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## **The Making of the Ego Scriptor**

### **Expression and Individuation through Dante Criticism**

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

I will try to propose a perspective and a few problems raised by the concept of ‘expression’ in literature. My research field is the history of Italian literature, yet I am also interested in the relation between poetry and philosophy, and consequently in the genesis of the theoretical tools used by critics. Thence, according to the nature of this atelier, I will refer not specifically to poetical texts, but to criticism, in order to discuss some assumptions about the role of the lyrical subject and the genesis of the narrator in the works of Dante Alighieri, under the light of the questions raised by the philosophical concepts of ‘expression’ and ‘individuation’.

In his *Aesthetics*, the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce defined ‘expression’ as verbal and non-verbal spiritual activity, identifiable with intuition and representation, mediating between feelings or impressions and logical thought;<sup>1</sup> on this notion he grounded all his monumental work of literary criticism. However, I will rather refer to the concept developed by Giorgio Colli: he adopts the notion of ‘expression’ in his theoretical writings to explain a kind of knowledge not depending on the subject, that is, an impulse originated from “obstacles”<sup>2</sup> found in memory – and so by the hindered referring to something other that hinders – consequently “integrating” moments of clash, or “contacts”, in the empirical centre of the individual.<sup>3</sup> Thence, the knowledge of the activity of the subject itself, of the self-conscience, is problematized, and the rigid primal role of the subject vanishes. Accordingly, the attention is translated, focusing on the activity of an “ensemble of

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<sup>1</sup> The reference is, in particular, to the chapter one. See B. Croce, *Aesthetic, as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* [*Estetica, come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale*, 1901/1921], transl. by D. Ainslie, London: Macmillan & Co., 1922, pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> See G. Colli, *Filosofia dell'espressione*, Milano: Adelphi, 1969, p. 19. See also pp. 35-38. The translations of the cited texts, where not noticed, are mine, as in this case.

<sup>3</sup> See G. Colli, *La ragione errabonda. Quaderni postumi*, a cura di E. Colli, Milano: Adelphi, 1982, pp. 225-226.

perspectives”, to the movement itself of the representation of objects (for a subject) from a hypothetical, metaphysical ‘pre-representative’ moment. For my purpose, I am going to assume, but not to discuss, Colli’s late idea that art is an means to “regain a perspective preceding that of individuation,”<sup>4</sup> or to follow, *à rebours*, the roots of reality in memory; and so that poetry is intended as a sort of “reverse cosmological impulse,”<sup>5</sup> tending to show the life-full and primal nature of expression, pre-forming the individual who is forming his world, throughout a restless and over-subjective knowledge. (However marginally, it must be added that the nature of the obstacle, in artistic evocation, has to be connected with an affective encounter with *someone* else, not merely *something* else, as we will see).

As in the renowned T.W. Adorno’s essay *On Lyrical Poetry and Society*,<sup>6</sup> the problem here concerns the aesthetical basis of the critical activity, in particular the connection between the poet and society, between poetical and political activity. Thus, my intent is to suggest, within this philosophical context, a new approach, or better a philosophical reading, neither philological or exegetical, of a few major, albeit now quite forgotten, critiques about Dante and his work, concerning the extremely complex figure of the ‘universal’ poet and the delicate relation between its activity and the self-consciousness of his function. In the end, we will discover that valuable suggestions may come from some points advanced by Colli, or by an unexpected Gilbert Simondon, in their ‘over-subjective’ aesthetical argumentations, that should provide an alternative to a culture still rooted in an (conscious or unconscious) Hegelian heritage.

## 2. DE SANCTIS AND THE WRITING OF THE “PHASES” OF THE LIFE

I begin with Francesco De Sanctis, one of the most ‘philosophical’ Italian critics of the Nineteen-Century, author of the highly celebrated Hegelian *History of the Italian Literature*. He begins an early essay on Dante and his “utopia” with these strong and passionate words:

I call that man a poet who feels a whole world of forms and images stirring confusedly within him; forms fluctuating at first without precise determination, rays of light not yet refracted, not yet graded in the brilliant colours of the iris, scattered sounds not yet combined into a harmony. Everyone, especially in his youth, is something of a poet; everyone has sometimes felt within him the knight-errant, has dreamed his Fairies, his golden palaces, has had, in Goethe’s words, some lady to protect, some villain to chastise. For most of us this state is transitory; reality snatches us only too soon from golden dreams and puts our nose to the grindstone. The world of imagination endures only in the soul of the poet, over which it takes possession, straining

<sup>4</sup> G. Colli, *Dopo Nietzsche*, Milano, Adelphi, 1974, p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> *Ivi*, p. 123.

<sup>6</sup> T. W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature* [*Noten zur Literatur*, 1958], vol. 1, ed. by R. Tiedemann, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991, pp. 37-54.

within, eager to break forth. Now, there is a solemn moment in every-one's life when he discovers his real self. We need an outside stimulus to receive this divine revelation, to be able at last to say, "That is what I was born for!" The life of Dante began the moment his eyes met those of Beatrice; and when he saw her a second time, when in the heat of emotion he recalled the powerful impression she had made on his still boyish spirit, then art was revealed to him and he knew he was a poet.<sup>7</sup>

From a scientific point of view, this beautiful paragraph should be accused of being vague and of providing a tautological definition of the poet, way too Romantic and indebted to the idea of poetry as "childish and sentimental," to quote Shiller.<sup>8</sup> However, one ought to look beyond De Sanctis' peculiar oratorical and passionate tone, for he is here really touching an essential point of Dante's own poetic, which can be resumed as the presence of the author recalling his own personal experience, as a prelude to a mission he is called for: that is, to make a useful art-work for the Italian people and, ultimately, for humanity.<sup>9</sup>

In this poetical universe, the idealistically beloved figure of Beatrice has the fundamental function to redeem both the life of Dante as an individual, "lost in the dark forest" of sin and desperation, as shown by the famous incipit of the *Commedia*,<sup>10</sup> and the activity of Dante as a writer. Indeed, he presents himself first as a master of the "sweet rimes of love" between Florentine poets of his generation, than during the years of his exile all over Italy as involved in philosophical-theological-political matters,<sup>11</sup> and finally he converts himself in a 'prophet' of the cosmic harmony (of Divine love) amidst the decadence of terrestrial war-time (of the civil hate). Let us briefly see the dynamics of this literary individuation.

As Erich Auerbach has clearly pointed out,<sup>12</sup> this double redemption is narrated since the *Vita nova*, Dante's first book, which, following the example of the life of saints and martyrs, narrates us his first love. To sum up: Beatrice is like "a creature came from Heaven to earth, to manifest (in her shape) the miracle (of the Divine),"<sup>13</sup> and Dante is like an apostle, busy in quotidian activities of his city, touched by the view and the call of Beatrice-Christ.<sup>14</sup> She gives a new spiritual sense to

<sup>7</sup> F. De Sanctis, *Character of Dante and His Utopia* [*Carattere di Dante e sua utopia*, 1858], in *De Sanctis on Dante*, ed. by J. Rossi and A. Galpin, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1957, pp. 17-32: 17-18.

<sup>8</sup> The reference is to the famous essay *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795-96).

<sup>9</sup> About the nature of the prophecy in Dante and the role of the character of Beatrice, see the seminal essay of G. Gentile, *La profezia di Dante* [1918], in Id., *Studi su Dante*, Firenze: Sansoni, 1965, pp. 131-176: 165-173.

<sup>10</sup> Dante, *Commedia. Inferno*, 1.2. All the references to Dante's works follow the texts edited by the Società Dantesca Italiana in the electronic volume: D. De Robertis and G. Breschi (edd.), *Le opere di Dante*, critical texts by F. Brambilla Ageno, G. Contini, D. De Robertis, G. Gorni, F. Mazzoni, R. Migliorini Fissi, P. V. Mengaldo, G. Petrocchi, E. Pistelli, P. Shaw, Firenze, Edizioni Polistampa, 2012. The English translations come from the texts digitalised in the Princeton Dante Project (<http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/>).

<sup>11</sup> The remand is, for example, to the third song of the Dante's *Convivio* (book IV): "Le dolci rime d'amor ch'i' solia".

<sup>12</sup> See E. Auerbach, *Dante als dichter der irdischen Welt*, Berlin-Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1929, and also Id., *Neue Dantestudien*, Bern: Franke, 1944.

<sup>13</sup> From the lines 7-8 of the famous sonnet "Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare" (Dante, *Vita nova*, 17.5-8).

<sup>14</sup> See Dante, *Vita nova*, 5.4-5.

Dante's life, even with her premature death, in the same way as Christ has given a new 'universal' sense to the pagan world of mythology and to the Biblical generations of prophets. But if we read the *Vita nova*'s incipit, we can see that the author's own purpose is to recollect the experience of his love and to write it in a book, organizing previous love poems with commentaries and narration in prose; and this concerns the first 'phase' of the redemption of the writer:

In my Book of Memory, in the early part where there is little to be read, there comes a chapter with the rubric: *Incipit vita nova*. It is my intention to copy into this little book the words I find written under that heading.<sup>15</sup>

Hence, in this work the figure of Beatrice represents the external force, or obstacle, that in the narration appears to define more and more Dante's individuation by providing a sense for his writing activity. In some way, Beatrice's function is to tell Dante how *to use* himself.

It can be argued that the *Commedia* is the product of this activity. Yet, after the conceptualisation of the philosophy in the essays of the *Convivio*, the movement itself of the writing activity arrives to a new 'phase', that is, that of the narrator as '*ego scriptor*' ('I, the writer'). The prophecy of redemption is formulated in the tenth canto of the *Inferno* by Virgil, Dante's main guide in the underworld: "When you shall stand before the radiance / of her whose fair eyes see and understand, / from her you'll learn the journey of your life"<sup>16</sup>; then, after numerous signs in the end of the *Purgatorio*, Beatrice's soul finally appears *in persona*, and calls directly Dante by name.<sup>17</sup> At this point, the previous autobiographical encounter narrated in the *Vita nova* acquires retrospectively – *après-coup* – sense by the successive imaginary encounter of the *Commedia*;<sup>18</sup> besides, with the following journey through the skies and stars of the Heaven (*Paradiso*), the same characters, i.e. Dante and Beatrice, are qualified to fit a new poetical structure, the very same *Commedia*, pervaded now with concrete political matters. This path described by the inner development of aesthetical forms and functions of Dante as author and character could be followed in two focal points of the *Commedia*, where Dante, as in the beginning of the *Vita nova*, shows his resolution to write down his memories: first, after the encounter with Beatrice and the apocalyptic nightmare of the decadence of the church of Rome;<sup>19</sup> then, after the meeting with his ancestor

<sup>15</sup> *Ivi*, 1.1.

<sup>16</sup> "quando sarai dinanzi al dolce raggio / di quella il cui bell'occhio tutto vede, / da lei saprai di tua vita il viaggio." Dante, *Commedia. Inferno*, x 130-132.

<sup>17</sup> Dante, *Commedia. Purgatorio*, xxx 56.

<sup>18</sup> For this reading, see J. L. Borges, *El encuentro en un sueño*, from *Nueve ensayos dantescos* [1982], in Id., *Obras completas*, vol. 2, Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1989, pp. 369-371.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, xxxii.

Cacciaguida and his prophecy of Dante's exile from Florence due to political corruption and the decadence of the German Empire.<sup>20</sup>

These elements could be explained in a philosophical way: the *differences* between the Dante of the *Vita nova* and the one of the *Commedia*, in both cases a 'narrating' and 'narrated' subject, gave us the impression that the man as a poet expresses its own dynamic structure of consciousness grounded within a community. He defines the 'phases' as long as the 'phases' define him, following different, wider functions of usefulness of his activity. Consequently, he expresses his creative potentiality in a way we could connect to the concept of the 'trans-individual'. This term is assumed from the prolific chapters of Gilbert Simondon's research on the psychic and collective individuation, and it seems to aid in providing a new sense to De Sanctis' formula of "real self" and of "divine revelation" just cited. Thus writes Simondon:

C'est l'individuation qui crée les phases, car les phases ne sont que ce développement de l'être de part et d'autre de lui-même, ce double décadage à partir d'une consistance première traversée de *tensions* et de *potentiels* qui la rendaient incompatible avec elle-même. L'être pré-individuel est *l'être sans phases*, tandis que *l'être après l'individuation est l'être phasé*. Une telle conception identifie ou tout au moins rattache *individuation* et *devenir de l'être*.<sup>21</sup>

Still, before we could clearly use Simondon's concepts, we have to define better the peculiar use of the subject by Dante, because it is a primal in the modern literature.

### 3. CONTINI AND THE PROBLEM OF THE NARRATOR IN THE *COMMEDIA* AND IN THE *RECHERCHE*

One of the greatest Twentieth-Century scholars of Dante's texts, Gianfranco Contini used the ambiguity between the 'I' of the narrator and the 'I' of the main character in Marcel Proust's *Recherche* to analyse the issue of Dante as "character-poet" in the *Commedia*.<sup>22</sup> The main question is: "the 'I' of Proust [...] is the subject of a limited, defined historical experience that is unrepeatable, or it is the transcendent subject of each adventure that is vital and formative?." <sup>23</sup> The answer needs a deep understanding of the plot of the seven parts of the novel, that however can be resumed, as Gerard Genette wrote,<sup>24</sup> with: "Marcel becomes a writer"; that means: his literary vocation becomes self-conscious and expresses itself through literature. Indeed, Contini writes:

<sup>20</sup> *Ivi*, *Paradiso*, XVII, but also the previous two cantos.

<sup>21</sup> G. Simondon, *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* [1958], Grenoble: Millon, 2013, p. 310.

<sup>22</sup> G. Contini, *Dante come personaggio-poeta della «Commedia»* [1957], in Id., *Varianti e altra linguistica. Una raccolta di saggi (1938-1968)*, Torino: Einaudi, 1970, pp. 335-360.

<sup>23</sup> *Ivi*, p. 336.

<sup>24</sup> See G. Genette, *Discours de récit*, in Id., *Figures III*, Paris: Seuil, 1972, pp. 67-274 : 75.

“The character that says ‘I’ recognizes himself as a poet, and the development of the plot consists in the evolution of this observation in representation. Life has acquired sense, keeping untouched its content.”<sup>25</sup>

As in Dante’s works, the encounters with the beloved woman are, in Proust’s novel, essential experiences for the character and for the writer; however, it misses a unifying figure like Beatrice-Christ in an harmonized Christian cosmos. Thence there are a lot of masks emerging from the memory, changing their nature during the narration, and showing to the character-narrator the illusions and the disillusion of his construction of reality. If Dante’s universe was constructed according to the following Medieval maxim: “*nomina sunt consequentia rerum*”, or “words are consequences of things (so they say the truth)”,<sup>26</sup> for Proust we could say: “*res sunt consequentia nominorum*”, or “things are consequence of words (so they could be false)”. There is in fact a doubling of the beloved woman, caused by the chaos in which things and words remand to each other falsely; but, this solution is for Proust useful as a key to give order to all memories evoked in the narration: one woman is loved carnally, Albertine, and she appears, dies and re-appears like an angel in the stones of Venice, to predict the literary work of Marcel (phases of a cycle determining the private individual); and another one is loved idealistically, Gilberte, and she projects herself in the figures of her mother (Madame Odette Swan) and of her daughter (Mademoiselle de Saint-Loup), in order to be useful for Marcel as an “aiguillon,” as he writes, that “disait qu’il était temps de commencer si je voulais atteindre ce que j’avais quelquefois senti au cours de ma vie, dans de brefs éclairs», «et qui m’avait fait considérer la vie comme digne d’être vécu”<sup>27</sup> (phases of a cycle determining the public and historical individual).

In both cases, experience is not formalized in the objective structure of a chronicle (like in Giovanni Villani’s Florentine history or in Saint-Simon’s Versailles’ memories), in which the writer alienates himself in the *exterior* construction of events; but it is neither enclosed in an abstract subjectivity of the autobiographical mythology, in which the writer assumes himself as a pure *interiority* passing through the changes of the environment. It is otherwise a construction, a structure expressed in the poetic form, containing the recording of the dynamics of a problematic, ‘metastable’ system in the solution of a particular individual: a solution of the subject as determined by the activity of writing *it-self* as moment of sense-production, both in Proust and Dante. The stabilization is differently operated by the appropriation of an affective ‘obstacle’, the beloved woman: an appropriation that stimulates the ‘crystallization’ of the phasing of an individual, from pre-individual life to trans-individual communication, converting in ethic energy the difference of

<sup>25</sup> G. Contini, *Dante come personaggio-poeta*, cit., p. 336.

<sup>26</sup> See Dante, *Vita nova*, 6.4.

<sup>27</sup> M. Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, to. XV: *Le Temps retrouvé* (2<sup>ème</sup> partie), Paris : Gallimard, 1927, p. 210.

potentiality between private sentiments and public aesthetic productions (which implies that the different ethical ‘worlds’ in Dante and Proust determinate different ‘works’ like the *Commedia* or the *Recherche*).

I am talking about a kind of individuation that is nothing else than psychic, and a particular kind of psychic individuation that may be defined as aesthetic, which occurs in the activity of the writer as a poet describing his own vocation. Hence, the ground in which it must be placed is that of the development of the *diegetic* (or of Maurice Blanchot’s “espace littéraire”),<sup>28</sup> and not that of the physiological or psychanalytic person. Recalling now Simondon’s genesis of the collective individual, we may adopt his concept of ‘transduction’,<sup>29</sup> or the dynamical character of the formation due to the presence of usefulness and surplus, the (de-differential) acting as one and its margins of potentiality (to mutate).

An integration to the De Sanctis’ starting point should be the observation that social groups “at certain moments can’t keep their structure and become incompatible in relation to themselves” (Simondon),<sup>30</sup> leading to “super-saturation” and to “transduction” of new structured solutions, however always metastable and in process. So, it could be said that works of universal poets like Dante and Proust (but also Goethe and Joyce, perhaps even the too egocentric Stendhal), are the artefacts (literally: ‘works made by human art or technique’) in which this process is fixed through the subject, by the research of his own expression. First, this “opération d’individuation” concerns the problematic simultaneity instituted between the ‘ego-actor’ (e.g. ‘I – Dante – am seeing the eyes of Beatrice, that are seeing me’) and the ‘ego-scriptor’ (e.g. ‘I – Dante – am writing like a poet, that is defining me as a poet’), with the differential organizations of the ‘phased’ and the ‘un-phased’ experience.<sup>31</sup> Second, Beatrice-like figures are centres of “affectivité” integrating, through patterns (or ‘systèmes transducteurs’) of topographical (e.g. Florence and Italy) and cultural (e.g. Pagan and Christian universes) elements, concerning social groups, Dante’s ‘new life’, expressed in the *Commedia*, or Proust’s ‘remembrance of past things’, expressed in *Le Temps retrouvé*.

<sup>28</sup> See M. Blanchot, *L’espace littéraire*, Paris : Gallimard, 1955.

<sup>29</sup> See G. Simondon, *L’individuation*, cit., p. 242 ss.

<sup>30</sup> See *ivi*, p. 556 ss.

<sup>31</sup> See *ivi*, p. 160: “Le groupe, par rapport à ces sous-individus, existe comme intégrateur et différenciateur. La relation entre l’être singulier et le groupe est la même qu’entre l’individu et les sous-individus. En ce sens, il est possible de dire qu’il existe une homogénéité de relation entre les différents échelons hiérarchiques d’un même individu, et de même entre le groupe et l’individu.”

#### 4. BAKHTIN, THE WORDS AS MEDIUM AND THE PRODUCTION OF SENSE

These problems pointed out, maybe abstractly, through Contini's and Simondon's concepts, were touched, in an aesthetic and literary inquiry, by the Russian critic and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. He has studied, in his early writings, the relation between the 'author', belonging to the ethical world of life itself, and the 'hero', belonging to the world created in an aesthetical way. For him, the *words*, that constitute the basic material of literary works, are the *medium* through which the concepts of 'author' and of 'hero' integrate themselves and operate on each other: it happens for the 'act of speech' constitutes the individual and his world through the potentiality of *dialogue* in a social group and, at the same time, by conserving the *ambiguity* (or 'meta-stability') of its references to the environment (this is the '*chronotopical*' or 'time-spatial' aspect).

This "translinguistic procedure", as Julia Kristeva called it,<sup>32</sup> is a structured integration in the text of non-univocal exchanges between the subject and his context: non-univocal because they connect the individual and the collective. Thence, the aesthetic world integrates both the ethical and the logical-axiomatic world; consequently the marginal, energy-like and non-quantifiable aspect of life could be expressed too, in the form of 'carnavalesque words', and 'carnavalesque' arguments and topics. For individuals, who express themselves thus, "the heart of the matter," as Bakhtin writes, "is not in the subjective awareness but the collective consciousness of their eternity, of their earthly, historic immortality as a people, and of their continual renewal and growth," and they may talk using "symbols of individual destiny, while instead it was precisely the people's destiny that was revealed in them, indissolubly linked to earth and permeated by the cosmic principle."<sup>33</sup>

In short, this "métastabilité des conditions"<sup>34</sup> are, for Bakhtin, revealed and integrated through the 'obstacle' of the *other-one* as *dialoguing one* and through the representation of reality as *ambiguous*. As he writes:

The time of history is itself non-reversible, of course, but within it all relations are fortuitous and relative (and reversible), for there is no absolute centre of value. History and geography are invariably aestheticized to a certain degree. [...] From within a human life, they acquire a unique centre of value, in relation to which they gain body. [...] [This is] what characterizes Dante's map of the world, with its coinciding

<sup>32</sup> See J. Kristeva, *Word, Dialogue, and Novel* [Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman, 1966-67], in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by T. Moi, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 34-61: 37.

<sup>33</sup> M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* [Tvorchestvo Fransua Rablei i narodnaja kul'tura srednevekov'ja i Renessansa, 1965], transl. by H. Iswolsky, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, pp. 250-252.

<sup>34</sup> See G. Simondon, *L'indivuation*, cit., pp. 556-558.



geographical, astronomical, and historical centres – centres of value as well as of events: the earth, Jerusalem, the event of redemption.<sup>35</sup>

It means that Dante makes himself a ‘centre of value’, defining the activity of the author-subject and that of the hero-object as double-bounded, because either determined by the encounter and opposition with Beatrice. This boundness inherits the nature of the ‘expression’ as defined by Colli. In Dante’s case, we can talk about an expression of God in history as well as an expression of memory in narration: they are linked together, by the double-faced characters of Dante and Beatrice, in an inter-subjective (or “inter-textual”)<sup>36</sup> expression of a definite, poetical architecture, or a “closed-cosmos”, as György Lukács called it in his *Theory of the Novel*.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, Dante’s works have different architectural structures, as we have seen through the different Beatrice’s functions. Now, if we may assume an hypothesis explained by the Italian philosopher Gennaro Sasso,<sup>38</sup> the *Commedia* too, as previously the *Vita nova*, is the most complete expression of an individual and of his world, yet moving towards (or ‘trans-ducting’) another transformation: the more objective political essays of the *Monarchia*, in which the ethical energy is converted into a political one, as exemplified, in the opening of the book, by the image of a flowering buried “talent” made “useful” for “our common heritage”.<sup>39</sup> Here, the Aristotelian suggestion of an “intellectual potentiality”, that “by extension becomes practical”, is declined in the “natural” function of grouping expressed through the individual, in whose “actions”, “regulated by political judgment”, and “products”, regulated by “practical skills”, are “excellent subordinations” of its historical and particular thinking.<sup>40</sup> Thus, universal concepts like ‘God’ or ‘Emperor’ are problematically connected with the particular collective organizations of the Catholic Church or the Imperial Government in the argumentative structure of the *Monarchia*, with the loss of the dreamy imaginary that surrounded the same topics in the aforementioned encounters of the *Commedia*. In the ‘utopian’ cosmos of his poem, Dante integrated and differentiated the “trashing-floor of mortals”<sup>41</sup> and the “candid rose” of immortals souls<sup>42</sup> in his narrated voyage, representing his own

<sup>35</sup> M. Bakhtin, *Supplementary section to Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* [*Avtor i geroj v estetičeskoj dejatel’nosti*, 1920-24], in Id., *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays*, ed. by M. Holquist and V. Liapunov, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990, pp. 208-231: 208.

<sup>36</sup> See J. Kristeva, *Word, Dialogue, and Novel*, cit., pp. 36-37.

<sup>37</sup> See G. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* [*Die Theorie des Romans*, 1920], transl. by A. Bostock, Cambridge (Massachusetts), The MIT press, 1971, p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> G. Sasso, *Dante. L’imperatore e Aristotele*, Roma: Istituto Palazzo Borromini, 2002; but also Id., *Le autobiografie di Dante*, Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> “Hec igitur sepe mecum recogitans, ne de infossi talenti culpa quandoque redarguar, publice utilitati non modo turgescere, quinymo fructificare desidero, et intemptatas ab aliis ostendere veritates.” Dante, *Monarchia*, I 13.

<sup>40</sup> “Potentia etiam intellectiva, de qua loquor, non solum est ad formas universales aut speties, sed etiam per quandam extensionem ad particulares: unde solet dici quod intellectus speculativus extensione fit practicus, cuius finis est agere atque facere. Quod dico propter agibilia, que politica prudentia regulantur, et propter factibilia, que regulantur arte: que omnia speculationi ancillantur tanquam optimo ad quod humanum genus Prima Bonitas in esse produxi.” *Ivi*, I III 9-10.

<sup>41</sup> “in areola ista mortalium.” *Ivi*, III XVI 11, but also Dante, *Commedia. Paradiso*, XXII 151.

life as ‘trans-ducted’ since the Beatrice-experience by integrating it, thereby retrospectively each time transforming its sense in the crystal-like, collective structure of (the words of) his work. Hence, as De Sanctis wrote,<sup>43</sup> “his fiery soul” “mirrors human existence in all its range,” but it is possible only thanks to the activity of the individual, because his individuation in his social world is an immanent and open aspect of his works. Quoting Gilles Deleuze: the traditional “appareil métaphorique de l’expression c’est le miroir et le germe,”<sup>44</sup> in the mystical knowledge of the Divine, and this is certainly valid for Dante; but it concerns, on a deeper level, the nature of memory, as both a private and a collective property, that is the essential point of Dante’s own poetic, as we have seen.

## 5. FIGURATION AND ABUNDANCE: A CONCLUSION

This conclusion is quite incomplete. Indeed, we miss a correct understanding of that ‘germinative’ aspect, or “enduring force”, that is alluded here, and constitutes the core of the De Sanctis’ essay. I am referring to the “enduring” of the childish “world of imagination” in the “soul of the poet”; that, by now, I may read using the idea of community formulated by Simondon in these terms: “tous les individus ensemble ont ainsi une sorte de fond non structuré à partir duquel une nouvelle individuation peut se produire.”<sup>45</sup> Maybe, this potential series of “new individuations” could be caught in the ‘I am’ written by the writer, and, reversibly, in the activity of the self-determination as ‘author-of-a-hero’, to use Bakhtinian terms. Furthermore, the brief reference to Goethe made by De Sanctis is capital.

Therefore, all of Goethe’s work is a representation of the phases of “crystallization” of a *restless* individual, one of the most genuine reflection in art of the difficulties of understanding the ‘transduction’. This is the main cause of the multiple redactions, from youth to maturity, of single works, as the *Ur-Faust* and the *Faust*, or the *Wilhelm Meisters teatralische Sendung* and the *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*; or of the difficulties to explain the paradoxical ‘formative experience’ (German: *bildung*) of the characters of his novels. And it is indicative that, in his *Autobiography*, Goethe narrates that in his childhood he used to abandon unfinished a lot of his artistic sketches and projects, but his father every time imposed to him to go on and to complete them, in order to celebrate his witness; and in his conversations with Johann Eckermann, he referred to his activity as a “perpetual rolling of a stone, which I have always had to raise anew.”<sup>46</sup> Again, the motor of the

<sup>42</sup> “In forma dunque di candida rosa / mi si mostrava la milizia santa.” Dante, *Commedia. Paradiso*, XXXI 1-2.

<sup>43</sup> F. De Sanctis, *Character of Dante and His Utopia*, cit., p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> G. Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1968, p. 300.

<sup>45</sup> G. Simondon, *L’individuation*, cit., p. 295.

<sup>46</sup> *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*, transl. by J. Oxenford, London, Smith, 1850, vol. I, pp. 124-125 (27<sup>th</sup> January 1824). In the same pages we could also read: «I must [...] treat this later period [of my life] more in the

plot in the *Wilhelm Meister* is the separation between the hero and his lover, another case of an affective obstacle of the memory: the young Wilhelm is forced by external forces (another richer lover) to brake his “unorthodox” relationship with the actress Marianna; but doing so, he finds out that this separation reflected an intimate and irrevocable *restlessness* of the self (the fear of becoming father, the fear of beginning a job and break up financially with his family, or with his artistic dreams etc.). So he can find out, in the making of the novel, his inner vocation as dramatic actor and writer; but in the second part, he ‘trans-ducts’ himself becomes a doctor (and it can be argued that, traditionally, the politician is the doctor or “medicin-man” of the *polis*, or community).

Biography is the writing of the individual passing through the ages of his life, as determined by inner and external events, and autobiography is the same thing, but through the ‘extension’ of the very own experience of the author as an individual operating as *ego scriptor*. Yet, to return to my initial assumption, for Colli “is not the autobiographical detail that interests these writers, and in general it is not something personal, but the fundament of the memory in its metaphysical nature, not individual.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Bakhtin writes that “the passage of time marks not only a quantitative, but also a qualitative growth – a movement toward flowering and ripening,” which the individual integrates as “necessary ingredients of generative growth.”<sup>48</sup> the time of “collective working-cure for the future”. Simondon himself has once written that

l’esthétique ce n’est pas seulement ni premièrement la sensation du « consommateur » d’œuvre d’art. C’est aussi, plus originellement encore, le faisceau sensoriel, plus ou moins riche, de l’artiste lui-même : *un certain contact avec la matière en train de devenir ouvrée*. [...] C’est le mystère lui-même du non-figuré.<sup>49</sup>

This means that the informative path, taken out from these poetic works, is not given in advance, as the DNA to the organism, but is the *process* itself presented in an architecture of sense. And to become aware of this, is useful to make alive the objects of culture, to handle them, not as congeries of historical *data*, or as valuable ornaments for a valuable collection, but as centres producing value in a critical dialogue, showing to the observer the dialectic relation between the structure and the ‘abundance’ in which the structure is situated. And this mysterious ‘abundance’ that transcends the figuration, and in our discussion a figuration made through words, may be caught making *operative* the concepts of ‘individual’ and of ‘expression’, as I have tried to do.

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fashion of annals: my outward actions must appear rather than my inward life. Altogether, the most important part of an individual’s life is that of development, and mine is concluded in the detailed volumes of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. Afterwards begins the conflict with the world, and that is interesting only in its results»

<sup>47</sup> G. Colli, *La ragione errabonda*, cit., p. 528.

<sup>48</sup> M. Bakhtin, *Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel* [*Formy vremeni i chronotopa v romane. Očerki po istoričeskoj poetike*, 1938-39], in Id., *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. by M. Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp. 84-258: 207.

<sup>49</sup> G. Simondon, *Sur la techno-esthétique*, ed. by J. Derrida in «Les Papiers du Collège International de Philosophie», n° 12, 1989, pp. 1-19: 8-11. Emphasis added.