



## Dante and Virgil: a glance at the inner journey

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**Key Words:** Dante – Virgil – transference – countertransference

**Citation:** Russello C., Casamassima S. (2021). *Dante and Virgil: a glance at the inner journey*

**doi.medra.org:** 10.48237/LIJ\_045

**lijedizioniretlis03072018**

**Copyright:**©LIRPA-International Journal

**Funding:** None

**Competing interests:** None

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*Abstract:* Though the Divine Comedy was born between the middle ages and the advent of the new age, it is its universality that explains the very powerful relevance of Dante's journey. The journey, as a symbol of the search for truth, spirituality, knowledge and wisdom, is the path that drives mankind to progress in his development. The influence of the travel archetype acts on mankind's body and spirit, propelling him like a wave along his path of individuation. It is good to let oneself be carried away by the current, to follow the main wave that shows us the way to realize the only true journey: the one that takes place within oneself.

The authors, inspired by the guiding figure of Virgil, propose a parallelism between the Dante-Virgil relationship and the patient-therapist relationship. In particular, they turn their attention to the concepts of transference and countertransference proposed by Robert Langs according to his Communicative Model, as well as to the theoretical-clinical contributions of Carl Gustav Jung.

### Introduction

Even 700 years after his death, Dante Alighieri, the *Sommo Poeta*, continues to conquer the soul of numerous readers all over the world. His major work, *The Divine Comedy* (*La Divina Commedia*) has gifted us a universal message, overcoming time and space through his inner journey across the complex labyrinth of the human psyche (Mazzarella 1991). Dante, in the *Commedia*, speaks about the mislaid man who afterwards finds the right path, embarking on a journey through the three realms of the dead.

Dante's journey can be likened to a straight line. At the extremes we find two opposite principles: "the disoriented and deteriorated action, that is the sin or crime, is punished by itself; 2. the oriented and integrated action, that is the good deed, has in itself its own reward" (Chiappelli 1965).

The themes of "losing" and "finding oneself again" in Dante not only visualize the moral world of mankind, but also give us the idea on how he perceives mankind as capable of associating and dissociating oneself, as well as communicating and self-improving, reciprocally. The condition of this sense of reciprocity is based on sensitivity or affectivity; in contrast, insensitivity and fixity in time and space represent Hell's highest form of punishment. The awareness of coexistence is the supreme



harmony which transcends time and space, which is Paradise's highest reward (Ibidem). As Junghians, inspired by the *Sommo Poeta*, we understand it is within this dialectic of opposite principles that we find the juxtaposition between psychopathology versus *Individuation*. Within this universal message from Dante through his poetic allegory, we also find the theme regarding "the choice of the journey". This refers to the free will – "expression used to indicate man's freedom, whose acts are not determined by superior forces (natural or supernatural), but derived from autonomous choices" (Treccani). According to Caludio Widmann (2004), Dante recognizes, through the oxymoron "beneath a greater Power and better Nature" (Pg XVI, 79-90), "the reality of a greater force, to which humankind is subjugated, that is God's excessive power (...). However, the freedom to confront this force is granted to man" (Widmann 2004):

*"If this were so, Free Will would be destroyed  
within you, and no justice would there be  
in having joy for good, and grief for ill.  
Heaven starts your inclinations, though I say  
not all; but ev'n supposing that I did,  
light has been giv'n to you for good and evil,  
with Free Will, which, if it endure fatigue  
in its first fights with heaven, will afterward,  
if duly nourished, conquer everything.  
Beneath a greater Power and better Nature  
ye freely lie; and that creates within you  
the mind, which heaven hath not in its control".  
(Purgatorio Canto XVI 70-81)*

Therefore Dante claims that God has given us *free will* as a precious light that enables us to discern the good from the evil.

What Dante seeks in his inner journey is the liberation from the evil, which is intrinsic in the human condition after the original sin, and he will reach this goal once arrived in Paradise.

That will only happen, firstly, after knowing the inner evil – the archetypal unilateral possession that prisons men in Hell, which is visible in the unconscious; and secondly, after being freed from the possession by natural instincts in the Purgatory, to reach inner freedom. This transition in the Purgatory corresponds to the integration phase of the *Shadow* (Mazzarella 1991). The first step is to recognize the *Shadow* while the second step consists of its integration.

To rephrase the concepts of free will and destiny, in in-depth psychology, equates to including fate and destiny of the human totality in the dialogue between the conscious and unconscious. This also means acknowledging the true nature of knowledge and wisdom as expressions of the unconscious. (Langs 1996)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The metatheoretical construct speculated by Langs is composed by two systems that communicate between each other: a *superficial conscious system* and a *deep unconscious system*. The latter was subsequently revisited and subdivided into two sub-systems:

1) *unconscious system of deep wisdom or emotional mind* (Langs 1996), which effectively uses deep perception and deep emotional intelligence to receive and elaborate information and unconscious meanings (this system



In light of this notion, the choice to undertake the analytical path also represents man's inner journey that could bring him towards *Individuation*. In Jung's view (1946), it is the process to acquire self-awareness, in which the Ego and the *Selbst*, the conscious and the unconscious, combine, enabling mankind to find his path toward personal realization. *Individuation* in all its aspects, is the true journey that man takes within oneself.

Throughout his journey, Dante was accompanied by three guides: Virgil in Hell and Purgatory, Beatrice in Paradise, and finally San Bernardo, who brings him towards the vision of God, the final destination of his long journey for the salvation of his soul. We would also include the Virgin Mary, the fourth guide who was much less mentioned, appearing at the journey's beginning and end.

Within this context, it is our aim to focus on Virgil's role as a guiding figure, suggesting a parallelism between Dante, Virgil, the characters of Hell and Purgatory, the patient and the characters created by his associations, based on the theoretical and clinical contributions by Carl Gustav Jung and Robert Langs. We would also like to analyze the dynamics of transference and countertransference, in light of the Communicative Method (Langs 1973;74, Grassi 2012).

### Transference and countertransference according to Robert Langs

The American analyst Robert Langs began his path at the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) where he went through his formal training and enrichment thanks to his clinical experience in various institutions in the State of New York. The clinical evidence propelled him to come up with a new approach that gradually deviated from the Freudian psychoanalytic method, until he differentiated from it completely, forming an innovative clinical methodology, defined as the Communicative model of Psychoanalytical Psychotherapy (Langs 1996). In his works, Langs studied on one hand the "unconscious communication" that takes place during interaction between the analyst and the patient, and on the other hand, the role of the interventions of the therapist to determine the patient's answers. His complex and articulated theoretical-clinical model of communicative psychotherapy is characterized essentially by four fundamental aspects:

- the first aspect is the "decoding system" of the patient's communication by derivatives<sup>2</sup>, which represents how the therapeutic relationship is built;

creates code communication);

2) *subsystem of anxiety and guilt*, which, in correlation with the conscious system, controls the emotional behavior and its dysfunctions.

The author acknowledges that the *Emotional Mind* has a higher ability to recognize, and consequentially to adapt, compared to the purely intellectual or rational one, which is the conscious system.

- <sup>2</sup> Langs (1979) elaborated the concept of derivatives, which presents a three-level structure:

1) manifest content, 2) conscious and unconscious implications 3) coded or "masked" meanings.

Derivatives are mostly constituted by narratives or images, stories, myths, descriptions of recent or past events, theatrical pieces, movies, dreams and other image-predominated narratives. Their meanings are elaborated and created within the deep unconscious system. In psychotherapy the therapist has to understand how a free association of derivative nature is essentially a transformed image, produced as an answer to a previous trigger. That image is produced by the processes of shift and symbolization. These processes exert their action on the raw and traumatic aspects of the trigger, to which the access to consciousness has been denied.

Understanding the derivative's nature we should underline the difference between the derivative of type I (*perception*) and the derivative of type II (*transference*). The first ones are inferences easily traceable from the manifest content of the patient's associations, without taking into account the adaptive context (event-stimulus) from which they started.



- the second aspect is the “*secure framework*” or the methodological scheme which provides the *setting’s precise rules*;
- the third aspect deals with rethinking the concepts of “*transference*” and “*countertransference*”;
- the fourth aspect is the “*Emotional Mind*”, the meta-psychological corollary on which the concepts of disease, cure and health are founded (Berivi and Grassi 2012).

In our context we especially focus on how Langs reformulated the concept of transference and countertransference.

According to the Communicative approach, both neurosis and transference’s manifestations are considered, from a theoretical and clinical viewpoint, as the constellations of unconscious fantasies, which express themselves as symptoms within the therapeutic relationship. Langs re-elaborates the theoretical definition of transference by Freud<sup>3</sup>. It still holds true that transference reactions by the patient are based on constellations of unconscious fantasies, partially derived by past relationships and experience; nevertheless Langs fully recognizes that these reactions are caused by specific stimuli originated from the therapist. Therefore the author suggests a more narrow definition of transference and countertransference within the therapeutic interaction: “*these two terms respectively refer to the pathological dimension of the therapist’s interaction with the patient and the patient’s interaction with the therapist. Analogously, I will use the terms non-transference and non-countertransference to deal with the valid, non-pathological behavior of the patient and the therapist*” (Langs 1988). In his book *Interactions* (1988), Langs describes two sequences of therapeutic interaction: the first is of psychopathological nature (countertransference - non-transference), the other is essentially psychotherapeutic (non-countertransference - transference). Only the latter lead towards the treatment based on *insight*, which is the foundation of what Langs calls the *truth therapy*.

#### • **Sequence 1: Non-countertransference-transference**

This sequence is considered ideal by Langs, where “*the therapist’s intervention receives an affective-cognitive confirmation<sup>4</sup> in terms of second-type derivatives and associative-behavioral answers, which represent a simultaneous, introjective, positive and unconscious identification with the therapist and his valid behavior*” (Langs 1988). Within a secure framework setting, the adaptive answers by the patient begin to express a significant quantity of psychopathology (transference). An important aspect underlined by the author is that a sequence like this one, despite assuming a mainly non-countertransference behavior by the therapist, is never completely free from countertransference. Some amount of countertransference by the therapist, even little, is unavoidable and always present. However the author also underlines how it is possible to identify numerous factors that are capable of triggering transference reactions in the absence of predominant countertransference. The existence of a safe framework is the fundamental prerequisite to achieve this kind of sequence.

The second ones are inferences derived from the manifest content of the patient, after having organized the patient’s material around one specific adaptive context, constituted by an action or intervention by the therapist/analyst. These derivatives are the main ingredients of the interpretations by the communicative therapist. They are also defined as interactional derivatives.

<sup>3</sup> See Berivi in Grassi 2012, pp. 65-7.

<sup>4</sup> See Langs (1979).



- **Sequence 2: Countertransference - non-transference**

In this sequence, countertransference by the therapist is the dominant expression. The main factor lies in the therapist' inability to correctly understand the communication in play. Once the prevalent countertransference arises through an intervention based on pathological unconscious fantasies, created by the patient's associations and behaviors, the answer by the patient will be mainly nontransferential. At that point, once the therapist recognizes their own technical mistake and their countertransferential conduct, they would be able to amend oneself through corrections and interpretations, inducing transferential reactions to the patient. To face this dynamic, the therapist has to self-analyze, and to understand the patient's unconscious effort in order to correct and cure the patient. This auto-analytical and corrective work is necessary to alleviate the impact of his own mistake. Only then, the communicative material of the session will move towards a sequence of psychotherapeutic kind (sequence 1).

In conclusion, the communicative point of view perceives countertransference as a constant element in the spiral-shaped communicative interaction, in contrast to the classical position, which considers countertransference only as an occasional presence, in relatively macroscopic forms.

### **The figure of Publio Virgilio Marone: the guiding role in the analytical path**

Virgil was a great poet of ancient Rome (70-19 BC), born in a family of small landowners in the Andes (nowadays Pietole), near Mantova. After gaining success through his work "Le Bucoliche" (ten short pastoral poems published in 39 B.C.), he was introduced to Mecenate's circle and endorsed the Augustan project of restoring peace and morality. He composed "Le Georgiche", a didactic short poem of rural topic, between 39 and 40 B.C., then dedicated himself to the "Eneide", the epic poem narrating Helen's escape from Troy and the foundation of the city of Lavinio, in Lazio, by the hero. He had such great fame during the middle age that he was considered a master of style and poetry, a model of philosophical wisdom and an unaware prophet of the Christian revelation (particularly the figure of *puer* in Egloga IV, erroneously interpreted as a prophecy of the Advent of Jesus Christ). According to Dante Alighieri, Virgil represents "the complete expression of the ancient culture" (Getto 1959), to the point of choosing him as his guide for the afterlife's journey from Hell to Purgatory. It is in the first canto of Hell that Virgil appears to help Dante in the dark forest. This place corresponds to Dante's intense personal confusion, but also represents the inner disorder that can lead the human soul to spiritual death (Mazzarella 1991). In universal terms, the forest corresponds to the fall of the human soul into mistakes and sins. However, it is precisely through the dark of the forest that the poet finds the force to look up towards the hill - the virtuous life that he abandoned. In this state he acknowledges the mess and misery of his own inner disorder and upon regret, he entrusts himself in Virgil's hands, choosing him as his guide towards the spiritual purpose (Cantilli 2012). Virgil also represents the human reason that, once purified, can grasp the superior truths of faith under Beatrice's guidance. We can look at Beatrice as the *Anima*<sup>5</sup> in the Jungian sense, through which we could achieve the celestial beatitude and the union with God - the reason why the Soul was created and where it naturally tends (Mazzarella 1991).

<sup>5</sup> The Anima is the archetype of life, and it equals to the real inner personality. From a psychological viewpoint, it represents the unconscious feminine inside the psyche of man. See Jung 1950.



*"When half way through the journey of our life  
I found that I was in a gloomy wood,  
because the path which led aright was lost.  
And ah, how hard it is to say just what  
this wild and rough and stubborn woodland was,  
the very thought of which renews my fear!  
So bitter 't is, that death is little worse;  
but of the good to treat which there I found,  
I 'll speak of what I else discovered there.  
I cannot well say how I entered it,  
so full of slumber was I at the moment  
when I forsook the pathway of the truth;"*  
(Inferno Canto I; 1-12)

*"But thou, to such sore trouble why return?  
Why climbst thou not the Mountain of Delight,  
which is of every joy the source and cause?"  
"Art thou that Virgil, then, that fountain-head  
which poureth forth so broad a stream of speech?"  
I answered him with shame upon my brow".*  
(Inferno Canto I; 76-81)

*"A different course from this must thou pursue,"  
he answered, when he saw me shedding tears,  
"if from this wilderness thou wouldst escape;  
for this wild beast, on whose account thou criest,  
alloweth none to pass along her way,  
but hinders him so greatly, that she kills;  
and is by nature so malign and guilty,  
that never doth she sate her greedy lust,  
but after food is hungrier than before".*  
(Inferno Canto I; 91-99)

In Virgil's discourse we do not find words of blame, but words of comprehension. The Latin poet indicates to Dante the road to undertake, different from the one he had previously chosen, so that he comes across the three beasts, the lynx, the lion and the she-wolf, symbols of the sin which is "so malign and guilty" (Hell, Canto I, 97). In this point Virgil symbolizes the invitation offered to the patient to leave behind himself his repetitive dysfunctional psychopathological modalities, to leave space for new, more functional modalities: in Jung's words, we could say to liberate himself from the "feeling-toned complex" domain. According to the author they consist of one set of partially or completely unconscious representations, thoughts and memories, connoted by a strong emotional charge, which limits the freedom of the Ego (Jung 1934). The complex then indicates a systemic



psychological structure, in which a strong emotional charge ties together representations, ideas and memories (Grassi 2012).

In the light of his own clinical experience Jung (1934) stated that:

*"[...] Then one must be a doctor in order to appreciate what an appalling menace a complex can be. Only when you have seen whole families destroyed by them, morally and physically, and the unexampled tragedy and hopeless misery that following their train, do you feel the full impact of the reality of complexes. You then understand how idle and unscientific it is to think that a person can "imagine" a complex. Casting about for a medical comparison, one could best compare them with infections or with malign tumours, both of which arise without the least assistance from the conscious mind. This comparison is not altogether satisfactory because complexes are not entirely morbid by nature but are characteristic expressions of the psyche, irrespective of whether this psyche is differentiated or primitive. Consequently we find unmistakable traces of them in all peoples and in all epochs".*

Thanks to the comprehension of the emotional-shade complex, Jung was able to understand how one's unconscious play out with their complexes, particularly by what their dreams represent through images. In this way, Jung provided us an important tool in understanding and acknowledging the presence of the complexes, not only in the patients, but also in the therapists.

Another relevant aspect to underline, as part of the Divine Comedy's message, is that the journey in the Afterlife involves both Dante and Virgil in the same way. In other terms, the analyst who does not confront oneself with their own *Shadow*<sup>6</sup> cannot guide the person in analysis to deal with their own *Shadow*.

In 1946 Jung published his book *The Psychology of the Transference* in which he used images from *Rosarium philosophorum*<sup>7</sup> to describe in a metaphorical way the psychotherapeutic relationship. According to Jung, the alchemical process can better represent the psychotherapeutic relationship. From the therapist's image as an alchemist arises a whole series of implications, also theoretical, on the concept of transference and even more on countertransference. Finally, Jung (1961) affirmed that:

*"The psychotherapist, however, must understand not only the patient; it is equally important that he should understand him-self. [...] The patient's treatment begins with the doctor, so to speak. Only if the doctor knows how to cope with himself and his own problems will he be able to teach the patient to do the same.[...]. The analysand must realize that it concerns himself, that the training analysis is a bit of real life and is not a method which can be learned by rote. The student who does not grasp that fact in his own training analysis will have to pay dearly for the failure later on".*

Coming back to Dante, Virgil represents his teacher and his model (Inf., I, 85-87), to the point that we see how the poet always addresses him with the appellatives "maestro" and "duca" (which means "guide"), and how the two build a very close relationship, not only as master-disciple, but even as father and son, during the first two cantica. That is especially evident in Purgatory XXX, 49-51, where

<sup>6</sup> The Shadow is the archetype which designates the inferior personality, the personification of what we don't know about ourselves. It is "what man would not want to be" (Jung 1945).

<sup>7</sup> A alchemical text of the XIII century, attributed to the physician and alchemist Arnaldo da Villanova (1235-1315).





Virgil disappears at the appearance of Beatrice: at that moment Virgil is addressed by Dante as *"dolcissimo padre"* (the very sweet father), just before the disciple bursts into tears for his departure. Throughout his path from Afterlife to Paradise, the poet is interposed between two poles of the Psyche: the instinctual-biological one tied to the Ego (Hell), and the instinctual-spiritual one (Paradise) of the Jungian *Selbst*, which is the psyche in its wholeness, the deepest point of the personality (Mazzarella 1991). In this intra-psychoic dialogue between the Ego and the Jungian Self, Dante asks himself and expresses all his doubts on the path he has to travel:

*"But why should I go there, or who concedes it?  
I 'm not Aeneas, nor yet Paul am I;  
me worthy of this, nor I nor others deem.  
If, therefore, I consent to come, I fear  
lest foolish be my coming; thou art wise,  
and canst much better judge than I can talk."  
And such as he who unwilld what he willed,  
and changes so his purpose through new thoughts,  
that what he had begun he wholly leaves;  
such on that gloomy slope did I become;  
for, as I thought it over, I gave up  
the enterprise so hastily commenced".  
(Inferno, II Canto 31-42)*

Here the great poet highlights one of the essential points of the analytical path. Virgil encourages Dante to continue his path, explaining to Dante that Virgil is confined within the limbo between the suspended souls; in that moment Beatrice, the soul of a beautiful woman, with eyes sparkling as stars and a pleasing voice, appeared to him.

*"O courteous Mantuan spirit, thou whose fame  
is still enduring in the world above,  
and will endure as long as lasts the world,  
a friend of mine, but not a friend of Fortune,  
is on his journey o'er the lonely slope  
obstructed so, that he hath turned through fear;  
and, from what I have heard of him in Heaven,  
I fear lest he may now have strayed so far,  
that I have risen too late to give him help".  
(Inferno Canto II 58-66)*

*"I, who now have thee go, am Beatrice;  
thence come I, whither I would fain return;  
't was love that moved me, love that makes me speak".  
(Inferno Canto II, 70-72)*





*“There is a Gentle Lady up in Heaven,  
who grieves so at this check, whereto I send thee,  
that broken is stern judgment there above.  
She called Lucīa in her prayer, and said:  
‘Now hath thy faithful servant need of thee,  
and I, too, recommend him to thy care’.”*  
(Inferno Canto II, 94-99)

Beatrice is the voice of the *Anima*, capable of putting mankind, Dante, into contact with God and with the *Anima Mundi* which is also, according to Mazzarella (1991), the feminine part of God. From the Sky, the Virgin Mary, moved by Dante, appoints Saint Lucy to intercede for him. The Saint, addressing Beatrice, explains that Dante, the man loved by her, was struggling with death, pulled down by the sin. We can observe how man who is victim of his own instincts, without the *Anima*'s intervention, get inexorably trapped. We would underline how the journey through the three cantica, from the beginning to the end, actually is the expression of a major will, the one of God, which is expressed through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, who feels piety towards the lost man. Erring and falling would be due to the inflated Ego, by man's abuse of knowledge for mere personal and selfish purposes, and by not recognizing the divine's wholeness.

That is how falling repeats itself and acquires a diabolical aspect, since man appeals to knowledge just to serve the power of the Ego (Mazzarella 1991). However, thanks to the Virgin Mary's intercession, Dante (man) finds his own guides, which will bring him through the three realms towards the presence of God. “According to the traditional interpretation, Virgil represents the light of the human Reason, which guides mankind towards the Good (within the limitations of nature), while Beatrice, who accompanies Dante into the celestial Paradise (where the Latin poet cannot enter, as he is a soul confined to the Limbo) represents Faith, which leads him toward the vision of God” (Balducci 2016).

### Clinical example

We propose a clinical vignette, as an example of what we presented before about the guiding role by the therapist within the analytical setting. The case we are presenting is connected to many allegories of Dante's work.

R. is a 36 years-old man, who came to the outpatient service specialized in addiction, as he was strongly in need of help for serious substance abuse, which many times had threatened his life. He has been working for many years in a family business, in which he covers a managerial role. In his family history, his father passed away early when he was a teenager. The patient leads a busy and frenetic life due to his work. Despite the possibility to assign his duties to others, he seems obsessed with the need to personally solve all problems. His constant need for control is contrasted by his massive cocaine abuse, which has many times led to his untraceable disappearance for days. The patient came to the outpatient clinic at his own will after another episode of cocaine abuse, in which for many consecutive days he was unconscious and eventually found in his car in serious physical conditions. After the experience the patient realized the severity and lethality of his conduct. Having seen his death up-close has shaken him to the point of fracturing himself in his omnipotence and making him aware of his need for help. The diagnosis is oriented towards a narcissistic personality



disorder with antisocial traits, not so much expressed in overt criminal behaviors, but mostly manifested in relational and social strategies based on an unscrupulous view of interpersonal and social relationships, valuing his own interests over others’.

The evaluation of the transferential and countertransferential dynamics was done within a psychotherapeutic setting, led by the communicative approach by Robert Langs. The author especially considers the psychopathological communication by the patient both as a possible expression of his unconscious perception of the therapist’s psychopathology, and as an expression of his transferential dynamics (repeat compulsion). The choice between the transferential and the perceptive-cognitive interpretation is made by the therapist through evaluating the communicative sequence of the patient, in which derivatives, associations and signs of confirmation or non-confirmation of the interventions (Langs 1973-4, 1979) can be found. These all represent reactions to stimuli-events. For instance:

- **Transference – non-countertransference sequence**

Therapist: *«You are telling me that you fear not being able to do this path, from 100 km/h you managed to shift down a gear doing this program».*

The patient reported feeling as if he was “running at 100 km/h” and made a superstitious gesture with his right hand (crossing his fingers).

The patient: *«I hope I could shift down another gear».*

T: *«You are also telling me that you fear dealing with some issues that made your “eyes wide open” in the previous session and that coming close to some issues scares you so much that you are trying to drug the therapeutic situation, in the attempt to keep the distance from me».*

P: *«Why are you telling me this? A person like me, I have no fear of striking any chord. I am not ashamed of anything. I am afraid to understand. I am afraid to die out of abuse, and not out of the addiction to any drug»* (in the meantime he buttoned up his sweater).

T: *«You told me that you want to “start with yourself”, but you include so many people, also in our conversations, you talk about your family, your business, your friends, you talk about isolation, so that you can avoid entering a deep relationship here with me».*

P: *«You are right, I do include many people...».*

### **Comment**

In this vignette, we can notice how the patient acted according to his regular patterns of reaction towards deep interpersonal situations by mentioning external topics during the session, interposing them between him and the analyst, so as to deviate the therapist’s attention. In this case the analyst understood his resistance and did not react out any countertransference.

During the successive session the patient reported as following:

P: *«coming here starts to get difficult... You asked me tell you my dreams, but I do not dream, when it happens, I will write it down for you... Sometimes it happens that I dream in my few hours of sleep though... other things from the last week? Nothing, very calm week, very little time to think... but I can see the results because there have not been any damage... The only event that happened, to be honest, it was... last Friday, I have seen a person in conditions that I have never seen before, I think he is under methadone. I see him, I saw him other times quite well, he was talking with other people, no, may be it was Tuesday or Wednesday! We have seen each other before. This person asked me for a cigarette, and*



*it was shocking, a little too much for me – may be without “a little”- he made us all apprehensive... I ask myself if coming here is to see the drug’s effects from the outside, because when you are inside you cannot see them. Or else I think, let’s see it this way, I come here because I put up the stakes... I don’t want to judge you, the question that I have is: “Is that discipline useful, are those stakes useful?”, but I think about this every day, “Are you going there to clean up your consciousness? Because it is useful? Just for curiosity?” I see it as a positive thing, because at least today I ask myself...». (The patient took his bottle of water that he previously placed on the desk, and he drank almost half of it).*

### **Comment**

Through those words, the patient communicated unconsciously how the intervention by the therapist during the previous session had made him face his own dysfunctional relational tendency and his own self-harming behaviors, fueled by the use of narcotics. In this case, we can see how the correct intervention by the therapist, inside a *secure framework setting* (the stakes and the discipline) - example of the sequence 1 *non-countertransference - transference* - has enabled the patient to come into contact with his own emotional world, particularly with his performance anxiety, and the need to slow down the pace of both his life and his psychotherapeutic relationship. Besides, he met one of his inner figures, who symbolizes a way of being, similar to what happened to Dante through the characters he met during his journey to Hell. The therapist during the session followed the indications of the deep unconscious, in her role as a guide and a teacher, and she used the symbolical language of free association to teach (the performance anxiety, the run, the uphill, the person who uses drugs).

### **• Perceptive-cognitive interpretation**

#### The patient tells one of his dreams:

P: *«I was partying with some of my childhood friends, no, my friends from my teenage age. One of my friends was searched by the police and was taken to the clinic, then he comes back and he tells me that they gave him methadone, and I was happy but he tells me that going to the clinic is of no use».*

T: *«Could you please tell me that again?»*

P: *«It was me, A. and M. going along with A.’s car and we were going to a party and we crashed, our car was parked uphill and as we were maneuvering we hit another parked car, and the owner called the police, the police came and they found the drug. A. was taken by the police to the clinic and they gave him methadone. When he was back to us he told us that they send him to the clinic and they gave him methadone, and then I was happy because they were taking care of him and I told him that I also take methadone, but he told that there is no use going to the clinic and I felt bad, and then I woke up».*

T: *«When did you have this dream?»*

P: *«I had it last week, at the middle of the week, and I remember it because I told it to my sister, the act of telling it made it easier to remember that dream. Now I don’t know what to say, can you tell me something about this dream? Now I don’t know what to do, do you want to ask me anything?»*

T: *«I ask you to write down your dreams in two copies so that we do not waste our time copying them here, it is a favor that I would ask of you, so that we don’t waste time in our session, because it is very important what just told telling me» (The patient skipped the next session).*

In this case we see how the patient, by telling his dream during the session, showed the therapist an intimate side of himself, by specifically referring to the therapeutic relationship, the clinic, and the discontent from his growing dependence to the therapist, enabled by the appropriate intervention



from the previous session. The therapist, facing this relational intimacy and the aggressive reactions of the patient towards this initial bond with her, got scared and reacted by reiterating the *setting's* rules "like a schoolmarm" and she assumed a defensive countertransferential attitude, identifying herself with a super-egoistic image. The patient reacted to that by not showing up to the following session. In the session after the one he skipped, he said:

P: *«I had a lot on my plates at work, my work does not give me any income, I work thrice and I earn one third».*

#### **Comment**

Through this derivative, the patient communicated unconsciously to the therapist that despite making lots of effort in the analytical work, telling his own dream, in exchange he received back just a little (just one third). This refers to the request to copy down his dreams to optimize timing of the session, but without the two thirds that would include the associative analysis of the dream and of the consequent interpretation of the therapeutic relationship as represented by the deep unconscious. That therapeutic interaction, according to us, is an example of the sequence 2 *countertransference – non-transference*.

#### **Considerations on the clinical case**

Through the observations of the dynamics of transference and countertransference, both understood in light of the communicative approach by Langs, we can understand the two psychopathological aspects, the one of the patient and the other one of the therapist. According to the author, in order to carry out a valid psychotherapy, it is crucial that the therapist recognizes and understands her own countertransference. The author (1988) underlines indeed how the *non-countertransferential* behavior by the therapist promotes a sense of trust and safety. It also represents a positive image of the therapist, which motivates the patient make more effort to get better, similar to the effort made by the therapist. Recapitulating the words of Dante:

*"Thou hast with such desire disposed my heart  
toward going on, by reason of thy words,  
that to my first intention I 've returned.  
Go on now, since we two have but one will;  
thou Leader, and thou Lord, and Teacher thou!"  
I thus addressed him; then, when he had moved,  
I entered on the wild and arduous course".  
(Inferno Canto II, 136-142)*

Otherwise the therapist's countertransferential behavior is perceived by the patient, on an unconscious level, as an expression of the therapist's madness (Langs 1988b).

As pointed out in the clinical case, we can see how the therapist, despite having the chance to deepen a relation, withdrew herself; in this way, she was not following the indications by the deep unconscious in the role of the Guide-Virgil, *"Go on now, since we two have but one will; thou Leader, and thou Lord, and Teacher thou!"* and so, she did not behave like the way Dante does with Virgil. In spite of having a chance to analyze the dream, to lead the patient fearlessly across his own hell (the patient's drug addiction), the therapist acted according to her own countertransference, reaffirming just the *setting* rules (*"I ask you to double copy your dreams..."*). The countertransferential defensive reaction by the therapist, which



prevented her from deepening the relationship, according to our view reflects an issue with entering a close relationship with the patient. The missed intervention by the therapist- the associative analysis and the interpretation of the dream - was correctly perceived by the patient as an act to keep a distance from him (*the work does not give me any income*), to which he reacted by skipping the next session.

We also notice regarding the rules of the *setting*, how the therapist and the patient shared a pathological side, diametrically opposite but equally disharmonious. This pathological side is represented by the reiterated attempts to alter the *setting* rules by the patient, and for the therapist by the rigid and uncompromising adherence to the rules, often deprived of an affective/contentious dimension. That adherence to the rules can be found in the *Animus* archetype in the *Shadow* version. The *Animus* is the archetype of "meaning" in the woman (Jung 1950) and it is constituted by beliefs, inspirations and values. A woman dominated by the *Animus* becomes directive, obstinate, dominant and possessed by prejudices and conviction with which she is not related (Grassi 2012). Conversely, the *light* version of this archetype represents an important element for the feminine development. The positive *Animus* of the woman allows her to gain a wider and more impersonal knowledge, therefore more objective, and also to develop a spiritual attitude that liberates her from the limitations and the strictly personal prejudices (Mazzarella 1991). Moreover, "*the masculine component in her can help her understand men better and to have a deeper relationship with them*" (Grassi 2012). It is the *conjunctio* of sentiment joined by *Logos* which allows the man and the woman to reach a deeper meaning of the experience and of the whole world (Berivi S., Carabini P., 2006). In different terms, "*the union of Animus and Anima is a goal which, in addition to make the man and the woman complete individuals, contains in itself the archetypal potential of individuation*" (ibidem).

In *The Divine Comedy* we see how Dante during his path grows as a man and acquires more self-confidence, precisely thanks to Virgil's nurturance. In the same way, also the therapist, when sided by a guide/therapist - her deep unconscious or the patient's, would be able to be conscious of her own countertransference reactions and therefore able to provide a secure *setting*, moving forward in her own path of individuation, as well as the patient's. As therapists, we fully understand the difficulty and the fatigue to face our own emotional world; however we are aware that we cannot escape from our duty. How is it possible to guide the patient to come in contact with his own emotiveness if we are afraid to dive in our own emotional depths? Langs (1979) reminds us that inside each of us we house a deep nucleus of madness; its structure can be primordial or advanced, extremely terrifying or just a tinge of angst. In light of this observation, both - the patient and sometimes the therapist - live moments of overt madness (Langs 1988, 1988b). The author also adds that all behaviors which fail to fulfil the necessary requisites of the therapist's role<sup>8</sup> are perceived by the patients, on the unconscious level, as expressions of the therapist's madness.

On the other hand, the more important factors in the cure of the patient is the therapist's ability to provide the patient a sense of *holding* and containment, a capability which expresses itself in realizing valid interpretations and guaranteeing the secure framework for the psychotherapeutic experience. A therapist capable of doing so, will inevitably generate in the patient unconscious identifications and introjections of his constructive and positive capacities (Langs 1990). Not casually, inside the unconscious communication of the patients, these capacities are enabled by the appearance of the guiding role, of

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the correct ways to intervene and manage the framework has been pointed out by Langs precisely on the foundation of the patient's unconscious answers.



the teacher. We can then suggest to consider Virgil as the expression of an archetype of the deep unconscious, playing a role as a guide and a teacher; and the therapist could follow his indications in Dante's way, "*since we two have but one will; thou Leader, and thou Lord, and Teacher thou!*". The therapist therefore could relate to the patient and to the characters of his inner and external life as the therapist's own inner characters, similar to the characters that Dante meets throughout his infernal journey.

### Conclusive considerations

Today more than ever, in the era of globalization, where we witness profound reciprocal influences between different cultures, we are pleasantly surprised by how Dante, after 700 years since his death, has been able to provide human consciousness with allegorical figures, which are valid symbols of some essential traits of the humankind, and which are still very much relevant.

Dante asks himself why mankind orients himself more towards the Evil than to the Good, and whether the reason beyond all that lies in the influences by the celestial bodies (pure determinism) or in his own responsibility (free will). Turning the attention inwards, Dante finds the answer to his questions (Mazzarella 1991).

It is important to underline how, in a therapeutic relationship, this glimpse towards the inner self should be done by both the patient and the therapist. Harold Searles, in his article from 1975 *The patient as therapist to his analyst*, described the unconscious capacities of the patient (Virgil, we would say now) to realize the therapist's flaws and to offer indications on how to amend them. As previously shown, we highlight how the communicative approach by Langs is greatly different from all the other psychotherapeutic approaches, since according to him, the crux of the question is precisely the fact that, in presence of the manifested madness of the therapist, the patient tends to not reveal much about their disorders. That is to say, if the therapeutic space is entirely occupied by the therapist's countertransference, there is no space left for the patient's transference. On the contrary, the therapist, by being stable mentally, can uncover, in the foreground, the "madness" of the patient. The cure of communicative nature (Langs 1988) is therefore founded, in clinical terms, by a therapist capable to:

- a) grasp the real nature of the coded communication by the mind's deep unconscious system;
- b) offer the patient therapeutical conditions based on a secure framework<sup>9</sup> (or anyway, in the cases where the deviations are unavoidable, to offer the patient some moments based on a secure framework, whenever possible during psychotherapy).

Langs shows therefore, through his clinical experience, that within a therapeutic relationship, in which the countertransference is controlled and properly managed by the therapist, the psychopathology of the patient - the Hell of Dante - will reveal itself.

Coming back to Dante, we observe that through the path made across the three cantica, he shows us the direction to follow - the journey towards Individuation: a painful path of alchemical transformation alongside his guiding figures.

We conclude with the words of Adriana Mazzarella, who reminds us that "*It is not possible to escape in a childish paradise of beatitude as a miracle with a prayer to the Virgin Mary, without having crossed the painful route of the spiritual alchemical transformation in the Purgatory. (...) The way of man is the way of the cross, which leads to death, to rebirth, to resurrection in this life*" (1991).

<sup>9</sup> Langs makes a meticulous list of the basic elements of the secure framework. See Langs 1979, 1988.



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