

EPILOGUE

Why, then, study the *Commedia*?

A special subject, which is man...the object of the whole work is not speculative, but practical...the end of the whole and of the part may be manifold, that is, it may be both near and remote. But setting aside all subtlety of investigation, we may say briefly that the end of both [the whole and the part] is to rescue* those who live in this life from their state of misery, and to guide them to the state of blessedness. [Epistle, X, 11,12,15,16]

nevertheless do not resort to lies,
let what you write reveal all you have seen,
[Par. XVII, 127-128]

Though when your words are taken in at first
they may taste bitter, but once well-digested
they will become a vital nutriment.
[Par. XVII, 130-134]

Dante has come to the end of his journey through the human consciousness and cast his eyes on the immensity of God. He has experienced the living God at all levels, from the most hidden recesses of the *Inferno* to the final union with Him. What he has seen transcends his time and individual personalities and concerns mankind in its entirety.

As long ago as the twelfth century, on the threshold of humanism, which would see the emergence of the new man of the modern age, Dante has a presentiment of the disastrous effects of the human mind, an instrument of Lucifer's savage forces. Indeed in that period the astrological age of the First Fish (Christ) in the aeon of Pisces was

* In the original latin, Dante uses the term *removere* which is nearer in meaning to *remove* than to *rescue*.

about to end and the age of the second fish, the Anti-Christ, was about to begin.

Like Jung in *Answer to Job*, Dante also feels that the problem does not lie with "nature", but resides in the human mind, because the gigantism of the Ego may cut the fine thread by which the fate of all mankind hangs.

for when the faculty of *intellect*
is joined with *brute force* and *evil will*,
no man can win against such an alliance.
[Inf. XXXI, 55-57]

Dante has unravelled the dark mechanisms that drag man down all unawares until he is imprisoned by them in the damnation of the *Inferno*. He has also explained the long and laborious process of achieving a balance between the contrasting forces at war in every individual. Dante has sensed the presence of innate instances in man that determine the ethical decisions (the *Purgatorio* XVI, XVII, XVIII) on which the good or evil outcome of each individual's life depends.

He revives hope through the unifying symbol of Christ and the faith that

from the blossom shall good fruit come forth
[Par. XXVII, 148]

Dante has intuited that man will increasingly sink into a morass of matter (materialism) and that he will have a correspondingly greater need of Sapiientia, the Sophia who is now dead to the world and whom Dante yearns to revive through the radiant image of Beatrice.

Like Jung, who claims that "now everything depends on man",¹ Dante also feels that the causes of the evils afflicting the world are to be sought in man himself ("the cause lies in yourselves", Pur. XVI,83). In fact mankind is in possession of a monstrous capacity for destruction that may be used either for its own annihilation in a *secunda morte*, or be transformed by the spirit of love and wisdom. Dante senses the presence in man of an instinct that comes directly from God (psychologically speaking, from the archetype of the Self), which is the moving force behind human development and which leads man

towards what Jung calls the “the process of individuation”.

This process is essential but all the same it is fraught with danger.² According to Jung the consciousness”, which issued forth like light in the dark abyss of the primeval world”, bears a heavy burden of responsibility; if it falls back into the undifferentiated mass of the primeval psyche then

the mass society that infallibly results destroys the meaning of the individual and of culture generally. From this it is clear that the psyche not only disturbs the natural order but, if it loses its balance, actually destroys its own creation. Therefore the careful consideration of psychic factors is of importance in restoring not merely the individual's balance but society's as well, otherwise the destructive tendencies easily gain the upper hand. [Jung, *On the Nature of the Psyche*, CW VIII, para. 427-428]

In the *Paradiso* Dante says:

these universal organs, you now see,
...receiving power
from those above, acting on those below.
[Par. II, 121-123]

And all the angelic ranks gaze upward,
as downward they prevail upon the rest,
so while each draws the next, all draw toward God.
[Par. XXVIII, 127-129]

If this innate archetypal power in the psyche is brought to consciousness, then man can use his free will. Dante reveals how unconsciousness is cruelly punished by nature itself, providing ample proof of this in the *Inferno*. His work, therefore, indicates that man's over-riding task is to achieve consciousness:

You were the lonely traveller in the dark
who holds his lamp behind him, shedding light
[Pur. XXII, 67-68]

Following in the footsteps of Christ's descent into Hell, it seems that man's destiny is to shed light into the darkness of pure being.

Not to increase His good, which cannot be,

but rather that His own reflected glory
in its resplendence might proclaim *I am...**
new loves blossomed from the eternal Love.
[Par. XXIX, 13-18]

The scope of the message that Dante has left us is enormous. At the beginning of the work, the message of mankind's salvation is projected onto Christ, but at the end of his journey he has a flash of understanding in which he realises that the means of salvation is innate in all of us. Within each of us is to be found the totality expressed in Dante's final vision after the *coniunctio* between the Spirit (the Trinity) and the Anthropos, which represents all mankind reintegrated in Mary, together with its potential for both good and evil, an evil which is no longer rejected but reintegrated into the *Unus Mundus*.

For this to happen each individual must become conscious of this totality by shouldering his or her personal cross and enduring the excruciating tension between good and evil present in the original pleroma, present in all mankind and therefore present in each of us as well. If we fail to become conscious of this, we will inevitably lapse into one or other of the extremes, with the result that the rejected contrary will be projected out from us and turn upon us, seeking our destruction. And as long as man is unconscious of his inner contradictions then these will be inevitably projected outside himself.³

Man's ultimate awareness is born of Mary, the feminine state of Love ("a gracious lady sits in Heaven grieving". Inf. II, 94), who shares the suffering of a son crucified between the two thieves: "Stabat mater dolorosa, iuxta crucem lacrimosa". In the unfolded splendour of the Rose, it is Mary who welcomes the newly-arrived pilgrim who dies to his egoism to be born again into the Self. Dante makes it clear that without Mary, who is both Sophia and Sapientia, there is no hope of redemption for either man or woman.⁴

I have been particularly struck by the low number of vacant seats left in the Rose, as though the poet had momentarily sensed that the Christian message had run its course. Dante was writing at the beginning of the transition from the age of the fish representing Christ to the age of the fish symbolising the AntiChrist. Now we are fully immersed

* See note on p. 496.

in the era of the second fish, the AntiChrist, with our lead-heavy materialism, the absence of all feeling and our rejection of the values brought by Christ.

The solution to the antimony within God must come about within man:

This involves man in a new responsibility. He can no longer wriggle out of it on the plea of his littleness and nothingness, for the dark God has slipped the atom bomb and chemical weapons into his hands and given him the power to empty out the apocalyptic vials of wrath on his fellow creatures...he can no longer remain blind and unconscious. He must know something of God's nature and of metaphysical processes if he is to understand himself and thereby achieve gnosis of the Divine. [Jung, *Answer to Job*, CW XI, para. 745- 747]

...We therefore need more light, more goodness and moral strength, and must wash off as much of the obnoxious blackness as possible, otherwise we shall not be able to assimilate the dark God *who also wants to become man*, and at the same time endure him without perishing. For this [*to integrate the Shadow*] all the Christian virtues are needed and something else besides, for the problem is not only moral: we also need ...Wisdom. [Jung, *Answer to Job*, CW XI, para. 742]

Christ's message, which psychologically underlies the entire process of individuation, is of extreme importance for each individual. There is the ever-present risk of lapsing into narrow individualism as a result of the failure to reach awareness of the real existence of the Self, to which the Ego is related. The process of individuation

wants the *human* connection. That is the core of the whole transference phenomenon, and it is impossible to argue it away, because relationship to the Self is at once relationship to our fellow man, and no one can be related to the latter until he is related to himself. [Jung, *The Psychology of the Transference*, CW XVI, par. 445]

In her beautiful study,⁵ Helen Luke observes that as it nears the Age of Aquarius, Christianity is entering into a new phase of consciousness: an awareness on the part of man that the Anthropos is the fourth element in the image of the divine trinity. Referring to Jung's research on the symbolism of the sign of Pisces in astrology, Luke points out that the stars within us, namely astrology, represent the

synchronicity of changes and shifts of the unconscious within us, the acausal order of the universe.

In the age of Aries, which began around 700 B.C., the human personality was founded squarely on the Ego. Very gradually it became conscious of the Self and the quality of Love, which meant that the selfish ends of the personal Ego had to be sacrificed. At the beginning of the age of Pisces, this sacrifice, projected on to animals in the age of Aries, was assumed by the Man, the historical Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ made this clear to everyone (baptism).

Jung claims that Christ's injunction to "love thy enemy" has not been properly understood.⁶ Christ's words advise us to understand the enemy within (the Shadow), which must also be fought when necessary.

Luke observes that now the two fishes have been abandoned on the shore.⁷ But Jung writes⁸ that the end of the age Pisces does not mark the end of the values brought by Christ. Indeed it is to be hoped that they will be resurrected in a new dimension, because without the Christian virtues there can be no process of individuation.⁹

Therefore, it is not Christian symbolism which is anachronistic, but the way it is approached. The Christian message should be the object of greater meditation, because it contains the seeds of even greater, wider growth. Modern man still needs to understand, but the answers do not always lie with our teachers. True love must pass through an experience of loss, suffering, and a death like that suffered by Christ who, dying on the cross, felt momentarily abandoned to a senseless fate. Only after such a profound transition, can one be reborn into a new vision. This is the process that lies at the heart of Dante's *Commedia*.

Unfortunately, as Luke observes,¹⁰ the Church is over-concerned with external moral imperatives which are essential when men are still at an unconscious stage of development. But now the ministers of the Church would do better to listen to the voice of one of its greatest sons.¹¹ This sentiment is shared by A Coomaraswamy,¹² who maintains that to renew itself the West should read Dante not only as a poet, but in order to rediscover in his work the essential, central, message of Christianity, as well.

Luke picks up from Jung's thoughts on the age of Pisces,¹³ and claims that with entry into the Age of Aquarius the fundamental

truths and values of Christianity will reappear in a new form, in a new unity of consciousness and Love which will also embrace the body, nature and matter. This would mark the fulfillment of the *hieros gamos* between matter and spirit, the accomplishment of the *Unus Mundus*.

The new man, reintegrated by Dante in the course of his process, emerges from below, out of night, darkness and evil. He is, so to speak, extracted from the *prima materia* (the dark wood) through a process of spiritual alchemy. Like spiritual instances (angels and demons as explained in the Creation sequence), the *prima materia* is of itself transcendent and only its phenomenology is visible. This maternal and terrestrial mystery is showered from on high by Grace, the eternal transcendent and spiritual feminine function. This repeats the gnostic motif of the divine spark trapped in the heart of matter, which can only issue forth again with the help of the "light" that man bears within himself: consciousness.

At the end of his celestial journey, Dante encountered the mystery of evil which also plays a part in the invisible Divine plan of things (Par. XXXII, 67-72). The reason for the presence of evil in the world, the meaning of the rise and decline of civilisations are to be sought in men, but they also depend on unknown factors like fortune and predestination.

Once man has re-entered phenomenal life, he must avoid falling into either one opposite or the other (good, or evil) and strive at all times to seek the middle way in all moral decisions. The great danger for men in the age of Aquarius is inflation of the Ego. The risk of ignoring the Self and identifying it with the Ego is never far away (see the Ego-gigantism ego of the True Man in the Earthly Paradise).

Jung has denounced with fiery words this very tendency in modern man.

Approaching the problem from a scientific angle, and innocent of any religious aim, Freud uncovered the abysmal darkness of human nature which a would-be enlightened optimism had striven to conceal. Since then psychotherapy, in one form or another, has persistently explored the extensive area which I have called the shadow. This attempt of modern science opened the eyes of only a few. However, the historic events of our time have painted a picture of man's psychic reality in indelible colours of blood and fire, and given him an object lesson which he will never be able to for-

get. [Jung, *The Spirit Mercurius*, CW XIII, para. 293-294]

Such a lesson should help mankind learn to stop using human creativity to produce instruments of power and destruction. Christianity attributes the utmost importance to the individual, on condition that each individual fully realises that he or she is subject to a transcendent Power. Modern man has forgotten this and has, instead, deified his powers of reason.

Man can hardly avoid seeing himself as a knower, yes, even as a creator with boundless possibilities at his command... modern man is already so darkened that nothing beyond the light of his own intellect illuminates his world...That surely is why such strange things are happening to our much lauded civilization, more like a *Götterdämmerung* than any normal twilight...Lucifer, who could have brought light, becomes the father of lies whose voice in our time, supported by press and radio, revels in orgies of propaganda and leads untold millions to ruin. [Jung, *The Spirit Mercurius*, CW XIII, para. 302-303]

However, there is renewed hope for humanity under the sign of Aquarius. As Helen Luke points out,¹⁴ the Great Man of Aquarius (the Anthropos who dwells in Heaven) is well aware that the jar he holds is the inexhaustible feminine *vas* containing the waters of the unconscious, which he pours into the mouth of the stranded fish that lies at his feet, so bringing it back to life.

Psychologically speaking, once conscious of the antitheses that emerged in the Age of Pisces – the age of the rival brothers, Christ and the Antichrist – man is capable of rising to a higher synthesis and using the creative lymph of the unconscious to revive the values brought by Christ: the twin fishes have now become “one”, the opposites have been integrated.