

## Memorable Dates and Symbolic Spaces:

### Lotman and Dante<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract

The twenties of the twenty-first century is a time of planetary challenges. At the same time, these are years of round anniversaries of major representatives of the cultural and scientific community, such as Dante or Lotman. This is a reason to turn to their reflections in order to better comprehend what is happening in connection with the nature of man himself.

Dante's *Divine Comedy* was in the center of attention of Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman, who devoted to this topic one of the chapters of the book *Universe of the Mind*. Lotman analyzes the structure of the *Divine Comedy* primarily as a symbolic space, where Nature and the Universe are semiotic texts, the meaning of which is to be deciphered. The text is organized around the semantic axis “Top-Bottom”, and the author's movement in the text is always a descent or ascent.

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The article proposes to consider the space of the *Divine Comedy* from the standpoint of Lotman's semiotics of culture, in connection with the philosophical hypotheses of Pavel Florensky, as well as with the later reflections of European semioticians of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

**Keywords:** construction of the universe, semiotic space, “Top – Bottom” axis, spiritual ascension

### **Introduction. A few words about anniversaries**

The era in which we live, the 20s of the 21st century, is a time of planetary challenges. At the same time, these are years of round anniversaries of major representatives of the cultural and scientific community, such as Dante (700th anniversary of death) or Lotman (centenary of birth). This is a reason to turn to their reflections in order to better comprehend what is happening in connection with the nature of man himself.

Memorable dates or Anniversaries are themselves a semiotic phenomenon. Semiotics deals with the phenomena of meaning, it builds a general image of signs and texts that make up the history of human culture. It is in this sense that today we should understand the statement of the outstanding Russian philologist and semiotician Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov: “The task of semiotics is to describe the semiosphere, without which the noosphere is unthinkable. Semiotics should help us navigate history” (Ivanov, 1999: 792). Therefore, memorable dates - anniversaries of prominent personalities, dates of book publications, periods of congresses - serve as a kind of cultural reference points on which the measurement scale is based.

In the UNESCO system there is a whole Program of Anniversaries (international days, international decades and anniversaries from a hundred years and above), aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue and tribute to the memory of outstanding personalities who contributed to the construction of human civilization. Recent examples of UNESCO Anniversaries include the

Congress of the French Semiotic Association on the centenary of birth of the founder of the Paris Semiotic School Algirdas Julien Greimas in 2017<sup>3</sup> and the Conference on the centenary of the living French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin in 2021<sup>4</sup>.

The anniversaries of Dante in 2021 and Lotman in 2022 were also included in the UNESCO Anniversaries program. For Lotman's centenary, inclusion in the UNESCO program marks another step towards the international institutionalization of semiotics as a discipline. If, from the point of view of European colleagues, semiotics does not need to justify its social or economic benefits<sup>5</sup> (Klinkenberg, 2012: 13), then it still needs to be institutionalized at the national and international level<sup>6</sup> (Fontanille, 2013).

According to the well-known expression of the Russian poet Sergei Yesenin, “the big is seen at a distance” (Yesenin, 1997: 88), and therefore the anniversaries of great authors are a wonderful opportunity to look at their texts from the point of view of semiotic analysis, which itself passed the path of evolution in the late 20th - early 21st centuries: from Lotman's semiotics of culture to semiotics of passions and further to anthroposemiotics.

### **Symbolic Spaces : The *Divine Comedy* as interpreted by Yuri Lotman**

The image of the artist-creator underlies many of Yuri Lotman's semiotic analyzes. One of the striking examples is the chapter “Semantic intersection as a semantic explosion. Inspiration” of his last lifetime book *Culture and Explosion* (1992). Lotman refers to the texts of Pushkin, Zhukovsky and Blok and describes creative inspiration as the greatest tension, an explosion that

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<sup>3</sup> The Acts of the Congress *Greimas aujourd'hui : l'avenir de la structure* are published on the website of the Association: <http://afsemio.fr/publications/greimas-aujourd'hui-lavenir-de-la-structure-actes-du-congres-de-lafs-2017/>

<sup>4</sup> Video recording of the conference dedicated to the centenary of E. Morin is available on the UNESCO website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZzfQn0W04>

<sup>5</sup> «Il est assez fréquent qu'un sémioticien — du moins lorsqu'il accepte de parler avec d'autres que des sémioticiens — se voie sommé de justifier l'utilité sociale et/ou économique de sa discipline. Il n'a évidemment pas à obéir à cette injonction : aucune discipline scientifique ne définit sa valeur intrinsèque par la rentabilité immédiate des concepts qu'elle met au point...» (Klinkenberg, 2012:13)

<sup>6</sup> «Il n'y a pas de recherche et de formation dans quelque domaine que ce soit qui puisse se faire en dehors des institutions, qu'il s'agisse des institutions existantes ou des institutions à créer. Même les chercheurs les plus solitaires et les plus individualistes ne peuvent se passer des institutions que d'autres animent, qui organisent des colloques et des congrès, qui pilotent des revues ou des collections, qui organisent des séminaires où ils sont invités, et qui cherchent et trouvent des financements pour tout cela» (Fontanille, 2013).

pulls a person out of the sphere of logic into the area of unpredictable creativity. Moreover, the entire process of creativity is a kind of tension that “makes the untranslatable translatable” (Lotman, 2004a: 29), when the “inexpressible”<sup>7</sup> inspiration is transformed into poetic words.

There is no happiness in the world, but there is peace and freedom.

For a long time my enviable share has been dreaming -

Long ago, a tired slave, I planned an escape

To the abode of distant labors and pure joys.

Pushkin, 1834: 528

Alexander Pushkin is Lotman's favorite author, and Pushkin's image of «peace and freedom», as well as «the abode of distant labors and pure joys», where the artist can completely surrender to the creative process and inspiration, is also interpreted by Lotman as an example of happiness<sup>8</sup>.

In the book *Universe of the Mind* (1996), Lotman pays special attention to the so-called symbolic spaces that are built by the artist: the writer and the poet. From the point of view of the founder of the Moscow-Tartu Semiotic School, Dante Alighieri could most accurately be called an architect (although he compared himself to a geometer), because the entire *Divine Comedy* is a "huge architectural structure", the construction of the universe (Lotman, 2004a: 303). According to Lotman, Dante's World is a huge message from its Creator, a mysterious message that must be deciphered. The world as a product of creativity is endowed with purpose and meaning, about every detail of it you can ask «What does it mean?» The universe is presented as a semiotic text awaiting its decoder, and in the process of interpretation, the semiotics of space comes to the fore.

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<sup>7</sup> Lotman refers to the famous expression of the poet Vasily Zhukovsky: «Nevyrazimoe podvlastno l 'vyrazhenju?» («Is the inexpressible subject to expression?»). Zhukovsky's doubts are quite accurately conveyed in the European translations of *Culture and Explosion*, see the French translation: *Qui pourrait exprimer, hélas, l'inexprimable!* (Lotman, 2004b: 46).

<sup>8</sup> Continuing both Pushkin's quote and Lotman's thought, we can say that it is peace and freedom that we (the inhabitants of the Earth) were deprived of in 2020 with the advent of the sanitary crisis (Merkoulova and Merkoulova, 2021: 145).

Dante the narrator simultaneously possesses the point of view of both the Creator and the Person. For the space building that he constructs in his text, the «Top-Bottom» axis is of particular importance. The first meaning of the «up-down» axis is valid only within the Earth: «down» is the center of gravity of the globe, and up is any direction from the radius to the center. The second meaning of the axis is the absolute top and bottom, as pointed out by the philosopher and mathematician Pavel Florensky<sup>9</sup>.

In the cosmic scheme of the *Divine Comedy*, space is organized according to the ideas of Aristotle: the northern hemisphere is at the bottom of the Earth (as less perfect), and the southern hemisphere is at the top. Therefore, Dante and his companion Virgil, following the earthly scale «up-down», descend into the depths of the Earth, from its surface to the center. But paradoxically, at the same time they rise up in relation to the orientation of the world axis.

Soon as he reach'd the point, whereat the thigh  
Upon the swelling of the haunches turns,  
My leader there with pain and struggling hard  
Turn'd round his head, where his feet stood before,  
And grappled at the fell, as one who mounts,  
That into hell methought we turn'd again.<sup>10</sup>

Dante, 1892 [1472], Canto XXXIV

The paradox can be explained in the context of Dante's semiotics, where a special meaning is attributed to each spatial category. In Lotman's view, Dante's relationship between expression and content is devoid of the traditional conventions of semiotic systems. We are not talking about signs,

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting that the fascination with the spatial ideas of Florensky, quoted by Lotman, was also passed by Vladimir Vernadsky, and later Vyacheslav Ivanov (both of them communicated and collaborated with Florensky's son at different periods). See Ivanov, 2015: 9 and Vernadsky, 1977: 162.

<sup>10</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*. Translation into Russian by M. Lozinsky. M., "Pravda", 1982. URL: <https://online-read.rf/dante-divine-comedy/#p1>. Quoted by Y. Lotman, 1996: 304. Hereinafter, we quote from the English translation (1892): <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8789/8789-h/8789-h.htm#link34>

but about symbols, in the terminology of Saussure. Dante's symbols, in the words of the pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, really show the world of superbeing at the level of being. The content of the symbol, as it were, «shines through in it» (Lotman, 2004a: 305). It shines through brighter if the object or being is closer to the heavenly light of truth. The further the text is from the source of truth, the dimmer its reflection, the more conditional the relationship of expression and content. At the highest level of the universal hierarchy, we can directly contemplate the truth with a spiritual eye, and at the lower level, it takes on the character of purely conventional signs.

Sinners and demons use purely conventional signs, so they can lie, deceive and commit treacherous acts, that is, separate content from expression. Righteous people, if they use conventional signs, do not harm them, do not use their conventional nature for evil. Thus, as one moves upward, the relationship of content and expression changes: the higher, the more symbolism grows and conventionality weakens.

In the *Divine Comedy*, the entire semantic architectonics of the text is organized around the «Top-Bottom» axis, and Dante's movement in the text is always either a descent or an ascent. At the same time, behind a real descent or ascent, a spiritual fall or ascension always shines through. As for human sins, they all receive a spatial fixation: the heavier the sin, the deeper the sinner is.

Lotman's attention on the content of symbols in Dante's text is explained by the direct influence of Pavel Florensky's ideas on his work, in particular his book *Imaginarities in Geometry* (1922). As Vyacheslav Ivanov rightly notes, in addition to Lotman's primary role in the formation of the Moscow-Tartu School, his great merit also lies in the fact that he began to revive the memory of scientists who died tragically in the Stalinist camps, in particular Florensky (Ivanov, 1999: 706). Therefore, Lotman's reflections on the space of The *Divine Comedy* are both the memory of Florensky and the development of his hypotheses.

Today, a hundred years have passed (another memorable date) since the publication of the volume *Imaginarities in Geometry*, where Florensky refers to the structure of Dante's text on the occasion of Dante's 600th anniversary. The first key postulate of this and earlier works of Florensky

is that the symbol should be understood as a phenomenon larger than itself, which is different from itself, but manifests itself through itself. We see that Lotman reformulates this thought as «shining through the content» of the symbol.

Dante and Virgil descend into Hell, and their movement signifies a descent downward. But at the same time, the descent of the heroes is also their ascent in the spiritual sense. As Lotman notes, “descending into Hell and knowing the abyss of sin, Dante is morally elevated in absolute terms,” that is, descent is equivalent to ascent (Lotman, 2004a: 307).

Florensky's second postulate is the understanding of perspective not as an attribute of an object, but as a way of symbolically expressing it. Perspective plays the role of a spiritual stimulus, impulse, awakening attention (Florensky, 1985: 162). Lotman formulates this idea as the ascent of characters in a spiritual sense. Of course, it is no coincidence that Lotman quotes the same fragment of *The Divine Comedy* as Florensky, where both poets, Dante and Virgil, turn their feet to the surface of the Earth. But both scholars place different accents: for Lotman, Dante's space testifies to the «individual value» of the author's experience (Ivanov, 1999: 737); and for Florensky it is proof that *The Divine Comedy* is a space organized according to the principle of elliptical geometry, and it is closer to the interpretations of the 20th and 21st centuries than the ideology of the Renaissance (Florensky, 1991: 47).

Building his semiotic analysis of the symbolic space in Dante's text, Lotman pays special attention to the non-trivial distribution of sins in terms of punishment. The author of the *Divine Comedy* offers his own interpretation of the severity of sins, far from church norms and everyday ideas. Medieval readers were surprised by the fact that Dante's hypocrites were placed in the VI slot of the VIII circle, and the heretics were much higher, in the VI circle. Modern readers are surprised when they see murderers in the first ditch of circle VII, thieves in the seventh slot of circle VIII, and counterfeiters in the depths: in the tenth slot of circle VIII. However, according to Lotman, such a distribution is strictly logical. As we descend from the heights of Divine truth and Love, the

unconditional connection between expression and content weakens. In earthly life, people use conventional signs to communicate with each other, and they can use these signs both for good, as a means of truth, and for harm, as a means of lying. If some actions (falsity) violate the true connections between content and expression, then they are worse than murder, since they kill the Truth and are the source of lies in all its infernal essence.

Lotman writes that there is a deep logic in the fact that in Dante's text, unrighteous deeds are assessed as less serious than the misuse of signs. He talks about a deceitful use of words (slander), values (counterfeiters), trust (thieves), ideas (hypocrites). However, the worst of all are the violators of obligations, that is, traitors<sup>11</sup>. Wrong single actions cause evil once, while the violation of symbolic ties undermines the very foundation of human society and turns the Earth into Hell.

As Lotman notes, Dante builds a spatial model of the world as a definite continuum. It contains individual trajectories of individual paths and destinies. After death, the soul of a person makes a certain path in the world continuum, as a result of which it is placed in a space corresponding to its moral value. Righteous souls are in blissful rest (this is practically Pushkin's motive of «peace and freedom»), sinners are in eternal cyclical movement. And only Dante himself, the author and narrator, has freedom of movement, since his upward movement includes the knowledge of all paths - both true and false.

Concluding his analysis of *The Divine Comedy*, Lotman argues that Dante was on the threshold of a new time and saw one of the dangers of the advancing culture. The poet spoke about the danger of isolating the individual, the separation of science and morality. Dante was deeply alien to these tendencies, and his knowledge was harmoniously integrated into a single structure of the cosmos.

In other words, Lotman passes from Dante as the hero of *The Divine Comedy* to Dante-author and makes this conclusion about him. Such an interpretation might surprise, since, as Lotman himself claims, “it would be naive to identify” these two roles of Dante (Lotman, 2004a:

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<sup>11</sup> We believe that this interpretation of Lotman approaches the well-known postulate of Mikhail Bulgakov in *The Master and Margarita*: the most terrible vice is cowardice (as the basis for further betrayal). We note that in the same book *Universe of the Mind* Lotman places a chapter on symbolic spaces by Bulgakov right after the chapter on Dante.



313). But everything becomes logical if we turn again to Florensky's text as the starting point of Lotman's reflections. According to Vyacheslav Ivanov, Florensky was against modern specialization and fragmentation of knowledge, a tendency coming from the philosophy of the Renaissance (Florensky, 1990: 344, cited by Ivanov, 1999: 708). He contrasted this tendency with the understanding of Life as a whole, the world as a whole, as a single picture and reality. The main feature of Florensky's work is the combination of a holistic view of the world with an alternating change of points of view on its individual sections.

We can conclude that through his semiotic analysis of the space of *The Divine Comedy* Lotman conveys to his reader these key ideas of Florensky. At the same time, he foresees the further development of semiotics, in particular the anthroposemiotic direction of the 21st century. On this occasion, it should be emphasized that anthroposemiotics must be understood first of all as a semiotic approach «which focuses on the signifying form of the multiple interactions between humans, the collectives they constitute, the environments they inhabit, and the imaginaries they project into their worlds of meaning.» (Fontanille and Couégnas, 2018: 278)

### **The fear of the invisible in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. From Lotman to Castellana**

Lotman begins the chapter of the book *Universe of the Mind* entitled «Symbolic Spaces» with an analysis of the geography of Russian medieval texts, then moves on to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, then to Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* and ends with a reflection on the symbolism of St. Petersburg as a utopian city.

For Lotman, travel and movement in general are inextricably linked with the ethical and moral assessment of the space-time continuum. From the religious interpretation of space in

medieval literature (Earth / Heaven, righteous lands / sinful lands), he moves to the categories of time, claiming that the city is constantly generating its past.

Lotman notes that the spatial image of the world created by culture is, as it were, between man and the external reality of nature. Human relations with this spatial image of the world are complex. On the one hand, this image is created by a person, and on the other, it actively forms a person immersed in it. Here we can see a parallel with poetic language, which “is created by the individual and in the opposite movement affects the entire collective” (Lotman, 2004a: 335).

The organized spatial sphere around a person includes both his “ideas” (Lotman, 2004a: 334) and his beliefs, rituals and passions. In this sense, we should interpret Lotman's assertion that Newtonian, Einstein's and posteinsteins ideas are often mixed in the consciousness of a modern person (here he hints again at Florensky's insights), with deeply mythological images.

In Lotman's reflections on *The Divine Comedy*, no special place is given to the emotionally passionate component of the characters' behavior. An exception is the reference to the «mighty passion» for the journey of Dante and Ulysses, these «voluntary or forced exiles» (Lotman, 2004a: 311). Therefore, we propose to refer to an article by the contemporary Italian semiotician Marcello Castellana, which can serve as a useful addition to Lotman's analysis of symbolic space and its inhabitants.

We are talking about Castellana's presentation at the International Semiotic Seminar in Paris, which was then published in the journal *Nouveaux Actes Sémiotiques* (Castellana, 1998). The text «La peur et l'invisible» («Fear and Invisible») focuses on the topic of fear of the invisible and otherworldly. This fear manifests itself as an emotion on the basis of which the so-called semiotics of the natural body is built.

In the preface to Castellana's analysis, the disciple and co-author of Greimas, Jacques Fontanille notes that in the last two decades of the 20th century, a turning point occurred in European semiotics and «the semiotic function was revised.» (Fontanille, 1998: 3) It was no longer just interpreted as a result of the relationship between the two functions that are the form of

expression and form of content. The semiotic function was also understood as a process subject to enunciation: a set of acts which construct the isomorphism of a plane of expression and of a plane of content. And in this sense, research on enunciative praxis, on the inodes of cognitive grasping participates in the exploration of «semiosis in action».

The relation between the two planes was no longer itself considered as a pure logico-semantic relation, known as of «reciprocal presupposition»; since the process that builds this relation comprises sensitive and perceptual phases, taking place on a phenomenal background, it cannot remain indifferent to these phases (representing their outcome). In the book *Semiotics of Passions*, Greimas and Fontanille (1991: 324) insisted on the mediation of the body: the two planes of the language are united not on a purely logical principle, but also thanks to proprioceptivity, which at the same time participates in the content (tensivity) and expression (phoria)<sup>12</sup>.

In Castellana's analysis of *The Divine Comedy*, the mediation (*médiation* in Greimas and Fontanille's terms) between expression and content, within perception, occurs not only through the body, but also within the body, and this phenomenon should be carefully studied (Castellana, 1998: 9). According to Castellana, Dante's text shows that the body is no longer the means of the homogenization of semiotic existence. It is no longer simply the common denominator of the interoceptive and the exteroceptive, making them the two planes of the language. The body is also the place of the signifying articulations, and this displacement obliges to consider a *semiotics of the natural body* (Fontanille, 1998: 3).

The research proposed by Castellana engages in an exploration of the tensivity and the phoria, passing by the different sensory modes or by the perceptual types: taste, smell, balance, respiration, heart rate, etc. Each type provides a semiotic organization (in particular, spatiotemporal) of proprioceptivity.

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<sup>12</sup> "...les deux plans d'un langage sont réunis non pas sur un principe purement logique, mais aussi grâce à la proprioceptivité, qui participe à la fois du contenu (parce qu'elle ressent - tensivité -) et de l'expression (parce qu'elle exprime - phorie -)" (Fontanille, 1998: 3).

In his analysis of the text of *The Divine Comedy* (Part I, Proemio), Marcello Castellana offers three types of concepts: *marking* (*le marquage*), *isophoria* (*l'isophorie*) and *proaction* (*la proaction*).

*Marking* is a concept that reflects the memory of the body within itself about its own reactions, positive or negative, to previous experiences.

*Isophoria* is a kind of semantic link between figures obeying the same somatic marking, and which results from a sorting and an orientation imposed on all the somatico-perceptual tensions.

Finally, *proaction* is an evaluation of situations and narrative paths, thanks to a simulated construction allowing the use of somatic marking and isophorias. This construction also makes it possible to rectify, influence or amplify erroneous or insufficient reactions.

The *Canto I* introduces the theme of *fear*, on which the relationship between the human and the sacred is built:

In the midway of this our mortal life,  
I found me in **a gloomy wood**, astray  
Gone from the path direct: and e'en to tell  
It were no easy task, how savage wild  
That forest, how robust and rough its growth,  
Which to remember only, **my dismay**  
**Renews**, in bitterness not far from death.

Dante, 1892, Canto I<sup>13</sup>

According to Castellana, fear (and its variant *horror*) at the level of enunciation is a marker of the «recognition» of the subject-traveler; any of us in a similar situation of entering an unknown world experiences similar feelings. And at the level of the narrative structure, fear is a manifestation

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<sup>13</sup> Highlights in quotes in bold are ours.  
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of psychodynamics, which allows a person to go into the other world and return from there, being as before endowed with a living body, since he continues to feel the same as other people.

The «gloomy wood » marks two critical moments for the fearful subject:

1. The opposition between the individual and the collective, *We / Me*: the midway of this **our** mortal life/ I found **me**... (*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovai per una selva oscura*: Castellana, 1998: 13);

2. The opposition between the space of life and the realm of non-life, *Life / Wood*: the **midway** of this our mortal life/ **a gloomy wood** (*cammin di nostra vita / selva oscura*).

Fear acquires a real taste (bitterness), and the forest is compared to the realm of non-life, to death:

That forest, how robust and rough its growth,

(...) **in bitterness** not far from death.

Ibid.

Thus, the physical reality is transformed into the inner reality, the thymic reality of the narrator. The fear inspired by the unexplored space of the forest is intensified by the lack of the possibility of normal vision (Castellana calls it «vision naturelle») due to the darkness: *in a gloomy wood*. The night around the narrator corresponds to the night inside his own body: a night of sensation and doubt. Also, the forest space marks a sharp transition, a kind of break on the path of life: *I found me (mi ritrovai)*.

The poet's fear is presented as a series of recognizable somatic images (for example, in the cardiovascular area):

But when a mountain's foot I reach'd, where clos'd

The valley, that had **pierc'd my heart with dread**,

I look'd aloft, and saw his shoulders broad

Already vested with that planet's beam...

Ibid.

Fear appears as a certain form that allows us, the readers, to identify ourselves with the narrator: this person is like us, we, like him, are afraid of the unknown and the invisible.

Then, together with the narrator, we gradually begin to free ourselves from fear: if someone wants to climb up, he must be below, and this is the only way to start the ascent. Likewise, if we want to achieve anything in the external world, then we must reach the bottom of our own inner life (*réalité externe/interne*: Castellana, 1998: 21). Analyzing the reaction of the natural body to fear, Castellana comes to the same conclusion as Lotman regarding the symbolic space of the entire *Divine Comedy*: to reach the bottom, turn over (emotional shock) and start climbing.

In the text, this is a movement up, towards the top of the hill, somatically accompanied by a respite and tranquility (*respite to the fear, difficult short breath, struggling with terror*):

Then was a little **respite to the fear**,  
That in my heart's recesses deep had lain (...)  
And as a man, with **difficult short breath**,  
Forespent with toiling, 'scap'd from sea to shore,  
Turns to the perilous wide waste, and stands  
At gaze; e'en so my spirit, that yet fail'd  
**Struggling with terror**, turn'd to view the straits

Ibid.

When moving upward (*hope of the height*), the fear of the invisible (darkness, the absence of other living beings) is replaced by another feeling: the fear of a specific personified danger. The

latter appears in the form of animals, also playing the role of symbols: *panther, lion and she-wolf*. The degree of fear increases and becomes maximum when meeting with a she-wolf, somatically this is expressed by the absence of any movement:

...A she-wolf

Was at his heels, who in her leanness seem'd  
Full of all wants, and many a land hath made  
Disconsolate ere now. She **with such fear**  
**O'erwhelmed me**, at the sight of her appall'd,  
That of the height all hope I lost.

Ibid.

In Castellana's interpretation, the experienced passions (*l'expérience passionnelle*) play the role of a connecting link that provides a harmonious linear sequence in the space of Dante's text. The excitement and tension that the feeling body experiences are in themselves an articulation between form and content (*with heart-gripping anguish, coming o'er against me, must needs another way pursue, wouldst 'scape from out<sup>14</sup>*):

...As one,

Who with his gain elated, sees the time  
When all unwares is gone, he inwardly  
**Mourns with heart-gripping anguish; such was I,**  
Haunted by that fell beast, never at peace,  
Who **coming o'er against me**, by degrees  
Impell'd me where the sun in silence rests.

(...)

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<sup>14</sup> «Peur, donc fuite (...) Fuite du corps et fuite de l'âme » (Castellana, 1998: 24).  
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«Thou **must needs**

**Another way pursue**, if thou **wouldst 'scape**

**From out** that savage wilderness».

Ibid.

The general perspective of the semiotics of passions and the interpretation of Dante's text from the standpoint of the semiotics of the natural body allows the Italian semiotician to come to the following conclusion: the Earth builds a whole system of relations with the Body and the Cosmos, on the basis of which the Meaning of the Story (*la Signification du Récit*) arises, and all this happens before the appearance any form of linguistic coding.

## **Conclusions**

The analysis of The *Divine Comedy* from the point of view of the semiotics of culture (Lotman) and from the perspective of the semiotics of passions and the semiotics of the natural body (Greimas and Fontanille, Castellana) reveals one of the key features of Dante's text: the author-thinker, with his spatial concepts of Good and Evil, and with bodily somatic manifestations of human nature and emotions, is an integrated part of the Cosmos. In this sense, Castellana's semiotic analysis (at the level of the micro-structure of the body and its passions) complements and explains Lotman's analysis (at the level of the macro-structure of the symbolic space of Dante's entire text). Both at the level of micro-structure and of macro-structure, an upward movement is observed as a path to perfection.

Dante was alien to the isolation of the individual, the separation of science and morality. As Lotman writes, Alighieri's encyclopedism of knowledge, which included almost the entire arsenal of science of his time, did not add up in his mind to the sum of disparate information, but formed «a



single integrated building», which merged into the harmonious structure of the Cosmos (Lotman, 2004a: 313).

Once again speaking about memorable dates, which in themselves create symbolic spaces, we would like to conclude with a quote from another great poet and writer, Victor Hugo. In a poem dedicated to Dante, he presents the latter precisely as a thinker, a part of the universe (*mountain, oak tree, lion, man*), with his physical weakness and intellectual strength (this is practically Pascal's image of the «Thinking Reed» so valued by Lotman<sup>15</sup>): «Speaking to the dark night with a growling voice; Now I'm a man, and my name is Dante».

Un soir, dans le chemin je vis passer un homme  
Vêtu d'un grand manteau comme un consul de Rome,  
Et qui me semblait noir sur la clarté des cieux.  
Ce passant s'arrêta, fixant sur moi ses yeux  
Brillants, et si profonds, qu'ils en étaient sauvages,  
Et me dit : « J'ai d'abord été, dans les vieux âges,  
Une haute montagne emplissant l'horizon ;  
Puis, âme encore aveugle et brisant ma prison,  
Je montai d'un degré dans l'échelle des êtres,  
Je fus un chêne, et j'eus des autels et des prêtres,  
Et je jetai des bruits étranges dans les airs ;  
Puis je fus un lion rêvant dans les déserts,  
Parlant à la nuit sombre avec sa voix grondante ;  
Maintenant, je suis homme, et je m'appelle Dante. »

Hugo 1856

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<sup>15</sup> Especially in *Culture and Explosion* in the chapter *The Thinking Reed (Le roseau pensant)*: Lotman 2004b: 51.

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