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Human Desire, Deadly Love

The *Vita Nova* in Gide, Delac, Lacan

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ABSTRACT: The relationship between Dante and psychoanalysis is altogether (to anticipate one of the themes of this essay) a sort of unconsummated love. Both Dante's and Freud's works start from the image of a catabasis, safeguarded and sanctioned by Virgil. As Lacan noticed in his seminar *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (1964): 'n'oublions pas que Freud, quand il commença de remuer ce monde, articula ce vers, qui paraissait lourd d'inquiétantes appréhensions quand il l'a prononcé, et dont il est bien remarquable que la menace soit, après soixante ans d'expériences, complètement oubliée — *Flectere si nequeo superos Acheronta movebo*. Il est remarquable que ce qui s'annonçait comme une ouverture infernale ait été dans la suite aussi remarquablement aseptisé.' The absence of Dante from Freud's reflection is remarkable — not only because psychoanalysis is, as Lacan constantly remarked in the seminar *L'éthique de la psychanalyse* (1959–60), an intrinsically devilish operation, through which the human psyche is returned to the 'prince of this world', Diabolus (I will return to this passage at the end of this essay). In 1990, on the seven hundredth anniversary of the death of Beatrice Portinari, the Italian Dante scholar Guglielmo Gorni bemoaned the fact that 'tra il Dante della *Vita Nuova* — così sollecito di sogni, del resto sottoposti all'altrui giudizio; collezionista di memorie d'infanzia; spesso in flagrante situazione di 'annullamento retroattivo' (Ungeschehenmachen) e, [...]

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1. WHITE MARRIAGE

The relationship between Dante and psychoanalysis is altogether (to anticipate one of the themes of this essay) a sort of unconsummated love. Both Dante's and Freud's works start from the image of a catabasis, safeguarded and sanctioned by Virgil. As Lacan noticed in his seminar *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (1964):

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tra il Dante della *Vita Nuova* – così sollecito di sogni, del resto sottoposti all'altrui giudizio; collezionista di memorie d'infanzia; spesso in flagrante situazione di 'annullamento retroattivo' (*Ungeschehenmachen*) e, sempre in gergo tecnico, di 'abreazione' in situazioni di smacco –, insomma tra un Dante così apertamente confesso *jam a pueris* e il perfetto umanista Sigmund Freud è da deplorare un incontro mancato.³

To fill the gap of such a missed encounter, the naïveté of early twentieth-century interpreters such as the Viennese psychoanalyst Alice Sper-

ber, who was committed to retracing the presence of the absent mother in the figure of Beatrice, is clearly insufficient.⁴ Nor does Lacan, at first glance, help much more. Lacan's knowledge of Dante – and more specifically of the young Dante, whose 'silenzio sulla morte di Beatrice con figura [...] un caso evidente di rimozione', thus legitimating the evocation of the 'paradigma freudiano di censura, che s'allenta parzialmente nel sogno'⁵ – appears altogether amateurish. In particular, it seems that Lacan uncritically subsumes Dante under the more general category of courtly love poetry, a subject that he discusses in *L'éthique de la psychanalyse* in his reassessment of the Freudian notion of sublimation. Dante appears as a 'metaphysical poet' – an overtly Romantic notion whose first theorization can be found in a fragment published by Friedrich Schlegel in the 1798 *Athenäum*⁶ – who transfigures an actual woman into a 'symbolic function':

Dans ce champ poétique, l'objet féminin est vidé de toute substance réelle. C'est cela qui rend si facile dans la suite à un tel poète métaphysique, à un Dante par exemple, de prendre une personne dont on sait qu'elle a bel et bien existé – à savoir la petite Béatrice qu'il avait énamourée quand elle avait neuf ans, et qui est restée au centre de sa chanson depuis *la Vita Nuova* jusqu'à *la Divine Comédie* – et de la faire équivaloir à la philosophie, voire au dernier terme à la science sacrée, et de lui lancer appel en des termes d'autant plus proches du sensuel que ladite personne est plus proche de l'allégorique. On ne parle jamais tant en termes d'amour les plus crus que quand la personne est transformée en une fonction symbolique.⁷

Dante is therefore the ultimate and most perfect accomplishment of courtly love, its *Aufhebung*, as has been said.⁸ Such a reading of the *stilnovo* Dante is peculiar to his French reception since the end of the eighteenth century. Rather than being perceived as the pivotal author of an idealized medieval Italy, as is the case in the British Isles, Dante is interpreted in France as the peak of a cultural process begun in Provence, that of courtly love poetry.⁹ '[L]'Italia vera', as Guido Ceronetti recently summarized in reviving this tradition, 'l'Italia pneumatica e *abscondita*, comincia di là, dai castelli e dalle passioni catare e trovadoriche, in lunga spola segreta con la Toscana, spiritualmente molto più provenzale che etrusca.'¹⁰ The rediscovery of Occitan courtly literature began in the middle of the eighteenth century with the work of Jean-Baptiste La Curne de Sainte Palaye (1697–1781), who published in 1753 his *Mémoires sur l'ancienne chevalerie* and in 1774 the three-volume *Histoire littéraire des troubadours*.¹¹ Sainte Palaye argued

that courtly poetry originated in the encounter between the cultures of southern and northern Europe, agreeing with the dissertation *Of the Origin of Romantic Fiction in Europe* published by his contemporary Thomas Warton (1728–1790) in 1774. These works first introduced some of the most tenacious stereotypes about Provençal cultures and courtly love, actually constructing the myth of medieval Provence as a first experiment in multicultural society.¹²

Between 1816 and 1821, the philologist François Raynouard (1761–1836) published a *Choix des poésies originales des troubadours*.¹³ His connections with Madame de Staël's cultural circle at Coppet determined the construction of the myth of courtly love as a forerunner of Romantic love, reverberating in Staël's *De la littérature* (1800)¹⁴ and in the treatise *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe* published in 1813 by Sismonde de Sismondi (1773–1842).¹⁵ This operation matched the contemporaneous recuperation of the Middle Ages by Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel. In 1818 August Wilhelm Schlegel published his *Observations sur la langue et la littérature provençale*, in which he maintained that there was a continuity between courtly and Romantic love.¹⁶ In 1822, the same thesis was defended and popularized by Stendhal in his *De l'Amour*, largely inspired by Claude Fauriel's lectures in Romance philology at the Sorbonne.¹⁷ In 1811, the connection between Dante and courtly love was made explicit in Pierre-Louis Ginguené's *Historie littéraire d'Italie*. Dante was portrayed there as a medieval Homer, who had created a Christian epopee in which the entire medieval age was synthesized.¹⁸ This topos would also reverberate within the twentieth century in such seminal works as C.S. Lewis's *The Allegory of Love* (1936)¹⁹ and Denis de Rougemont's *L'Amour et l'Occident* (1939).²⁰ Although their conclusions are extremely different, both Lewis and de Rougemont agree in identifying courtly love as the most crucial revolution in European culture and in highlighting its continuity with Italian love poetry of the Middle Ages and with modern attitudes towards love. As Lewis summarizes:

We are tempted to treat 'courtly love' as a mere episode in literary history – an episode that we have finished with [...]. In fact, however, an unmistakable continuity connects the Provençal love song with the love poetry of the later Middle Ages, and thence, through Petrarch and many others, with that of the present day. If the thing at first escapes our notice, this is because we are so familiar with the erotic tradition of modern Europe that we mistake it for something natural and universal and therefore do not

inquire into its origins. [...] French poets, in the eleventh century, discovered or invented, or were the first to express, that romantic species of passion which English poets were still writing about in the nineteenth. They effected a change which has left no corner of our ethics, our imagination, or our daily life untouched, and they erected impassable barriers between us and the classical past or the Oriental present. Compared with this revolution the Renaissance is a mere ripple on the surface of literature.²¹

According to this cultural tradition, Dante is an intermediate (although pre-eminent) step in the history of Western desire, a process begun in medieval Provence and revitalized by European Romanticism.

When Lacan approaches Dante, it is therefore *one* Dante – *this* Dante – that he is approaching. The present essay, in which I analyse three tightly interwoven texts, explores some of the reverberations of this encounter. In 1958, Lacan published in *Critique* an article entitled ‘La jeunesse d’André Gide, ou la lettre et le désir’.²² This text, later included in Lacan’s *Écrits*, was meant to be a review of a biography of the young Gide published in 1956 by Jean Delay, entitled *La jeunesse d’André Gide*.²³ In comparing Gide’s life with his works of youth, Delay notably focused on Gide’s novel of 1891, *Les Cahiers d’André Walter*, the third text on which I focus my inquiry.²⁴ These three texts evoke in various ways the relationship between Dante and Beatrice, using it as a cultural allusion through which specific problems of sexuality (or, better, of the absence of sexuality) are conveyed. This essay aims therefore to be a study in the rhapsodic and subterranean presence of Dante and the *Vita Nova* between the end of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, as well as in the relationship between literature and psychoanalysis through the quartet Dante-Gide-Delay-Lacan.

2. ‘EVERYTHING HAS TAKEN PLACE WITHIN THE SOUL’

The progressive discovery of a space inaccessible to consciousness – later to be called the unconscious – and the equally progressive defamiliarization of the ego ‘in its own house’ as a crucial experience of modernity are two roughly concurrent processes taking place around the nineteenth century, for which psychoanalysis ultimately supplied a specific vocabulary.²⁵ Now, if Romantic structures of metaphor (the Romantic symbol, the revaluation of dreams, the notion of the haunted house of fantasy literature as a metaphorical space for a perimeter of

familiarity haunted by an impalpable otherness²⁶) undoubtedly played a role in causing this turn, my hypothesis is that the nineteenth-century rediscovery of the *Vita Nova*, itself grounded in the same metaphorical premises, is relevant from this perspective. Interest in the *Vita Nova* begins around the 1840s with the discovery of the Bargello portrait allegedly painted by Giotto and reaches its peak in the fin de siècle.²⁷

Indeed, the *Vita Nova* matches nineteenth-century taste in many respects. It could be read as a precursor of the nineteenth-century *Bildungs-* or *Künstlerroman*, in which the Romantic myth of the ‘artist as a young man’ mirrors itself. It evokes an ambiguous dichotomy between body and soul, surrounded by spectres of guilt and unspoken quiverings, in which the tensions of Victorian desire could be framed.²⁸ Most of all – I think – the *Vita Nova* became a literary paradigm because it addressed some crucial challenges, which would later reverberate in psychoanalytic discourse. Through its unclassifiable genre and its absolute novelty, the *Vita Nova* stages a powerful subjectivity, situated on the border between autobiographical recollection and the intentional construction of authorship.²⁹ In stressing the knot joining love, memory, and writing – constellated by dreams, visions, and premonitions and characterized by what could be read as a sort of pre-Symbolist tonality – the *Vita Nova* provided a particularly robust paradigm through which specific nineteenth-century tensions could be framed: the splitting and alienation of the nineteenth-century ego, the artificial and unreliable nature of language, the role of the symbol, and the divided and erratic nature of desire. More specifically, the *Vita Nova* served as an archetype (whether philologically correct or not) of inner autobiography, and it was from this perspective that it was read and rewritten in the nineteenth century and especially in the fin de siècle. Dante Gabriel Rossetti summarizes this common reading in the preface to *Dante and His Circle* (1874), defining the *Vita Nova* as ‘the Autobiography or Autopsychology of [Dante’s] youth’.³⁰ The *Vita Nova* is thus constructed as an embryonic form of self-analytical writing, in which the ‘inner life’ of the ‘soul’ can be portrayed, as occurs in Rossetti’s *The House of Life* (1881), but also in Gérard de Nerval’s *Aurélia ou le rêve et la vie* (1855), Rémy de Gourmont’s *Sixtine, roman de la vie cérébrale* (1890), Gabriele D’Annunzio’s *Il trionfo della morte* (1894), and, of course, Gide’s *Cahiers d’André Walter*.

Chronologically and stylistically, Gide’s novel of youth belongs to the environment of French Symbolism, in which it was received with

general acclaim. In June 1891, Rémy de Gourmont praised it in the *Mercure de France* as a ‘livre [...] ingénieux et original, érudit et délicat’, adding that it was a kind of ‘condensation de toute une jeunesse d’étude, de rêve et de sentiment, et d’une jeunesse repliée et peureuse’. Gide was defined as one of the ‘quelques esprits très subjectifs’ who are able to metamorphose feelings into ideas (‘ces sensations [...] se métamorphosent, se multiplient en idées’).³¹ This centrality of subjectivity was, as is well known, one of the most crucial features of Symbolist poetics: in 1886, Gustave Kahn identified Symbolism as a process of the objectification of subjectivity, namely the exteriorization of inner images.³² The Symbolist poet, writes Glauco Viazzi, ‘trasferisce su materiali all’altro uno psichismo per tentar di risolverne le tensioni’,³³ thus metamorphosing psychology into metaphysics and vice versa. ‘Ideal figurations’ (objectifications of mental images) and transfigured images from the external world engender an interaction – or, better, a semantic short circuit of reciprocal connotation (‘il simbolismo [...] risulta [...] una tipica semiotica connotativa [...] un procedimento che primariamente connota nel denotare, e pone il connotato come ulteriore denotante che a sua volta eccetera’).³⁴

In the same year, the Greek poet Jean Moréas (Ioannis Papadiamantopoulos’s pseudonym) published in *Le Figaro* a text entitled ‘Le Symbolisme-Manifeste’, in which the *Vita Nova* was included in an ideal canon of the precursors of Symbolism.³⁵ Moréas also located the most crucial challenge of Symbolism in the valuation of subjectivity over objectivity: the ‘objectif’ in the arts can be only ‘un simple point de départ extrêmement succinct’.³⁶ Arguably, the *Vita Nova* can be read as a text in which this programmatic task was fruitfully accomplished. As Francesco Arru notes, Kahn’s intention to ‘objectiver le subjectif’ actually shows a striking proximity to the definition of the ‘beatrice’ (in lower-case letters) given by the Italian historicist scholar Adolfo Bartoli in 1881: ‘la *beatrice* dei poeti del *nuovo stile* non è appunto altro che l’oggettivazione di una intima e profonda soggettività’.³⁷

Through the mediation of French Symbolism, the *Vita Nova* shapes Gide’s *Cahiers d’André Walter*, a text that, like the *Vita Nova*, is explicitly presented, from the start, as a ‘book of youth’. Gide completely masks himself under the name of his fictional character: the first edition of the novel was simply titled *Les Cahiers d’André Walter: Œuvre posthume*, without any mention of Gide’s name on the title page.³⁸ The *Cahiers* were purportedly edited by a friend of André’s after his death,

recalling in the initial ‘Notice’ the incipit of another famous ‘book of youth’, Goethe’s *Werther*.³⁹ The text is presented as the complete publication of notebooks written by André in the last ten months of his life in preparation for a never-written novel to be titled *Allain*. This projected novel is said to be an ‘œuvre étrange, “scientifique et passionnée”’, echoing the definition of the *Vita Nova* given by Dante in the *Convivio* (‘opera [...] fervida e passionata’, *Conv.* I, i, 16). Technically, the *Cahiers* therefore aim not to be a *Vita Nova*, but to prepare for its composition: they show a ‘préparation du roman’, to quote Roland Barthes’s last seminar at the Collège de France, thus implicitly displaying the eternally fragmentary and preparatory form of writing of the modern novelist.⁴⁰

Explicit or implicit quotations from Dante are interwoven within the text. Apart from overt references, on which I will focus more extensively later, the *Cahiers* show situations and expressions that can easily be traced to a Dantean source. ‘Il te faudra prier bien sagement ce soir,’ writes André, ‘et que tu croies. Cela te reste, qui ne te sera pas ôté.’⁴¹ In the *Vita Nova*, Dante identified in the praise of Beatrice something that could not fail him (‘lo mio signore Amore, la sua mercede, à posto tutta la mia beatitudine in quello che non mi puote venire meno’, VN 10, 6).⁴² In another passage, André Walter speaks of ‘subtle correlations’, an expression that Dante often used in the *Vita Nova*: ‘Sujet – Verbe et Attribut. [...] c’est le rapport inévitable. Pourtant cela ne satisfait pas: toutes choses ne sont pas dans une si fatale dépendance: il est des corrélations plus subtiles.’⁴³ The *Comedy* is also frequently present: André feels as though he is lost in a ‘nuit obscure’;⁴⁴ he perceives the presence of the three dead women in his life, his beloved cousin Emmanuèle (the Beatrice of the *Cahiers*) his mother, and his long-dead younger sister Lucie – who look like uncanny afterimages of the ‘tre donne benedette’ (*Inf.* II, 124) who blessed Dante’s journey: Beatrice, the Virgin Mary and Saint Lucy.⁴⁵

The *Cahiers* are also intermixed with biblical echoes and with quotations from English and German. In particular, German seems to take on, in the *Cahiers*, the role that Latin had in the *Vita Nova* as the language of philosophy: André Walter wants to discuss with his beloved cousin Emmanuèle ‘quelque problème ardu de métaphysique allemande qui m’avait inquiété longtemps’;⁴⁶ later in the book, the task of the author is summarized by the the single German verb ‘Philosophieren’.⁴⁷ The *Cahiers* show a transition from the Middle Ages to modern times

and from Thomism to German metaphysics as the only appropriate philosophical system in which to frame the modern taste for vagueness and indefiniteness:

Nous apprenions ensemble l'allemand, bien que le sachant déjà; mais les leçons nous étaient un prétexte de lire, et penchés sur le même livre, pour traduire, nous amusions nos esprits aux subtilités rhétoriques des équivalences. Ainsi nous connûmes *die Braut von Messina, die Heimkehr, die Nordsee*. L'allemand a des allitérations chuchotées qui mieux que les français disaient les songeries embrumées.⁴⁸

The influence of the *Vita Nova* is, however, most evident in André's writing project. The *Cahiers* are structured around a double subtraction of Beatrice/Emmanuèle. André was first forced to renounce his marriage to his cousin Emmanuèle on his mother's deathbed: the first aim of the *Cahiers* is therefore to sublimate his love for the forbidden object of desire into spiritual love, corresponding to the sublimation of external contemplation (*extra nos*) into inner praise (*intra nos*) highlighted by Charles Singleton in the *Vita Nova*.⁴⁹ André's task is therefore to collect his previous writings and Emmanuèle's letters in order to save events from oblivion and to start a 'new life'.⁵⁰ In doing this, André articulates a relationship among writing, memory, and desire that fully corresponds to the Dantean paradigm; old texts from his journals are intermingled with new prose, engendering a peculiarly vitanovian shift between new texts and old ones reread from a novel angle:

J'ai [...] Sorti toutes les pages écrites qui me rappellent autrefois. Je les veux toutes relire, les ranger, copier, les revivre. J'en écrirai de nouvelles sur des souvenirs anciens. Je délivrerai ma pensée de ses rêveries antérieures, *pour vivre une nouvelle vie*; quand les souvenirs seront dits, mon âme en sera plus légère; je les arrêterai dans leur fuite: une chose n'est pas tout à fait morte qui n'est pas encore oubliée.⁵¹

The other subtraction is the one determined by Emmanuèle's death. In the same way as the news of Beatrice's death irrupts suddenly within the *Vita Nova* through the Latin epigraph '*Quomodo sedet sola civitas*' (VN 19, 1), the narration of the *Cahiers* is suddenly broken by André's friend's note to the journal entry dated 4 August: '*Mme Emmanuèle T. mourut dans la nuit du 31 juillet. André Walter ne l'apprit que trois jours plus tard.*'⁵² From this point on, the text is polarized by the acknowledgment of Emmanuèle's definitive absence, which inspires a

further possibility of sublimation (Singleton's *supra nos*):⁵³ 'Elle meurt: *donc* il la possède ...'.⁵⁴ Unlike Dante's form of sublimation, however, this is a sublimation that is lucidly acknowledged as irrational: in the *Cahiers* there is no afterlife, and no ultimate providential plan ('Jamais les choses ne se concluent: c'est l'homme qui tire les conclusions des choses').⁵⁵ Any meditation upon the dead beloved is, for André Walter, a 'lutte [...] sans la victoire':⁵⁶

Les combats désespérés sont les plus nobles; puis une saveur de victoire se goûte déjà dans l'audace de les avoir tentés. Il faut que l'âme proteste de la contrainte des choses: ne céder qu'à soi-même et qu'à Dieu ... et encore? [...] *Je ne me laisserai pas dominer par quoi que ce soit.*⁵⁷

Writing is therefore a fight and a wholly absorbing spiritual exercise: 'la vision de l'œuvre me poursuit: j'y subordonne toutes choses'.⁵⁸ On the one hand, it is an education, corresponding to the creation of a literary canon: 'choisissons les influences. Que tout me soit une éducation'.⁵⁹ Dante is included among those influential texts from which the author's prophetic and ineffable style is to be constructed ('je lirais la Bible, les Védas, Dante, Spinoza, Rabelais, les Stoïques; j'apprendrais le grec, l'hébreu, l'italien').⁶⁰ On the other hand, writing is an 'autopsychology' insofar as it must face the impasses of oblivion and of the splitting of a divided subjectivity: 'mais qu'il est difficile de ressaisir une pensée échappée'.⁶¹ Most of all, it is a quest for purity. André longs for the 'voluptés farouches de la vie monastique [...] dans l'insomnie, trouver des extases violentes, éperdument penché sur un verset, dans la nuit enveloppante, effrayante'.⁶² Carnal love is therefore sublimated into intellectual ecstasy, while the desire for physical contact with Emmanuèle is metamorphosed into the idealization of a caress: 'amoureuse, adoratrice ou passionnée,' writes André, 'j'ai l'obsession de la caresse'.⁶³ Loving Emmanuèle is compared to loving a statue, thus evoking the myth of Pygmalion between the lines:

Un peu de chair s'y mêle encore, tant ce marbre est si diaphane. Le désir de posséder me tourmente et je souffre affreusement, dans le corps et dans l'âme, du sentiment de cet impossible; – le *Tireur d'épine*, l'*Apollon Saurochtone*, le torse mutilé de la *Diane au repos* – le regard ne me soûle pas – il m'altère; [...] Et puis encore je souffre à penser qu'ils ne sentiraient pas mes caresses.⁶⁴

On the other hand, this process of desexualisation corresponds to a dematerialization of writing. André's aim would be to reach the perfection of Emmanuèle's writing style: 'son écriture est d'une perfection impassible, impeccable, figée, – décourageante',⁶⁵ algid, we might add, like a marble statue. The act of 'travailler frénétiquement, *improbe*'⁶⁶ is therefore an attempt to reach a purity of style in which no materiality ('la chair') is mingled, thus achieving a direct communication between sister 'souls'.⁶⁷

To this purpose, the *Vita Nova* provides a fruitful model. In 1885, Rémy de Gourmont had defined the *Vita Nova* as a 'roman mystique aussi vague et aussi indéchiffrable que peut l'être un récit où aucun personnage n'a de nom, où le lieu des scènes n'est pas indiqué, où les dates ne sont que des chiffres cabalistiques'.⁶⁸ This image reverberates with André Walter's programmatic task: André's projected novel *Allain* was supposed to be a veritable *Vita Nova* for the fin de siècle, portraying 'la vie toujours intime – et pourtant la vie si violente' in which 'tout s'est joué dans l'âme; il n'en a rien paru'.⁶⁹ The external world ('les phénomènes') would be interpreted as a set of signs, in order to understand the 'langage de volonté derrière eux';⁷⁰ 'les phénomènes', André Walter later writes, 'sont le langage divin'.⁷¹ The project of *Allain* is fully and uniquely centred on the subject, in accordance with this quotation from Schopenhauer:

'Ce qui connaît tout et n'est connu de personne, c'est le Sujet. Il est donc le support du monde'... Quelles exaltations. Crier à pleine voix cette phrase et se plonger dans cette pensée orgueilleuse.⁷²

Allain was to be focused on the conflict between soul and flesh. It would have had to describe, therefore, a uniquely inner experience:

les lignes simples – l'ordonnance schématique. Réduire tout à L'ESSENTIEL. L'action déterminée, rigoureuse. Le personnel simplifié jusqu'à un seul. – Et comme le drame est intime, rien n'en apparaît au dehors, pas un fait, pas une image, sinon peut-être symbolique: la vie phénoménale absente, – seuls les noumènes; [...] n'importe quand et n'importe où; hors du temps et de l'espace.⁷³

We are quite close to Gourmont's definition of a 'roman mystique [...] vague et indéchiffrable [...] où le lieu des scènes n'est pas indiqué, où les dates ne sont que des chiffres cabalistiques'. Style should reflect this ethereal vagueness:

Pas la couleur, rien que la nuance. C'est alors dans le rapport des mots, non plus dans la phrase entière: *Kühl bis ans Herz hinein ...* Connexion des deux essences – parfait. Mais plutôt encore le rythme allitéré, l'ondement de la période – et le rappel interrompu des assonances. Et quand la syntaxe proteste, il la faut mater, la rétive – car lui soumettre sa pensée, je trouve cela très lâche. Il ne faut pas céder aux choses.⁷⁴

In his meditation on the double loss of Emmanuèle, André Walter chooses to turn to an 'autopsychology', and moreover to what we could call a self-analysis. The 'mysticism' of the *Cahiers* is a reflection on memory and loss, which turns to the subject in order to preserve 'quello che non mi puote venire meno' (VN 10, 6), and whose outcome is hallucination: 'les choses DEVIENNENT vraies', as André writes in his journal, 'il suffit qu'on les pense'.⁷⁵ Slowly deepening into one's self, the chimera becomes actual, usurping the place of reality:

Si j'arrivais à contempler la chimère avec assez de fixité [...] la chimère inventée m'apparaîtrait réelle; et si c'est une image évoquée d'autrefois, j'oublierais que c'est autrefois, je la ferais toute présente, usurpatrice des réalités.⁷⁶

In his essay on Beatrice, Rémy de Gourmont maintained that Dante could have experienced an equivalent hallucination:

Qu'il ait réellement entendu la voix de l'Amour lui dictant ses vers d'amour, je ne m'en étonnerais qu'à demi. L'inspiration, en sa réalité physiologique, a de ces effets; ce n'est qu'un des mystères de la sensation surexcitée.⁷⁷

André Walter's experience of writing can be understood as the progression of a purportedly 'mystical' enlightenment. This progression is divided in three steps, corresponding to three keys to his own writing: 'métaphorique', 'symbolique', and 'hallucination'.⁷⁸ As afterimages of the medieval senses of Scripture, these terms, however, denote the most relevant divergence between Dante's and André Walter's techniques. Whereas the *Vita Nova* ended with Dante's 'mirabile visione', leading to the design of a future work (VN 31), André Walter's final goal is a hallucinatory meditation, in which the writing project itself becomes undetermined, and everything is absorbed in a 'néant voluptueusement perceptible':⁷⁹

Méditations métaphysiques. '*Le temps et l'espace n'existent que pour la raison de l'homme*'. – Se pencher sur ces profondeurs et les fixer jusqu'au

vertige. [...] La mort n'est pas une conclusion; le roman ne s'arrête pas là, – qui sait seulement s'il s'arrête? ... et s'il commence avec la vie? – qui sait seulement s'il commence?⁸⁰

This shift also affects the return of Emmanuèle. Her *adventus* is not the glorious parade crowning Beatrice in the Garden of Eden in the final cantos of the *Purgatorio*, but rather the uncanny appearance of a ghost. 'Voilée de noir, au crépuscule, je t'ai vue accoudée au chevet de mon lit, telle qu'une ombre, silencieuse. [...] J'eus peur, la vision s'évanouit.'⁸¹ The image of Emmanuèle, conjured up ever more frequently, 'se déforme avec des bizarreries inquiétantes': 'son sourire est devenu celui des poupées de cire.'⁸² Eventually, Emmanuèle is transformed from Beatrice into the 'femmina balba' of *Purg.* XIX, 7–33; the gesture is the same, although André's dream is not connected to impurity, but rather to the ultimate 'néant' hiding behind his metaphysical speculation:

Cauchemar. Elle m'est apparue, très belle, vêtue d'une robe d'orfroi qui jusqu'à ses pieds tombait sans plis comme une étoile; elle se tenait toute droite, la tête seulement inclinée, avec un mièvre sourire. Un singe, en sautillant, s'est approché; il soulevait le manteau [...]. Sous la robe, il n'y avait rien; c'était noir, noir comme un trou; je sanglotais de désespoir. Alors, de ses deux mains, elle a saisi le bas de sa robe et puis l'a rejetée jusque pardessus sa figure. Elle s'est retournée comme un sac. Et je n'ai plus rien vu; la nuit s'est refermée sur elle...⁸³

André Walter's progression is not a purification or an ascension, but rather a descent into mental insanity. This vision forms the prelude to the end of the book. In the last page of his journal, André writes: 'Allain est fou – je ne le suis pas encore.'⁸⁴ The journal terminates with two passages: the poetic lines 'Ah! te voilà chère âme! | Je t'avais bien longtemps attendue ...' and a quotation from St Paul, '*Ne savez-vous pas que nous jugerons les anges?*'⁸⁵ A footnote following the verses informs the reader that 'la fièvre cérébrale qui emporta notre ami se déclara sitôt après. Un intervalle de trois semaines sépare ces lignes des suivantes, les dernières d'André Walter'.⁸⁶ It is interesting to remark that the *Vita Nova* too ends with a quotation from St Paul's Epistle to the Romans ('qui est benedictus in saecula', Rom. 1. 25; 'qui est per omnia secula benedictus', VN 31, 3).⁸⁷ While the 'cerebral life' – to use Gourmont's expression – leads to brain fever and to death, these two fragments show a final 'return of Beatrice' taking place in the domain of illusion and hallucination.

3. 'WOMAN OF THE BEYOND'

Les Cahiers d'André Walter, wrote the critic Paul Souday in 1927, is a book that 'explique toute l'œuvre de M. André Gide'.⁸⁸ In the second, revised edition of 1930, Gide himself agrees with those 'qu[i] m'y trouvent déjà presque entier';⁸⁹ while proofreading, he declared to Maria van Rysselberghe that he finds the book 'plein d'étranges pressentiments'.⁹⁰ The book of youth explains the mature writer, containing the germ of his future masterpiece(s).

This is the perspective from which, in 1956, Jean Delay published his *La jeunesse d'André Gide*. The peculiarity of this work (and one of the reasons why Lacan decided to review it) is that it presents itself not as a conventional biography, but as a 'psychobiographie'.⁹¹ 'La genèse d'un artiste', writes Delay, 'ramène a sa jeunesse comme à la source principale':⁹² through the deliberate juxtaposition of literary texts, private writings, and other biographical materials, Delay attempts to show the progressive self-construction of Gide from the time of his youth: '[Gide] s'est composé avec art, il s'est artificiellement fabriqué'; 'la vie d'un homme est son image', as Gide had himself written in his journal on 3 January 1892, thus confirming Delay's hypothesis that he deliberately constituted himself as an author.⁹³

In order to explain Gide's youth, and focusing in particular on the *Cahiers* and on Gide's love for his cousin, Madeleine Rondeaux, who had inspired the character of Emmanuèle, Delay introduces a notion which he calls 'angélisme'.⁹⁴ This concept is extremely open and vague: Delay seems to subsume several episodes of Western culture under it – Platonism, Gnosticism, courtly poetry, the myth of Tristan, the *Roman de la Rose*, Dante's works, Novalis and the German Romantics, and eventually Gide himself. In this syncretistic juxtaposition of different authors and cultural environments, Delay retraces the presence of a sort of 'perennial Romanticism' reverberating up to Gide's time characterized by specific features. 'Angélisme' is a 'pur amour, auquel rien de charnel ne se mêl[e]',⁹⁵ an almost incestuous passion for an 'âme-sœur'.⁹⁶ In the *Cahiers*, André sees Emmanuèle's features confounded with those of his dead younger sister Lucie, making Emmanuèle an object of desire.⁹⁷ This is an intellectual love: 'tout l'effort de mon amour', confesses Gide apropos of Madeleine in the late memorial *Et nunc manet in te* (1938), 'n'était point tant de me rapprocher d'elle, que de la rapprocher de cette figure idéale que j'inventais'.⁹⁸ 'Angélisme' is nourished by sacrifice:

André Walter's mysticism, writes Delay, has Jansenist roots, and therefore creates its own obstacles by looking for 'la voie la plus difficile, la route la plus ardue, celle du renoncement à soi'.⁹⁹ It is finally accomplished in death: 'elle meurt; *donc* il la possède.' Above all, 'angélisme' is rooted, according to Delay, in a conflict between the spirit and the 'thorn in the flesh', first given concrete form in a 'depraved virginity'¹⁰⁰ and later in Gide's homosexual drives: 'angélisme', writes Delay, is based on a 'dissociation du désir et de l'amour',¹⁰¹ through which desire is confined within the domain of the forbidden, preserving love for a disembodied and absent figure.

This notion, as well as the cultural genealogy in which it is situated, is clearly rooted in the theories expressed by Denis de Rougemont in *L'Amour et l'Occident*. Delay makes extensive use of Rougemont's book, deriving incidental support from a statement by Gide himself: 'c'est [dans *L'Amour et l'Occident*], [...] et non dans les ouvrages des psychanalystes, que j'ai trouvé l'explication de quelques-unes de mes erreurs, et des plus anciennes'.¹⁰² Following Rougemont, Gide can be placed in a timeless tradition, that of Tristan as the foundational myth of the 'église de l'âme-sœur'.¹⁰³ For Delay as for Rougemont, this tradition is perceived as substantially unaltered, so that Novalis (or Gide) can be explained through Dante or the *Roman de la Rose*, and vice versa: 'c'est bien une mystique Béatrice, revenue de l'univers du Dante, la Dame élue des troubadours attentifs à n'être pas exaucés, que le jeune poète imagine en Emmanuèle'.¹⁰⁴

As we have seen, Rougemont (and Delay) take a specific cultural construction of the nineteenth century to its extreme: that of a 'perennial Romanticism', originating in medieval Provence (although possessing Platonic or even Zoroastrian roots) and later reverberating from the works of Dante to the nineteenth century itself. Moreover, the very idea of 'psychobiography' can be considered to be the post-psychoanalytic concretization (thus somehow ennobled by a shade of scientific orderliness) of one of the most tenacious dreams of the nineteenth century – to penetrate an author's 'heart' through his minor writings, reappraised as the secret keys of his whole work. In the nineteenth century, this exercise was mainly conducted on two central authors of the canon, Dante and Shakespeare, who were akin to one another in the scarcity of biographical information about them. In the case of Shakespeare, this method produced at least one masterpiece, Oscar Wilde's *Portrait of Mr*

W.H. (1889). The same occurred for the *Vita Nova*. While defining it as the ‘autopsychology’ of Dante’s youth, Rossetti added that

wedded to its exquisite and intimate beauties are personal peculiarities which excite wonder and conjecture, best replied to in the words which Beatrice herself is made to utter in the *Commedia*: ‘Questi fù tal nella sua vita nuova.’ Thus then young Dante *was*.¹⁰⁵

The *Vita Nova* is considered crucial for understanding

the whole bitterness of wrong to such a soul as Dante’s, its poignant sense of abandonment, or its deep and jealous refuge in memory. Above all, it is here that we find the first manifestations of that wisdom of obedience, that natural breath of duty, which afterwards, in the *Commedia*, lifted up a mighty voice for warning and testimony. Throughout the *Vita Nuova* there is a strain like the first falling murmur which reaches the ear in some remote meadow, and prepares us to look upon the sea.¹⁰⁶

Lacan’s review of Delay’s biography is above all directed against Delay’s assumption that knowledge of who the ‘young Gide was’ is possible. Lacan evokes Sainte-Beuve as the epitome of nineteenth-century literary criticism, who had pursued the project of ‘a natural history of minds’ by granting to ‘the critic the power to make the writer’s private life intrude into the literary work to the degree of his own vanity’.¹⁰⁷ Concerning ‘angélisme’, however, Lacan is more ambiguous. Never mentioning Delay’s definition, he seems to focus solely on the specific case of the young Gide. Gide’s ‘perverse virginity’ is the result of a ‘symbolic subtraction which occurred in the place where the child, faced with his mother, could only reproduce the self-abnegation of her jouissance and the envelopment of her love’.¹⁰⁸ ‘Gide as a child’, Lacan writes, ‘between death and masturbatory eroticism, receives, as far as love is concerned, only the kind of speech that protects and the kind that prohibits’, determining an identification with the mother: ‘in taking his father, death took away the speech that humanizes desire. This is why’, he concludes, ‘desire is limited to the clandestine for him’,¹⁰⁹ ‘giving form to the ideal of an angel that impure contact cannot touch’.¹¹⁰

Thus Lacan obliquely introduces the problem of courtly love, later explored in more detail in the course of his seminars. In *The Youth of Gide*, writes Mario Mancini, courtly love works as an ‘archetipo di questo amore puro, “imbalsamato contro il tempo”, colpito da un tocco mortale e reso immortale, [...] amore per una donna dell’aldilà’.¹¹¹

This dead woman is the Emmanuèle of the *Cahiers*, as well as the dead Madeleine of *Et nunc manet in te*, whose alterity is nonetheless remarked upon by Gide even before their marriage. As Lacan writes,

there is no reason to discredit what Gide writes about her to Valéry, in his final struggle to convince Madeleine to marry him: “She’s Morella.” Woman of the beyond, disowned in her daughter, who dies when Poe calls her by her name which should never had been pronounced ...¹¹²

She is Poe’s Morella, but also Beatrice, who – like Poe’s feminine figures – is also seen as a ‘woman of the beyond’:

Everything here is supported by a very old tradition, justifying [Delay’s] mention of the mystical bonds of courtly love. Gide himself was not afraid to relate his union [with Madeleine], despite its bourgeois trappings, to Dante’s mystical union with Beatrice. And if psychoanalysts were capable of understanding what their master said about the death instinct, they would be able to recognize that self-realization can become bound up with the wish to end one’s life. In fact, Gide’s feeling for his cousin was truly the height of love, if love means giving what one does not have and if he gave her immortality.¹¹³

The passage that Lacan mentions is from *Et nunc manet in te*: ‘tout l’effort de mon amour n’était point tant de me rapprocher d’elle, que de la rapprocher de cette figure idéale que j’inventais. [...] je ne pense pas que Dante en ait agi différemment pour Béatrice’.¹¹⁴ The connection was already explicit in the *Cahiers d’André Walter*:

Quand j’étais jeune [...] Je rêvais des nuits d’amour devant l’orgue; la mélodie m’apparaissait, presque palpable fiction, comme une Béatrice nuageuse ‘*fior gittando sopra e d’interno*’ [sic] comme une Dame élue, immatériellement pure, à la robe traînante aux reflets de saphir, aux replis profonds azurés, aux lueurs pâles, aux formes lentes, musicales.¹¹⁵

This equivalence between Beatrice and the ‘Dame élue’ is, however, more eloquent than it might seem at first glance. ‘La Damoiselle élue’ was the French translation of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *The Blessed Damozel*, set to music in 1888 by Claude Debussy.¹¹⁶ Rossetti is a strong presence in the *Cahiers*, given both his status as a precursor of French Symbolism and the cultural exchanges between France and England that had brought his works to the French public in the 1880s, from Rossetti’s friend Joseph Knight, who was a journalist in Paris, to Paul Bourget and to Gabriel Sarrazin and Clémence Couve, who in 1887 translated

The House of Life.¹¹⁷ In 1891, the same year as the *Cahiers*, Marcel Schwob published a collection entitled *Cœur double*, which included a biographical fiction about Rossetti (*Lilith*) and a story significantly titled *Béatrice*, where Dantesque features were grafted onto a Poe-like feminine character. This connection between Dante and Poe was first established in *The Blessed Damozel*, a poem explicitly constructed as an inversion of *The Raven*: instead of depicting the mourning of an earthly lover for a lost Lenore, the poem focused on the grief of a Beatrice-like blessed soul for her lover, from whom she had been departing.¹¹⁸

Gide's (and Lacan's) association of Madeleine with Beatrice and Poe's women is therefore supported by a specific tradition, which is not, however, the tradition of courtly love, but that of its nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelite re-elaboration. In medicalizing Gide's 'unconsummated marriage' with Madeleine¹¹⁹ by evoking a fatal love for a 'woman of the beyond', Lacan is actually speaking more of Rossetti's Elizabeth Siddal (and of Poe's Virginia Clemm) than of Dante's Beatrice. This is the case because – roughly speaking – the Beatrice of the *Vita Nova*, and later of the *Commedia*, is never technically 'dead'. At the beginning of the book she is already 'gloriosa' (VN 1, 2), a blessed soul in heaven, into which she has been assumed almost without rupture. As she will tell Dante in the Garden of Eden, she has undergone a metamorphosis, not a death ('mutai vita', *Purg.* XXX, 125). In the *Vita Nova*, Dante does not describe her death in any way; in any case, there is no sepulchre.¹²⁰ This can, of course, make us think about Dante's use of censorship, even from a psychoanalytic angle. It does not, however, allow us to superimpose upon Beatrice the nineteenth-century image of the 'dead beloved as a muse', which is Elisabeth Bronfen's description of situations in which the 'fading metaphor' of the muse 'is revitalised by turning to real death'.¹²¹ Although frequently nourished by references to the Dante-Beatrice relationship, these experiences show a remarkable shift with respect to their Dantesque source: by focusing on mourning and the corpse, they construct the *Vita Nova* as a frame in which to question specific nineteenth-century challenges concerning femininity, death, and loss.¹²²

In framing Gide's relationship with Madeleine through the split between the 'negative impact of desire, giving form to the ideal of an angel' and 'the height of love, [...] giving [...] immortality',¹²³ Lacan establishes a dichotomy which would likely have been inconceivable to a medieval mind, but which definitely corresponds to the ambiguity

that the nineteenth century found in the *Vita Nova*. In other words, he reproduces Delay's notion of 'angélisme' as a 'dissociation du désir et de l'amour',¹²⁴ because he is entrapped in the same short circuit between medieval texts and their nineteenth-century manipulations.

In his seminar on love, *Encore* (1972–73), which can be seen as Lacan's ultimate contribution to the theme of courtly love, he will eventually speak of it as a 'façon tout à fait raffinée de suppléer à l'absence de rapport sexuel, en feignant que c'est nous qui y mettons obstacle'.¹²⁵ Gide's 'angélisme' originated in his father's death, which had also taken away 'the speech that humanizes desire'.¹²⁶ 'What would have happened', Lacan asked in his 1958 review, 'if Madeleine had turned toward André the face of Mathilde (her mother, whom she resembled) that a womanly flush had revived?'¹²⁷ The original text spoke of 'la couleur du sexe': Lacan's text establishes an opposition between 'humanized' (namely, sexual) desire and the abstract (in-human) 'ideal of an angel that impure contact cannot touch',¹²⁸ as well as between the icy otherness of the 'woman of the beyond' and the 'real' (i. e., sexualized) woman. The encounter with this inhuman 'woman of the beyond' is a 'hieroglyph', whose ultimate meaning is

the mark of the iron with which death brands the flesh when the Word has disentangled flesh from love. This mark, which perhaps is no different than what the Apostle calls 'a thorn in the flesh,' has always seemed horrific to wisdom, which has done everything to disregard it. Let us note that wisdom has been punished for this with the air of slavery it has conserved through the ages, an air it probably owes to being encumbered by carrying this branding iron under its robes, acting as if nothing were the matter.¹²⁹

This is the afterimage of Dante's love for Beatrice, 'che nulla volta sofferse che Amore mi reggesse senza lo fedele consiglio della Ragione' (VN 1, 10), after being metamorphosed by the nineteenth century, through which Lacan reads Dante and courtly love. Humanized desire is opposed to inhuman abstraction: only sex, for modernity, is human. Psychoanalysis, Lacan said, 'a fait rentrer en nous tout le monde, l'a remis définitivement à sa place, à savoir dans notre corps, et pas ailleurs.' In other words, 'la libération de l'homme moderne' has restored metaphysics to its proper owner, 'le prince de ce monde – *Diabolus*'.¹³⁰ This definition of the devil as the ruler of the earthly world – *Rex Mundi* – is not without tradition: it was in fact one of the cornerstones

of the Cathars' dualistic theology, to which Rougemont credited the ideological background of Provençal courtly love.

We might therefore say that, in speaking of courtly love, Lacanian psychoanalysis takes the side of the *Rex Mundi* as the nineteenth century had (more or less unwillingly) done, recuperating the *Vita Nova*'s unearthly love and using it in order to frame the definitively earthly tensions of modern subjectivity. (It would be worthwhile to note that both pre-Raphaelism and psychoanalysis were accused of pansexualism, 'fleshliness' and 'degeneration'). This is not surprising: although theorized and developed throughout the twentieth century, psychoanalysis is a fully nineteenth-century discipline; according to Philippe Muray, the twentieth century itself is nothing more than a mere dream of the nineteenth, its appendix and gloss.¹⁵¹ This does not teach us much about Dante or about courtly love, but it teaches us much, I think, about cultural transmissions and their rhapsodic movement, through which a thirteenth-century text is disinterred by the obsessions of the nineteenth and resonates its way to the analyst's couch of the twentieth.

NOTES

- 1 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1973), p. 32.
- 2 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre VII: L'éthique de la psychanalyse*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1986), p. 111: 'L'investigation freudienne a fait rentrer en nous tout le monde, l'a remis définitivement à sa place, à savoir dans notre corps, et pas ailleurs. Je me permettrai de vous rappeler à ce propos à quel point la pensée scientifique et la pensée théologique ont pu être occupées, dans la période qui a immédiatement précédé la libération de l'homme moderne, par quelque chose dont Freud n'a pas hésité à parler, et à l'appeler par son nom, mais dont nous ne parlons plus jamais, c'est à savoir celui qui a été désigné pendant longtemps comme le prince de ce monde – *Diabolus*.'
- 3 Guglielmo Gorni, 'Beatrice agli Inferi', in *Omaggio a Beatrice (1290–1990)*, ed. by Rudy Abardo (Florence: Le Lettere, 1998), pp. 143–58 (p. 151).
- 4 Alice Sperber, 'Von Dantes unbewußtem Seelenleben: Erinnerungen und Eindrücke aus seiner Kinderzeit', *Imago*, 3.33 (1914), pp. 205–49.
- 5 Guglielmo Gorni, 'Beatrice agli Inferi', p. 151.
- 6 'Dante's prophetic poem is the only system of transcendental poetry, and is still the greatest of its kind.' Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 52.
- 7 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre VII: L'éthique de la psychanalyse*, p. 179.

- 8 'La crociata contro gli Albigesi riuscirà ad avere la meglio su questa "strana" civiltà, col ferro e col fuoco. E la poesia di Dante e Petrarca opererà un processo di conservazione-superamento, una grandiosa *Aufhebung*. Ma si sa che l'*Aufhebung*, lacanianamente, è uno dei bei sogni della filosofia, è sempre una rimozione. E i trovatori resteranno nella coscienza europea come una memoria e come una ferita.' Mario Mancini, *La gaia scienza dei trovatori* (Parma: Pratiche, 1984), p. 6.
- 9 On the history of courtly love as a cultural category, see Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), and Luisa Passerini, *L'Europa e l'amore: Immaginario e politica fra le due guerre* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1999), pp. 197–230.
- 10 Guido Ceronetti, *Un viaggio in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 2004), p. v.
- 11 See Jean-Baptiste La Curne de Sainte Palaye, *Histoire littéraire des troubadours* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1967).
- 12 See Luisa Passerini, *L'Europa e l'amore*, p. 213.
- 13 See François Raynouard, *Choix des poésies originales des troubadours*, 6 vols (Osnabrück: Biblio-Verlag, 1966).
- 14 See Madame de Staël, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, ed. by Paul Van Tieghem, 2 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1959).
- 15 Jean Charles Sismonde de Sismondi, *De la littérature du midi de l'Europe* (Paris–Strasbourg, Treuttel et Wuerz, 1813). On Dante and the cultural environment of Coppet, see also Christine Pouzoulet, 'Pour une renaissance politique et littéraire de l'Italie: enjeux du modèle de Dante chez Madame de Staël et Sismondi', in *Le Groupe de Coppet et l'Europe 1789–1830*, ed. by Kurt Kloocke (Lausanne: Jean Touzot, 1994), pp. 291–307.
- 16 August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Observations sur la langue et la littérature provençale* (Paris: Librairie Grecque-Latine-Allemande, 1818).
- 17 Posthumously published as Claude Fauriel, *Histoire de la poésie provençale*, 3 vols (Paris: Labitte, 1846).
- 18 See Francesco La Brasca, "'Solenni vindicie": Pierre-Louis Ginguené historien de la littérature médiévale italienne', in *Ginguené, 1748–1816, idéologue et médiateur*, ed. by Edouard Guillon (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1995), pp. 153–73.
- 19 C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936). Lewis elaborated the first draft of the book in 1928 and then gave it its final form in 1935, after his conversion to Christianity.
- 20 See Denis de Rougemont, *L'Amour et l'Occident* (Paris: Plon, 2001).
- 21 Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, pp. 3–6.
- 22 I quote from the English translation, Jacques Lacan, 'The Youth of Gide, or the Letter and Desire', in *Écrits*, trans. by Bruce Fink, Héloïse Fink, and Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 623–44.
- 23 Jean Delay, *La jeunesse d'André Gide*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1956). Lacan's text is also intended as a review of Jean Schlumberger's *Madeleine et André Gide* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956). The relevant topics for this essay, however, concern only Delay's text.

- 24 I quote from André Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter avec des fragments inédits du Journal*, ed. by Claude Martin (Paris: Gallimard, 1986).
- 25 Cf. Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970).
- 26 See Fabio Camilletti, 'Il passo di Nerina: Storia, memoria e formule di *pathos* ne *Le Ricordanze*', *Italianistica* (forthcoming autumn 2010).
- 27 I reconstruct this process in Fabio Camilletti, *Dante's Book of Youth: The 'Vita Nova' and the Nineteenth-Century (1840–1907)* (London: IGRS Books, forthcoming 2011).
- 28 See Julia Straub, *A Victorian Muse: The Afterlife of Dante's Beatrice in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (London: Continuum, 2009).
- 29 On this aspect, see Manuele Gragnolati, 'Authorship and Performance in Dante's *Vita nova*', in *Aspects of the Performative in Medieval Culture*, ed. by Manuele Gragnolati and Almut Suerbaum (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 125–41.
- 30 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Collected Works*, ed. by William Michael Rossetti, 2 vols. (London: Ellis and Scrutton, 1886), II, p. 1.
- 31 Quoted in the appendix to Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter*, pp. 296–97 (p. 296).
- 32 'Le but essentiel de notre art est d'objectiver le subjectif (l'extériorisation de l'Idée) au lieu de subjectiver l'objectif (la nature vue à travers un temperament)'. Quoted in Francesco Arru, 'La *Vita Nova* de Dante chez les écrivains de la deuxième moitié du XIXe siècle en France, Italie, Grande Bretagne' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Paris IV-Sorbonne, 2002), p. 136.
- 33 Glauco Viazzi, 'Le *Figurazioni (ideali)* e le *Imagini (terrene)*', in *Dal Simbolismo al Déco*, ed. by Glauco Viazzi, 2 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), I, pp. xxiii–xxviii (p. xxv).
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.
- 35 Jean Moréas, 'Le Symbolisme-Manifeste' (1886), later reprinted in his *Les Premières armes du symbolisme* (Paris: Léon Vanier, 1889), pp. 31–39. The *Vita Nova* is mentioned at p. 34.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 37 Adolfo Bartoli, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, 7 vols (Florence: Sansoni, 1878–1889), IV (1881), p. 192. The closeness of Bartoli's and Kahn's statements has been highlighted by Arru, 'La *Vita Nova* de Dante', pp. 136–37.
- 38 Reproduced in Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter*, p. 28.
- 39 Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter*, pp. 33–34. I have stressed the nineteenth-century assimilation of the *Vita Nova* and Goethe's *Werther* within the frame of a more general mythography of the 'artist as a young man' in Fabio Camilletti, 'Dante's *Vita Nova* and the Victorians: the Hidden Image Behind Rossetti's *Giotto Painting the Portrait of Dante*', in *The Victorians and Italy: Literature, Travel, Politics and Art*, ed. by Alessandro Vescovi, Luisa Villa, and Paul Vita (Monza: Polimetrica, 2009), pp. 181–92.
- 40 Cf. Roland Barthes, *La préparation du roman I et II: Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1978–1979 et 1979–1980)*, ed. by Nathalie Léger (Paris: Seuil, 2003). The initial idea of the 'novel' always starts, from Barthes, from the movement of: 'choisi[r] ma dernière vie, ma vie nouvelle, *Vita Nova* (Dante) ou

- Vita Nuova* (Michelet)' (p. 28). *Vita Nova* was also the title given by Barthes to his projected novel, sketched between August and November 1979.
- 41 Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter*, p. 37
- 42 I quote from Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nova*, ed. by Guglielmo Gorni (Turin: Einaudi, 1996).
- 43 Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter*, p. 127. The expression 'sottile' is central in the *Vita Nova*, in which it generally indicates the ability to discern the divine and providential plan behind factuality: cf. e.g. 'chi volesse sottilmente considerare, quella Beatrice chiamerebbe Amore', VN 15, 5; 'più sottilmente pensando e secondo la infallibile veritate, questo numero [nove] fue ella medesima', 19, 6; 'forse ancora per più sottile persona si vedrebbe più sottile ragione in ciò', 19, 7; 'luce d'amor, che gli angeli saluta, l e lo 'ntellecto loro alto e sottile', VN 22, 8 ('Quantunque volte, lasso, mi rimembra', lines 24–25); 'io no'llo 'ntendo, sì parla sottile', VN 30, 12 ('Oltre la spera', line 10).
- 44 Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter*, p. 39.
- 45 'Emmanuèle n'est pas la seule; ma mère encore et Lucie, toutes les âmes aimées errant autour de moi et me contemplant', *ibid.*, p. 132.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 120.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 49 Charles Southward Singleton, *An Essay on the 'Vita Nuova'* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 106 and *passim*.
- 50 'Ces trois derniers jours, j'ai relu tes lettres.' Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter*, p. 63.
- 51 *Ibid.*, p. 40; my italics.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- 53 Singleton, *An Essay on the 'Vita Nuova'*, p. 159.
- 54 Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter*, p. 119.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- 57 *Ibid.*, pp. 119–20.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 97
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- 65 *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- 66 *Ibid.*
- 67 'L'harmonie plutôt – la musique! La musique propage l'ondulation de l'âme jusqu'à l'autre âme. Les corps me gênaient: ils me cachaient les âmes. *La chair ne sert de rien*: ce serait l'immatérielle étreinte', *ibid.*, p. 75.
- 68 Rémy de Gourmont, *Dante, Béatrice et la poésie amoureuse* (Paris: L'Herne, 1999), p. 23.
- 69 Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter*, p. 41.

- 70 Ibid., p. 68.
- 71 Ibid., p. 121.
- 72 Ibid., p. 96.
- 73 Ibid., p. 92.
- 74 Ibid., p. 127.
- 75 Ibid., p. 59.
- 76 Ibid., p. 109.
- 77 Quoted in Arru, 'La *Vita Nova* de Dante', p. 149.
- 78 Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter*, pp. 129–33.
- 79 Ibid., p. 140.
- 80 Ibid., pp. 139–40.
- 81 Ibid., p. 133.
- 82 Ibid., p. 156.
- 83 Ibid., p. 157.
- 84 Ibid., p. 160.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 I thank Manuele Gragnolati for having brought this coincidence to my attention.
- 88 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 8.
- 89 Ibid., p. 29.
- 90 Rysselberghe relates this in her journal, in the entry of 28 January 1930, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 240–41.
- 91 Delay explains this notion in *La jeunesse d'André Gide*, 1, pp. 11–30.
- 92 Ibid., p. 11.
- 93 Ibid., p. 24.
- 94 Cf. the chapters 'De l'angélisme', in *ibid.*, pp. 492–519, and 'L'envers de l'angélisme', pp. 520–39.
- 95 Ibid., p. 495.
- 96 Ibid., p. 493.
- 97 'On t'avait fait habiter la chambre de Lucie. Il semblait que la chère morte ne l'eût pas quittée tout entière. Quand tu vins, les choses d'elle autrefois parurent la reconnaître et reviver. [...] Au milieu de tout cela, tu vivais d'une vie comme passée déjà et ancienne [...] Le soir, je retrouvais *son* profil disparu dans l'ombre de ta tête penchée, – ta voix, quand tu parlais, me faisait souvenir. Et bientôt votre mémoire à toutes deux se confondait indéci-.' Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter*, p. 49.
- 98 André Gide, 'Et nunc manet in te', in *Journal 1939-1949, Souvenirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), pp. 1121–60, p. 1124.
- 99 Delay, *La jeunesse d'André Gide*, 1, p. 503.
- 100 It is a passage from Gide's own journal, where Gide defines himself as 'complètement vierge et dépravé' (quoted in *ibid.*, p. 524).
- 101 Ibid., p. 534.
- 102 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 505.
- 103 Ibid., p. 510.
- 104 Ibid., p. 495.

- 105 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Collected Works*, II, p. 2.
- 106 Ibid.
- 107 Lacan, 'The Youth of Gide', p. 625
- 108 Ibid., p. 635.
- 109 Ibid., p. 634.
- 110 Ibid., p. 635.
- 111 Mario Mancini, *La gaia scienza dei trovatori*, p. 18.
- 112 Lacan, 'The Youth of Gide', p. 635.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 'Et nunc manet in te', p. 1124.
- 115 Gide, *Les Cahiers et les Poésies d'André Walter*, p. 56.
- 116 Claude Debussy, *La Damselle élue. Poème lyrique d'après D.-G. Rossetti*, trans. by Gabriel Sarrazin (Paris: Durand, 1906).
- 117 Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *La Maison de Vie*, trans. by Clémence Couve (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1887).
- 118 I discuss *Blessed Damozel* and its sources in more detail in Fabio Camilletti, 'I sospiri della santa. La donna e la malinconia nell'opera di Dante Gabriel Rossetti dalla *Blessed Damozel* a *Bocca Baciata*', *Contemporanea*, no. 3 (2005), pp. 77-83, and in my *Beatrice nell'Inferno di Londra: Saggio su Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Trento: La Finestra, 2005), pp. 51-64.
- 119 Lacan, 'The Youth of Gide', p. 636.
- 120 On the absence of Beatrice's death from the *Vita Nova* cf. the poignant analysis made by Guglielmo Gorni, 'La Beatrice di Dante, dal tempo all'eterno', in Dante Alighieri, *Vita Nova*, ed. by Luca Carlo Rossi (Milan: Mondadori, 1999), pp. v-xl, pp. xii-xix.
- 121 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 360-83, p. 364.
- 122 It is remarkable that most of the authors evoked by Bronfen in her chapter on the 'dead beloved as a muse' – Novalis, Emerson, Rossetti, Nerval, Thomson, Nabokov – make more or less explicit references to the *Vita Nova* in their literary accounts of personal griefs. I discuss this in my forthcoming *Dante's Book of Youth* (see above note 27). In the specific case of Victorian England, Alison Milbank has noted how 'Ruskin, Patmore Rossetti and Tennyson made Dantean reference to their bereavement. All lost a lover, or a beloved and idealised friend'. See her *Dante and the Victorians* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 255.
- 123 Ibid., p. 635.
- 124 Delay, *La jeunesse d'André Gide*, I, p. 534.
- 125 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre XX: Encore*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 65.
- 126 Lacan, 'The Youth of Gide', p. 634.
- 127 Ibid., p. 636.
- 128 Ibid., p. 635.
- 129 Ibid., pp. 636-37.
- 130 Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire livre VII: L'éthique de la psychanalyse*, p. 111.
- 131 Philippe Muray, *Le XIXe siècle à travers les âges* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

Fabio Camilletti, 'Human Desire, Deadly Love: The *Vita Nova* in Gide, Delay, Lacan', in *Metamorphosing Dante: Appropriations, Manipulations, and Rewritings in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. by Manuele Gragnolati, Fabio Camilletti, and Fabian Lampart, *Cultural Inquiry*, 2 (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2011), pp. 177–200 <https://doi.org/10.25620/ci-02_11>

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