

CHAPTER TWO

Dream Cultures of the Italian Cinquecento

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A book was published in Venice in 1499, “dove si mostra che tutte le cose umane altro non sono che sogno” (or, in the Elizabethan, partial translation: “wherein he sheweth, that all humaine and worldlie things are but a dreame, and but as vanitie it selfe”). In a search for the dreaming Cinquecento, it would be difficult to find a more appropriate starting point than this turn-of-the-century publication, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (*The Strife of Love in a Dream*)—the chronological parallel for the twentieth century of the 1899 appearance of Freud’s *Traumdeutung* (*Interpretation of Dreams*)—although the flamboyant Platonic symbolism of the earlier text could be seen as closing an epoch more than inaugurating a new one. In addition to the *Hypnerotomachia*’s interest for the role it assigns to the dream as narrative structure and the kinds of imagery production it credits to dreams, it has been suggested that the Venetian text may also testify to the mystical, dreamlike experiences of the author, identified as Friar Francesco Colonna, who lived between Treviso and Venice.¹

In the opening of his perceptive 2008 essay on Renaissance dream interpretation, Armando Maggi presents two opposite views from the period. On the one side, Giovanni Della Casa’s advice book, *Galateo* (1558), recommends that we not bore people by telling them our dreams, as vile matter most of the time is best forgotten. On the other side, we have Francesco Colonna’s *Hypnerotomachia*, which is entirely based on the identification of the dream with gradual

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interior illumination.² One could be tempted to identify Polifilo, Colonna's protagonist, with the spirit of the Renaissance and Galateo with early modernity, with all the latter's baggage: Descartes's rationality, Foucault's discipline, Norbert Elias's civilizing process—you name it. Matters tend to be more complicated, however, and Maggi does not opt for shortcuts or oversimplifications.

Renaissance historiography refers not infrequently to dreams in the metaphorical sense of more or less utopian ideals, as with Guido Ruggiero's notion of "redreams."³ The present discussion will instead approach dreams from the perspective of a history of experience. I begin with a brief review of the semantic field of dreams and dreaming as attested in reference works on the Italian language. I then turn to one Renaissance dream theorist and consider his critical writing in relation to his autobiography, which includes accounts of his dreams. This chapter concludes with some final thoughts on dreams in medieval and Renaissance literary writings in other genres. My general argument is that the Renaissance is a rich, if only recently acknowledged, source of information for the study of dreams in the history of human experience.

The history of experience, which has emerged recently within the broader area of cultural history at the crossroads between the history of emotions and the history of the senses, may prove particularly fruitful for studying a slice of human life at the heart of which is something regularly experienced by (though not only by) human beings and to which in different cultural contexts a variety of values and meanings are attributed.⁴ The dream as a literary genre, fictional representations of dreams, and the factual dream reports examined here are all different types of cultural production that should not be confused with one another; nevertheless, considering them together offers a valid and potentially fruitful opportunity to examine the overall dream culture of a given epoch and community.

Following some relatively isolated intellectual endeavors, the study of historical dream cultures has gained systematicity over the past few years, becoming the object of specific, transnational, and interdisciplinary attention. Scholars working in this area of human experience now possess an unprecedented opportunity to assess past forms of understanding, evaluating, and interpreting the oneiric world, together with the media in which that area of experience has been communicated. Chief among these are dream narratives, with all of their nuances and interconnections between the factual and fictional stories they represent.⁵ Within this renewed scholarly framework, the Italian

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Renaissance—together with many other cultural contexts—presents a fresh opportunity for fuller appreciation of the richness of oneiric culture, from dream theories to narratives and uses in creative writing.

Dreams in Italian Renaissance Language and Reference Books

As with all experiences to some extent shaped by or at least mutually interacting with language, sharing Renaissance dreams required first of all finding words to express and communicate them, and this was affected by the shared connotations of their usage. Salvatore Battaglia's *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* offers some glimpses of the Renaissance historical semantics of the family of dream words. If we exclude the most obvious and literal denotation of the word "dream," the *Trattato del ben vivere* (Treatise on Good Living), dating from the first half of the fourteenth century, presents one of the first uses of *sogno* with the meaning of "fallacious, illusory appearance." A century later, the Florentine poet Francesco Scambrilla introduced a phrase that became ubiquitous, "in questa breve vita ch'è un sogno" (in this brief life, which is a dream). The next recorded uses of *sogno* with this meaning were by the fifteenth-century Florentine poet Bernardo Pulci and, in the sixteenth century, the poet Benedetto Dell'Uva. The dictionary gives as a subentry for the word the sense of "person who is worthless," a usage found in the works of the sixteenth-century grammarian Giovanni Fabrini and in Giordano Bruno's *De gli eroici furori* (*The Heroic Frenzies*, 1585), where it appears in close association with *un'ombra* (a shadow) and *una febbre quartana* (a quartan fever) and resonates with an earlier phrase in a sonnet by Francesco Berni (c. 1497–1535) evidently referring to the type of delirium that may originate from a fever.⁶

"Fanciful hypothesis," "thesis without foundation," and "unfounded news" are meanings identified with dreams in sermons by the fifteenth-century preacher Bernardino da Siena, and then in the following century, the works of historian Francesco Guicciardini and novella writer Matteo Bandello have connotations that bend in the direction of "rash decision," as found also in the *Lamenti di Volterra* (*Laments for the Sack of Volterra*, 1473). Among proverbs, "I sogni non son veri, & i disegni non riescono" (Dreams are untrue and intentions don't materialize) is registered by the *Grande dizionario* as occurring in the Cinquecento in the comedies of Francesco d'Ambra and Agnolo Firenzuola. These also feature in John Florio's book of Italian proverbs, *Giardino di ricreazione* (*Garden of Recreation*, 1591).⁷

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As for the verb *sognare*—again, in addition to its most literal meanings—the figurative sense of “to imagine unreal, non-existing things, people and facts; to glimpse them with one’s imagination; to presume they may exist or happen” is found in the writings of Dante and Machiavelli, among others. Chiaro Davanzati in the Duecento, followed by Boccaccio later, also used it to mean “create with one’s imagination (or in memory), and yearn for what one intensely desires.” Furthermore, we find, again in texts by Dante, Boccaccio, Machiavelli, and others, that this verb could signify “to follow images created in one’s own fantasy; to confuse reality with imagination; to fantasize, to rave.”⁸ In the late thirteenth-century *Bibbia volgare* (*Vulgate Bible*) and, in the Cinquecento, in Ludovico Castelvetro’s exposition of Aristotle’s *Poetics* and in Remigio Nannini’s *Epistole d’Ovidio* (*Ovid’s Heroides*), the noun *sognatore*, later also applied to the utopian dreamer, could specifically refer to the prophetic, premonitory dreamer. A range of connotations, thus, was carried by a family of terms not purely descriptive of a nighttime sleeping experience.

Proverbs aside, John Florio offers us interesting access to some comparative evaluation of semantic dream fields in early modern English and Italian, thus also allowing us to move from retrospective modern historical semantics to Renaissance linguistic self-awareness. The 1598 edition of his Italian–English dictionary has four relevant entries adjacent to one another: *sognare*, *sognatore*, *sogno*, and *sognoso*. Florio’s 1611 *Queen Anna’s New World of Words* adds *sognabile* and *sognevole* (both equated with “that which may be dreamed”). All chiefly refer the reader to the equivalent word family of dreams and dreaming. A few nuances may be worth highlighting. With only slight variations between the two versions, *sogno* is given as “a dreame, or raving in sleepe, a vision in ones sleepe. Also a vaine trifle not likely to be true.” The slightly unexpected *sognoso* (which the *Grande dizionario* only registers for the twentieth century) indicates “dreaming, raving, full of dreames, that dreameth often.” While the verb was initially rendered as “to dreame, to rave in sleepe” in the second edition, Florio finds it appropriate to add: “Also to stand doubtfull or irresolute, to waver in minde.”⁹ This meaning does not appear in Battaglia’s *Grande dizionario*, and so tracking down occurrences of it would be illuminating.

A look at monolingual dictionaries may also be worthwhile, and the fact that the Italian language was leading the way in this genre helps. Giacomo Pergamini’s Italian dictionary *Memoriale della lingua*, published in 1602, gives not only the Latin equivalent of *sogno* and a cluster of literary occurrences but also some linguistic and rhetorical variations in usage. The latter include “dream:

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metaphorically used to mean a short-lived thing that does not last and a vanity,” which is an interesting novelty for those who arrive at this point through Battaglia and Florio.¹⁰ Also listed is our suspect, “sognare: metaforicamente stare sospeso, irresoluto, badare, travedere” (to dream: to remain metaphorically suspended, irresolute; to hesitate, to misconstrue). However, the examples given immediately after this phrase start with a passage from *Decameron* IX.4 (“I believe you are dreaming, to which Pirro replied”) and do not appear pertinent.¹¹ Whether or not this meaning of “irresolute” has evidence to support it, it appears extremely likely that, between editions, Florio consulted his Pergamini. Helpfully, despite his addition of a prefix, Pergamini ends his entry with “tra-sognato,” although the meaning he gives it—“insensato, stupido” (senseless, stupid)—is not entirely convincing.¹² Two years after Pergamini’s death, an edition of his *Memoriale* edited by his nephew Orazio Negri and mostly based on further notes his uncle had taken from modern authors, added for *sognare* the meaning of “Aspettare. Desiderare indarno” (To await. To desire in vain). The example given comes from Petrarch’s *Trionfo d’amore* (“Triumph of Love”) [“E intanto pur sognando libertate” (And meanwhile dreaming, still, of liberty)].¹³ By comparison to Pergamini, the 1612 first edition of the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (*Dictionary of the Academy of the Crusca*) including entries for *sognante*, *sognare*, *sognatore*, and *sogno* is poorer, given that it does not attend to nuances of usage. Nevertheless, its definition of the key term is worth citing, if for nothing else, for the cognate term it evokes to render the meaning: “Apprension di fantasmi, fatta, in dormendo” (apprehension of ghosts, formed while sleeping).¹⁴

On the frontispiece of his work, Pergamini indicated his expected audience by advertising that it would be “necessary not only for secretaries and writers of prose and poetry, but for anyone who wishes to write correctly. And in addition to this, most useful for foreigners.”¹⁵ Vernaculars and early reference books offer us a view of Renaissance language roughly as it was spoken or, rather more appropriately, offer us the opportunity to hear it. Pergamini in particular was careful to indicate systematically, for the benefit of foreigners, accents and close or open vowels to guide correct pronunciation: thus, *sogno* is “pronuntiato con ‘o’ chiusa” (pronounced with a closed “o”).¹⁶

The addressees of the first Italian dictionary’s frontispiece, however, also continued to be regular users of Latin in many walks of life and consequently were thus equipped with reference material on that front too. Here, Ambrogio Calepino provided a dictionary, the *Dictionarium Latinum*, whose first edition

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dates to 1502, which combined classical Latin usage, encyclopedic information, and literary examples from antiquity. Modified by additions in subsequent editions, this reference became a landmark humanist tool and the early modern dictionary par excellence. Given its international success, it may represent, among the material examined in this chapter, something slightly less characteristically Italian. A scholar could just as well have compiled it elsewhere, and many, often anonymously, contributed to its expansion. Nevertheless, we can still appreciate it, in other respects, as an Italian contribution to European erudition.¹⁷

Slightly incongruously alphabetized between *sop-* and *sor-* entries (as if it contained a “q”), the family of *somnus* and its cognate words fills two-thirds of a folio column in Calepino’s first edition. (A cross-reference directs readers here from *insomnia*.) The main term is introduced with reference to its ancient Greek equivalent (*hypnos*) and etymology. The entry gives literary occurrences; encyclopedic information including a reference to the personification of Somnus, as in the Greek case, as a god; and Macrobius’s classification of dream types. Macrobius’s commentary on Cicero’s *Dream of Scipio* (*Somnium Scipionis*) had been throughout the Middle Ages and remained during the Renaissance the standard authority for a taxonomy of oneiric experiences. According to Macrobius, there were two types of non-predictive dreams that result from one’s waking concerns, *visa* (apparitions) and *insomnia* (nightmares), and three types of predictive ones, endowed with prophetic functions—*visiones*, *oracula*, and *somnia*—the latter specifically requiring interpretation due the terms’ obscurity.

One of the secondary representatives of this word family, the adjective *somniculosus*, occasions a short and fairly entertaining digression. Calepino states that, while ordinarily referring to someone who is sleepy, it can occasionally mean, instead, sleep-inducing. His source is Aulus Gellius, who in his *Attic Nights* (*Noctis Atticae*, 9.12.12) gives examples of words with multiple, contrasting meanings. He quotes the only extant choliambic verse by Gaius Helvius Cinna (first century B.C.E.), who says that someone does something sleep-inducing as a Psyllus could do to an asp. According to Pliny, the Psylli were African people whose bodies contained a poison deadly to snakes and smelled to the extent that they made the reptiles flee, and the word *somniculosus* also became a general term for snake charmers and healers of snake bites. It has been recently observed that the fragment referred to by Gellius is clearly part of a simile and leaves us wondering what the missing half might have said. A likely possibility is that, by referring to animals traditionally known as able to poison

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or induce sleep, Cinna's line was suggesting that humans and animals may swap roles and that North Africans can enchant reptiles. However, if we consider that the passage is the only one where the adjective *somniculosus* has a causative sense and given the lack of the complete source, it is conceivable that Gellius got it wrong. In this case, in a context in which the poet appears already to be punning on matters of retribution (*poena*), the missing parallel may well have used the sleepy snake for some sexual innuendo.¹⁸ Whatever the ancient puzzle may entail, the sixteenth-century dictionary contributed to its circulation.

Besides dictionaries, on the desks of the majority of Renaissance *gens de lettres* there would have been a range of florilegia, commonplace books, and similar volumes (as well as subject-specific tomes). Proper scholarly attention has been paid only relatively recently to these types of texts as a historical form of information management and to the related, porous notion of authorship in an age dominated by plagiarism and the aesthetics of imitation. Nonspecialist reference books complemented and, to some extent, competed with the practice of note-taking. As Ann Blair puts it, their proliferation and success testified to the fact that they were needed because contemporary readers struggled with an information overload.¹⁹

Domenico Nani Mirabelli's anthology of literary quotations, *Polyanthea*, offers one of the earliest and most popular publications in this assorted family of texts. The preface that is addressed to William IX Palaeologus, marquis of Montferrat, identifies the audience as students beginning to study eloquence. Surely, however, the actual readership of the work was much wider and included many people significantly more advanced in their studies. Following, with some variations, the standard structure and content of the book's entries, Nani Mirabelli introduces *somnus*, as Calepino had, beginning with its Greek equivalents and then proceeding with definitions and remarks derived from Aristotle, Avicenna, the Bible, Church Fathers, and medieval theologians. He takes his longest quotation from Cicero's *De divinatione* (On Divination) and ends with the poets Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and Horace. The gathering of information does not tend to convey a particular line of interpretation. By comparison, Calepino's summary of Macrobius was analytically more informative, although in the dialectics between classical and Christian references and mental maps, the emphasis Nani Mirabelli places on Aristotle's authority by positioning it at the beginning of the definition of *somnus* tends to anchor the dream phenomenon in physiology rather than in connections to divination. At least, a distinction is made between the term when it defines a physiological phenomenon and when

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it refers to a dreamed vision, “a phantom made in sleep, that is, a fantastic apparition made in sleep” (phantasma in somno factum, id est apparitio phantastica in somno facta).²⁰ Since *Polyanthea* went through its share of vernacular adaptations and plagiarism, it would be interesting to see if at some point it became the vehicle of a more specific assessment of the oneiric experience.

A Renaissance Dreamer Caught between Theory and Experience

Girolamo Cardano was the most substantial contributor to the sixteenth-century European discourse on dreaming. His role should be regarded as resulting from a combination of being the author of the epoch’s most systematic treatise on oneirocritics and of an extraordinary autobiography, both of which, among other material, include reports and interpretations of his own dreams.²¹ One must remember that, in addition to the two most focused chapters of his autobiography in which his dreams and their interpretation are at stake, much of Cardano’s writing in a wide range of disciplines tends to include some autobiographical perspective and evoke oneiric material.²²

The *De vita propria* (*The Book of My Life*, published posthumously in 1643) is arguably even more intriguing than the closing chapter of the *Somniorum Synesiorum* (*Dreams of Synesius*, 1562) and has been the subject of frequent scholarly analysis, which is helpful for guiding the reading of one of the most remarkable egodocuments of all time. In order to appreciate the meaning of the relevant chapter of the *De vita* (chapter 37, “Certain natural eccentricities; and marvels, among which, dreams”), it may be worth recalling some facts and critical assessments regarding the book. It was written during the last year of the author’s life and was not prepared by him for publication. (It was published posthumously in its original Latin text in the seventeenth century.) Ancient models of biographical and autobiographical writing offer obvious precedents, and Cardano’s exercise in the field has been noted to include, among other precursors, Petrarch’s unfinished epistle, *Posteritati*.

Carlo Gregori has suggested that Cardano’s autobiography is atypical and can be better understood as positioned at the crossroads of three subgenres of egodocuments. The first subgenre is the self-geniture. In the astrological tradition, this genre required revisiting one’s past in function of the present, from birth and the lives of one’s parents onward; it also included a detailed examination of one’s physical and psychological traits. (Astrology occupied a very important place in Cardano’s mental map, as Anthony Grafton’s intellectual profile

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of him has emphasized.) A second subgenre is the catalog of one's own books, enriched by personal anecdotes. Cardano had written a *De libris propriis* (1544) as a conscious revisitation of the precedent set by the philosopher Galen. Thirdly, there is the subgenre of the apologetic text.²³ Despite the fact that apology as a mode of writing has not left other traces in Cardano's literary production, it would be difficult to miss the fact that he wrote the *De vita propria* while in Rome in his seventies, after having been arrested for heresy in Bologna, tried by the Inquisition, and obliged to make an *abiuratio de vehementis*, the abjuration made by a Roman Catholic strongly suspected of heresy.²⁴ This multifaceted perspective on the background and the agenda for his writing can help us make sense of his choice of which personal dreams to record and of the comments that accompany them.

Chapter 37 of the *De vita* inserts the author's oneiric life into the wider field of his "certain natural eccentricities and marvels" and is extremely interesting well before the second half of the chapter that is specifically subtitled "Dreams." Cardano lived a truly extraordinary life and never misses the opportunity to point to its exceptionalism. Thus, the first paragraph starts with his birth and narrates circumstances that made it anomalous. Next, as a second remarkable manifestation of exceptionalism, comes the description of an experience he allegedly had between the ages of three and five. While he lay awake in the morning, awaiting the time when his father allowed him to get up, a vision regularly arose from the corner of his bed; small opaque rings with transparent spaces between them formed a phantasmagoria of shapes.

They were images of castles, of houses, of animals, of horses with riders, of plants and trees, of musical instruments, and of theaters; there were images of men of divers costumes and varied dress; images of flute-players, even, with their pipes as it were, ready to play, but no voice nor sound was heard. Besides these visions, I beheld soldiers, swarming peoples, fields, and shapes like unto bodies which even to this day I recall with aversion. There were groves, forests, and other phantoms. . . . Even flowers of many a variety, and four-footed creatures, and divers birds appeared in my vision.²⁵

This memory is recalled together with another scene. Because he gazed so raptly at his vision, which delighted him so much, his aunt asked him what he was looking at. But the boy feared that his visual festival might disappear if he revealed it, so he hesitated and said it was probably nothing. He underscores, how-

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ever, his hesitation in answering, since he tells us, or anyway tells himself in this text, whose audience is not entirely obvious, that neither in his youth nor yet in his old age has he ever told lies. If we recall Gregori's classification of the different generic roots of the *De vita*, the re-elaboration of the story here apparently serves to prove some of the author's natural character traits. Also, the final dialogue, or its absence, is commented on as an example of the fact that he always tells the truth. Cardano, the recent suspect before the Inquisition, is documenting that he should be believed. The geniture code in the use of an anecdote from his early life thus intertwines here with the apologetic code.

At the beginning of the section of the chapter specifically labeled "Dreams," Cardano retells some of his favorite dream narratives that he tended to re-elaborate through time and various versions. The section opens with a statement on the special truthfulness of his dreams. The first example depicts a complex scene full of details that Cardano does not hesitate to decipher as a premonition of his future fame and of the difficulties he had to overcome in order to reach it, allegedly dreamt in his thirties when, in his own judgment, he had not yet achieved very much. Here, in a chapter central to the production of Cardano's self-image, we encounter many things: a mountain with vegetation, a rock and an abyss, a thatched cottage, a multifarious crowd running toward death, Cardano's climb, and the final figure of a boy. The second dream of this section features his father. It places Cardano's soul in the heaven of the Moon and is interpreted by him as an allegory of the multiple disciplines covered by his wisdom.²⁶ More often his references to the contents of a dream are much more condensed (of the type Manfred Engel classifies as "symbol-oriented shorthand notes" and exemplifies with the description "I dreamt of lions on a beach"²⁷), offering essential coordinates for the author-dreamer to contextualize and retrospectively explain their correct meaning. Retrospective interpretation of prophecy is not per se manufactured: Cardano is showing the reader what a message should have meant to him, even if, as he often candidly admits, at the time he did not understand it properly. Cardano's life was so eventful that he is not short of dramatic episodes to which to connect his oneiric experiences.

Cardano's dream theory may help us understand what he considered relevant in his own dreams. His work on the subject is sufficiently large and complex to have allowed for distinctly diverging lines of interpretation of that work within recent scholarship. Before giving a short account of such dialogues among interpretations, however, let us step back and look at the theoretical palette a sixteenth-century writer had at his disposal for understanding dreams.

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The Renaissance appetite for the interpretation of dreams was strong. It quickly engaged the printing press to serve the cause, so that, for instance, the output included in 1525 an Italian translation of (pseudo-)Achmet's tenth-century book on dream interpretation, *Oneirocriticon*, a central text of the medieval Arab-Byzantine tradition.²⁸ Two key ancient figures who were rediscovered and came to keep company with Macrobius thanks to this phenomenon were Artemidorus and Synesius, Greek authors published together in an Aldine edition of 1518.²⁹ Artemidorus's oneirocritics distinguished between *enhypnia*, dreams that merely expressed the anxieties and desires of a person unable to control their thoughts, therefore only referring to the present, and *oneiroi*, which announced the future either explicitly or allusively, and it was the latter case that offered the cultural justification for an art of deciphering symbols. (The idea that dreams open our eyes to the past pertains instead to modern oneirology.) Artemidorus's book is organized according to dreams' apparent subject matter, that is, the images they display. A couple of centuries later (around 400 C.E.), Synesius of Cyrene, a neo-Platonic philosopher-turned-bishop, showed a different orientation by adopting as his key term *enhypnia*, which his predecessor had marginalized as meaningless. In contrast to Artemidorus, he advocated more individualized strategies of interpretation. Where does Cardano stand in relationship to these two somewhat competing models?

Guido Giglioni emphasizes the fact that, by referring to Synesius in the very title of his work, Cardano opts for the later author, whose reading of the oneiric experience was dominated by its celestial origin and frame of meaning; a "Synesian" perspective thus suggests an emphasis on prophecy.³⁰ Other scholars, however, support a more nuanced or somewhat different view. Sylviane Bokdam, who authored a major monograph on the French Renaissance literary dream while framing it in the epoch's dream theories, positions Cardano between Artemidorus and Synesius. In the context of a period in which Artemidorus, the author of a treatise intended for the use of professional dream interpreters, was read and adapted via Synesius, that is, translated into vernaculars and offered to readers as a guide for deciphering their own dreams, Cardano also appears to aspire to combine the two influences and conjoin rationality of method with the consideration of the individuality of oneiric experiences.³¹

Alice Browne finds his method of interpretation eclectic and contradictory, although she recommends that his material be "read not as detailed instructions but as a corpus of information which might come in useful for someone who is learning by experience to interpret his own dreams" by an author "more con-

cerned to show that dreams can and should be interpreted than with explaining in detail how to do this.”³² She also emphasizes Cardano’s care for describing the physiology of dreaming by silently adapting Aristotle’s explanation and admires the clarity of the conditions he sets for holding prophetic dreams reliable. A point Browne makes, which is consistent with Grafton’s exposition of Cardano’s astrology, is about his anti-determinism. Cardano understands prophetic dreams as warnings of danger, not predictions of events that will inevitably happen, and this is precisely how he reads his own dreams.³³ Given Cardano’s uniqueness, one would love to know more about how much ordinary people took note of personal dreams and what they made of them. Fortunately, Florentine *ricordanze* (family diaries) offer telling examples, though space does not permit their exploration here.³⁴

Though Cardano was the most systematic sixteenth-century dream theorist, he was by no means the only one. Maggi’s survey includes, among others, works by Leone Ebreo, Agostino Nifo, Girolamo Fracastoro, Giovanni Argenterio, Tommaso Campanella, Torquato Tasso, and Pompeo della Barba.³⁵ Oneiric discourses variously negotiated among different classifications and evaluations deriving from Christian and classical traditions, among which medicine played a significant role. The last section of the Hippocratic *De diaeta* (*On the Diet*) is entirely dedicated to the subject of dreams.

Dreams and Italian Renaissance Literature

While the similarities between the dream world and the literary imagination constitute a commonplace that hardly needs elaboration, it is more interesting, within an inquiry on the oneiric landscape of an epoch and a culture, to examine more specifically what poetry and fiction made of the dream as a mode of experience or an ingredient of plotment. If the *Hypnerotomachia*, from which we started, has given us a highly idiosyncratic example of the romance (if, indeed, it can be classified within any genre whatsoever), writers in other literary forms did not miss the opportunity to exploit and develop the oneiric topos. With classical literature offering a variety of models and sources of inspiration, vernacular writing illustrated many relevant uses of this material. First of all, however, the Italian Cinquecento was indebted to the Trecento for establishing certain traditions in writing about dreams.

While dreams certainly play a key role in Dante’s *Vita nuova*, the whole of the *Commedia* has the nature of a vision and set an influential precedent in the

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imagination of generations of readers.³⁶ Petrarch makes a predominantly metaphorical recourse to the dream as the condition that grants him the most happiness. The lyric tradition that developed from Petrarch's lyric sequence, the *Canzoniere*, over the following couple of centuries, however, tended to feature the beloved dreamed as alive, rather than appearing postmortem, and to allow a sensuality that would not be admitted outside the oneiric framework. The woman may feel merciful toward her lover and, just before the dreamer's awakening, yield herself; kisses are not infrequent in this work, and ambiguous words like *dolcezza* (sweetness) and *piacere* (pleasure) may suggest something more than spiritual consolation. The notion of the dream as deceitful and doubts over the dream's truthfulness are also thematized.³⁷

As he did in other works of his, Boccaccio made good use of the dream in the construction of the *Decameron* and the establishment of the novella—a genre that surely exploited and encouraged cultural sharing and exchange throughout the social hierarchy. Tancredi Artico, among other scholars who have examined this element systematically, suggests that Boccaccio's use of dream *topoi* tends to fall into two principal categories. One scheme is the vision, which provides the novella that adopts it with the structure of the "tale within a tale"; the other is the *beffa*, where the dream is a convenient device for deceiving the victim of a practical joke by making him believe something unbelievable.³⁸ The status of visions has been the subject of critical debate, with Frédéric Canovas, for instance, evoking the category of the *mise en abyme* and labeling these narrations as ekphrastic while disputing their attribution to modernity and affirming their long medieval tradition.³⁹ On the matter of the interaction or distinction between fictional and real oneiric worlds, the question remains whether an author (like Boccaccio) would have entirely invented his dreamed material or to some extent resorted to their own or personally reported experiences.⁴⁰

In the case of theater, scholars have observed that, while building on ancient precedents, the premonitory dream plays a renewed role in many vernacular tragedies of the Cinquecento by arousing early on in the script the spectators' and readers' expectations about the development of the plot and the associated emotional response.⁴¹ On the whole, as in other contemporary literatures, experiments with a few uses of the fictional dream established a significant territory of a shared cultural world—in some areas, naturally, shared within narrower communities—which enriched the human experience and challenged the distinction between the real and the imagined.

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An Archeology of the Dreaming Subject

In introducing their collection of medieval autobiographical dreams, Gisèle Beson and Jean-Claude Schmitt distinguish between the dream in “traditional societies,” to which they assign those of medieval Europe, and in modern ones. In the traditional conception, the dream comes from outside the individual—spirits, the dead, the demonic, and the divine—and, through images and voices, reveals something to dreamers who think of themselves as *alienated* subjects, dependent on an Other. To the contrary, modern psychology (since Descartes), and psychoanalysis in particular, have postulated dreamers as autonomous individuals who examine their own selves in the search for meaning.⁴² The Enlightenment is often evoked as an epoch of paradigm shift toward critical self-knowledge, but the Renaissance should not be easily dismissed as a period of meaningful transition. In fact, early modernity has attracted recent scholarly attention for a number of historical developments, from scientific innovations and ideas (including the questioning of the reliability of vision) to religious reforms and cultural encounters.⁴³

Carol Schreier Rupprecht has advanced a claim in this direction by dismissing the idea that no dream theory of importance was produced between antiquity and the present and inviting us to read Cardano closely. Her representation of the points of departure and arrival in the dream theory transition are *divinity*—with divination as the chief function of dreams, a concept that declined in the West after the seventeenth century—and *insanity*, the frame within which modernity (with obvious reference to Foucault’s *Folie et déraison*) has tended to subsume the oneiric experience. Both are detectable in Cardano (insanity only retrospectively, as the unconscious is a category of our own time). However, and unusually for his own time, Cardano’s concept of divination has no overt religious context: consistent with Renaissance natural philosophy in general, God and nature are, for him, roughly synonymous. A third dimension Rupprecht explores in Cardano’s work is oneiric creativity. This force comes to bridge the fading of divinity and the emergence of a concept of insanity. Even if an aesthetic link between art and dreams was not a novelty in the sixteenth century, Cardano shows a special awareness of it. He pays attention to language and rhetoric, to literature and art; ultimately, he conceptualizes the dream as a poetic text and the poem as a dream.⁴⁴ To sum up, Rupprecht’s reading encourages a reevaluation of both the central role of dreaming in Western culture and the role of the sixteenth century in the history of dream theory. Maggi supports

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a similar evaluation of the relevance of the period and the topic and suggests that modern dream interpretation begins with Cardano, especially considering the importance he places on the interaction between dream and wakefulness.⁴⁵

Another question on the topos of Renaissance historiography cannot be ignored here. After having evoked Besson and Schmitt's reflections on the duplicity of the dreaming subject, we need to ask ourselves: What can this tell us about the rise of individualism? Cardano's mixing of rational method with personal experience is refreshing. He thinks that only the dreamer possesses adequate knowledge of all circumstances that can guide the proper interpretation of dreams. Thus, the repeated recounting and deciphering of his own oneiric experiences is not just self-absorption; it is the one area where he feels entirely entitled to apply his interpretative techniques. But, as the Hippocratic texts did with their regimens, he offers his text to readers who already feel encouraged to perform this analysis themselves. The rise of modern individualism may not have happened exactly in the place, the time, and the way historian Jacob Burckhardt imagined over 150 years ago. Nevertheless—and somehow in such less predictable corners of daily life and human experience as the world of dreams and the way people came to interpret them—the Italian Renaissance never ceases to show us developments that changed remarkably our ways to be and to feel in the world.

Notes

1. Mino Gabriele, "Introduzione," in *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, eds. Marco Ariani and Mino Gabriele (Milan: Adelphi, 1998), 2: xxi. Among the copious studies devoted to the book, at least two special issues of the journal *Word & Image* are worth mentioning: 14.1–2 (1998), 31.2 (2015).

2. Armando Maggi, "Interpretare i sogni," in *Il Rinascimento italiano e l'Europa. 5: Le scienze*, ed. Antonio Clericuzio and Germana Ernst (Costabissara, Italy: Colla, 2008), 261–280.

3. Guido Ruggiero, *The Renaissance in Italy: A Social and Cultural History of the Rinascimento* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 438–488.

4. On the notion of the history of experience, see especially David Carr, *Experience and History: Phenomenological Perspectives on the Historical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Rob Boddice and Mark Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

5. See, in particular, Bernard Dieterle and Manfred Engel, eds., *Writing the Dream / Écrire le rêve* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2017); Bernard Dieterle and Manfred Engel, eds., *Theorizing the Dream / Savoir et théories du rêve* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2018); Bernard Dieterle and Manfred Engel, eds., *Historizing the Dream / Le rêve du point de vue historique* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2019); Bernard

Dieterle and Manfred Engel, eds., *Mediating the Dream / Les genres et médias du rêve* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2020). A fifth and last volume of the series is expected on the subject with the title *Typologizing the Dream / Le rêve du point de vue typologique*.

6. *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, ed. Salvatore Battaglia (Turin: UTET, 1961–), s.v. “sogno.”

7. *Grande dizionario*, s.v. “sogno;” Giovanni Florio, *Giardino di ricreatione* (London, 1591), s.v. (alphabetically arranged including by their definite articles). The digital edition of the latter has the advantage of allowing word searches, which produce a cluster of other interesting cases: “I sogni né sempre son veri, né ogni volta falsi,” “Tanto erra chi crede tutti i sogno esser fallaci, quanto chi gli crede esser veraci,” “Di questi sogni rotti” (whatever that may mean), and the colorful “A vision d’infermi, e sogni vani, a cingani, mercanti, e cortegiani, si può più ch’ a puttana prestar fede, tutta bugia da la cima al piede”; with the singular: “Lamar senza speme, è sogno e ciancia” and “Quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno”; and again, with the verb: “Mentre dorme l’avarò, si sogna il ladro” and “Chi mal ti vuole, male ti sogna.” The last (also recorded in *Grande dizionario*, s.v. “sognare”) occurs in *Decameron* IX.7 and has been commented on as evidence of popular skepticism about the predictive power of dreams: see Franco Cardini, “Sognare a Firenze fra Trecento e Quattrocento,” *Quaderni medievali* 9 (1980): 86–120, reprinted in his *Le mura di Firenze inargentate. Lettere fiorentine* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1993), 40–41.

8. *Grande dizionario*, s.v. “sognare.”

9. John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes* (London, 1598) and *Queen Anna’s New World of Words* (London, 1611), s.vv.

10. sogno: per traslatione si è posto come cosa momentanea che non dura e per vanità.”

11. “Io credo, che tu sogni, al quale Pirro rispose.” Giacomo Pergamino, *Il memoriale della lingua italiana* (Venice, 1602), s.v. “sogno.” Sergio Lubello, “Pergamini, Giacomo,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 82 (Rome: Treccani, 2015).

12. Much richer and more interesting are what appear in the *Grande dizionario*, s.v. “tra-sognato” and related words.

13. Giacomo Pergamino, *Il memoriale della lingua italiana . . . seconda impressione* (Venice, 1617), s.v. “sogno.”

14. *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (Venice, 1612), s.v. “sogno.”

15. “necessaria non solo a segretarii, a prosatori et a poeti: ma a ciascuno, che desideri di scriver regolatamente. Et oltre a ciò utilissima a gli stranieri;” Pergamino, *Il memoriale* (both editions), frontispiece.

16. Pergamino, *Il memoriale* (both editions), s.v. “sogno.”

17. Ambrosius Calepinus, *Dictionarium Latinum* (Reggio nell’Emilia, 1502). Cf. Ann M. Blair, *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 122–123.

18. Robert Cowan, “Cinna’s Trouser Snake—or the Biter Bit? Alternative Interpretations of Cinna fr. 12 FRP,” *Antichthon* 48 (2014): 95–108; cf. A. Cornelius Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* (*Attic Nights*), trans. John C. Rolfe, 2, Loeb Classic Library 200 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), including the Loeb editor’s notes.

19. Blair, *Too Much to Know*.

20. I have consulted the edition of Cologne 1552, s.v. “somnus.” Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 93–95; Paolo Cherchi, *Polimatia di riuso. Mezzo secolo di plagio (1539–1589)* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1998), 42–50; Amedeo Quondam, “Strumenti dell’officina classicistica: *Polyanthea & Co.*,” *Modern Philology* 101, no. 2 (November 2003): 316–335; Blair, *Too Much to Know*, 125–126.

21. The two main sources for Cardano’s own dreams are Girolamo Cardano, *Somniorum Synesiorum libri quatuor: Les quatre livres des songes de Synesios*, ed. and trans. J.-Y. Boriaud (Florence: Olschki, 2008), 2:602–661; Hieronymus Cardanus, *De propria vita liber*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam, 1654), chapter 37, 113–126. For the former, see also Gerolamo Cardano, *Sogni*, ed. A. Grieco and M. Mancina (Venice: Marsilio, 1993), 140–161; for the latter, Jerome Cardan, *The Book of My Life (De Vita Propria Liber)*, trans. J. Stoner (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1930), 147–162, and Gerolamo Cardano, *Della mia vita*, ed. A. Ingegno (Milan: Serra e Riva, 1982), 117–126. I have presented this case at an Université du Québec à Montréal online seminar “Pour une histoire de l’expérience” (2021) and am grateful to its participants and conveners, Piroška Nagy and Xavier Biron-Ouellet, for their thought-provoking feedback. I explore an aspect of Cardano’s oneirology in Alessandro Arcangeli, “Cardano: sognare gli affetti,” *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 24, no. 2 (2018): 421–437. In stigmatizing the tendency to “over-emphasise his biography in trying to make sense of his thought,” Alice Browne has specified that when she suggests “connections between his ideas and his life, this is not meant as a reductionist explanation of how he come to have the ideas”; Browne, “Girolamo Cardano’s *Somniorum Synesiorum Libri IIII*,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 41, no. 1 (1979): 123–135 (123).

22. Anthony Grafton, *Cardano’s Cosmos: The Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 178–198; Guido Giglioni, “Autobiography as Self-Mastery. Writing, Madness, and Method in Girolamo Cardano,” *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 7, no. 2 (2001): 331–362.

23. Carlo Gregori, “Rappresentazione e difesa: osservazioni sul *De vita propria* di Gerolamo Cardano,” *Studi storici* 73 (April 1990): 225–234; Grafton, *Cardano’s Cosmos*, 182 (on the *De libris propriis*, with additional reference to Erasmus).

24. Giuliano Gliozzi, “Cardano, Gerolamo,” in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 19 (Rome: Treccani, 1976), [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gerolamo-cardano_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gerolamo-cardano_(Dizionario-Biografico)); Leen Spruit, “Cardano, Girolamo,” in *Dizionario storico dell’Inquisizione*, ed. Adriano Prosperi (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2010), 1:271.

25. Cardan, *The Book of My Life*, 147–148.

26. Cardan, *The Book of My Life*, 156.

27. See Manfred Engel, “Towards a Theory of Dream Theories,” in Dieterle and Engel, *Theorizing the Dream*, 50.

28. *Expositione de gli insomnii secondo la interpretatione de Indy, Persy, & Egyptii. Tradute de greco in latino. Per Leone Toschano. Et al presente date in luce per il Tricasso Mantuano* (Venice, 1525), and subsequent editions. On the source, see Maria Mavroudi, *A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation: The Oneirocriticon of Achmet and Its Arabic Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Anne-Marie Bernardi, “L’*Oneirocriticon* d’Achmet et la christianisation de la tradition grecque d’interprétation des rêves,” *Kentron* 27 (2011): 81–98.

29. Artemidorus, *De somniorum interpretatione libri quinque*; Synesius, *De insomnijs* (Venice: Aldus, 1518).

30. Guido Giglioni, "Synesian Dreams: Girolamo Cardano on Dreams as Means of Prophetic Communication," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 16, no. 2 (2010): 575–584 (a book review of the edition and translation by Jean-Yves Boriaud).

31. Sylviane Bokdam, *Metamorphoses de Morphée: Théories du rêve et songes poétiques à la Renaissance, en France* (Paris: Champion, 2012), 420–439. On Artemidorus's influence on Cardano, see also Mauro Mancia, "Il pensiero di Cardano come cerniera tra le idee antiche e moderne sul sogno," in *Cardano e la tradizione dei saperi*, ed. Marialuisa Baldi and Guido Canziani (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003), 35–41.

32. Browne, "Girolamo Cardano's *Somniorum Synesiorum Libri IIII*," (134).

33. Browne, "Girolamo Cardano's *Somniorum Synesiorum Libri IIII*," 130; Grafton, *Cardano's Cosmos*.

34. For an exceptional and well-known dream reported by Giovanni di Pagolo Morelli from the year 1407, see text and comment in Cardini, "Sognare a Firenze," 47–58. Dreams are listed among the elements worth registering by Attilio Bartoli Langeli, "Scheda analitica per la rilevazione dei libri di famiglia," *LDF: Bollettino per la ricerca sui libri di famiglia* 1, no. 1 (1989): 14–15.

35. Maggi, "Interpretare i sogni."

36. Karlheinz Stierle, "Dantes Poetik des Traums," in Dieterle and Engel, eds., *Writing the Dream*, 149–158. See Cardini, "Sognare a Firenze," for an attempt to reconstruct, beginning from Dante, the oneiric landscape of a city.

37. Erika Milburn, "Il sogno erotico nella lirica del Cinquecento," *Italique* 17 (2014): 43–71, <https://journals.openedition.org/italique/384>; cf. Sarah Jane Todd, "Dream-Visions in Boccaccio and Petrarch," (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2015); Dietrich Scholler, "De l'intercesseur au centre d'intérêt. Sur l'évolution de la place des rêves dans la poésie de la Renaissance italienne," in Dieterle and Engel, eds., *Historizing the Dream*, 119–129.

38. Tancredi Artico, "Per una grammatica del sogno nel *Decameron*: Forme e strutture delle novelle a tema onirico," *Italianistica Debrececiensis* 24 (December 2018): 96–109. See also Simone Marchesi, "Dire la verità dei sogni: la teoria di Panfilo in *Decameron* IV.6," *Italica* 81, no. 2 (2004): 170–183; Monica Balestrero, *L'immaginario del sogno nel Decameron* (Rome: Aracne, 2009); Valerio Cappelletto, "Delle verità dimostrate da' sogni: Boccaccio e l'oniromanzia medievale," in *Boccaccio 1313–2013*, ed. Francesco Ciabattini, Elsa Filosa, and Kristina Olson (Ravenna: Longo, 2015), 203–211.

39. Frédéric Canovas, "Forme et fonction de l'énoncé onirique dans le texte médiéval: L'Exemple du *Décameron*," *Neophilologus* 80, no. 4 (1996): 555–568.

40. As hypothesized, for instance, by Cardini, "Sognare a Firenze," 38–39.

41. Fabio Ruggirello, "Strutture immaginative nella tragedia del Cinquecento: il topos del sogno premonitore," *Forum Italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies* 39, no. 2 (2005): 378–397.

42. Gisèle Besson and Jean-Claude Schmitt, "Introduction," in *Rêver de soi* (Toulouse: Anacharsis, 2017), 7–43 (especially 8–11).

43. Ann Marie Plane and Leslie Tuttle, "Review Essay: Dreams and Dreaming in the Early Modern World," *Renaissance Studies* 67 (2014): 917–931.

44. Carol Schreier Rupprecht, "Divinity, Insanity, Creativity: A Renaissance Contribution to the History and Theory of Dream/text(s)," in *The Dream and the Text: Essays on Literature and Language*, ed. Carol Schreier Rupprecht (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 112–132. On the shaping force of dreams on Cardano's thought, which Rupprecht finds has been totally ignored by historians of science, "In fact, his major text in natural philosophy, *De Subtilitate*, was instigated by a dream. His psychologically astute autobiography, *De Propria Vita*, shows how fully dreaming dominated his perspectives in all fields. And it is hard not to see connections between his famed treatise on algebra, *Ars Magna*, with its mathematical computation of probability and chance as related to his interest in the predictive powers of dreams" (112). See also Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jean Khalfa (New York: Routledge, 2009).

45. Maggi, "Interpretare i sogni," 264.