
Forging an Arrow of Gold: Translation and Analysis of Carducci's "Il poeta" from a Psychosynthesis Perspective

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Abstract

The psychological approach to literary criticism has been mainly influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, and is referred to as psychoanalytical criticism and Jungian literary criticism respectively. This article introduces psychosynthesis psychology as an additional theoretical approach for literary analysis. Psychosynthesis, a transpersonal psychology and therapeutic approach, offers a model of the human personality that includes multiple levels of consciousness. Two of its fundamental concepts are that of a Higher Self, with which each individual is in relationship, and 'right relations', which refers to the use of all aspects of will and the deepest awareness possible to relate to all that is present. Through the example of the author's translation of the poem "Il poeta" ("The Poet") by Giosuè Carducci, this article explores how the fundamental psychosynthesis concepts of the transpersonal consciousness, the Self and right relations can provide an independent methodology for literary criticism. Since these concepts are not considered viable for psychoanalytical criticism or relevant to Jungian literary criticism, psychosynthesis literary criticism can provide a more inclusive and enriching analysis, especially of poetry. An analysis of Carducci's poem from the Jungian perspective of the blacksmith archetype is also presented. This article demonstrates how the framework of psychosynthesis psychology is a viable methodology for literary criticism.

Keywords: Literary Criticism, Psychosynthesis, Giosuè Carducci, Psychoanalytical Criticism, Jungian Literary Criticism

1. Introduction

The psychological approach to literary criticism has been mainly influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), and is referred to as psychoanalytical criticism and Jungian literary criticism respectively. Psychoanalytical criticism initiated in 1907 with Freud's essay "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" in which he argued that literary texts, like dreams, express the unconscious desires and anxieties of the author, and that a literary work is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses (Freud et al., 1968-1974). While one may psychoanalyze a particular character within a literary work, it is usually assumed that all such characters are projections of the author's psyche. Like psychoanalysis itself, psychoanalytical criticism can examine evidence of the author's unresolved psychological issues, such as repressed emotions, psychological conflicts, guilts, ambivalences, as well as experiences of childhood trauma and sexual conflicts. In addition to the author as the object of analysis, psychoanalytical criticism can be applied to the fictive characters in the text as well as to the reader (Brooks, 1987). One of the results of this framework for literary criticism has long been related to deconstructionist analyses (Brooks, 1987; Ellmann, 1994; Holland, 1990).

However, the main caveat in applying this method of literary investigation is all too familiar to any psychoanalyst — the (mis)interpretation of a text (or patient) can readily fall under the influence of the critic's (analyst's) psychological state of mind, including his or her own unresolved and repressed unconscious material.

Moving beyond classical Freudian psychoanalytic criticism, Jungian archetypal criticism “demonstrates how literary imagery derives from recurrent psychological and mythological themes” (Wallach, 1992, p. 133). In Jung's (1922/1971) essay “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry”, he argued that the “reductive method of Freud is a purely medical one” and when applied to a literary text or painting “strips the work of art of its shimmering robes and exposes the nakedness and drabness of Homo sapiens” (pp. 305–306) to which we all — artist, poet, and psychotic personality alike — belong. Such penetrating literary (or for that matter psychological) analysis does little to help us understand the poet, and even less so the meaning of the poem. Jung insisted that a work of art:

is not a human being, but something supra-personal...Indeed, the special significance of a true work of art resides in the fact that it has escaped from the limitations of the personal and has soared beyond the personal concerns of its creator (p. 309).

Instead of Freud's reductive/deconstructive analysis which focuses on what the artwork might be revealing about the artist's personal unconscious, Jung suggested that the literary critic would do better to examine what is emerging from the collective unconscious, in particular the archetypes present in the writing. “The secret of great art...” posited Jung (1922/1971), “consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work” (p. 321).

Archetypal readings often prove more valuable than psychoanalytical ones as extensively discussed by Maud Bodkins (1934) in her formidable classic treatise *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination*. Archetypal readings can often discern symbolic patterns across the levels of plot, character, theme and language. In addition, Jungian literary criticism can also focus on the fictive characters' journey towards individuation, including the integration of their anima/animus and shadow. One limitation to this methodology is the fact that Jung's description of ‘archetype’ (as well as many other Jungian terms) is not easily pinned down. For example, sometimes archetypes are described as archaic images charged with a strong emotion and other times as ‘principles’ or ‘ideas’. Edward C. Whitmont (1968; 1912–1998), a Jungian psychoanalyst who introduced many Americans to the fundamentals of Jungian psychology, once said:

I must warn you that insight into or comprehension of what Jung really stands for can *not* be gained from his published writings. Quite frequently they hide more than they express, unless, of course, you can read between the lines... I want to emphasize that you cannot judge what Jung said from his writings; you can judge [analytical psychology] only from the way it is being practiced. (pp. 1, 13, emphasis in original).

Asserting that the only way to really understand Jung was through personal experience, Whitmont (1968) then related an example from when he was Jung's student. Perplexed by a concept that Jung had written about, Whitmont asked Jung for further explanation. “Where the hell did you read this nonsense?” Jung asked him. “In your book!” Whitmont responded, citing the page number and paragraph. “Oh forget it!” said Jung (p. 2).

Both classical Freudian psychoanalytic criticism and Jungian archetypal literary criticism treat a work of art as an *object* of analysis as opposed to entering into a *dialog* or *relationship* with the text. Since relationship is a fundamental concept of psychosynthesis, psychosynthesis literary criticism, unlike other methodological approaches, actually requires the reader to enter into a dialog with a text and come into relationship with it. This engagement with the text can provide unique literary insights and offer more inclusive and enriching results. This article attempts to show how psychosynthesis can be an additional useful method for literary criticism through the analysis of the author's translation of the poem “Il poeta” (“The Poet”) by Giosuè Carducci (1835–1907). Regarded as the official national poet of modern Italy, Carducci was a poet, writer, literary critic and teacher. In 1906 he became the first Italian to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature “not only in consideration of his deep learning and critical research, but above all as a tribute to the creative energy, freshness of style, and lyrical force which characterize his poetic masterpieces” (Borini, 2014).

Psychosynthesis is an integrative transpersonal psychology that provides a comprehensive framework for integrating one's body, feelings, attitudes, and behavior into a harmonious and synthesized whole that includes all human dimensions — physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. Founded by Roberto Assagioli (1888–1974) — who was the first to translate Freud's writings into Italian and was a colleague of Jung's — psychosynthesis also provides a therapeutic approach, which focuses on enabling clients to work towards personal and spiritual synthesis. Psychosynthesis includes a higher psychological plane, called the superconscious or transpersonal conscious, from which our higher ethical, aesthetic, scientific, and spiritual values are derived. In addition, psychosynthesis includes the concept of a Higher Self (or more simply Self) which represents a transpersonal center of consciousness and will. One of the principles of psychosynthesis is the need for individuals to emphasize, explore, and cultivate relationships on all levels—intrapersonal, interpersonal, as well as with the Self. Being in harmonious relationship with one's life and all that exists in it is referred to as ‘right relations’.

The main difference between Freud's psychoanalysis and psychosynthesis is that psychoanalysis often overstates a singular element, in particular sexuality, as the cause for psychological manifestations. Psychosynthesis instead takes a more inclusive and wholistic approach to infantile trauma, frustration, and the sense of inferiority by considering the psychodynamic intensity of each experience. For example, psychoanalysis tends not to distinguish between one's sexual instinct as opposed to having a desire for self-affirmation (Assagioli, 2000, 2002). In addition, Assagioli once explained that while psychoanalysis forced one to live in the “basement of the house of the personality” (the unconscious), psychosynthesis held the view that the human

psyche included an “attic with the window open to the sky”, i.e. a higher consciousness (Hardy, 1987, p. 27). In the archives of Assagioli (n.d.), one can find a brief note in which he succinctly describes the differences between the two psychologies. PS (psychosynthesis) differs from PA (psychoanalysis) in that:

- 1) It doesn't limit itself to the elimination of complexes, resistances and other obstacles, but brings about the training of insufficiently developed functions and of latent energies and possibilities, through the use of active PS techniques.
- 2) The recognition and awakening of Superconscious facilities.

Psychosynthesis and Jungian psychology are, on the other hand, more similar in that they both integrate the spiritual and transcendent aspects of the human experience within their frameworks. The differences between them are briefly: their understanding of archetypes and the functions of the Self, the individual self, and the shadow; and the contents attributed to the unconscious. Another major difference is that disidentification, the will, and subpersonalities are emphasized through the whole psychosynthesis process. In contrast, in Jungian psychology, the will is recognized and valued for the process of individuation, however, it is given little overall attention and not actively utilized. While few studies have compared psychosynthesis with Freudian psychoanalysis (e.g. Guggisberg Nocelli, 2021; Lombard, 2018), more literature exists examining the similarities and differences between psychosynthesis and Jungian psychology (Assagioli, 1974; Lombard, 2017a; Rosselli and Vanni, 2014).

Despite psychosynthesis psychology having the possibility of providing a holistic framework and a transpersonal perspective useful in critical analysis, this approach remains relatively new to literary criticism (e.g., Tóth-Izsó, 2019, 2022). This case study of psychosynthesis literary criticism as applied to Carducci's poem “The Poet” – from the perspective of the translator and reader – demonstrates how fundamental psychosynthesis concepts of the transpersonal conscious, Self and right relations can provide an additional approach to literary criticism now lacking in other methodologies. In this article, I first introduce basic psychosynthesis concepts. Then I briefly describe my translation process of Carducci's poem “Il poeta” (for the poem and translation, see Appendix A and B). Finally, as both reader and translator, I examine the archetype of the blacksmith in “Il poeta” and then analyze the poem from a psychosynthesis literary perspective.

2. A Brief Overview of Psychosynthesis

Psychosynthesis psychology was developed by Roberto Assagioli, who was an Italian medical doctor and one of the first psychoanalysts in Italy. In the 1960s, along with Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), he was one of the founders of the emerging field of transpersonal psychology, helping to define essential transpersonal concepts such as peak experiences (Maslow, 1968) and the transpersonal or Higher Self (Assagioli, 2000). In 1933, Assagioli first published his model of the human psyche (Figure 1), which he described as a “conception of the constitution of the human being in his living concrete reality” (p. 14).

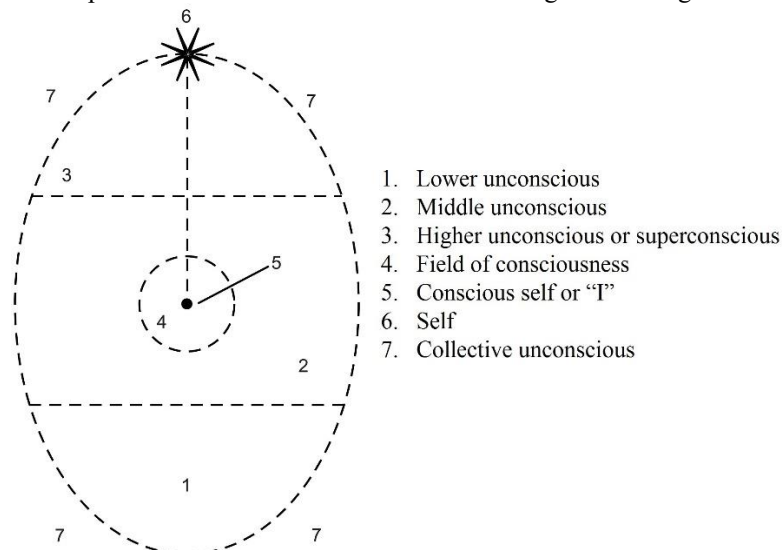


Figure 1: Assagioli's Model of the Structure of the Psyche. Note: Dotted lines indicate permeable boundaries (Assagioli, 2000, p. 15)

2.1. Different Levels of Personal Unconsciousness

Psychosynthesis subdivides the personal unconscious into (1) lower, (2) middle, and (3) higher. In addition, every individual has a field of “I” consciousness (4), which contains our conscious sensations, images, thoughts, feelings, desires, and impulses. The lower unconscious contains basic psychological activities which co-ordinate bodily functions, fundamental drives, and primitive urges, as well as complexes containing intense emotion (Assagioli, 2000). Like psychoanalysis, psychosynthesis also aims to develop a healthy ego and heal (childhood) trauma, however, its ultimate goal is to create a well-integrated whole individual both personally and spiritually. This goal is equivalent to Jung's aim to produce for each client a profound

transformation of the personality and its integration by means of what he called the ‘process of individuation’. Assagioli (1974) stated that this process and its phases are “akin to psychosynthetic therapy” (p. 44).

The middle unconscious contains the awareness that lies within the periphery of our consciousness and is, therefore, easily accessible to us (Assagioli, 2000). The middle unconscious is where memories are held that are easily retrievable and where “imaginative activities are elaborated and developed in a sort of psychological gestation before their birth into the light of consciousness” (p. 15). The higher unconscious or transpersonal unconscious holds our greater human potential and is the region from which we receive our “...higher intuitions and inspirations — artistic, philosophical or scientific, ethical ‘imperatives’ and urges to humanitarian and heroic action” (p. 15).

2.2. *The Self and I-Self Connection*

According to Assagioli (2000), the Self is a transpersonal center, a “*unifying and controlling Principle of our life*” (p. 21, emphasis in original). The Self (6) is represented in Figure 1 as a star, and stands in relationship with the “I” (5), the “inner still point that we experience as truly ourselves” (Hardy, 1987, p. 28). One can think of the “I” as a reflection of the full potential of the Self. The connection between the “I” and the Self is referred to as the I-Self connection and is indicated in Figure 1 by a dotted line. Like the Self, the “I” is permanent and unchangeable; and both the Self and the “I” have two central functions: consciousness and will. From a psychosynthesis point-of-view, our life’s journey is to seek, reconnect, and synthesize the consciousness and will of the “I” with the consciousness and will of the Self — in other words, to synthesize the personal with the transpersonal.

Assagioli asserted that the Self is not necessarily religious, dogmatic, or tied to any specific symbolic forms, but rather is a mystic state, a reality that has been testified to by a vast number of individuals throughout history and across cultures. Assagioli repeatedly stated that his principles and methods were based on solid personal experience and that transpersonal experiences do not need to be demonstrated but are a fact of consciousness that contains its own evidence and proof within itself (Haronian, 1976). Viewed in this way, transpersonal experiences are far removed from Freud’s belief that they are merely the neurotic sublimation of the sexual urge or regression to the postnatal stage of development (Freud, 1961). In contrast to Jung’s (1969) definition of the Self as a fundamental transcendent archetype that (like all archetypes) cannot be directly experienced, Assagioli believed that the Self is a reality that can be directly experienced by the individual, and is actually the key part of the individual that connects the transpersonal with the personal and, hence, the personal with the universal.

2.3. *Working in right relations*

Throughout the process of psychosynthesis, the essential dynamic of good will guides individuals towards communicating, understanding and cooperating with other living beings and with nature in general. Ultimately, this working dynamic allows for creativity and renewal within the relationship, including within oneself. This idea in psychosynthesis is called “right relations,” which refers to the use of all aspects of will and the deepest awareness possible to relate to all that is present in space and time. Right relations arouse the urge and determination to resolve conflicts, counterbalance selfish and dichotomous tendencies and activities, and to create right human relationships. The two guiding principles of love and will are both active during right relations in balanced proportions. Assagioli (2002) wrote:

One of the principal causes of today’s disorders is the lack of love on the part of those who have will and the lack of will in those who are good and loving. This points unmistakably to the urgent need for the integration, the unification of love with will (p. 91).

The union of love and will fosters and acts upon the growth and evolution of individuals who are in relationship. According to psychosynthesis, each of us has the responsibility to become aware of our situation and choices, act with good will, and work towards positive growth — individually, socially, and universally. Ultimately, one of the long-range goals of psychosynthesis is to establish a full, permanent sense of relationship with all beings (Haronian, 1976; Lombard, 2017b).

For a full explanation of psychosynthesis, its concepts and techniques, please refer to the literature (Assagioli, 2000, 2002; Ferrucci, 1982; Firman & Gila, 2002; Guggisberg Nocelli, 2021; Lombard, 2014; Lombard & Müller, 2018; Nguyen, 2002; Vargiu, 1974).

3. About the Translation

In many ways, the process of translating Carducci’s poem “Il poeta” reflected the meaning that I discovered within the poem itself. The translation also became an act of ‘creative psychosynthesis’; that is, the distinct purpose of translating the poem became a dynamic and creative attempt to balance numerous tensions. The process was not static, for I and the poem constantly moved forward and struggled towards a greater synthesis.

I was inspired to translate the poem while working on the translation of Roberto Assagioli’s book *Psicosintesi: Per l’armonia della vita*. In Chapter 4, Assagioli (1966/2022) invites his readers to:

Reread Giosuè Carducci’s poem “Il poeta” as it expresses in a wonderful way this ideal of the artist, which is, in reality, a work of creative psychosynthesis, through which the psychic elements are fused and shaped in an inner fire, producing works of beauty (p. 36).

Stimulated by Assagioli’s suggestion, I searched the internet for the poem and found it in Italian along with a translation by G. L. Bickersteth published in 1913. While Bickersteth’s translation is faithful to the meter and rhyme of Carducci’s poem, the language itself felt antiquated — for example, his use of ‘merry-andrew’ in the third line. Unable to find another translation of “Il poeta”, I decided to attempt to translate Carducci’s poem myself from a more literal and contemporary perspective.

My experience of translating Carducci's poem first needs to be coupled with the observations of Bickersteth (1913). In his preface he states: "The ideal translator of poetry must not only be a poet himself, but must probably also be capable of writing poetry in the language which he is translating" (viii). This is something neither Bickersteth nor myself claim to be able to do. Aligned with Bickersteth's translation, mine is not a substitute for Carducci's poem, but rather an "*interpretation* of the original to those unacquainted or only slightly acquainted with the Italian language" (viii, emphasis in original). For there is much truth to heed in Dante's warning in his *Convivio*: "*Nulla cosa per legame musaico armonizzata si può della sua loquela in altra trasmutare senza rompere tutta sua dolcezza ed armonia*" ("Nothing harmonized by a musical bond can be changed over from its own language into another without breaking all its sweetness and harmony"; Friscardi, 2017, pp. 28–29). Rabindranath Tagore, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, would agree, having struggled with translating his own poetry from Bengali into English: "I think one should frankly give up the attempt of reproducing in a translation the lyrical suggestions of the original verse and substitute in their place some new quality inherent in the new vehicle of expression" (Tagore, 2006, p. 169).

My translation process was continual and slow, as I managed to work on one stanza a day with at least six revisions of the text. Fired by the need to understand what both Assagioli was inferring and Carducci was saying, I hammered away word-by-word, trying to form the molten incandescent mass into a golden arrow that I might shoot into the English-speaking world. Familiar to any translator, countless decisions needed to be made, but I knew the sound of the forge needed to appear in the poem as well as a strong masculine voice. Many of Carducci's words are archaic in Italian, and finding a way to best express them poetically in English and at the same time accessible to a modern reader — while not exactly leaving me, as the word-smith, in a sweat (!) — did cause some consternation. Perhaps the most difficult stanza to translate was the sixth, which describes the creative process itself. The Italian words *guizza*, *brilla*, *sfavilla*, *rosseggia*, *sibila*, *rugge*, and *fugge* seemed to leap up like staccato flashes of light as the fire hissed and sizzled. Translating such words is particularly difficult because the Italian language is as rich as it is nuanced. I can only say that I did my best 'and nothing more'.

Meanwhile, I searched the internet for images of blacksmiths and found a video with the sound of the smith striking his hammer on the anvil. Like the smith, I went forward with the translation in a determined and careful way, often searching ceaselessly for the right word that might precisely express the poet's thought and feeling. Nearly midway through, I did wonder about the final translation for 'what will be, I do not know/ God only knows', but rested assured that God was smiling down on me.

Once complete, I shot the translated poem into the air(ways), offering it and my analysis to a total of forty-six psychosynthesis practitioners during two different online conferences. My understanding of the poem deepened with each presentation of it, just as it has with the writing of this article. Now with the poem's publication, the arrow is once again flying 'towards the sun' and I can only 'watch how high it flies' with the hope that it might have captured Carducci's 'graceful brilliance' as well as a hint of what Assagioli felt the poem conveyed about creative psychosynthesis.

From a psychosynthesis perspective, during the translation process, I was cultivating a multitude of relationships with not only Carducci and his poem, but also with Bickersteth and his translation, and with Assagioli and his interpretation. In addition, the blacksmith's forge entered my awareness despite its historical distance from my own daily life. More minutely, when struggling to ascertain a precise English equivalent to an antiquated Italian word in the poem, I found myself in deep relationship with a single word. "Il poeta" slowly became like a pebble dropped into a still pool, as circle after circle of relationship resonated outward when I shared the translation with others and interacted with their own questions, responses, and interpretations. This dialogue extended to Emily Dickenson and Seamus Heaney when I discovered each poet's expression of the blacksmith archetype in "Dare you see a Soul" and The "Forge", respectively. Ultimately, I am now in relationship with you as the reader of this article about this translated poem.

4. The Archetype of the Blacksmith

In "Il poeta", Carducci's use of the archetype of the blacksmith as a metaphor for the poet acting as a word-smith was, undoubtedly, a conscious choice. Carducci was a Greek, Latin, and Italian scholar and would have been familiar with the mythological associations of the blacksmith Hephaestus, the god of fire and metallurgy in ancient Greek mythology and his Roman counterpart Vulcan. Hephaestus is the only physically imperfect god amongst the Olympians. In the *Iliad*, we learn how his mother Hera, upon seeing his deformity, cast him out of heaven. As a smith, Hephaestus returns to Olympus and is highly honored as the creator of gods' armour, weapons, dwellings and furnishings. In his workshop are handmaidens he has forged out of gold who help him with his work. His wife is one of the three Graces in the *Iliad*, and in the *Odyssey*, his wife is said to be Aphrodite (Britannica, 2023).

Dante's (Alighieri, 1472/2021) metaphoric reference to the smithy in *Paradise* would have also been familiar to Carducci: "*Lo moto e la virtù d'i santi giri, / come dal fabbro l'arte del martello, / da' beati motor convien che spiri*" (Par. 2. 127–9; "The motive and power of the holy gyres, / as the hammer's art derives from the blacksmith, / must derive from the blessed angelic movers"; my translation). Angels move the heavenly spheres, determining the distinctive quality of each, just as the smith determines the motion of his hammer to create his various artforms. Dante, as the consummate poet, does the same in the *Divina Commedia*, not only crafting his epic work of genius, but also moving and forming us, through the wonder and beauty of each heavenly sphere in *Paradiso*. In one of Carducci's many learned contributions to the study of Dante, he declared that Dante is a singer "of the deepest things in life, the deepest thoughts of men, the deepest secrets of the soul, not of his own soul

only, but of all souls” (as cited in Bickersteth, 1913, p. 47). In 1895, Carducci himself was crowned with a laurel plucked from Dante's tomb at Ravenna.

Blacksmithing is an ancient trade and art that has been practiced for thousands of years. Transforming wrought iron and steel into objects ranging from agricultural implements to weapons and armor and religious artifacts, the blacksmith's tools are numerous. However, he cannot beat the heated metal into the desired shape without certain essential implements, namely the hammer, tongs, anvil and, perhaps most importantly, fire.

Fire is also one of the five elements (wood, fire, water, metal, and earth), which are all present during the blacksmith's work. The charcoal wood builds a fire which heats the metal ore extracted from the earth, which, in turn, is hammered into shape and ultimately quenched in water in order to increase the overall strength of the metal. The element of air is also essential for heating the coals and burning the fire. During the procedure, all these elements are brought into the correct proportion and harmony and, together with the blacksmith's skill and intellect, synthesized into a finished product.

As an archetype, the blacksmith is symbolic of the Divine Smith or Celestial Smith, the one who “creates and organizes the world and imparts knowledge of the mysteries” (Cooper, 1978, p. 154). The Divine Smith's attributes are thunder and lightning, hammer, tongs, and anvil and he controls the power of fire. The smith's craft has the quality of being sacred and magical, and the smith himself possesses initiatory secrets. According to Baltic mythology, Kalvis, the heavenly smith, forges a new sun every morning and throws it into the sky (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998). Interestingly, the Celtic goddess Brigit was the patroness of blacksmiths as well as poets and healers. While not a blacksmith herself, she is depicted with a fiery pillar rising over her head, and until the last century was called upon in prayer by some Irish people to bless their nightly household fire (Condren, 1989; Jones, 1994).

As shown in the next section, Carducci uses the archetype of the blacksmith to lift his readers' imagination towards God, or a higher level of consciousness. The archetype of the blacksmith is resonating out of “the world of here and now which momentarily lifts the plane of the action from the temporal to the eternal” (Frye 1957, p. 75). In psychosynthesis terms, the reader's conscious “I” is lifted towards the Self as Carducci evokes the divine directly out of the physicality of the blacksmith.

In “Il poeta”, the blacksmith embodies the skillful shaping and honing of a poem through the use of time-tested techniques. Smithing and poetry writing are both ancient practices requiring the artist to be focused and respectful, not only of quality, but also tradition. Each carries a legacy of its predecessors and neither can afford to be deterred by either challenges or setbacks. Just as the smith's fire transforms the metal, the poet's fiery passion drives her to create song. Just as the smith is confident in wielding his hammer and striking decidedly upon the work of art, so is the poet able to proficiently revise and fine-tune the writing. When Hephaestus' goddess mother threw him down to earth, divine power in heaven descended and connected to our earthly reality. Both the smith and poet mold divine inspiration derived from Infinity into a concrete, physical and finite reality — one with metal and the other with words.

5. Psychosynthesis Analysis of Carducci's “Il poeta”

In this analysis, I have taken the liberty to divide Carducci's poem of twelve stanzas into four parts: Part I, stanzas 1–3; Part II, stanzas 4–6; Part III, stanzas 7–11; and Part IV, stanza 12. In Part I, Carducci explicitly states what a poet is not. In the second part, he states what a poet is through the image of the blacksmith, and in the third he describes the poet's creative process through the blacksmith's work. Finally Part IV ends with the ultimate result of the poet's labors.

Carducci's first line, ‘The poet, oh foolish folk’, sets the scene, although it is not clear if ‘the poet’ is Carducci himself or, more objectively, poets in general. However, there is no mistaking who we are. We are ‘foolish folk’, the reading public who doesn't have a clue as to who a poet is or what a poet does. This clear and no-nonsense address immediately brings Carducci into relationship with his readers.

Once this relationship is established, Carducci begins by explaining what a poet is not. The first stanza tells us that a poet is not a beggar or crude jester, crashing banquets and stealing bread. The reader is to understand from this that a poet is to be taken seriously, neither laughed at or scorned nor seen as a thief in the backrooms of literature. In the second stanza, we ‘foolish folk’ are told that poets are not lazy daydreamers with their heads up in the clouds ‘in vain search of angels’. In the third stanza, Carducci uses the metaphor of the gardener who simply throws manure on the earth — without the hard labor of tilling, weeding or sowing — only to offer cabbage flowers and violets, both which grow spontaneously and without much effort on the gardener's part. This stanza clearly infers that poets are not sentimental or trite, nor do they offer quickly attained entertainment. In fact, Carducci viewed Romanticism as sickly sentimental and a lifelong foe (Bickersteth, 1913).

By now we might be asking, “Well, then, for heaven's sake, what *is* a poet?” Carducci begins Part II of the poem by reading our minds and striking without any trepidation: ‘The poet is a mighty blacksmith’. Bang! Pounding down with great strength, the hammer clobbers us on our foolish heads, forcing us to land on our feet in the real world. The language then becomes seething with physicality and male erotic energy. We cannot escape our bodies or the ideal man while we are confronted with descriptors like ‘bare-chested’, ‘steely muscles’, ‘sturdy neck’ and ‘sinewy arms’.

The fifth stanza then explains how the poet/blacksmith wakes up at dawn — even ‘before the birds’ — and prepares his ‘forge to labor in’. This exuberant and spirited start to the day and the task ahead mirrors stanza two where we were told that the poet is not a slothful dreamer. Then in stanza six, the sound of the creative process begins with flashing flames that are roaring, hissing and soaring until the ‘crimson embers’ are ready for the work to begin in the grate.

In terms of psychosynthesis, Part I illustrates some of the ways we ‘foolish folk’ can convince ourselves that we are doing the difficult work of self-realization. Assagioli (2000) was clear in stating that self-actualization is a “long and arduous journey, an adventure ... full of surprises, difficulties and even dangers” (p. 35). He states that we must “resolutely concentrate all our energies towards the achievement of the chosen goal” instead of only managing our inner chaos with “a series of stop-gap solutions, compromises, adaptations and ... hypocrisies towards ourselves and others” (pp. 9, 94). After all, the claims of all great ideals have to be paid in full, and not half-heartedly. Knowing how easily human nature can lull itself into a half-serious, lazy and mundane attempt to create a full and harmonious life, Assagioli (2002) wrote an entire book on the will and the training and development of the will in all its aspects. Similarly through the archetype of the blacksmith, Part II demonstrates the physical strength, dedication, and ‘audacious’ inner fire we must have to forge an understanding of who and what we really are and ultimately express that fullness through every creative act.

Part III, which appears almost in the middle of the poem, starts with the sudden appearance of Carducci, the poet, and his admission that: ‘What will be, I do not know’. This verse is ambiguous as *we don't know* either. Is Carducci is talking about the very poem we are reading? Or some other poem he is writing? The writing of poetry in objective terms? The article the blacksmith is about to create? Or life in general? Then he immediately surprises us with: ‘God only knows’. Suddenly the poem is revealing not only the creative personality of the poet/blacksmith but also the Infinite Creative Personality of God. In psychosynthesis terms, the Higher Self has been recognized along with its Higher Will, and this Higher consciousness and will has been brought into relationship with, not only Carducci himself, but also the reader. The next line tells us that God is ‘smiling upon the poet’, which is to say, in psychosynthesis terms, that the will and conscious of the poet and Self are in alignment.

Just as suddenly as the poet and God have appeared, the blacksmith has gone up in smoke. All that remains of the smith is his archetypal image. The stanza ends with identifying the two major elements thrown into the fire as ‘love and thought’, the polarity of Eros and Logos, which are the elements of a desired synthesis so aptly expressed by Dante (Alighieri, 2021) as “*luce intellettuale, piena d'amore*” (Par. 30. 40; “intellectual light, full of love”; my translation).

But feeling and reason are not the only necessary elements that the poet must throw ‘into the furnace’ to create a poem. In the next stanza, Carducci describes other elements such as memories, ancestral inheritances, and the glories of future generations. In psychosynthesis terms, the ‘incandescent mass’ from which the poem (or authentic and harmonious “I”) will emerge contains the multiplicity of elements within the poet’s inner psyche, including the poet’s subpersonalities, inherited elements, ancestral atavistic elements, and external collective and individual influences (Assagioli, 1966/2022). This mass of collected psychic material is now ready to be acted upon by both the individual poet and God.

In Part IV, the actual creative process takes place. The poet ‘seizes his hammer’ (i.e., his pen) and begins to toil over the red-hot mass. While the ‘hammer beats and sings upon the anvil’ the sun (symbolic of the Self) shines resplendently upon the work that is ‘so laboriously won’. Stanza 9 is mirroring stanza 3 in that the work is labor intensive, unlike the gardener casually throwing manure around the fields only to later offer spontaneous flowers. In stanza 10, the poet continues to labor, but the transpersonal qualities of the Self become prominent. The new creation is slowly forming into virtuous expressions of freedom, fortitude, victory, glory, beauty, majesty and sweetness. Contrast this display with the hazy daydreams and ‘vain search of angels’ in stanza 2. This manifestation of higher qualities is only possible through the poet’s active relationship with the Self, evident through his attitude of trustful surrender to the consciousness and will of a higher power.

The hard work of the poet continues in stanza 11. We are rewarded with the manifestation of these higher qualities mentioned in the previous stanza now appearing in the material world as decorated tabernacles and embellished altars — everything necessary for ritual. All rituals encompass every aspect of the highest forms of art — from the implements used during the ceremony, to the music and its poetic prayers, costumes and choreography. The infinite has become finite through the ritual and its accompanying art forms. Ultimately, the poet has created receptors for the ritual meal — rich chalices for the banquet’, which are in stark contrast to the beggar at the banquet in the first stanza sneaking into the pantry to steal bread.

Part IV is an understated epilogue affirming the mystery of the entire creative process. In contrast to Bickersteth’s (1913) belief that the first three stanzas of “Il poeta” offers readers a “sufficiently clear conception of what Carducci set before himself as the ideal poetic figure for his time” (p. 24), this understanding only truly becomes evident at the end of the poem. The ‘poor blacksmith’ reappears, presumably sweaty, exhausted and elated after the exertion of all that hammering. In the end, the poet/blacksmith has nothing more than ‘an arrow of gold’, an arrow that he must make for himself. (One might note, however, that this arrow is made of gold and nothing less.) All that remains for the poet/blacksmith is to shoot the arrow towards the sun and ‘watch how high it flies / and how splendid it glows’, to marvel at its grace and brilliance ‘and nothing more’. The poet has no expectations that the finished artwork might garner fame or fortune, despite its cost to himself and the effort required to create it. In every sense, it is the journey, not the result, that is to be marveled upon, as the poet releases the final product into the world and ‘shoots it towards the sun’. Satisfaction of completing a creative act is derived from the wonder of the results, results that often rise above what one could ever have imagined possible. In psychosynthesis terms, the golden arrow, fashioned by the will and consciousness of poet/blacksmith is the “I”, which becomes more authentic and attuned to the Self after each creative act brought into existence. Just as the arrow will never reach the sun, our personalities will never fully reach the full potential of the Self. Nevertheless, we can, throughout our lives, continually forge the arrow and shoot it towards a higher reality as we aim to become more fully human and our unique selves.

6. Conclusion

This article provides an example of literary criticism from the perspective of psychosynthesis psychology through the analysis of Carducci's poem "Il poeta" and the author's experience of translating the poem into English. The psychosynthesis concepts that appear in the poem and translation are the Self, transpersonal consciousness, and right relations. From a Jungian literary analytical view, the archetype of the blacksmith is also examined in the poem. The sum total of Carducci's rendering of the blacksmith allows the universal archetype of the blacksmith to emerge not only as the subject but also as the means of the poem. The blacksmith, like the poet himself and all poets in general, labor with dedication to mold their finite abilities into expressions of divine beauty. This creative process is also the aim of psychosynthesis undertaken by all individuals who commit themselves to the long journey towards wholeness and authenticity. Like the artifacts created by both blacksmith and poet, personal and spiritual psychosynthesis calls for a synthesis of the ineffable mysteries of the infinite within the limitations contained in the finite. May the mighty blacksmith's hammer sing at dawn, and the poet's pen never waver.

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Appendix A: “Il poeta” by Giosuè Carducci

Il poeta

Il poeta, o vulgo sciocco,
 Un pitocco
 Non è già, che a l' altrui mensa
 Via con lazzi turpi e matti
 Porta i piatti
 Ed il pan ruba in dispensa.

E né meno è un perdigiorno
 Che va intorno
 Dando il capo ne' cantoni,
 E co 'l naso sempre a l' aria
 Gli occhi svara
 Dietro gli angeli e i rondoni.

E né meno è un giardiniero
 Che il sentiero
 De la vita co 'l letame
 Utilizza, e cavolfiori
 Pe' signori
 E viole ha per le dame.

Il poeta è un grande artiere,
 Che al mestiere
 Fece i muscoli d'acciaio:
 Capo ha fier, collo robusto,
 Nudo il busto,
 Duro il braccio, e l' occhio gaio.

Non a pena l' augel pia
E giulfa
Ride l' alba a la collina,
Ei co 'l mantice ridesta
Fiamma e festa
E lavor ne la fucina;

E la fiamma guizza e brilla
E sfavilla
E rosseggia balda audace,
E poi sibila e poi ruggie
E poi fugge
Scoppiettando da la brace.

Che sia ciò, non lo so io;
Lo sa Dio
Che sorride al grande artiero.
Ne le fiamme così ardenti
Gli elementi
De l' amore e del pensiero

Egli gitta, e le memorie
E le glorie
De' suoi padri e di sua gente.
Il passato e l' avvenire
A fluire
Va nel masso incandescente.

Ei l' afferra, e poi dal maglio
Co 'l travaglio
Ei lo doma su l' incude.
Picchia e canta. Il sole ascende,
E risplende
Su la fronte e l' opra rude.

Picchia. E per la libertade
Ecco spade,
Ecco scudi di fortezza:
Ecco serti di vittoria
Per la gloria,
E diademi a la bellezza.

Picchia. Ed ecco istoriati
A i penati
Tabernacoli ed al rito:
Ecco tripodi ed altari,
Ecco rari
Fregi e vasi pe 'l convito.

Per sé il pover manuale
Fa uno strale
D' oro, e il lancia contro 'l sole:
Guarda come in alto ascenda
E risplenda,
Guarda e gode, e più non vuole.

Appendix B: Author's Translation of *Il poeta* by Giosuè Carducci*The Poet*

The poet, oh foolish folk,
 is not a beggar
 crashing other's banquets
 with vile jokes and crazed antics
 to steal away the bread
 he robs from the pantry.

Nor is he a loafer
 with hazy daydreams,
 his head forever in the clouds,
 his eyes roving
 in vain search of angels
 only to see swallows
 nesting in the barn.

Neither is he a gardener
 enriching life's paths
 with manure
 only to offer cabbage flowers
 to the men
 and violets
 to the ladies.

The poet is a mighty blacksmith,
 a bare-chested artisan
 who everyday with pride
 makes for steely muscles
 and sturdy neck,
 sinewy arms and lively eyes.

Just before the birds
 twitter their morning song,
 and the dawn shines upon the hills,
 the blacksmith's bellows
 awaken flames to roar
 his forge to labor in.

And the flames flash and shine
 sparkling boldly
 audaciously glowing
 whistling, hissing, and then roaring
 finally soaring
 crimson embers in the grate.

What will be, I do not know.
 God only knows
 while smiling upon the poet
 smithing the flame
 so fervent
 upon the elements
 of love and thought.

Elements that he throws
into the furnace
along with memories
and the glories of his forbearers
and his people
past and future
flowing into one
incandescent mass.

He seizes his hammer
to toil and tame the molten mass.
The hammer beats and sings
upon the anvil.
The sun rises and is resplendent
upon the work
so laboriously won.

He hammers! For freedom
Swords and shields of fortitude
Garlands victorious
Life glorious
And Beauty's coronation
Majestic and sweet.

He hammers! And lo!
Tabernacles decorated
for the household gods
and their rituals.
Tripods and altars embellished
with rare frieze.
And rich chalices for the banquet.

For himself, the poor blacksmith
makes an arrow of gold
and shoots it towards the sun
to watch how high it flies
and how splendid it glows.
To watch and marvel
its graceful brilliance
and nothing more.