

Preface

The 700th anniversary of Dante Alighieri's death brings back the live spirit and still inspiring presence of the poet, philosopher and scholar engaged into the current political and social entanglements. He was an expert on the rational seeking of the truth and the discoverer of the soul led in the abyss of Inferno, in the limbo of Purgatory and the yonder of Heaven. He was mainly an aristocrat of the spirit. Dante with his developed sensitivity reached the spiritual depth which does not die but which develops in suffering. Suffering multiplies love and joy which originate in the Creator's creation. The poet experiences raising to the joy which brings smile into the faces of Beatrice, Bernard, the angels smile as well. The smile completes the silence. He found "That circulation, which being thus conceived Appeared in thee as a reflected light" after his long wondering in the afterlife guided by his beloved guides who are filled with love, they also bring the master to Love. The Antinomy and Love are the categories of the first Greek tragedians, who combined philosophy with beauty and the mixture has lasted until contemporary times. Dante indicated the constantly current sources of the language which for the artist originated in the tradition of the biblical language which has been organized in the logical system of philosophy, scholastically clear in the transmission of Saint Thomas Aquinas¹.

The tragic nature of Comedia is perceived as a philosophical, philosophical and anthropological and aesthetic category developed in the images, which transmits Dante's language as *lingua volgare*. For a contemporary reader it is not understandable how to include both the comedy and tragedy into the same narrative forms. However, both literary genres inspired visual arts during Dante's

¹ R. Imbach, *Portrait des Dichters als Philosoph: Eine Betrachtung des philosophischen Denkens von Dante Alighieri*, Schwabe 2020, p. 29 (Jacob Burckhard-Gesprache auf Castelen, 37).

time and in the modern time. The heterogeneous sense and understanding mimesis are the essence here². Contaminations of characters, plots, places and even historical and mythological events are not blurring the boundaries of understanding for Dante. The poet trusts the reader for whom the time and space are open and who is not focused on one social group in one place. The poet knows the allegorical language of the Bible, the way of reading it and of interpreting biblical texts which originate in the patristic tradition, particularly of the Alexandrians. He knew the texts of ancient and contemporary well-known poets *dolce stil nuovo* of XIII century.

The existential and spiritual (two inseparable categories in Dante's time), the poet's language introduces into the dimensions of uniqueness of knowledge, which is ascribed to Dante's talent and imagination. Giovanni Boccaccio in *Trattatello in laude di Dante* distinguished the poet with the word 'divine' and the privilege was later confirmed by Giovanni Gabriele Giolito de' Ferrari in the title of the Venetian edition in 1555³. 'Comedia' combined with 'tragedy' does not soothe the contemporary nagging question about the deeper meaning of this relation which still permeates the powerful contemporary minds.

The questions which the poet was asked in the previous times were numerous and still so they are. They are intensified with every new discovered mystery of Dante and currently the scientific research apparatus has been introduced to examine it, the process will also require to make use of the knowledge about the earth and the space, about the immeasurable spaces and cavernous depths. Dante travels through them along with the history, he is led by his guides, holy sages whose wisdom is interwoven with beauty. The journey of the soul draws the horizon of the meaning of humanity, the beginning of which is in the first day of creation of the man by the Creator, while its end is in the eschatology of Parousia. The poet wanders through the circuit of Inferno and Purgatory in order to reach Heaven. They draw the circle *nowhere* and its constant unchanging point is the light vibrating without the beginning and without the end. Dante, wandering through the afterlife, seeks eternity the figure of which is reflected in the pulsating circles of the light. Even the gardens of the dead are not extinct, they are not closed although they are surrounded by a fence⁴. The echo of the Medieval motifs *hortus conclusus* in literary topos, well-known to the artist, of the images of Mary the Humble, and of infinite spiritual love which was reflected in the image of the Mother of God's Son Virgin Mary *humilitas*.

2 M. Maślanka-Soro, *Tragizm komedii Dantego*, Kraków 2005, p. 27.

3 M. Maślanka-Soro, *Tragizm komedii Dantego*, Kraków 2005, p. 22.

4 L.H. McAvroy, *The Enclosed Garden and the Medieval Religious Imaginary*, Cambridge 2021.

The richness of the meanings – *amplificatio* of the images – the visions introduced by Dante, awakens the emotional condition, presents the conditions of psychological entanglements with the broad range of experiences. However, these were not the emotions and experiences that the poet had in mind, they are a kind of media which indicated the essence of humanity, similarly, the role of the guide who leads to but is not the destination itself. The rich metaphors of spiritual experiences permeated the essence of the real human nature. The first and the latter refer to „the gardens open at all times” of saints, teachers and scholars present in the poetic metaphors and in the visual arts of Antiquity and of early Christianity⁵ are renewed in literature and art of modernity and of contemporary times.

Dante’s imagination is vibrant, with the life of a symbol, with its affinity to what it symbolizes and what the symbol is. In such a semantic structure the symbol indicates the transcendence of visual things which will therefore never be cognitively drained in the closed *constans* which lead towards the mystery. The analogical relations are present in the stile *Dolce stil nuovo* in literature and is reflected in the visual arts as the international Gothic *beautiful style*. It grew from the circle of metaphors of the perfect beauty defined by the Platonic, Dionysian and Thomistic philosophies in the basic category *claritas divina*. Dante experiences the beauty in the metaphysical structure of the object in its sensual colour, glow, smell, shape. The beauty as *claritas* is at the same time *consonantia*, Harmony permeates sensual experiences as the porches of spiritual perfection.

In Dante’s time at the end of XIII century, the need for the perfect beauty, including the beauty of art, originated in the uncertain, fragile social background, in the political events, in social divisions in Italy, in wars and epidemics in Europe. It was at that time when the university science started to blossom and was enjoyed; this phenomenon also regarded the science somehow buried in the hidden laborious monastic studies. Despite the extreme ideas, contradictory statements within theology and philosophy, the group of enthusiasts of science and of knowledge drawn out of the Antique tradition as well as of the current searches in the fields of wildlife, botanic, mathematics and architecture, grew gradually. The tastes of beauty of its form and contents were sharpened. Dante’s fascination with science and arts are filled to the top with no spaces for doubts but he reveal his personal choices. He raised Giotto to the top, but he left – Oderisi from Gubbio (+1299), the illuminator who was rightly referred to the patterns of the Parisian „illuminating” for the Purgatory (Purgatory, Song XI, 81). He called painting “more laughing... touched by the brush of...”, (the contem-

5 P. Piehler, *The visionary Landscape. A Study in medieval Allegory*, London 1971, p. 115.

porarily lesser-known eclectic) underestimated painter Francis from Bologna from the turn of XIII/XIV centuries. The human mastery is a vane glory, it puts the artist to trial, it demands humbleness and modesty, restraint, the inalienable values of every man, the more of the artist. He presents the acknowledged and valued master Cimabue of Dante's times as a teaching. The master who thought „that he should hold the field” (Purgatory Song XI, 94).

Now Giotto has the cry,
So that the other's fame is growing dim (Purgatory, Song XI, 95–96).

The reality of the art of Florence in Dante's times was painstakingly researched, which is reflected in the monograph of Angelo Tartufieri, Mario Scalini⁶. Before Dante's eyes, the baptistery with the mosaic decoration, the piece of art made by Venetian artists, was being created.

Dante's itinerary of a wanderer and pilgrim was determined by his spiritual guides, they allowed for the touch of holiness, the guide led to Love- Paradise. The poet was taken away from the tragic fate and from the havoc of the inferno, encouraged by the simple smile – and not even by the word – of master Bernard, he looked not ahead but above, up, according to the indications of his guide:

was beckoning unto me, and smiling, That I should upward look
(Paradise Canto XXXIII, 49).

The Paradise of the Father, Son and the Holy Ghost is the constant glory and Dante's universe spoke with the smile – the sign of unspeakable joy. In visual arts, which the poet carefully observed, the smile beamed in the face of Virgin Mary and of the Child already in the Byzantine and Latin art of X century. Since the half of XIII century artists started creating numerous figures of smiling Beautiful Madonnas. The smile of holiness remained the constant attribute of angels and saints in the modern art. They originate in the metaphors of the considerations of litanies, prayers and songs in Benedictine piety. The smiling faces are harmonious with the illusion of the form, with the soft floating of the figure, e.g. each Madonna presents her Child raised high in her frail arms, they seem to be lightly swirling in their dance. They seem to be floating with the spiritual joy – the liturgical *gaudium* on their invisible feet. It is neither laughter nor a jest that Saint Thomas Aquinas warned against. The oldest among the preserved figurines of smiling Madonnas come from the first half of XIII

6 *L'arte a Firenze nell'età di Dante (1250–1300)*, a cura di A. Tartufieri, M. Scalini, 2004.

century, they resemble the visions of smiling angels of paradise of Dante, which, similarly to the ones in the visual arts, are floating in the heavenly dance.

The spirit of Dante's time, preserving its eternal divine beauty, enriched it with the joy of beauty and holiness, replacing the harshness, gravity and grandeur which could even intimidate. It was therefore necessary to express joy which resulted, despite the difficulties, of the current earthly existence and was not *the result* of some *golden age*. The spiritual joy was brought to contemporaries by the Gospel which inspired masters of philosophy, artists of the word, of chisel and of paintbrush. The joy reflected the enthusiasm of creating. The joy of wandering resulted from both the intellectual and spiritual admiration for God. Dante gave in to his guides, he knew the taste of a feast, the Plato's Symposium as well as the one from the images of late Antiquity and early Christianity.

So did my mind, among those aliments
Becoming larger
(Paradise, Canto XXIII, 43).

The humanism of both Dante's time and of the Renaissance period of XV and XVI centuries made joy the meaning of life, the essence of faith and of hope. Joy weaved with God's Wisdom. In a monumental and thoughtful way this is shown by the figures on the western facade of the Rheims cathedral (1260–1274). In the scene of Annunciation the angel is smiling while Virgin Mary maintains restrained solemnity. Gabriel's joy results from the knowledge – from recognising God's will. Gabriel knows God's plan. He transmits Father's Wisdom which is the joy of the birth of the Son. Before the earth and the shepherds rejoiced, the joy had embraced the angels' heaven. E. Gilson indicated the symbolism of the intellect which brings the joy of cognition in Dante's work⁷.

The joy in Lord involves faith and knowledge as it was symbolically reflected in the relief of the Magi worship from the Cistercian abbey from the second half of XII century in Fontfroide (at present the Musee de la Societe Archeologique, Montpellie.) The history of the joy reflected in the smile in literature and visual arts developed in the XIV and XV centuries. The smile assumed in Dante's Paradise promotes the silence of the tongue and voice. The tongue is not able to reflect the beauty of the smile:

to a thousandth of the truth
It would not reach, singing the holy smile
And how the holy aspect it illumed (Paradise, Canto XXIII 58–60)

7 E. Gilson, *Dante and Philosophy*, London 1995, p. 231–233.

The Holy Trinity is the Highest Beauty and the poet calls It the smile of the universe (Paradise Canto XXVII, 4). The smile precedes the language with which Dante described the most beautiful visions as the archetypes of paintings. The description of a young girl on the opposite bank of the paradise river is inseparable with nature, the poet compares it to the nest of the human life, confirming his view with the psalm 91/92. „For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy”. Matilda explains Dante the beauty of God’s creation. She also teaches him to contemplate the beauty in silence.

The once posed question about the matter and sensuality of beauty, appears also today. In his visions Dante presented the profound light and colours which have the power to crush the forms of matter which then become the Nebula or again the sparkling colourful circular whirlpools. Dante as a visionary creates visions of light, sparks, streak of light and colours which rotting the sensuous and sensual shapes. At the same time nobody did it as beautifully as Dante, nobody presented the heavenly creatures and spiritual creatures and at the same time sensual creatures, made from the fleshly matter, in such a beautiful way. How else can we see the smile if not beyond the flesh?

I saw there at their sports and at their songs
A beauty smiling, which the gladness was
Within the eyes of all the other saints (Paradise, Canto XXXI 134–136).

It has been more than seven hundred years since master Dante was wandering on the streets of his beloved Florence which he was forced to leave. He lived in a house which commemorates the poet until today. Italian scientists indicated the urbanistic and artistic condition of the city in the second half of XIII century and its development in XIV century. At that time a baptistery with the abundant mosaic decoration was built and the panel painting was created e.g. of master known as the Master of the Mansi Magdalen with smiling Madonnas. Without doubt the poet was impressed by the Roman mosaic. Dante relentlessly tells about it to the contemporary reader, as the spiritual pilgrim who is under the care of the guides and who traverses his homeland and the afterlife. He can transmit more: of the sorrows of his time, of the splits, social crises, disappointment with the closest ones, of the tragedy of the human fate. The world presented by Dante is marked by *mimesis* according to Aristotle, the concept which is so current and controversial, which persistently comes back in the contemporary deliberations. Dante is the master of thinking and

of symbolic imagination and the symbol is thought-provoking in solving the mystery of the images of the poet's visions. Thomas S. Eliot made a reflection on Dante's poetry indicating — „the work of a philosopher, the man who deliberates over pure ideas and the poet's trouble which consists in the effort to realize the idea, cannot appear simultaneously. However. It does not mean the claim that poetic visual imagination cannot be of philosophical nature to some extent. The poet can treat the philosophical concepts not as a matter for discussion but as a matter of vision. Dante's imagination is visual”⁸. A distinguished contemporary philosopher Giovanni Reale compared the thought and the visions of Dante to the poetry of Karol Wojtyła, Saint John Paul II, indicating the parallel in the Roman Triptich. In the Medieval philosophy of Dante's time, the divergent views met e.g. the mysticism of Bernard of Clairvaux, and the resurgent Aristotelianism of Saint Thomas Aquinas. The peculiar syncretism of knowledge defined as “Dante's humanism”, included theses drawn from various philosophical sources: antique and patristic of Jan Chryzostom of Gosławice and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite⁹. The poet introduced the abundance of spiritual states and emotions from anxiety, horror to sadness and joy into his poetic language based on symbolism and metaphors. He experiences the sweetness of spiritual love, happiness on earth and the eschatological joy of being in heaven. That is consistent with Dante's mystery which touches the intellect and the soul of the man who is thinking and experiencing beauty, which is so necessary to the contemporary man. After Thomas Eliot we can pose the question which is still valid Who is Dante for me¹⁰. The echo of the ongoing interest in the poet on all continents, in Europe, America and Australia¹¹. Therefore, the concern of Hans Georg Gadamer „Are poets falling silent?” is still so valid¹². And poets will not fall silent if only the need to discover their beauty, their knowledge, their imagination, which is constantly seeking the faith in God, does not disappear. Dante developed the symbolic reality which indicated transcendence but did not degrade the essence of the matter available to the senses. The symbol is in the middle between the word and the silence¹³. Dante knew the meaning of silence which transforms every language, even the most beautiful

8 T. S. Eliot, *Opere 1904–1930*, Milano: Bompiani, 1992, p. 419, after: G. Reale, *Komentarz krytyczno-literacki do „Tryptyku rzymskiego”*, [in:] *Wokół „Tryptyku rzymskiego” Jana Pawła II*, ed. A. Wierzbicki, Lublin 2003, p. 35.

9 A. Renaudet, *Dante Humaniste*, Paris 1952, p. 344 passim.

10 T. S. Eliot, *Kto to jest klasyk i inne eseje*, transl. M. Heydel, M. Niemojowska, H. Praczkowska, M. Żurowski, Kraków 1998, p. 87.

11 M. Maślanka-Soro, *Dante Alighieri. Boska komedia*, transl. E. Porębowicz, Kraków 2004, p. 475.

12 H. G. Gadamer, *Czy poeci umilkną?*, transl. M. Łukasiewicz, Bydgoszcz 1998.

13 W. Stróżewski, *Istnienie i sens*, Kraków 1999, p. 440.

one. Dante, who was submitted to his guides, is the guide himself, he teaches, he is an attentive shepherd, he as a philosopher and a theologian, he is very understanding, he experiences everything with his artistic soul. He is a wise man and at the same time a rejoiced child. Dante's images are built on philosophical, theological and historical concepts of writers and authorities. The need for the authority of science, art, faith reflect the need to constantly raise the Poet up on a pedestal of our times in order not to give way the truth of humanity which loving and feasting with the Other who accompanies us „Such truth he to my intellect reveals Who demonstrates to me the primal love Of all the sempiternal substances”. (Paradise, Song XXVI, 37–39) It reflects the poet's need to be with others, to feast and to contemplate delights the contemporary reader. The poet is among the twelve scholars whom he asked to be introduced to by Thomas Aquinas. They are present in the fourth heaven as the first circle of scholars. Dante the philosopher engages the mind and imagination. The first and the latter in the European philosophy and literature have their promoters and patrons, and the first circle of the fourth heaven still remains open.

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