



ZSUZSANNA TÓTH-IZSÓ

Human and Divine Time in the Comedy as Viewed by Psychosynthesis

“Time passes on, and we perceive it not” (*Purg.* IV. 9)

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEMATICS OF TIME: CHRONOS AND KAIROS

Giovanni Papini wrote in *Treaties about Mankind* that “humans, a poet once said, are composed of two elements: time and eternity. Years slip away swiftly for those who live for time; but those who live for eternity will arrive till the consummation of their days, like Mosé.”¹ O’Connell Baur in his *Dante’s Hermeneutics of Salvation* also uses the pair of binary oppositions “*the temporal*” and “*the eternal*”. Similar distinctions are made by several other writers, poets, or philosophers.

On the one side, humans need chronological time to complete tasks, organize their everyday life, and develop themselves from every point of view. On the other side, however, there is another type of time, “the right time”, which is not short or long, which does not have a measure. Its description often appears in sacred or literary pieces. It happens in one instant but contains eternity. Chronos and Kairos, time and eternity, human and divine. Theologically speaking we can say that while in the dimension of Chronos causality (or *karma*) rules, in the world of Kairos finality (or *akarma*) does.

Chronos is the normal, ordinary time, as we usually perceive it in our everyday life: the time measured by metronomes, clocks, watches, and other measuring instruments.

Kairos is a quite different kind. Having reviewed the relevant literature, finally – mainly based on the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* and the *Psychology Dictionary Professional Reference* – the following working definitions have been accepted:

Kairos is an experience of a timeless moment of heightened awareness at which a person’s typical knowledge of time fades away and one feels a sense of holistic involvement with another individual or thing or with the universe as a whole.²

¹ Papini 1977. 448.

² Cf. <https://dictionary.apa.org/kairos>.

Kairos is also known as the state of *mystic union* (otherwise known as the *cosmic identification* or *oceanic feeling*), which is a feeling of spiritual identification with nature and the whole universe.³

The distinction between the Chronos and Kairos time was produced by the ancient Western culture, by the antique Greeks. Concerning the time, the ancient East had also produced something partly similar: by the teaching of the ancient Indian yoga philosophy, the spiritual development has seven distinct stages (chakras) of which the first four relate to the normal time (equivalent to Chronos) experienced every day by ordinary people (see *Figure 2* later). At the very high spiritual level of the fifth chakra and above, however, there is a kind of timelessness (equivalent to Kairos).

The average person stays at a medium or even a bit lower spiritual level, lives according to Chronos, his life is lead by karma and he is located approximately at the level of the fourth chakra, the so-called Anahata. Psychologically and spiritually more advanced and matured individuals although, who have transcended the limits of their ego and have stepped out of the circle of causality, and got rid of (chronological) time, may enter a realm that already belongs to the higher chakras. Eastern tradition marks the cessation of chronological time from the fifth chakra. Papini describes the timelessness of these stages as follows:

Space, for these dreamers, is reduced to a single point and time to eternity. (Papini 1977. 424.)

Eternity is neither short nor long; a moment that has no present because it no longer knows the earthly schedule of time for past and future. Eternity is, like God. (*Ibid.* 448.)

When in the Bible God says “I am who I am” (Ex. 3:14) it is the final statement of self-existence, it indicates immediate presence. In Papini’s vision Eternity’s, just like God’s existence is not upon any spacious or temporal circumstances. Eternity is beyond human time, beyond Chronos. In the original, Greek version of the Bible, the New Testament contains the word Kairos 86 times, while Chronos is mentioned 54 times. This fact does not have to surprise us, since it contains countless descriptions of transpersonal experiences in which the individual exceeds human time and enters divine time. Vacchelli, saying that “We, moderns, have already lost this radical relationality”⁴ refers to this duality of time which is manifested also in the fact, that in modern languages (at least in our case, in Italian, Hungarian, and English) there is no linguistic distinction between the two temporal concepts (we have only “tempo”, “idő” and “time”).

³ Cf. <https://psychologydictionary.org/kairos>.

⁴ Vacchelli 2018. 28.

So, people of the modern Western world are almost exclusively inheritors of chronological time, and we have lost an important part of ourselves by ignoring this distinction. We have to search hard to awake our “eternity part” since our “time part” dominates everything around us. It is no accident that – among others – Walt Whitman raises the question in his famous *Song of myself*: “The clock indicates the moment—but what does eternity measures?” (44), then he says:

Here or henceforward it is all the same to me, I accept Time absolutely.
It alone is without flaw, it alone rounds and completes all,
That mystic baffling wonder alone completes all.
I accept Reality and dare not question it,
Materialism first and last imbuing. (23)

In the Kairos-ruled realm of existence, which also Dante will enter, the binary oppositions disappear: the soul is neither strong nor weak, nor is time short or long anymore, it no longer has a measure. Dante also gets to experience the dissolution of oppositions at the peak of his spiritual journey, as Papini writes in *Dante vivo*:

Dante is outside the fixed categories, above incidental divisions, beyond the unyielding *yea* and *nay* (Papini 1935. 28.)

in *Poesia in prosa*:

I am with me. I am dissolved, far from and outside the system. I do not belong to your circle. (Papini 1932. 222.)

or in *Mostra personale*:

Eternity is not, as many think, an avalanche of days, the succession of centuries, the sum of thousand years, but an infinite and perennial Present. Nothing is more similar to eternity than one moment of ecstasy. (Papini 1941. 128.)

Sándor Weöres calls that one minute there, that Kairos “eternal moment”:

A moment leaning out of time
arrives here and there,
guards what time squanders keeps
the treasure tight in its grasp—
eternity itself, held
between the future and the past.
As a bather’s thigh is brushed
by skimming fish— so
there are times when God
is in you, and you know:
half-remembered now
and later, like a dream.
And with a taste of eternity
this side of the tomb.
(Weöres 1975)

In this eternal moment, it is the soul, the spirit that – with its omnipresence and eternal stability – rules time and space without their human divisions: “the spirit is above these human distinctions, for him, everything is the same, he justifies everything” (Assagioli 1988e. 134).

II. PSYCHOSYNTHESIS IN A NUTSHELL AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE COMEDY

Psychosynthesis was established by Roberto Assagioli, who accepted, extended, and later further developed the analytic psychology of Carl Gustav Jung. About psychosynthesis in general, in English, the interested reader can refer to the following basic publications:^{5 6 7}. The main ideas of psychosynthesis can best be summarised shortly by the so-called “egg diagram” below (*Figure 1*).

⁵ Assagioli 1971.

⁶ Assagioli 2000/2008/2012.

⁷ Assagioli 2010.

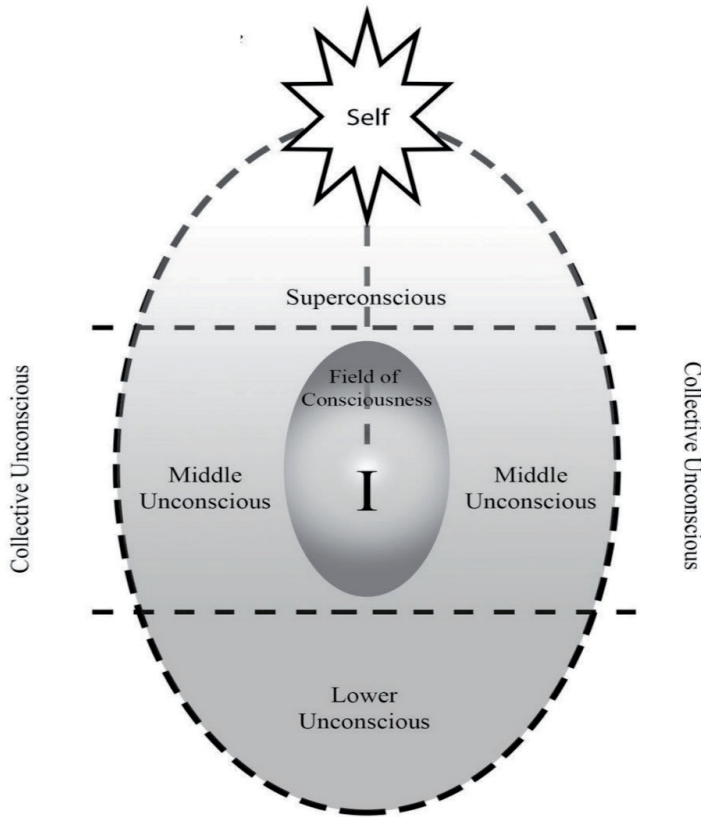


Figure 1.

Assagioli's model of the structure of the human psyche⁸

The "I" is the centre of the *Field of Consciousness*, surrounded by the *personal unconscious*. The *personal unconscious* is subdivided into the *lower unconscious* (elementary psychological activities, drives, primitive urges, phobias, etc.), *middle unconscious* (ordinary mental and imaginative activities), and *higher unconscious* or *superconscious* (higher intuitions and inspirations) regions.

The Self (also known as Transpersonal Self, or Higher Self), represented as a star at the top of the diagram. The Self, mostly as defined by Jung, is dual: it is both personal and transpersonal (universal). Assagioli declared that the Self, the real subject of all transpersonal experiences, is a permanent centre which is not necessarily religious or dogmatic:

⁸ Assagioli 2000/2008/2012. 17.

the Self exists in a sphere of reality different from that of the flow of psychic phenomena and from sensory inputs of organic life, and cannot be influenced by these, while its influence can profoundly modify our psychophysical conditions. (Assagioli 1988i. 25.)

All the personal unconscious contents are interfacing with the *Collective Unconscious* via the dotted borderline of the “egg”, also in the sense as Jung used this term.

According to Assagioli “it is a harmful illusion – that can easily sham us – that we are indivisible, immutable, and consistent beings.” (Roberto 1952) On the contrary, within the human psyche, there are so-called *subpersonalities* of different levels and kinds, which are partly autonomous entities existing in continuous interactions and fighting with each other. Subpersonalities are based in the personal unconscious and are agglomerates of different attitudes, drives, habit patterns, characteristics, and act as false selves.

As Assagioli puts it:

Psychosynthesis, both personal and transpersonal, is a process of growth based on the harmonious integration of all aspects of the personality around the self, the center of awareness and will. Psychosynthesis sees man as tending naturally toward harmony within himself and with the outer world. (Assagioli 2010. Preface.)

The *personal psychosynthesis* (horizontal dimension) includes the development and harmonizing of all human functions and potentialities at all levels of the lower and middle unconscious.

The *transpersonal psychosynthesis* (vertical dimension), however, includes the development and harmonizing of all human functions and potentialities at the levels of the higher unconscious (superconscious). During this process of the inner ascent, the area of consciousness comes to include the content of the superconscious and is approaching more and more closely to the Self. It consists in raising the conscious “I” to higher levels towards the Self, and with it also the whole area of consciousness. This is what Assagioli called “psychological mountain-climbing”:

Two different, and in a certain sense opposite, ways of exploring the superconscious offer themselves. The more usual is the one that may be described as *descending*. It consists of the inflow, the irruption of higher elements into the field of consciousness. [...] These inflows manifest themselves in the form of intuitions, inspirations, creations of genius, and impulses to humanitarian and heroic action. [...] The other type of relationship and contact which we can establish with the superconscious is the *ascendant*. It consists of raising the conscious “I” to higher levels, and with it the area

of consciousness, to the point where a zone is penetrated whose location above the ordinary level of our consciousness normally prevents our knowledge of its existence. (Assagioli 1988b. 28.)

Jung wrote:

We can hardly escape the feeling that the unconscious process moves spiral-wise around a centre, gradually getting closer, while the characteristics of the centre grow more and more distinct. Or perhaps we could put it the other way around and say that the centre – itself virtually unknowable – acts like a magnet on the disparate materials and processes of the unconscious and gradually captures them as in a crystal lattice. (Jung 1974. 217.)

The “magnet metaphor” – and with a bit more stressful feeling the other, so-called “spider metaphor” also – are quite apposite for many cases of ascending transpersonal psychosynthesis.

Assagioli asserted that the Comedy provides “a wonderful picture of a complete psychosynthesis”⁹ to its readers. He goes on as follows:

The first part, the Pilgrimage through Hell – indicates the analytical exploration of the Lower Unconscious. The second part – the Ascent of the Mountain of Purgatory – indicates the process of moral purification and gradual rising of the level of consciousness through the use of active techniques. The third part – the visit to Paradise or Heaven – depicts in an unsurpassed way the various stages of superconscious realizations, up to the final version of the Universal Spirit, of God Himself, in which Love and Will are fused. (Assagioli 1973b. 174.)

The “wonderful picture” of this inner journey will be shown in the following in some details after an excellent article by Lombard and den Biesen.¹⁰ Parts of this article of these authors are often cited in the rest of this section. Further deeper analyses on this topic can be found in two other, equally excellent, articles by the same authors.^{11 12}

The Comedy¹³ starts with:

⁹ Assagioli 1973b. 174. In English Assagioli 2000. 186.

¹⁰ Lombard – den Biesen 2014. 5–11.

¹¹ Lombard – den Biesen 2015a. 15–20.

¹² Lombard – den Biesen 2015b. 15–21.

¹³ This and the following cited pieces are from the translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Available also online: <https://antilogicalism.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/divine-comedy.pdf> (23/03/2021)

Midway upon the journey of our life
 I found myself within a forest dark,
 For the straightforward pathway had been lost.
 (*Inf.* I. 1–3.)

Dante, the pilgrim, states he is “midway upon the journey of our life.”¹⁴ ¹⁵ The explicit use of the word “our” – and not “my” – here, as Lombard and den Biesen put it,¹⁶ indicates that this is a universal journey that all of us have to take once, or at least should take.

This universal journey, however, is also always personal, as expressed by the singular in the second line of the poem: “I found myself within a forest dark” (*Inf.* I. 2) (again, after Lombard and den Biesen¹⁷).

Dante then confesses that “the straightforward pathway had been lost” (*Inf.* I. 3), therefore he has to take a longer one. For Assagioli it means that Dante has to “experience a profound self-analysis”.¹⁸ As Lombard and den Biesen¹⁹ asserts, from a psychosynthesis perspective, based on *Figure 1.*, it follows that

- the first line of the poem represents the collective unconscious journey,
- the second line represents the “I”, the Field of Consciousness,
- and the third line represents points to the “I”-Self-connection that had been lost (indicated as a dotted vertical line connecting the “I” with the Self).

¹⁴ The term “*midway of life*” can be interpreted as corresponding to the “*midlife crisis*” concept coined by Jung. During the first half of our life we receive our education, choose our careers, begin a family, build up a new existence, etc., and, in the meantime, we develop a strong ego (Ego-Self Separation). Doing so, we step-by-step lose connection with the rest of our psyche. Therefore, we usually reach our midlife feeling that our things are going wrong. At midlife we may experience alarm messages from the psyche in order to (re)establish the unity of the psyche. (After: <http://jungian.ca/mid-life-jungian-analysis/>, (20/03/2021).

¹⁵ Assagioli’s interpretation of the *selva oscura* explicitly concerns to spiritual awakening:

“The wilderness represents not only, as commentators generally say, the vicious life of the ordinary man, but also and above all, the special state of unease, of acute suffering, of inner darkness, which usually precede the awakening of the soul. To this state corresponds, much more than to the life of ordinary man, what Dante says about the forest; that is, only the memory of it filled him with fear. [...] In fact, the discovery of the hill illuminated by the sun, and the elevation of the gaze clearly indicate the decisive moment of the awakening of the soul. Then fear subsides in the lake of the heart and, after a little rest, he begins to climb the slopes of the hill. This clearly symbolizes the phase following the awakening.” (Assagioli 1988c. 131.)

And Vacchelli: “Realizing is essential. That’s all. But it is also only the beginning of seeing, of awakening.” (Vacchelli 2018. 34.)

¹⁶ Lombard – den Biesen 2014. 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Assagioli 1973b. 174.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Vacchelli puts it as follows:

The three canticles are also three states of conscience: the separative and violent, infernal one; that of transformation, purgatorial; and the paradisiac one, of integration. They are not waiting for us later, but they are here now. (Vacchelli 2018. 79.)

Since for Dante, “the straightforward pathway” – which is the direct, shortest path to the Self – had been lost, his life’s journey from the “I” has to be re-established towards the Self. Dante discovers that he is far from having a direct connection to the Self. Instead, he is standing in a “selva oscura”, (“forest dark”) helplessly and frightened. In reality, Dante is terrified by his own shadow,²⁰ his unexplored unconscious. Assagioli believes that the *selva oscura* represents “that acute suffering and inner darkness which usually precedes the awakening of the soul.”²¹ And really, there comes a touch of the awakening of the soul: he got to a mountain representing the Self.²²

But after I had reached a mountain’s foot,
At that point where the valley terminated,
Which had with consternation pierced my heart,

Upward I looked, and I beheld its shoulders,
Vested already with that planet’s rays
Which leadeth others right by every road.

(*Inf.* I. 13–18.)

The border between the wild woody valley and the high mountain appears as a numinous transitional threshold. When he looks up to the shining top, the decisive moment arrives: his soul is awakened, he – although imperfectly and for moments only – enters Kairos-time. He then desires to receive more of this light and immediately begins to climb towards it. He, however, cannot approach the light straightforward, because his way is blocked by three wild beasts (a leopard, a lion, and a she-wolf) and thus he is forced to give up his quick ascent up the mountain. These three beasts are symbolic manifestations of lower-level sub-personalities over whom Dante has yet to gain conscious awareness and control. After experiencing the light, Dante is forced back to his dark wood, but now he is suffering so acutely that he cries out for help. And the help suddenly comes

²⁰ Shadow meant (also) in the Jungian sense.

²¹ Assagioli 1993. 156.

²² In 1907 Assagioli, at the age of 19, wrote a story full of metaphors on spiritual research, *Fantasia in Re interiore*. It was published in the *Leonardo* of Papini and its most important symbol is a high mountain lit by the sun. http://www.psicosintesi.it/sites/default/files/rivista_1991_04_robertoassagiolifantasiainreinteriore.pdf (22/03/2021).

in the shape of Virgil, the great Roman poet. In psychosynthesis terms, Virgil – himself also a subpersonality of Dante, but of a higher level – acts as the ideal guide, teaching Dante to be in relationship with his authentic “I”. As Lombard and den Biesen formulated, “Virgil empathically mirrors Dante, offering him tools and insights for achieving discernment.”²³ Vacchelli, although not using psychosynthesical terms, stresses the same interpretation of the archetypal figure of the “old sage”: “the outer guide is also an inner guide. Virgil is not only “another person”, but also a part of the profound of Dante himself and of all of us.”²⁴ These interpretations recall the figure of another famous inner guide, Philemon, who was a subpersonality of Jung,²⁵ representing superior insight. It is no coincidence that Vacchelli highlights the parallels between the Divine Comedy and the *Red Book* of Jung:

The Comedy is also Dante’s Red Book, just as the Red Book is, in its way, a reinterpretation of Dante’s Comedy. The underworld descent is a necessary step: if I go directly to the median world of Purgatory, I make a fundamental mistake. I am shipwrecked. (Vacchelli 2018. 54.)

As Assagioli himself states, “Virgil leads Dante on his pilgrimage, helping him, encouraging him, explaining to him the various phases of the [psychosynthesis] process.”²⁶ Virgil outlines the entire journey and makes clear that Dante cannot directly climb up to the Self, because he first must make a pilgrimage through Hell: “Thee it behoves to take another road” (*Inf.* I. 91). Hell represents his lower unconscious and Dante has to understand it and bring it under control. The motto of psychosynthesis, “Know, possess, transform yourself”, refers to all parts of the psyche and could easily be the motto of the Divine Comedy. So, Dante cannot bypass the experience of Hell, first, the contents of his lower unconscious have to be integrated and finally synthesized around the “I”. The three beasts, as lower-level subpersonalities, that first blocked his way, now have already been integrated and synthesized. Therefore, only after having visited Hell, can he climb the mountain of Purgatory and pass through the purification process to redeem and transform his lower unconscious. Only then will he be able to once more continue his climb towards the light.

Later Virgil explains that at a certain point when reasoning is transcended, he will have to step back:

²³ Lombard – den Biesen 2014. 7.

²⁴ Vacchelli 2014. 187–188.

²⁵ Jung 2009. 200–202; 207; 216; 218; 223–224; 312.

²⁶ Assagioli 2000. 187.

If Virgil is the mind, the reason (even in the medieval meaning we were talking about) it is obvious that certain areas of reality are closed to him. This is not Dante's will, but the common experience and science of mystics. Reason lives in a space-time dimension, and cannot access non-time. He can get as close to it as the threshold, but no more. (Vacchelli 2018. 195.)

Virgil "is a true master, and as such he frees and does not bind his disciple. This is why he steps aside when the time comes for him to do so." (*Ibid.* 188.) Alessandro Berti catches with great sensibility this very moment when saying:

The mind must be silent and withdraw in front of the glorious presence of the Infinite. This is the state that Assagioli proposes to us as a "second birth". (Berti 1987. 24.)

János Arany describes the significant moment of the transcending of reason in his *Dante*, a poem that tells the marvellous journey of the "sommo poeta":

Such a depth makes reason's plumbline grow unsteady,
 Float as if with feather weighted, not with lead.
 Consciousness accepts it's caught up in the eddy.
 Wondrous divination fills the human head.
 It can feel the pull of other-worldly quarters;
 Shudders at the dread and pleasures they afford;
 Hears Leviathan go thrashing in the waters...
 Onto which has passed the presence of the Lord.
 (Arany in Prickett 2010. 711)²⁷

From that moment a female spirit will accompany Dante for the final climb towards the heavens to join the "blessed" in Paradise.

To whom, then, if thou wishest to ascend,
 A soul shall be for that than I more worthy;
 With her at my departure I will leave thee;
 (*Inf.* I. 121–123.)

It means that Virgil, the symbolic personification of Reason, can only guide Dante towards *personal psychosynthesis*, but for the *transpersonal psychosynthesis* already another guide, a worthier female spirit (Beatrice, herself also a subpersonality of Dante, but of an even higher level), will be necessary. Only after Dante has harmonized and coordinated his conscious, as well as lower and middle un-

²⁷ Translated by David Hill. Also in Gyapay 2017. 364–365. Original poem: János Arany: *Dante*. In Arany 1978. 184.

conscious material into an authentic personal “I”, can he be guided by Beatrice towards his transpersonal Self, where – as Virgil says – human reason cannot go.

The beautiful Beatrice, the symbolic personification of Wisdom, Dante’s inner divine mother, sister, and lover (in Jungian terms his divine Anima) – already representing the transpersonal qualities from Dante’s superconscious – takes over the guidance from Virgil. As Dante leaves Virgil and joins Beatrice, Dante’s journey continues towards the heavens: Divine Light, Love, and Joy (that is to the Self).

III. IT IS TIME FOR KAIROS: DANTE IN THE *SELVA OSCURA*

Since its birth the Divine Comedy has been analyzed from several points of view, was torn down to little pieces to be then recomposed again, but to the best of my knowledge, the aspect of time has not yet been considered. This very slice of this magnificent cake of different interpretations is rather modest, but maybe offers a small, but interesting new hint, a humble contribution to the huge worldwide Dante criticism.

The article, other than the antique theory of Chronos and Kairos, is also inspired by two (sometimes similar, sometimes divergent²⁸) interpretations of the Comedy: Assagioli’s psychological approach and Gianni Vacchelli’s thoughts on the actuality of Dante, the *selva oscura*, and symbolic hermeneutics. To them, I added Romano Manescalchi’s polarity concept in which the pilgrim Dante via his ascent along the spiritual growth’s axis, arrives from the lower pole, the *she-wolf*, to the higher pole, the *Virgin* (actually the triad of Beatrice, Lucia and Virgin Mary). This process is symbolizing the development from the attachment to the physical body with its instincts at the lower extreme, to its superation in psychological and spiritual self-realization at the higher, respectively.

Taken overall, our proposed tentative model for a psychosynthetic interpretation of Dante’s inner journey, based on his Chronos and Kairos experiences, is summarised in *Figure 2*.

Important to emphasize that, as Assagioli himself asserts, people do not develop linearly.²⁹ It can be observed time-to-time that certain transpersonal qualities – that, in the terms of Indian yoga philosophy, involve the level of the fifth or even the sixth chakra – occasionally can also appear in a poorly integrated personality. These phenomena, of course, cannot take long, because the destiny determined by the person’s earlier acts and experiences (the so-called “karma”) necessarily pulls him back after a while.

²⁸ Cf. Leoncini 2021 (in print).

²⁹ For non-linear development, see Sorrensen 2021.

It means, the rarely – and only for short time – even quite ordinary people can experience Kairos. But only highly developed persons can reside longer, or almost permanently at the height of the fifth, or quite exceptionally even the sixth chakra. Assagioli, in *Transpersonal development*, describes the psychological effect of the five stages of spiritual awakening, in which he also refers to the temporality of these high, chronologically timeless moments:

Such a blessed state lasts for varying periods, but it is bound to cease. The lower self was only temporarily overpowered and stunned, but not killed or transformed. The inflow of spiritual light and love is rhythmical, as is everything in the manifested universe; after a while, it diminishes or ceases—the out-flow is followed by the ebb. This is a most painful experience for the neophyte and it is apt, in some cases, to produce strong reactions and cause serious troubles. The lower self reawakens and asserts itself with renewed force. All the rocks and rubbish which had been covered and concealed by the high tide emerge again. The man whose moral conscience has become more refined and exacting, whose thirst for perfection has become more intense, judges with greater severity and condemns with a new vehemence his personality and he is apt to nurture the false belief of having fallen lower than before. It sometimes happens that some lower propensities and impulses which had been lying dormant in the subconscious are vitalised by the inrush of higher energy, or stirred into a fury of opposition by the spiritual consecration of the awakened soul, which is a challenge and a menace to them. (Assagioli 1988g. 103.)

Assagioli's statement on "the lower self [*that*] reawakens and asserts itself with renewed force" can easily be applied to the emergence of the three beasts. Right at the moment when Dante "finds himself", the beasts arrive. Immediately after when he finds himself in a *selva oscura*, he sees the sunlit summit. Seems that everything happens in one huge, divine moment, free of human, chronological time. So said that, how can we interpret the concept of time in the case of Dante's inner experience?

According to Vacchelli, the time of the Comedy is "the time of the soul":

The Comedy is (and not only) a super-tale, a super-myth. Time is – from the very beginning – the time of the soul, even if in Dante everything is intersected, multi-level and polysemic: even where soul-time kairos seems to prevail, under the surface history-time chronos rules, and vice versa. We, moderns, have already lost this radical relationality. But Dante sees it and experiences it in reality and reproduces it in his work, which serves as a *speculum* to see reality, or maybe it is better to say it is a micro-reality, a microcosmos. (Vacchelli 2018. 28.)

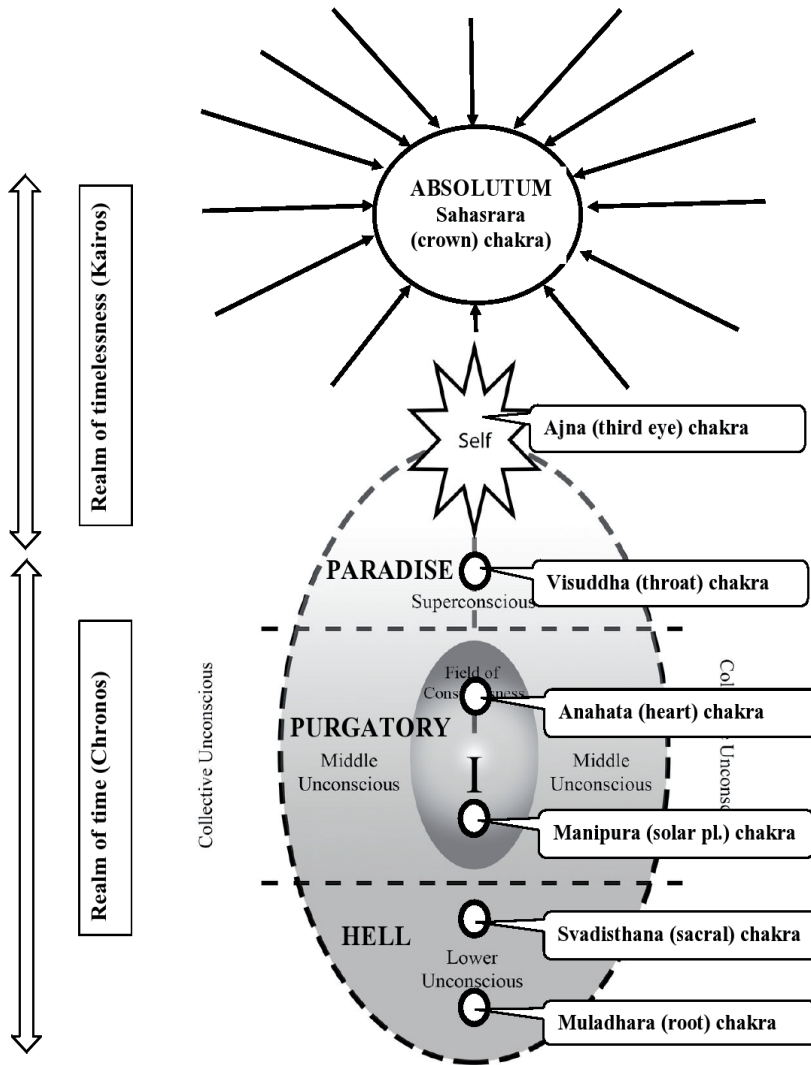


Figure 2.

Assagioli's model of the human psyche completed with the absolute centre, the seven chakras, the realms of time and timelessness, and the three stages of Dante's inner journey in the Comedy.

The figure shows that all the individuals, represented by converging arrows, are developing towards the absolute centre (the Absolutum, the seventh chakra). Of the many, only one individual's spiritual growth axis is indicated combining Assagioli's "egg diagram" with the chakra system.

That reflects the macro-reality, the macrocosm. Although Dante, in his gigantic vision, seemingly walks in an outer world, in the summary of the then macrocosm, we agree with most interpretations that he makes his journey inside his psyche, in his microcosm. All the men represented in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise are tendencies, inclinations, or attitudes that manifest in humans in very different measures. From a certain point of view, they are all subpersonalities of Dante and all of us, as Assagioli highlights it:

man is a microcosm: it contains the various forces of the universe, from the lowly to the sublime, and it would be a mistake to focus only on the bad as we sincerely find and understand our lowly components, we must treat our virtues with the same sincerity. They need to be accounted for, they need to be recognized: we need to know what guidelines, incentives, and tasks are driving us toward further improvement. (Assagioli [without date]. 5.)

From a different point of view, as opposed to Freud's psychology and the medieval Christian attitude concerning sins, mainly focus on hidden sins, on inner tendencies or instincts of which one has to be ashamed of, for this Assagioli calls the attention also to the "good guys", the subpersonalities that help us to achieve self-realization. The goal of personal psychosynthesis, as already mentioned, is the harmonization, the integrating synthesis of all of our subpersonalities. From this integrated state, transpersonal psychosynthesis can be developed. Harmonization is not an easy job as we can see it also in the outstanding case of a Dante... Papini described Dante's microcosm as the synthesis of several, sometimes even contrasting parts:

In him there is everything: the wisdom of the East, the Greek *logos*, the Christian *caritas*, the Roman *civilitas*. He venerates Aristotle and follows St. Thomas, but he does not hesitate to levy upon the Arabians and the Jews. He feeds upon the Old and New Testaments, but does not scorn to make use of Moslem tradition. (Papini 1935. 28.)

And as a generalization of the idea, he precisely gives a literary description of personal psychosynthesis:³⁰

Real contradictions are found more often in mediocre minds, and that on the case of the great we ought to take account of the vastness of soul and intellect which gathers within itself opinions and tendencies apparently contradictory, but actually concurrent and complementary. In little minds, contrasting ideas live together with difficulty and must of necessity come to blows; and in the outcome remain definitely

³⁰ Assagioli himself, after having found in *Dante vivo* these sentences, confirmed that they are authentic reflections of personal psychosynthesis.

contradictory. But in vigorous minds, more active and more ample, contrasting ideas work together to produce a richer vision; and, in achieving harmonious results, arrive at a higher synthesis which annuls, while justifies, their oppositions. (Papini 1935. 27.)

We find very similar thoughts in Vacchelli's text as he sees Dante as the unity of different parts:

Do not search for one unique idea in Dante, more for the harmony and integration of the parts. Furthermore, there is no need to assume that this harmony is perfect and it does not show sometimes sutures and some juxtapositions. Certain intuitions may not be developed sufficiently in their consequences. Even though they are sons of the same time, they transcend it in depths and "pierce" it vertically. Every life and every epoch has its kairos. (Vacchelli 2014. 210.)

Dante's moment of Kairos has yet arrived: when he finds himself in the *selva oscura*, his spiritual awakening happens. As he realizes the importance of the moment, it becomes a point of no return. The story begins... The parts of his psyche gather around his conscious "I" and form one unified cosmos. In that very minute, in that minute of intuition, in that moment of Kairos, Dante steps out of chronological time and enters in "the time of soul". According to Manescalchi, the whole work is built upon this crucial intuitional moment, when Dante finds himself in desperation, admits it and calls for help, and help arrives in the figure of Virgil sent by divine love:

Every work of art is based upon one unique principle, a primary intuition that branches out for the whole work, joining to and absorbing in itself all of its parts. (Manescalchi 2007. 97.)

For Manescalchi the unifying principle is exactly this divine love that reaches its manifestation in the mystical body of the Catholic (thus "universal") Church. Surely here we are not talking about the official institution of the Church with all its historical failures and sins, but the church based on Christ's Verb:

As a synthesis, we can say that the organizing principle of the Comedy is love donated for us by God. ("Neither Creator nor a creature ever, / Son," he began, "was destitute of love / Natural or spiritual; and thou knowest it" (*Purg.* XVII. 91–93). When we cultivate and grow it, we rise towards the zenith and create an increasing number of more and more solid bonds of love with God and with other humans till the point of our merge in one unique body, the mystical body of the triumphant Church, in which "Nay, 'tis essential to this blest existence / To keep itself within the will divine, / Whereby our very wishes are made one" (*Par.* III. 79–81). (*Ibid.* 100–101.)

The two summits may represent the already identified two entities: the she-wolf, the love for ourselves that progressively rules out everything that does not belong to the self till the point of total loneliness, the absolute aphasia; and the Virgin, in her, love has reached its zenith and she assimilates all the spirits in the mystical body of the glorious church. The different stages along the axis correspond, in an arbitrarily fine gradation to the stage that the individual souls have reached whether in their process of integration into the mystical body or in the disidentification from the body of its associated life, till the most radical atomism of the habitants of the ice of the frozen Cocytus, including demons that – at that level – do not have any connection between them. (*Ibid.* 104.)

In summation, the two poles of this axis are the absolute unity, the superior synthesis of the many at the highest, and on the opposite side the absolute isolation of the individual at the lowest. The “El Camino” is long and full of difficulties and one can never know whether he will really arrive at “Santiago de Compostella” or not. We are all on the rugged road, with different backpacks, different mates, different physical and psychological makings... and because of this, the steps upwards of the spiritual growth’s axis can be very little ones or even quite huge ones. Mathematically speaking, the axis can be divided into arbitrarily small line segments till the last unit of geometry, the one single point. In our context, a point means stagnation. Most people proceed slowly, even unconsciously, while living life’s experience in their Chronos.

As Leoncini highlights it³¹, Assagioli finds human time, so chronological (sequential or linear) time, very important to achieve psychological and spiritual goals, that is to realize personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis. This slow and often much suffered personal development is a typical characteristic of ascendant psychosynthesis (from human to divine). Assagioli wishes to ensure chronological time for his patients enough to realise their spiritual growth, accompanies them even from a serious neurotic illness to recover psychological health (original meaning of the term “psychosynthesis”). In other words, he helps them through the healing progress from a depressive state or existential crisis of the *selva oscura*, via the purification process of Purgatory, to the psychological-spiritual self-realization. Step by step, meeting after meeting, respecting the individual pace of the patient, understanding and accepting him, and gradually guiding him in Chronos-time. This is the general case, but also exists another one, the case of Saint Paul, Dante, the mystic Master Eckhart, and many other Christian saints, the wise men of the oriental traditions, and numerous unknown pilgrims who reached the summit silently and humbly: they were able to make a huge or even gigantic step upwards, in certain cases, they even overstepped the whole remaining part of the axis and arrived at the other pole, which represents

³¹ Cf. Leoncini 2021 (in print).

the union-experience with God. Now, this huge step, this Chronos-independent very minute is Kairos: the time of not-time, when, as Papini said, “time is reduced to eternity”. It is the time of the Penitent Thief on the right side of the cross of Jesus. He is deeply touched by the intuited sinlessness of Christ next to him. He lets his ego go, admits (and thus transcends) his sins. And this is when Christ’s dissolution and upliftment comes:

But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. “Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise. (Luke 23,40-43.)

It is the time of Milarepa, the so much-cited and invoked minute of “illumination”, of divine understanding when the veil falls, and one sees the reality instead of its reflection. This is what can be seen in *Figure 2*: at the level of the fifth chakra, the person can already directly observe reality instead of its manifestations. As Saint Paul says:

For now, we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (1 Cor. 13,12)

But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3,16-18)

Finally let’s read in Purgatory Dante’s beautiful description of this Kairos moment when the individual is absolved of his sins (or his karma) by “the fire of love”, by divine forgiveness:

For top of judgment doth not vail itself,
Because the fire of love fulfils at once
What he must satisfy who here installs him.

And there, where I affirmed that proposition,
Defect was not amended by a prayer,
Because the prayer from God was separate.
(*Purg.* VI. 37–42.)

Other than religious traditions and related sciences, it is literature that gets closest to the description of transpersonal experiences. Psychology, from this point

of view, is just an indirect method and not a direct source. Countless literary pieces sang human feelings, psychological sensations experienced while “transcending” themselves. In Mathematics when dealing with sequences or functions we often use the concept of “limit” which is a given, prescribed number to which the sequence or function tends. Their value can be sufficiently close to, but never exactly equal to the given limit. This is what happens to poetry or in psychology to transpersonal psychology. Generally speaking “poetry is dancing around the unutterable”³² – as a famous Hungarian actor, Zoltán Latinovits, said once. Kenneth Sorensen turns to Assagioli to describe this phenomenon by the metaphor of the sun:

The Transpersonal Self creates the Superconscious (1974, p. 119) with all its creative processes of light, beauty, and love. The soul is a static centre of pure being and self-awareness whose energies radiate, in the same way as the sun’s do, a comparison Assagioli often makes. We see the sun’s rays but not its stable core. (Sorensen 2016. 26.)

Dante became the one in every thousand years who could glow in the “fire of the unutterable” during his earthly life: “One millennium sets and one millennium rises, / Till a mortal’s dream into that world will stray, / Till the unbelieving person recognizes / That mist-hidden Godhead to which he must pray”³³ – as János Arany wrote in his poem *Dante*. So Dante did what was thought to be impossible: he reached the limit, even if temporarily! He arrived at the other pole, in religious terms and according to Manescalchi, to the mystical union with the holy body of the church of God, he lived the alchemical marriage, the most powerful union of duality, the most perfect conjunction:

And I remember that I was more bold
On this account to bear, so that I joined
My aspect with the Glory Infinite.
O grace abundant, by which I presumed
To fix my sight upon the Light Eternal,
So that the seeing I consumed therein!
(*Par.* XXXIII. 79–84.)

It is the Kairos of Dante’s life, according to Vacchelli. Kairos is the very second of crystallization. As it is known, crystallization takes place from a solution suddenly, when the necessary conditions for supersaturation supervene.

³² Latinovits 1978. 69.

³³ Translated by David Hill. In Prickett 2010. 711. Also in Gyapay 2017. 364–365. Original poem: János Arany: *Dante*. In Arany 1978. 184.

Similarly, the individuals also have to be prepared for such an extraordinary event, the disciple has to be ready to take in, to internalize the teaching of the master. Only this way can he step out from Chronological time and enter Kairos-time, can he accept descending psychosynthesis or moving forward in his ascendant psychosynthesis. In his “Esercizi Danteschi” (*Dante exercises*) Assagioli warns us:

About the exercise based on the Divine Comedy, it is important to know that it is suggested only to subjects that have sufficient cultural preparation and spiritual aspiration. (Assagioli 1973c. 175.)

For Vacchelli, divine grace is already present when Dante awakes and his eyes open up to see his condition. Similarly, Assagioli sees in that crucial moment a quick synthesis of the whole spiritual pilgrimage of Dante in which fear and blessing are co-present. They include and not exclude each other:

Dante, “in the middle of the journey of his life” finds himself, without knowing how, in a “forest savage, rough, and stern / Which in the very thought renews the fear” (*Inf.* I. 5-6); but it is precisely in that dark forest that he finds a good. In fact, wandering in that forest he reaches to the foot of a hill; then he looks up and sees that it is illuminated by the sun. In this simple allegory, everything concerning the first stages of spiritual development is symbolized in a quick synthesis. (Assagioli 1988e. 130.)

Furthermore, Assagioli says:

The wilderness represents not only – as commentators generally say – the vicious life of ordinary man, but also, and above all, the special state of discomfort, acute suffering, and inner darkness that usually precede the awakening of the soul. [...] In fact, the discovery of the sunlit hill and the elevation of the gaze clearly indicate the decisive moment in the awakening of the soul. Then fear subsides in the lake of the heart and, after a little rest, he begins to climb the slopes of the hill. This evidently symbolizes the phase that follows the awakening of the soul. (*Ibid.* 131.)

While Dante is in this grave danger, Virgil appears to him and Dante immediately invokes him humbly, asking for help. Thus the soul, after having ascertained by painful experience the difficulties of life, after having suffered the first bitter defeats, loses its boldness and its presumption recognizes its own weakness and impotence, acquires, in short, the true humility and therefore puts itself in the condition of being able to be helped. And as soon as it has been done, help comes. This is a great and consoling law of the life of the Spirit [...] The superior help is always ready, it never fails: only in us are the obstacles that keep it away from us. We don't know, we don't want to ask it right. (*Ibid.* 132.)

Virgil, the reason and the power of superior spiritual discrimination inherent in man, recognized that the still impure soul cannot face and overcome the beasts and climb directly to the radiant summit; therefore, to Dante's request for help he says: "It is convenient for you to take another trip. (Assagioli 1988e. 136.)

And Dante, at this point, becomes a disciple and starts to follow his master.

In the first two songs of his divine poem, Dante represents the human soul at the beginning of the spiritual path - that is, he represents each of us. And each of us is given - if we willingly want it - to walk the path he has traveled, to follow him along the various stages of his great pilgrimage, to climb with him to the sublime spheres of Light and Love. (*Ibid.* 136-137.)

What happens during Dante's Kairos when he "si ritrovò" (*found himself*) and after the necessary descent to the underworld of his subconscious will ascend to the luminous summit? He lived with his whole existence a magnificent transpersonal experience. What happened can be described also without religious terms as one of Assagioli's patients told his personal story:

I remember well that night, almost the exact moment, at the top of the hill where my soul opened, so to speak, into infinity, and the two worlds, inner and outer, fused into a single unit. Depth called depth; to the depth opened by my struggle was the immeasurable depth of the outer universe beyond the celestial bodies, which truly responded. (Assagioli 1988f. 124.)

After his "finding himself", his spiritual awakening, Dante accepts to follow his master and he leaves Chronological time to enter Kairos-time, the "time of the soul", as Vacchelli calls it. Sándor Weöres calls it "inside time" and makes the following distinction between Chronos and Kairos, or, as he calls them, outside and inside time:

You experience a variety of days and seasons: this is the *outside time* that you can measure with the steady movement of the clock.

You experience the alternation of the disembodied contents of your personality: this is the *inner time* for which you have no measure. (Weöres 1975. 675.)

The quotation expresses exactly what happens to Dante: he discovers the "disembodied contents" of his personality, his subpersonalities, and all of his microcosm.

The first step is to discover the dark side of his soul, the inferior unconscious. Entering Hell he enters the world of eternal time. This characteristic of Hell is explicitly expressed by Dante when he describes the gate of Hell:

Justice incited my sublime Creator;
 Created me divine Omnipotence,
 The highest Wisdom and the primal Love.

Before me there were no created things,
 Only eterne, and I eternal last.
 All hope abandon, ye who enter in!”

These words in sombre colour I beheld
 Written upon the summit of a gate;
 Whence I: “Their sense is, Master, hard to me!”

And he to me, as one experienced:
 “Here all suspicion needs must be abandoned,
 All cowardice must needs be here extinct.
 (*Inf.* III. 4–15.)

In Purgatory Dante describes his own psychological state of *trans* or *flow*. Nothing enters from the outside world, nothing disturbs his Kairos, no tick-tack of chronological time, no sounds, no senses, “time passes on, and we perceive it not” (*Purg.* IV. 9):

And hence, whenever aught is heard or seen
 Which keeps the soul intently bent upon it,
 Time passes on, and we perceive it not,

Because one faculty is that which listens,
 And other that which the soul keeps entire;
 This is as if in bonds, and that is free.
 (*Purg.* IV. 7–12.)

and

O thou, Imagination, that dost steal us
 So from without sometimes, that man perceives not,
 Although around may sound a thousand trumpets,

Who moveth thee, if sense impel thee not?
 Moves thee a light, which in the heaven takes form,
 By self, or by a will that downward guides it.

Of her impiety, who changed her form
 Into the bird that most delights in singing,
 In my imagining appeared the trace;

And hereupon my mind was so withdrawn
 Within itself, that from without there came
 Nothing that then might be received by it.
 (*Purg.* XVII. 13–24.)

To exemplify this exit from the physical time-space world and enter the inner one, I cite Giovanni Carmassi, master of piano, who perfectly catches the “Kairosness” of music-experience:

It is always the music that creates a particular suggestion, so you no longer think about the technical elements of the performance, or perhaps the gas bill that expires the next day. When the miracle happens, however, thought stops, and time no longer passes according to the rhythm of the clock. (Carmassi–Ferrucci 2013. 166.)

What Carmassi asserts concerning music, is also true to poetry: There is no music without time, and poetry is a kind of music. Starting from Antiquity, music, and poetry have always been intertwined: poems were mainly sung and frequently also accompanied on lyre, lute, or guitar. Be mentioned here as examples only the medieval troubadours in South Europe, and the Welsh bards³⁴ in the North. Poems – especially rhyming poetry, like the Comedy, that also have a rhythm in the words – share some salient temporal properties with music. If one is listening to a poem or reading it aloud, the musical instrument is the human voice. If one is reading a poem silently, the instrument is the person’s inner hearing.

Apart from the grandiose spiritual content of the Comedy, which is the topic of this paper, also its highly inspiring form is to be mentioned and appreciated. The poem also works as highly inspiring music, the Terza Rima (or “chained”) rhyme scheme is especially suitable to picture the transition from Chronos to Kairos. The highly inspired content and the brilliant artistic form together make the Comedy a masterpiece.

Time cannot be Chronos and Kairos at the same “time”. The same is true for our double human nature: or we live in the outer world, or we enter in ourselves and leave outside Chronos. When the inner journey starts (for Dante also), the individual enters Kairos.

³⁴ The Welsh word “cerdd” has a double meaning of both „music” and „verse”.

What is Dante looking for? Actually, at this point, he does not know yet, but he knows that has to finish what he has started, it is an inner need, an inner urge that cannot be oppressed.

IV. DIVINE COMEDY: EXAMPLE OF BOTH DESCENDING AND ASCENDANT PSYCHOSYNTHESES

Assagioli has repeatedly expressed his concern that “religion” is discussed in an overly intellectual and abstract form (and perhaps even from a metaphysical point of view). In his opinion, the study of religious experiences, such as the description of their essential part and the provoked psychological mechanisms are completely relegated to the background. The approach lacks a careful study of the states of consciousness experienced during the religious experience, and it is precisely to this end that literature, which testifies countless religious or other types of transpersonal experiences from various ages, places, and in various ways, will be of great help. Although the psychological characteristics of the experiences of Eastern and Western mystics are the same, Assagioli points out that the paths are different: Christians regard the mystical experience as a special gift of God’s grace, while the Orientals also use their own power through various willful and conscious internal practices to elevate their soul to the higher spheres.

We note that for Assagioli, these mystical experiences (“peak experiences”) were important in that they represented a higher-than-average state of consciousness, more precisely the contact with the upper unconscious.

The unexpected conversion of St. Paul is a fine example of far-reaching, descending psychosynthesis, while the enlightenment of Gautama Buddha is the fruit of a long, persistent search, meditation, and retreat, and thus of conscious action, and thus a good example of ascendant psychosynthesis.

Turning back to literature, the inner experience described by Dante in the Comedy is not the result of a pre-planned, conscious upward pursuit. The initiative came from above, hence it can be called *descending psychosynthesis*. What happens to the poet when divine energies flow in his soul? Arany will answer us:

...the poet (wretched rascal’s label!)
Trembling, drops his worthless laurels to the sod;
And, as if before a church’s altar table,
Prayerful, he kneels earthward, for he senses God.³⁵

³⁵ Translated by David Hill. In Prickett 2010. 711. Also in Gyapay 2017. 364–365. Original poem: János Arany: *Dante*. In Arany 1978. 184.

Dante moves on, and instead of “sensing God”, in the end, he will also “see” God, he will admire the Empyrean. His description suits completely the psychological sensations listed by Assagioli when talking about the superconscious experiences (citing himself Dante):

It is then that the normally superconscious region, or sphere, is reached in full consciousness. At this stage, one may experience the various psychospiritual qualities and activities which have play in the superconscious. They are not something abstract, vague, and evanescent, as those who are unfamiliar with them might think. They are rather something living, intense, varied, and dynamic, which are perceived as more real than ordinary experiences, both inner and external. The principal characteristics of this stage are as follows:

1. A perception of light, an illumination, both in a general sense and as light on problems and situations which are thereby rendered comprehensible and whose significance is revealed.
2. A feeling of peace, a peace independent of any external circumstance or inner state.
3. A feeling of joy, of happiness, the state of happiness so well expressed by Dante in the words:

*“O Joy, ineffable gladness,
O Inner life of love and peace,
Full of richness untainted by avidity.”*

4. A feeling of harmony and beauty.
5. A feeling of power, of the power of the spirit.
6. A sense of magnitude, of boundlessness, of universality, of the eternal.

All these qualities interpenetrate one another. Dante pictures their inseparability in his admirable tercet:

*“Intellectual light full of love,
Love of truth overflowing with joy,
Joy which transcends every sweetness.”*

Naturally, there can be no permanence in such a lofty contemplative experience; but even in departure, it leaves behind effects and changes, often profound, in the ordinary personality. Among other things, it fosters a gradual stabilization of the centre of personal consciousness and little by little raises the area of normal consciousness to higher levels.³⁶

Furthermore:

Numerous poets have had and attempted to express these enlightenment experiences. The greatest of them is Dante: Dante’s “Paradise” is full of expressions of

³⁶ Assagioli 1988b, 34; Assagioli 1976.

light. At the beginning of the Canticle, he clearly states that he has had the ineffable experience of the highest Light, the one that shines in the highest 'heaven', closest to the Supreme Reality, God.³⁷

Since transpersonal experiences are, by their nature, temporary, Dante cannot stay in the divine presence forever. He has to go back to his "normal, everyday" life. The question is, how he continues it.

In the following, I will attempt to show that the Comedy is also ascendant, and moreover, it is ascendant in two different ways. First, it is ascendant as Dante leads himself to a higher spiritual level consciously by writing the Work. Secondly, the Work itself helps many individuals (even today) to accomplish personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis. Nicely, the two are integrated into each other, not in several other cases, when the writing of a literary piece caused catharsis and by it healing to its creator, on the other hand, was harmful to a huge number of readers by dragging them into his problems. For Assagioli, an instructive example for this case is Goethe's *The sorrows of young Werther*.

Let's consider first Dante's ascendant psychosynthesis.

Individuals that reached spiritual peaks of their inner landscape, later on, when they find themselves in the plain, in the lowland again, often feel the desire to relive the experience that cannot ever be forgotten. They are eager to experience it again, and this happens to

Dante. First of all, with all the fresh, miraculous, and eye-opener experiences in his mind, he wishes to tell the world his dramatic and elevating journey, with all its details. He prays to have the power to do so in Paradise:

³⁷ The glory of Him who moveth everything
Doth penetrate the universe, and shine
In one part more and in another less.

Within that heaven which most his light receives
Was I, and things beheld which to repeat
Nor knows, nor can, who from above descends;

Because in drawing near to its desire
Our intellect ingulphs itself so far,
That after it the memory cannot go

(*Par.* I. 1–9.)

The manifestation of light assumes – in the consciousness of those who perceive it – different aspects. More precisely, different aspects prevail in it, since they are not separate but interpenetrate and merge in various ways according to individual differences. Sometimes, the perception of beauty prevails, for example in Tagore; in others, the cognitive aspect do, as in Plotinus and Eckhart. In Christian and even in Eastern mystics, these aspects are combined with feelings of love and adoration. In others, enlightenment above all arouses a sense of joy, which can lead to ecstatic bliss. But, I repeat, it is a question of the prevalence of one or the other of these aspects: in general, they are all present to some extent. Their fusion was expressed in an admirable way by Dante. (Assagioli 1988c. 60.)

O splendour of God! by means of which I saw
 The lofty triumph of the realm veracious,
 Give me the power to say how it I saw!

There is a light above, which visible
 Makes the Creator unto every creature,
 Who only in beholding Him has peace.
 (*Par.* XXX. 97–102.)

Assagioli highlights this “inner need to share” in the third phase of spiritual growth:

The former personality, with its sharp angles and disagreeable traits, seems to have vanished, and a new loving and lovable individual smiles at us and the whole world, full of eagerness to please and to Serve, and to share his newly acquired spiritual riches, the abundance of which seems almost too much for him to contain. (Assagioli 1988d. 103.)

Unlike St. Paul, Dante, after his depressing, gigantic vision of God, returns to a similar continuation of his life so far. An overwhelming, descending transpersonal experience takes place with it, but the full and lasting transpersonal psychosynthesis is not yet realized: Dante is about to fall back into the horizontal dimension, from where he will grope nicely again in the vertical direction.

The pilgrim, who is in Paradise in his physical body and will turn back to earth, knows that he is not immune to temptations, and so “*Let thy [Maria’s] protection conquer human movements*” [...] Maria wins against the she-wolf, but it is not a definitive victory. Dante has to go back into his human world and will continue the fight against her in his human conditions, so he prays: “*Let thy protection conquer human movements*”. (Manescalchi 2007. 98)

Assagioli makes another clear statement that refers to Dante’s ascendant psychosynthesis process:

In general, the great artists, the great writers and poets have then worked on the material that surfaced or descended in their consciousness, elaborating it consciously. A typical example is that of Dante. He, replying to Bonagiunta, in the Divine Comedy, clearly said that he was inspired:
 And I to him: “One am I, who, whenever
 Love doth inspire me, note, and in that measure
 Which he within me dictates, singing go.”
 (*Pur.* XXIV. 52–54) (Assagioli 1988j. 38–39.)

Ferenc Baranyi's poem, *Prologue* (which is an introductory poem to the poem-group entitled *Dante's confession*), illustrates very well the whole process of the creation of the divine work, including also the phenomena and dangers of "ego-bloating":

Ferenc Baranyi: *Prologue*

Halfway through the path of human life
I told what I could say then.
And I still believe what I said then;

although a poet is ordered also by circumstance,
but only until the will radiated on him
shall not generate violent self-belief

I had to descend to the depths of hell,
so that I no longer decimate my inspiration,
and I shall not be frightened if I see disintegrated

my discipline transformed into freedom.
I just simply sang the cosmos,
since it is impossible to tell the whole, the everything.

If I accused while not willing to hurt anyone,
if I was a hero only if allowed to be,
and I just related to myself, just as

my truth relates to the absolute truth:
than all the poems were created in vain,
even if my work is valued.

At the beginning of the journey of "NEW LIFE"
I write down again everything that I already wrote,
to believe my faith for good and all
and to find my savior in the paper.
And you, hear my poem anxiously
and not nodding gently: so it is.

My heart just sings what has already sung,
only with a more undisciplined voice,
and, if necessary, it will even sue itself,
to win everything and lose everything.

(Baranyi 1969)

The fate of St. Paul, as is well-known, did not turn out this way: after the groundbreaking, blinding transpersonal experience, he not only does not continue his previous (Christian persecutor) life but changes radically (“Paul’s turn”). His astonishing encounter with the Self results in him identifying with the Self as far as his human circumstances allow. Hence his famous sentence, “And I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2,20). As I have repeatedly pointed out in the wake of Jung, in Western Christian culture, Christ is the symbol of the Self. Master Eckhart, the great Christian mystic, writes of St. Paul’s experience in a mystical interpretation:

This is what happened to Paul: he could have stayed for a hundred years where he lived the vision of eternal goodness, he would not have returned to his body by that time: he would have completely forgotten about it.

But he returned, hiding back in his physical garment to continue his earthly career, thus giving up the joy of the eternal contemplation of the Absolute. He justifies his action as follows:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (Phil. 1, 21-24.)

Assagioli outlines five phases of spiritual awakening. To get through these phases is a (chronological) time-consuming task for the average person, and the achievement of the goal is not even guaranteed. Man can do one thing, to follow the counsel of Imre Madách, placed in the mouth of God in *The Tragedy of Man*: “O Man, strive on, strive on, have faith; and trust!” (Madách 1963). Phases can take up to one-two decades, and we earthly mortals, like the patients of Assagioli, are not a Dante, a St. Francis, a St. Augustine, or a Milarepa. We could, of course, trust Vacchelli’s words: “Every life [...] has its kairos” (Vacchelli 2014. 210). Dante viewed himself in an ambivalent way: on the one hand, he states in Comedy that “I not Aeneas am, I am not Paul, / Nor I, nor others, think me worthy of it” (*Inf.* II. 32–33), also Vacchelli draws attention to this. On the other hand, as Brockman states in his psychoanalytical exploration of the Comedy, “Dante pridefully claimed his spiritual imagined trip was far superior to the one by St. Paul” (Brockman 2017. 2).

The second case of ascendant psychosynthesis regarding the Comedy is when readers are helped to reach their own transpersonal psychosynthesis by the “report” of Dante. Dante was able to translate the world of symbols, the supreme experience of the transpersonal, into “human” language. He dances so close around the fire that he almost ignites, and the reader himself feels the radiant heat of the flames.

Even more valuable are personal relations with someone who has himself explored these heights. In this category are the genuine spiritual teachers: the false claims of many to be spiritual teachers necessitate the emphasis on the word genuine.

Thus doubly prepared, we can now tackle the ascent itself. Being an ascent and not a flight, it has several stages and halting places. There exist two very instructive and illuminating descriptions of this gradual ascent; one is that of Dante's ascent of the Mount of Purgatory, the subject of the second part of *The Divine Comedy*. Studied from a psychosynthetic and anagogic point of view, it is even today a source of much relevant instruction, since the obstacles and difficulties to be overcome are largely the same in both cases. The other is the Ascent of Mount Carmel, described by St. John of the Cross. Despite its specifically ascetic and mystical character, it contains real treasures of psychological knowledge and some direction which, expressed in modern language and abstracted from its period frame, could prove very instructive. (Assagioli 1988b.)

"Dante's ascent of the Mount of Purgatory" is a guide of conscious spiritual and moral growth for all of us. The *Divine Comedy* is able to function as a useful and practical tool for its readers to accomplish ascendant psychosynthesis. Assagioli came into truly personal contact with the chapter of Paradise when he was imprisoned for a month in fascism for his Jewish origins and pacifist manifestations in 1940. It is no coincidence that he developed a series of therapeutic exercises based on the work called (and already mentioned) "Dante-exercises".³⁸ Assagioli's point was to create a practical exercise based on the Comedy aiming at fostering the ascendant psychosynthesis for ordinary people living in the ordinary Chronos world.

One realization of these exercises is described in *Rivista della Psicosintesi*. In the article Laura Maninchedda explains Assagioli's reasons to think of the Comedy as a tool to reach personal development:

He recommends the exercise of the Divine Comedy as a useful stimulus to retrace the stages of one's life and inner itinerary, precisely because of the universal value of Dante's journey, which symbolically represents that of all humanity. (Maninchedda 2012. 17.)

Further on she makes a summary of her reading experience as follows:

The best way to approach Dante seemed to me to listen to the poem and try to grasp the resonances and emotions it arouses within us. In the reading we tried to make him our contemporary, avoiding arbitrarily updating him, indeed ignoring the many aspects of his thought and his outdated conceptions of the world, that is, paying at-

³⁸ Assagioli 1973c. 174–175.

tention above all to what makes each of us feel close to Ugolino or Francesca, that is to his greatness as a poet. On the other hand, themes such as the passionate aspiration for justice, moral indignation, commitment to the search for truth, living and moving participation in the feelings of humanity represented in its most varied aspects, but always seen concerning their existential task, they do not need explanations, they are very clear and present even in today's readers, who find in the Divine Comedy a very rich range of situations and experiences that recall their own ones. In addition to the infinite possibilities of comparison and resonance with spiritual, moral, passionate, emotional contents, a careful reading can focus on the many main themes of the poem that address the essential questions for every man who wants to live consciously, and which are at the basis of all personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis. (*Ibid.* 18.)

Maninchedda's vision is very close to Vacchelli's: to read Dante (not as a critic or a literate, but as one individual, as "me") it is important not only to try to understand its plural symbolism³⁹, but also to "feel" his poetry, to let it enter and form, or even transform me. As the Hungarian writer, Géza Gárdonyi wrote: "An inspired piece of literature works because its vibration creates vibration in the hearts" (Gárdonyi 1974. 75) and "the true produces greater vibration" (*Ibid.* 83). Now, the Divine Comedy can be considered a true experience, a very intimate and personal, but for Dante a true and real experience. Precisely for this, it affects and "resonates", quite independently of the cultural background of the reader. As Vacchelli highlights:

Dante is a sublime poet, but also a popular one (Contini). In Tuscany illiterate peasants know entire songs by heart. I saw and felt it with my own eyes. He is a learned poet, but he has the greatness of absolute geniuses to speak even to the simple, the humble. [...] What does this mean? That Dante wants to speak to everyone. (Vacchelli 2012. 74.)

The Divine Comedy works in different levels of understanding, cultural background, or material knowledge, in different stages of psychological and spiritual growth. It works as a guide to self-realization, even if the process is not a conscious development. Similarly to the Bible, the Tao-Te-King, or other spiritual materials, it offers new and new guidelines as the reader goes ahead in his dialectic self-development promoting the realization of his personal, inter-personal and transpersonal psychosynthesis.

³⁹ The four levels of interpretations of the symbolism of Dante are: literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical. Cf. Assagioli 1973b. 174.

V. CONCLUSION

The interpretation of the Comedy from a psychosynthesis view is a rather new approach, several excellent papers have been recently published on that. This paper also accepts this approach as a general frame, but specifically focuses on the problematics of time as perceived by Dante. Till the “midway” of his life journey, Dante – as the vast majority of all the people – lived in the normal, ordinary sequential time, measurable by measuring instruments (like metronomes, clocks, watches, etc.). This kind of ordinary time is called Chronos (the human time). Then, however, at this “midway”, suddenly something unforeseen happened to him: he found himself in the middle of a *selva oscura*, and simultaneously he found also himself out of time. This extraordinary, numinous, and “timeless time”, that cannot be measured, is called Kairos (the divine time). This overwhelming and shocking out-of-time Kairos experience helped him to an unusual ascent of his consciousness, a touch of the awakening, providing him with a true, but painful insight about his destiny: he had to realize that “the straightforward pathway had been lost” and therefore he had to take a longer and more troublesome route. A descending psychosynthesis (initiated from divine to human) happened to him in Kairos –although temporarily – in which Chronos had no role at all. Finally, looking out from the Comedy, we can identify an ascendant psychosynthesis (initiated from human to divine) too. After his decisive transpersonal experiences gained in Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, Dante turns back to live again his ordinary human life. But after his experiences, which he can never forget, this life already cannot be the same as before: he then desires to receive more of the light of Paradise, he is longing for being “blessed”. Dante – already not as a pilgrim – is slowly, advancing step-by-step in Chronos, begins his ascendant psychosynthesis. Writing The Divine Comedy is not only a help for himself, the psychological elaboration of his experience, but also a useful tool for those who are to make the first steps towards self-realization, for those who dare to accept the invitation to step out of Chronos and enter Kairos.

REFERENCES

- Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. <https://antilogicalism.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/divine-comedy.pdf> (23/03/2021).
- APA *Dictionary of Psychology* 2015. Edited by Gary R. VandenBos. Washington, D.C., American Psychological Association.
- Arany, János 1852/2010. Dante. Translated by David Hill. In Stephen Prickett (ed.) *European Romanticism: A Reader*. London – New York, Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Arany, János: *Dante*. In *Arany János összes költeményei I.* Budapest, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó. 1978. 184.
- Assagioli, Roberto 1952. *Contributi della psicologia ai retti rapporti umani*. Firenze, Archivio Assagioli. 15238 Box. 51.

- Assagioli, Roberto 1971. *Psychosynthesis: A Collection of Basic Writings* (An Esalen Book). New York, The Viking Press.
- Assagioli, Roberto 1973a. *Principi e metodi della psicosintesi terapeutica*. Roma, Casa Editrice Astrolabio.
- Assagioli, Roberto 1973b. *Introduzione alla psicosintesi transpersonale – Esercizio sulla Divina Commedia di Dante*. In Assagioli 1973a.
- Assagioli, Roberto 1973c. *Esercizio sulla Divina Commedia di Dante*. In Assagioli 1973a.
- Assagioli, Roberto, 1976. Part One. Transpersonal Inspiration. *Psychosynthesis Research Foundation* (reprint). 36.
- Assagioli, Roberto 1988a. *Lo sviluppo transpersonale*. Roma, Casa Editrice Astrolabio.
- Assagioli, Roberto 1988b. *Alpinismo psicologico*. In Assagioli 1988a. In English: Roberto *Psychological Mountain-Climbing and Meditation*, 2017.
<https://kennethsorensen.dk/en/superconscious-mountain-climbing/> (20/03/2021).
- Assagioli, Roberto 1988c. *L'ispirazione transpersonale*. In Assagioli 1988a.
- Assagioli, Roberto 1988d. *Sviluppo spirituale e disturbi neuro-psichici*. In Assagioli 1988a. In English:
https://www.kadermo.fi/images/pdf/SPIRITUAL_DEVELOPMENT_AND_NERVOUS_DISEASESPart-I_Assagioli_.pdf (25/03/2021).
- Assagioli, Roberto 1988e. *La purificazione dell'anima*. In Assagioli 1988a.
- Assagioli, Roberto 1988f. *Il risveglio dell'anima*. In Assagioli 1988a.
- Assagioli, Roberto 1988g. *Sviluppo spirituale e disturbi neuro-psichici*. In Assagioli 1988a. In English:
https://www.kadermo.fi/images/pdf/SPIRITUAL_DEVELOPMENT_AND_NERVOUS_DISEASESPart-I_Assagioli_.pdf
- Assagioli, Roberto 1988h. *La purificazione dell'anima*. In Assagioli 1988a.
- Assagioli, Roberto 1988i. *Psicologia dinamica e psicosintesi*. In Assagioli 1988a.
- Assagioli, Roberto 1988j. *Espansioni della coscienza*. In Assagioli 1988a.
- Assagioli, Roberto 1993. *Transpersonal Development, The Dimension Beyond Psychosynthesis*. London, The Aquarian Press.
http://www.psicosintesi.it/sites/default/files/rivista_1991_04_robertoassagiolifantasiainreinteriore.pdf (22/03/2021).
- Assagioli, Roberto (without date). *Lo studio di sé*. Firenze, Archivio Assagioli, Istituto di Psicosintesi.
- Assagioli, Roberto 2000. *Psychosynthesis. A Collection of Basic Writing*. Amherst MA, The Synthesis Center Inc.
- Assagioli, Roberto 2000/2008/2012. *Psychosynthesis. A Manual of Principles and Techniques*. Amherst MA, The Synthesis Center Inc.
- Assagioli, Roberto 2010. *Psychosynthesis. The Act of Will*. Amherst MA, The Synthesis Center Press.
- Baranyi, Ferenc 1969. Prológus. In *Túl az éjszakán*. English translation by the author.
<https://mek.oszk.hu/02200/02299/02299.pdf> (27/02/2021).
- Berti, Alessandro 1987. *Roberto Assagioli. Profilo biografico degli anni di formazione*. Firenze, Edizione Istituto di Psicosintesi.
- Betts, John 2021. Mid-life and Jungian Analysis.
<https://jungian.ca/mid-life-jungian-analysis/> (20/03/2021).
- Brockman, David Dean 2017. *A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Dante's The Divine Comedy*. New York, Routledge.
- Carmassi, Giovanni – Ferrucci, Piero 2013. *Dal silenzio la musica - Il pianoforte e la costruzione interiore del pezzo musicale*. Pisa, Edizioni ETS.

- Dante, Alighieri *The Divine Comedy*. Translation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.
<https://antilogicalism.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/divine-comedy.pdf> (23/03/2021).
- Gárdonyi, Géza 1974. *Titkosnapló*. Budapest, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó.
- Gyapay, László 2017. Experiencing Divinity. János Arany's Interpretation of Dante. *LEA – Lingue e letterature d'Oriente e d'Occidente*. 6. 364-365.
- Jung, Carl Gustav 1974. *Psychology and Alchemy*. In *Collected Works* vol. 12. (Bollingen Series XX). Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Jung, Carl Gustav 2009. Edited by Sonu Shamdasani. *The Red Book Liber Novus* (Philemon Series). New York – London, W. W. Norton & Company.
- Latinovits, Zoltán 1978. *Verset mondok*. Budapest, Népművelési Propaganda Iroda.
- Leoncini, Paolo 2021. *La "Purificazione dell'anima" – Possibile Nucleo Ermeneutica Della Divina Commedia*. Firenze, Edizioni Istituto di Psicosintesi (in print).
- Lombard, Catherine Ann – den Biesen, Kees 2014. Reading the Divine Comedy from a Psychosynthesis Perspective. *Psychosynthesis Quarterly*. 3/2. 5–11.
- Lombard, Catherine Ann – den Biesen, Kees 2015a. "Into the hidden things he led my way". A Psychosynthesis View of Dante's Inferno. *Psychosynthesis Quarterly*. 4/1. 15–20.
- Lombard, Catherine Ann – den Biesen, Kees 2015b. Reconnecting the Personal Self with the Higher Self: Journeying with Dante – Part I: Facing Our Shadows. *Psychosynthesis Quarterly*. 4/2. 15–21.
- Madách, Imre 1963. *The Tragedy of Man*. Translated by J. C. W. Horne, Budapest, Corvina.
<https://mek.oszk.hu/00900/00915/html/madach15.htm> (25/03/2021).
- Manescalchi, Romano 2007. Ipotesi sulla costruzione della "Divina Commedia" sopra un principio un unico principio, estratto da Campi immaginabili. *Rivista Semestrale*. 36/37. 97–104.
- Maninchedda, Laura 2012. Quando andare all'inferno non fa paura. *Rivista di Psicosintesi*. 17/4. 17.
- Papini, Giovanni 1935. *Dante vivo*. New York, The Macmillan Company.
- Papini, Giovanni 1941. *Mostra personale*. Brescia, Morcelliana.
- Papini, Giovanni 1977. *Rapporto sugli uomini*. Milano, Rusconi.
- Prickett, Stephen (ed.) 2010. *European Romanticism: A Reader*. London – New York, Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Psychology Dictionary Professional Reference.
<https://psychologydictionary.org/> (22.02.2021).
- Sorensen, Kenneth 2016. *The Soul of Psychosynthesis: Seven Core Concepts*. Oslo, Kentaur Forlag.
- Sorensen, Kenneth 2021. *The Developmental Theory of Psychosynthesis*.
<https://kennethsorensen.dk/en/the-developmental-theory-of-psychosynthesis/>
 (23/03/2021).
- Vacchelli, Gianni 2012. *Per un'ermeneutica simbolica – Tra filosofia, religione e poesia*. Macerata, Edizioni Simple.
- Vacchelli, Gianni 2014. *L' "attualità" dell'esperienza di Dante – Un'iniziazione alla Commedia*. Milano, Mimemis Edizioni – Triquetra Cirpit.
- Vacchelli, Gianni 2018. *Dante e la selva oscura*. Bergamo, Lemma Press.
- Weöres Sándor 1975. *Örök pillanat*. Translated into English by Edwin Morgan. In *Egybegyűjtött írások I*. Budapest, Magvető.
https://www.babelmatrix.org/works/hu/We%C3%B6res_S%C3%A1ndor1913/%C3%96r%C3%B6k_pillanat/en/24356-Eternal_moment (15/03/2021).