fails *«due to the overbearing force of the object that meets it but from which it then receives a superior visual energy»* (*ibid.*, p. 154). This happens in particular in front of rivers of light, living sparks, gems, bees (Par. XXX, 61-69). Therefore, the fact that Dante often does not understand, does not only have a negative meaning, but refers to the hidden reality that is hidden behind the appearances or the first images captured by the first glance. Guardini writes:

«The fact is extraordinarily vivid from the psychology of visionary experience. In it, sometimes it happens that, when a first image appears, the viewer finds it closed and incomprehensible at first, while presenting something else in it. Then, this first image develops or transforms and, directly or in a series of images, it reveals the authentic reality» (*ibid.*, p. 155).

Let us go back to the vision of the rose and try to understand its symbolism and penetrate its meaning, following the Guardianian comment:

«The rose is extraordinarily large. In the Convivio (IV 8, 7), Dante says that the diameter of the sun is 35,750 miles, but the circumference of the luminous lake "would be a belt too wide for the sun" (Par. XXX, 103-105). The petals expand towards all sides, in height and in width, forming an inconceivably large picture, in which the look is lost. But Dante says: the rose is beyond space and time, in pure presence. In it there is no distance, but at every point everything is visible in the same way. Perhaps, we could say according to his ultimate intention: in every point of the rose all



its form and, all the fullness of its content are present. What previously seemed like flying sparks, living gems, swarming bees, now appear in their true reality» (ibid., p. 157).

It is the "holy militia", the host of the blessed washed in the blood of the Lamb, and the flying angels (bees) who sink into the lake of light, at the center of the rose, and spread it over the blessed, a sign of a community of love and life that expands in every sense (Par. XXXI, 1-27). Guardini explains:

«Let us synthesize. It is a symbol that expresses a multiplicity gathered in a harmonic order. The rose contains the human existence with its various personalities and acts, which has reached the eternal form. It is the creation returned to God and integrated into communion with him. The figure of the flower indicates that the character of the perfect being is beauty, a sacred enjoyment beyond any activity and utility» (ibid., p. 157).

Dante sees / recognizes, in the lake of light in the center of the rose, the reflection of God's light and the fulfillment of earthly reality (Par. XXX, 106-107) and Guardini comments as follows:

«The rays of the divine light that penetrate the world from the Empyrean, operating everything that has value and meaning, are reflected there from the surface of the last sphere, that is, from the far edge of the world they are projected towards free space. This reflection is the lake: the divine power of light and love that has accomplished its work in the world and which, through the spiritual acts of creatures, returns with the contribution of what has been done in the world» (ibid., p. 158).

But there is more. Dante leaves the sphere of the world and stops at the lake of light into which, the divine rays source flow: the Empyrean. Here it appears as *«over spatial space, which surrounds the world; its rays then penetrate into this like a mantle from all sides. It follows that, the rose blooms everywhere on the surface of the world, and everyone can see it from the point of view in which it leans out, in the place where it is located» (ibid., p. 160).*

Thus, another visionary moment appears in the highest sense of the term: the procession of the blessed that moves from the spheres towards the *Empyrean* (Par. XXXIII). Dante rose from the ends of the world into the absolute transcendence of the *Empyrean*. Beatrice's words accompany him and transform him, creating a new look in him. At first, he contemplates the celestial river and the flying sparks, then,

«at the order of his guide, his eyes drink the light from the river and the rose that blooms from the outskirts of the world towards the Empyrean appears where he is. To use the terminology of the Middle Ages, he went through "purification" and "enlightenment"; now he is ready for "union" and can thus see the rose in the simplicity of divine light, the synthesis of creation and history. In this same light, he conquers the meaning of his own life and overcomes the distress he talked about at the beginning of the poem. Dante recognizes how existence must be built according to the will of the Creator and is commissioned to bear witness to it» (ibid., pp. 160-161).

From this long and rich journey, the meaning of the *Comedia* that emanates from an extreme creative depth is evident. In it, everything is directed to its "end" (*finis*, in the medieval meaning of the term),



that is, to its essential goal. Here every existent reaches its fulfillment and Dante, with his work, is “one of the first Christian creative lay” (ibid., p. 117), builder of an ordered and just world, inspired by God and his will, as Guardini remembers in the essay “*The angel in the Divine Comedy*”:

«Dante’s work, like the cathedrals of the Middle Ages and the sums of the scholastic philosophers, sets itself the gigantic task of building that structured world, in which the richness of existence reaches unity. It wants to find an order in which everything has its place, it wants to found a holy dominion in which every being rests on the meaning, every force on law and every obedience leads to freedom, precisely a “hierarchy” (“sacred dominion”), which according to the definition of San Bonaventura, means that the individual has his own meaning in himself, but at the same time exists for the others; that everything is founded on the preceding and together found the next one, and that, by expressing itself, it manifests together the Whole» (Guardini 2012, p. 116).

But the description of the order of the universe and the yearning for perfection fixed in man since creation, are not the only elements of the path. In fact, the *Comedia* illustrates the itinerary that Dante undertakes to overcome the initial state of disorder and loss «to rediscover the incarnation of the sublime, Beatrice. Both meanings flow into the celestial rose, which thus represents the expression of the finis reached, both for the universal macrocosm as for the microcosm of Dante, the man» (ibid., p. 161).

It seems almost paradoxical that the Supreme Poet, accustomed to historical reality and politics, prefers the image of the flower to that of the celestial city, the place of arrival and fulfillment of the Apocalypse. Maybe Dante preferred it to express his ideal of beauty, fulfillment of the divine in the gratuitousness and sublimeness of the gift, in a cosmic dimension. «What the figure of Beatrice expresses, that is, that the maximum power does not lie in the greatness of the results, but in the pure gift, in the smile of the loving and blessed woman, is translated into a cosmic dimension through the rose» (ibid., p. 163).

The golden flower and the rose

In today’s world, the theme of the flower and the rose risks having only historical and aesthetic value. Therefore, to give solidity to his speech, Guardini quotes an important Chinese book, *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (Tung-Pin, 1993)⁸, and offers a brief comparison with the book by Carl Gustav Jung, *Comment on the “Secret of the gold”* (Jung, 1957). In this regard, he writes:

«Jung sets the task of the human effort in the realization of the “self”. The individual must become what is already inserted in his conscious but also unconscious being, in his individuality, but also in the relationships, culminating in it, of the species, of life, of the world in general. He has to

⁸ Revealed to the West in 1929 by the joint work of Jung and Richard Wilhelm, the book still has a dual, exceptional interest today. To lovers of oriental philosophies and alchemy, and to historians of religions, it is offered as a precious text of the Taoist esoteric tradition, which clearly states the methods and the ultimate meaning of Chinese wisdom: the principles of the “circulation of light” and of the “defense of the center”, the art of rhythmic breathing, the secrets of immobile meditation. However, at the same time, the Secret of the Golden Flower guided Jung in the rediscovery of the meaning of alchemy that led him to understand the processes of the collective unconscious, and initiated him into that “psychological confrontation” with the East, which is one of the most significant and current constants of his reflection.



create an individual cosmos, a double of the universal one, which cannot happen without efforts and overcoming. He therefore needs an image that enlightens his spirit, but that is felt by him in his heart as pertinent to him, because it embraces the multiplicity of existence in an authentic order» (Guardini 2012, p. 164).

The Secret of the Golden Flower is a book on Chinese meditation and alchemy, between Buddhism and Taoism, translated by the Sinologist Richard Wilhelm and commented by Carl G. Jung⁹. It alludes to a metaphor according to which each of us is obliged to wake up, to “blossom” like a flower, in order to open our conscience towards the light. In the introduction written by Thomas Clearly, we read:

«The experience of the blooming of the golden flower is compared to the illumination of the sky, the sky of an awareness that transcends images, thoughts and feelings, a boundless space that contains everything without being full. In that way, it opens a channel to an endless source of intuition, creativity and inspiration. Once such a power of mental awakening has been developed, it can be intensified and regenerated indefinitely» (Tung-Pin, 1993).

The secret can be learned in all its simplicity. Turning the light inside is a fundamental and essential teaching of every spiritual initiation. Guardini recalls, that in the spirit and of religions history, images appear several times that, when contemplated, help the individual to realize own being: *«As for the form, as a rule these integrative images are based on the circle, where the circumference expresses the element that contains and restrains forces, while the center means the creative integrity»* (Guardini 1986, p. 165). This happens above all in the East, where the emerging image is that of the *mandala* (circle, magic circle), but forms of this species are also found in the West, *«especially evident, in the rose windows of the choirs of Gothic cathedrals (...) they also emerge spontaneously in the dreams or sleep-wake fantasies»* (Guardini 2012, pp. 164-165).

If we compare the images of the “golden flower” and of the “rose”, we discover amazing analogies. For example, in *Dante's Paradise*, the rose is made of yellow light: *“In the yellow of the eternal rose”* (Par. XXX, 124). For his part, Jung reports that the Chinese flower appears as luminous gold: *«The gold flower is a symbol of the mandala, which I have often encountered among my patients»* (Jung, 1957).

In the *Introduction*, he writes that, despite not knowing either Chinese or Eastern philosophy, he came into contact with it in an empirical way, through his patients: *«Practical experience has opened up a new and unexpected way for me to access Eastern wisdom»,* discovering *«that its content – this is the extraordinary thing – at the same time forms a very vivid parallel with what happens in the psychic development of my patients, who are not Chinese»* (Jung, 1957).

⁹ Original title: *Kommentar zu “Das Geheimnis der goldenen Blüte”*. Published, in the first edition, in the volume of the sinologist Wilhelm R., Jung C. G. (1929). *Das Geheimnis der goldenen Blüte. Ein chinesisches Lebensbuch*. Dornverlag: Monaco. The book contained the translation of an ancient Chinese text, il *T'ai I Chin Hua Tsung Chih'* (*The secret of the golden flower*) preceded by the “European” commentary by C. G. Jung.



In the preface to the second edition (1938), Jung recalls the importance of this text for his subsequent studies, which have also been merged into other essays¹⁰. However, let us not forget his relevant and original introduction to the *I Ching* book. The *Book of Changes*, one of the most important texts of the Chinese literary tradition, “a spring of living water”, which was the main source of inspiration for men of the stature of Confucius and Lao-tse. He presents it as a living book, which can be questioned like an oracle and which offers solutions to those who know how to listen, without prejudice (free from the “principle of causality” that conditions the Western reader), letting oneself be involved, with simplicity, in the first person.

The not easy confrontation between East and West, often full of lack of understandings and misunderstandings gets, this way, closer to us through Jung who, although not an expert in a technical meaning, has worked on the subject showing affinities and analogies that, in some cases, go beyond any expectation. Guardini writes:

«When the easterner is about to meditate, he picks up his mandala image and immerses himself in its specificities and contexts; in such way, his spirit opens up to welcome the truth. But even the westerner, says Jung, while not knowing the theoretical context, when such images are offered to his contemplation, experiences a liberation and a unification of being» (Guardini 1986, p. 166).

To understand better the symbolic meaning of the rose, one can read *The Book of Symbols. Reflections on archetypal images* (Martin 2011, pp. 162-165) where one discovers the ancient legacy of the delicate and thorny flower, angelic and seductive:

«For at least six millennia, its five-petalled wild ancestors, and thousands of cultivated descendants, have delighted the eyes, soothed the soul and attended a myriad of events and rituals of human history. Loved by both the powerful and the humble, roses evoke the evanescence of innocence and youth, crown the winner, commemorate the martyr, adorn the flags of nations and the banners of royal lineages. But more than anything else, roses mean love in all its earthly and celestial shades: for the person or thing we love, for those we have loved and lost, or more, for something which, we don't know how to name but which, attracts us and mysteriously escapes us» (*ibid.*, p. 162).

We discover that the rose is used not only by the mythical literature of ancient Greece and by Christianity (see Dante's *Paradiso*), but also by alchemy, with particular symbolic nuances:

«For the alchemists, the entire process of psychic transformation takes place sub rosa (literally, “under the rose”). With the meaning of “in confidence, secretly”, this expression presumably finds its origin in the rose that Eros gave to Harpocrates, the god of silence, as a sign of gratitude for the discretion he had on the illicit love affairs of his mother Aphrodite. However, in alchemy the crossing between a red and a white rose not only alludes to the “love adventure” and the “marriage” between opposite natures, to the albedo and the rubedo as understanding and realization of psychic processes, but also to the silence that must necessarily wrap up the profound

¹⁰ Jung writes: «The reader will find a more exhaustive treatment on this subject in my two writings *Dream symbols of the individuation process* and *The representations of liberation in alchemy*, which appeared in “Eranos-Jahrbuch” in 1936 and in 1937. The two writings are now included in *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944), in “Works”, vol. 12».



essence of the work, the womb or the "rose" within whose petals the Self is secretly conceived» (ibid., pp. 162-163).

If it is true that Dante chooses the image of the rose over that of the city, it is also true that, often in the West the city (think of Palmanova) is, in a certain way, «*the stylization of a flower seen from above, furthermore, and the plan of a symmetrically constructed city» (Guardini 1986, p. 165).*

«As it seems, Dante's rose must be understood psychologically in this context. It is the noblest flower but, in its form, we can also glimpse, as we have already mentioned, the elements of the city. It is made of light and, at its bottom lies the lake of the divine life which – expression of dynamic Unity and Totality – is carried by the angels in its various points. The rose means the totality of existence that has reached its eternal perfection, and Dante's thought would certainly be correctly interpreted if we said that only for it, the world becomes understandable. But at the same time, it is also the model-image and the signpost according to which, the eternal image of every single creature must be implemented by virtue of grace» (Guardini 1986, p. 165-166).

The rose encloses, in its mysterious beauty, the end of a journey which, from the loss in the dark forest and the risk of remaining prisoners in hell («*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'intrate*» = *leave any hope, you who are entering*), leads to the discovery of the luminosity dell'«*amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle*» (= *of love that moves the sun and the other stars*)).

The *Comedia* introduces us to a living experience that does not leave us passive, rather it invites us to enter into the narration to become active protagonists. How? Through the *vision*:

«The Commedia does not just want to narrate wonderful experiences, but wants to communicate a vision in which the viewer makes a journey through the afterlife and experiences, himself, the decisive transformation there. The visionary moment (...) is inseparable from the narrative. The poet not only says: I saw this and that, I was shaken, enlightened, made happy, but this visionary gaze of the afterlife specifies the whole process and nature of the things represented. This is so much more significant as the Divine Comedy is all saturated with reality, its contents are extremely dense and concrete and its form is of the greatest precision» (ibid., p. 168).

According to Guardini, the reader has only one chance to enter Dante's poem and this consists precisely in "reliving the vision": «*The visionary element that vibrates everywhere is what creates the atmosphere of the afterlife in the Divina Commedia. If the reader wants to understand what it is, he must in some way relive the vision» (ibid., p. 169).* And he offers us a further pearl of his interpretation of the poem (in the third part of his *Divina Commedia* by Dante "Earthly reality and eternal reality"), showing us the Christian reunifying work in the Incarnate Verb (*Logos*) and the implementation of the human vocation as communion between man and God, which has always been an "idea", conceived and desired by the creator and "realized" in the true "Rose of Heaven", the person of Jesus Christ:

«Regaining oneself; the unification of man as he is on earth, with the way in which God thought and wanted him; the realization of the idea as unity between God and man through Christ, which certainly is the "idea / which gives birth to, by loving, our sire" (Par. XIII 53-54), the Logos – this is the Rose of Heaven» (Guardini 2012, p. 285).



Before Him every image, be it the highest and most sublime object, fails. His person is the living essence of the journey (birth, life, death, resurrection), as Guardini himself showed in a beautiful book, *The essence of Christianity*, centered precisely on the person of Jesus (Guardini, 1993).

Conclusion

The Guardianian rereading of Dante's *journey and vision* led us to turn our gaze to the Christian vision of man, culminating in the incarnate verb, Jesus, "Logos", "idea", "our Lord", "Rose of the heaven", the essence of Christianity, mediator and synthesis of divine humanity.

Guardini's philosophical-theological orientation was careful to the themes of anthropology and psychology and it is not by chance, because he treated people and themes with a fine psychological sensitivity, both in spiritual accompaniment and as an interpreter of the man and culture of his time.

The journey and the vision were also opportunities for reflection and debate on the theme, between Jung and Guardini, whose deepening can only be very fruitful in the future. Think, for example, of the *archetype of the journey* that is the basis of every human movement, every tension towards the outside, towards the future or towards an objective, every search for something other than oneself and every immersion within oneself. It is the path that leads the individual forward, in a continuous process, integral part of the human evolution. This movement, this "exodus", according to Jung, tends to the only true journey of which every other is a symbol: the individuation path. Moreover, think of the theme of *shadow and light* that can offer just as many opportunities for comparison and dialogue.

At the end of this investigation, we may ask: what do the *I Ching*, *The Secret of the Golden Flower* and the *Divina Commedia* have they in common? If nothing else, the clear intention of leading the reader to a journey and an inner vision that can enlighten the person, purifying and freeing him from his impediments and limitations, opening him to the *truth of reality* (against any appearance and superficiality), to experience upon oneself the purification, the liberation, the enlightenment.

Therefore, journey and vision become elements of regeneration. Also common and very clarifying characters, in these works, to reach a kingdom of light. Not only external but also internal, to a real and transforming illumination that brings to fulfillment, the potentialities inherent in the person, who is not only the realization of passions or desires but the true realization of the "self", the fulfillment of own personality, stable and lasting bliss, and, we would dare to say, full happiness.



Bibliografia

- Arnheim, R. (1969). *Visual thinking*. Berkeley: Los Angeles.
- Arnheim, R. (1974). *Il pensiero visivo*. Einaudi: Torino.
- Auerbach, E. (1999). *Studi su Dante*, prefazione di Dante Della Terza. Feltrinelli: Milano.
- Balthasar (von), H.U. (1973/2014). *Dante. Viaggio attraverso la lingua, la storia, il pensiero della Divina Commedia*. Brescia: Morcelliana.
- Barbero, A. (2020). *Dante*. Laterza: Bari.
- Bloom, H. (1994). *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. Harcourt Brace New: York.
- Bloom, H. (1996/2008). *Il Canone occidentale. I libri e le scuole delle età*. Rizzoli: Milano.
- Bloom, H. (ed. 2011). *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Dante Alighieri – New Edition*, Introduction by H. Bloom. Infobase Publishing: New York.
- Cleary Th. (1991). *The Secret of the Golden Flower. The Classic Chinese Book of Life*. Translated, with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary by Thomas Cleary. Harper: San Francisco.
- Ciardi, F. (2021). *Vergine madre, figlia del tuo figlio. La preghiera di Bernardo nel Paradiso di Dante*, in «Vita Consacrata» 57, 1/2021, pp. 1-13.
- D'Onofrio, G. (2020). *Per questa selva oscura. La teologia poetica di Dante*, vol. 1, La gioventute. Città Nuova: Roma.
- D'Onofrio, G. (2020). *Luce intellettuale. Dante e il pensiero eidetico 2020*, in «E così face a questo amore amare». Dante e la filosofia del '900, a cura di M. Marianelli, Pièdimosca: Perugia, pp. 13-37.
- Gennari, M. (2006). "Viaggio", in *Enciclopedia filosofica*, vol. XII, Bompiani: Milano, pp. 12109-12111.
- Gentile, G. (1965). *Studi su Dante*, raccolti da Vito A. Bellezza. Sansoni: Firenze.
- Gerl-Falkowitz H.-B. (1985). *Romano Guardini (1885-1968). Leben und Werk*. Matthias Grünewald: Mainz.
- Gerl-Falkowitz H.-B. (1988). *Romano Guardini. La vita e l'opera*. Morcelliana: Brescia.
- Gilson É. (1953). *Dante et la philosophie*. Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin: Paris.
- Goethe (von) J.W. (1999). *La teoria dei colori*. Il Saggiatore: Milano.
- Guardini, R. (1951). *Der Engel in Dantes göttlicher Komödie*. München: Kösel-Verlag.
- Guardini, R. (1958). *Landschaft der Ewigkeit*. München: Kösel-Verlag.
- Guardini, R. (1986). *Studi su Dante*: Morcelliana: Brescia. Contiene due saggi: *L'angelo nella Divina Commedia di Dante*, pp. 9-130; *Paesaggio dell'eternità*, pp. 131-372.
- Guardini, R. (1993). *L'essenza del cristianesimo*. Morcelliana: Brescia.
- Guardini, R. (2012). *La Divina Commedia di Dante. I principali concetti filosofici e religiosi (Lezioni)*, a cura di Oreste Tolone. Brescia: Morcelliana.



- I Ching. Il Libro dei Mutamenti* (2020), a cura di R. Wilhelm, prefazione di C.G. Jung. Adelphi eBook: Milano.
- Jung, C. G. (1944). *Psicologia e alchimia*, in "Opere", vol. 12. Boringhieri: Torino.
- Jung, C. G. (1957). *Commento al "Segreto del fiore d'oro"*, in "Opere", vol. 13. Boringhieri: Torino.
- Mazzotta, G. (1993). *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge*. Princeton University: Princeton NJ.
- Mazzotta, G. (1993). "Theologia ludens", in *Miscellanea di Studi Danteschi in memoria di Silvio Pasquazi*, a cura di A. Paoletta, V. Placella, G. Turco, 2 vol., Federico & Ardia: Napoli, vol. II, pp. 507-517.
- Mazzotta, G. (2014). *Reading Dante*. Yale University Press: London.
- Petrosino, S. (2006). "Visione", in *Enciclopedia filosofica*, vol. XII. Bompiani: Milano, pp. 12183-12188.
- Martin, K. (ed. 2011). *Il libro dei simboli. Riflessioni sulle immagini archetipiche*. Taschen: Köln.
- Ricordi, F. (2020). *Filosofia della commedia di Dante. Il Purgatorio*. Mimesis: Milano-Udine.
- Saramago, J. (1990). *Viagem a Portugal*. Caminho: Lisboa.
- Saramago, J. (1999). *Viaggio in Portogallo*, con uno scritto di Claudio Magris. Einaudi: Torino.
- Wilhelm R., Jung C. G. (1929). *Das Geheimnis der goldenen Blüte. Ein chinesisches Lebensbuch*. Dornverlag: Monaco.
- Tung-Pin, Lü (1993). *Il segreto del fiore d'oro. Il libro cinese della vita*, introduzione, note e commento di Thomas Cleary. Astrolabio-Ubaldini: Roma.

Web

- Casale E., *La luce dell'inconscio. Luce dell'Ombra e l'Ombra della luce*, <https://www.jungitalia.it/tag/la-luce-dellombra>
- Fornasari G., *L'arte del Viaggiare. Perché ogni viaggio e soprattutto un viaggio interiore*, <http://www.guidofornasari.it/psicologia-larte-del-viaggiare-perche-ogni-viaggio-e-soprattutto-un-viaggio-interiore/>
- Papapicco C., *Psicologia del viaggio*, <https://www.stateofmind.it/2019/09/viaggio-psicologia/>
- Santo Padre Paolo VI: http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19651207_altissimi-cantus.html
- Santo Padre Francesco: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/messages/pont-messages/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150504_messaggio-dante-alighieri.html
- Santo Padre Francesco: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20210325_centenario-dante.html