

# **Review of the Book „Dante, Freud and Dalí: What They Might Have in Common? Psychoanalytic Reflections on Dante’s Inferno”, author: Marius Dumitrescu, Lumen Publishing**

**Marius ROMILA<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>PhD, independent researcher,  
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University  
from Iasi, Romania,  
[emromila@yahoo.com](mailto:emromila@yahoo.com)

**Abstract:** This paper is a review of the book „Dante, Freud and Dalí: What They Might Have in Common? Psychoanalytic Reflections on Dante’s Inferno”, authored by PhD professor Marius Dumitrescu, published by Lumen Publishing House from Iasi, Romania, in 2022.

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Dante, Freud and Dalí - what could the three great geniuses of humanity have in common?

We find the answer in the book of Professor Marius Dumitrescu (2022), from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Iași. Published by Lumen Publishing House, in English, the volume tries to answer this question: how can Freudian psychoanalysis explain what is hidden behind Dante's work, the *Divine Comedy* (Chessick, 2001), and the paintings of Salvador Dalí. And, above all, how did Dante's work influence the emergence of psychoanalysis?

The very subtitle of the book, "Psychoanalytic Reflections on Dante's *Inferno*" (Dumitrescu, 2022) is our guide to formulating an answer.

In the first part, entitled "Discovering the Unconscious through Dreams in Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis", Professor Marius Dumitrescu (2022) approaches, from the perspective of philosophical anthropology, the way in which Freudian theory explains the elaboration of dreams.

Let's not forget, the most important influence on Sigmund Freud was the encounter with the method of Dr. Josef Breuer, who developed cathartic therapy, but which Sigmund Freud did not use, as he identified other, more effective ways to access the rich content of the unconscious area: the method of free associations and, subsequently, the analysis of missed acts. But the Royal Road to this amazing universe of the unconscious was considered by Sigmund Freud to be the interpretation of dreams. I will not insist here, Professor Dumitrescu (2022) provides detailed explanations about this in his book. A very important aspect, noted and developed in the book, is the determinism of the Freudian unconscious.

The second chapter of the book develops the Freudian psychoanalytic perspective on the punishments invented by Dante in the *Inferno* (Alighieri, 2003).

Shortly after the passing of the great Florentine poet into the world of shadows, his first biographer, Giovanni Boccaccio (2009), collected and published testimonies and legends woven around the life of the man who was also a great politician of his time, as well as a good mediator of rival parties of the cities of the Italian Peninsula.

I would like to mention further two moments, both of which illustrate the intense connection between Dante and Freud (2018).

First, in 1321, after an exhausting journey to reach a political mediation with the rival city, Venice, Dante died of malaria in Ravenna, being buried with the honors due to such an erudite spirit. After his death, Iacopo and Piero Alighieri, the sons of the great Florentine poet, intended to publish the *Paradise*, but they could not find the manuscripts of the last 13

cantos of the third part of the Divine Comedy, which were presumed lost. The two tried to finish the poem themselves, but the lines refused to take shape, in the matrix of their great predecessor. In an initiatory dream, narrated by Giovanni Boccaccio (2009) in the *Life of Dante*, Iacopo has a vision in which their father, already passed into the world of shadows, leads him directly to the place where the pages of the lost chants were, in an apse of the room where the great author, in exile, wrote (Dali, 1964). Following the signs in his father's dream, Iacopo went to the indicated place, where he found the hole in the wall that housed the lost parts of the masterpiece. It is a path that has not been debated so far and that can lead to a lot of developments.

Second, from the perspective of the French esoteric philosopher René Guénon (2004), Dante belonged to the current Fedeli d'Amore, a mysterious initiatory organization, traces of which can be found in the Italian poems of the trecento period. In *The Secret Language of Dante and "Fedeli d'Amore"*, an essay published in February 1929 in *Le Voile d'Isis*, a pioneering magazine published in France from 1888 to the present, René Guénon (1929a; 1929b) shows that the understanding of some texts, which seem impenetrable at first sight, depends on the esoteric key in which they are read. Thus, the poems can become intelligible, viewed through a secret code, used by the entire initiatory stream in the encryption and concealment of the true meaning of the work of the poems.

Like the beautiful Beatrice from Dante's poem, Laura de Noves from Francesco Petrarca's Songbook is, according to Luigi Valli's theory, only the muse that inspires the poet, and with whom the author will not meet directly during his life – as she was portrayed only after passing into the world of shadows.

In the symbolism of Fedeli d'Amore, there is a relationship between Amor and Death (Guénon, 2012, p. 78), (the second important connection with Freudian psychoanalysis), which would correspond, from the point of view of Freudian psychoanalysis, to the ambivalence of Eros - Thanatos. As a leading exponent of the mentioned esoteric circle, Dante used - according to René Guénon - a system of representations, which also appear in Persian and Arabic poetry, in which the symbol of love had an ambivalent character, due to which the boundaries were continuously transformed.

In René Guénon's vision, the poets of Christian esotericism inspire themselves from the name of a female who lived in reality, hiding in her shadow the love for divine Wisdom (2012, p. 106).

An allegorical text, rich in symbols and metaphors, the Divine Comedy represents a disturbing declaration of faith, which presents itself to

the reader in a mixture of Christianity and paganism of Greek and Roman origin. Dante's work can be interpreted - and professor Marius Dumitrescu (2022) does it to the full - from a psychoanalytic point of view, through the Freudian method, as a battle between Eros and Thanatos.

Dante's journey symbolically begins on the night of Maundy Thursday in the year 1300, the year of the First Jubilee, and will end after seven days, in divine grace. The initiatory route – Hell, Purgatory, Paradise – will transform Dante, as it will also mark his readers throughout the ages.

The dark forest in which Dante gets lost represents, from a Freudian perspective, the first step towards the infernal world - which represents the world of the unconscious. His entry into the forest, in a state of sleep, of lack of rationality, generates anguish, fear. Starting to the left, Dante goes astray, loses the right path, and starts on the path of Satan.

It is interesting, from a psychoanalytical point of view, that there are three beasts which try to stop Dante's ascent and want to make him return to the forest of sins: the panther, who symbolizes debauchery - the metaphor of Florence, with its struggles between Whites and Blacks; the lion, which signifies the pride of Philip IV the Fair of France, who abolished the Order of the Templars; the "shewolf only bones and skin" (Alighieri, 1982, Cant I, 49 – p.6), whose greed is the mark of the Papacy. Cornered by these beasts, Dante glimpses a hope: the Roman poet Virgil.

We leave aside Virgil, whose psychoanalytic significance is perfectly outlined in the volume of Professor Marius Dumitrescu (2022).

We cannot understand Dante's universe without remembering the beauty of God and the beauty of Beatrice, how Dante perceives the two true sources of beauty.

The beauty of the Divinity and the beauty of Beatrice - the initiatory journey, the descent into Hell represents, from the psychoanalytical perspective, the descent into the drive zone of the unconscious, dominated by primal instincts, by Thanatos, but also by the brutal, destructive Eros, related to Thanatos. From the point of view of Freudian psychoanalysis, Dante's presentation of the ascension to Paradise, through Purgatory, is also interesting. This initiatory path hides true psychological mechanisms, which, once deciphered, will reveal the presence of the creative, constructive Eros.

More precisely, the beauty of Divinity is closely linked, from a Freudian perspective, to the presence of Beatrice, guide and beloved, identified with the divine Reason itself. In other words, the beauty of the Divinity is prefaced, it is announced by the beauty of Beatrice, more and more beautiful and radiant as the ascent continues - to reach the moment of beatific union with God at the perfection of the precious stone -, although

unlooked for. In fact, Beatrice's beauty enhances divine beauty and vice versa.

Professor Marius Dumitrescu's (2022) interesting conclusion is that, by writing this poem, Dante was able to interpret his own momentums, his own impulses. Because of these impulses, which he did not understand and manage before, at the right time, he went into exile (). But thanks to the dream presented in his poem, *The Inferno*, through which he was able to self-psychoanalyze himself, the poet was finally able to better understand his impulses and, consequently, reconcile himself with his condition.

If, for Dante, writing represented a "discharge", what did the illustration of scenes from Dante's *Inferno* represent for Dali?

Of course, it should be noted that not only Dali was inspired by Dante. Before him, Sandro Botticelli or Robert Rauschenberg were seduced by the wonderful descriptions of Dante's *Inferno*. Later, in a period closer to us, it was Gustav Doré who, at the end of the 19th century, made the most beautiful drawings to illustrate the re-editions of Dante's volume. However, Professor Marius Dumitrescu (2022) perfectly captures the fact that the most important contribution to the illustration of the work of the famous Florentine belonged to Salvador Dali - "the painter of infernal light", as the Lesian author aptly calls him.

Analyzing 15 of the 101 representations of Salvador Dali regarding Dante's *Inferno*, Professor Marius Dumitrescu (2022) emphasizes that the provocative genius of the Spanish painter made a revolutionary contribution to surrealism, putting into practice, like no other, the concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis.

The most important part of the volume, its major contribution to a better understanding of the psychoanalytic approach, is the fourth chapter: "The Influence of the Divine Comedy on the Genesis of Dream Interpretation", the textbook of psychoanalysis, undoubtedly one of the most important works of Sigmund Freud. The Viennese Master finds the detailed descriptions of Hell in the very dreams of his patients – the same symbols transformed by the unconscious, of people who had not read the work of the illustrious Florentine. Because the similarity between Dante's descriptions and the dream patterns interpreted by Freud is evident, precisely because they contain the same characters, the same mental frameworks are in place or, as Mircea Eliade would call them, the same mythological or religious symbols.

However, what did the three have in common?

Genius is the answer to be given, and well documented, by Professor Marius Dumitrescu (2022). Genius, with all that this means: social rejection

and misunderstanding by contemporaries, but also well-deserved recognition, of course, but in full only postmortem. And the fact that both Dante and Freud were soul mates, forced by the events of history to leave their homeland and die in exile (Dalí will also do it, but for other reasons - financial, first of all - and here we note a striking differentiation between the first two and the mercantilism of the third).

It is relevant that this volume was completed, in manuscript, in the very Year of Dante, in 2021, when the 700th anniversary of the death of the great Florentine poet was commemorated.

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