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The Dream Vision and Medieval Incubation in the *Hypnerotomachia P.* Epistemological Reflections on the Dream in Literature

La visión en sueño y la incubación medieval en la *Hypnerotomachia P.* Reflexiones epistemológicas sobre el sueño en la literatura

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Abstract
Attributed to Francesco Colonna, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (HP) —*The Strife of Love in a Dream*— wrote in the Renaissance's threshold:1499. From our perspective, in spite of the date of its publication, it is a novel deeply rooted in the medieval tradition which, in turn, was nourished of Patristic Literature sources. In consequence, will be demonstrated that Colonna adopted, in a one hand, the Christian dream vision perspective (the medieval dream-book and incubation), to access the knowledge of the [him]self. In another hand, monastic composing strategies —about prayer and spiritual healing— were adopted, by the author, as a cognitive tool intended for reflection the imaginary creation process. The present research aims to demonstrate that HP is a monastic and literary exercise with redeeming goals. For this reason, will apply the medieval taxonomy of dream-visions. We will expose like pieces of evidence certain passages from the HP and determined iconographic materials. The selected contents express medieval dream-vision concerns, metacognitive reflections of the author about literary practice, and his epistemological approaching about the meaning of the dream-books like cultural devices.

Keywords: Dream Vision, Incubation, Meditation, Monasticism, Redemption.

Resumen

Atribuido a Francesco Colonna, la *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (HP) —*El sueño de Polífilo*— fue escrito en los umbrales del Renacimiento. Pese a la fecha de publicación (1499), consideramos que la novela está profundamente enraizada en la tradición medieval que, a su vez, se alimentó de las fuentes de la literatura patrística. En consecuencia, demostraremos que Colonna adoptó, por una parte, la perspectiva cristiana sobre las visiones en sueño (libro de registro de sueños y el sueño incubatorio), para acceder al conocimiento de sí mismo. Por otro lado, las estrategias monásticas de composición —para la plegaria y purificación espiritual— fueron adoptadas por el autor como herramienta de reflexión de los procesos creativos de la imaginación. Por consiguiente, la presente investigación demostrará que la HP es un ejercicio literario y monástico que tienen por finalidad la redención espiritual de su autor/protagonista. Utilizaremos la taxonomía medieval sobre las visiones en sueño, y expondremos como evidencia determinados pasajes y material iconográfico de la obra, que muestran la pertinencia de la visión en sueño destinada, en este caso, para la reflexión metacognitiva del autor acerca de la practica literaria, y su aproximación epistemológica al significado de los libros de sueños como dispositivos culturales.

Palabras clave: visión en sueño, incubación, meditación, monasticismo, redención.

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An object of study for the medieval treatise field, dreaming was instrumentalized for the allegoresis with Agustine of Hippo in his *De Doctrina Christiana* (ca. 426), it was a miraculous expression in the hagiographies from the *Dialogorum* (ca. 594) by Gregory the Great and classified according to the scale of prophecies compiled by Isidoro of Sevilla in *Etymologiae* (ca. 630). Furthermore, the visions present in dreams also offered a creative topic for poets: the 'dream vision'. *Roman de la Rose*, from the 13th century, and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* or *Pearl*, from the 14th century, are only some examples illustrating how the oneiric experience also legitimized fantastic writings.

Moreover, from the research conducted by some contemporary medievalists —such as John Bequette with his *Rhetoric in the Monastic Tradition. A Textual Study* or Jacques Le Goff and Nicolas Truong in *Una historia del cuerpo en la Edad Media* —it can be ascertained that for medieval theologists and poets, material and spiritual reality coexisted in tension, which influenced their cultural dynamic (2005, 12-14). Dreams inhabit the liminal spaces between these two poles; thus, the analysis of

this tension mirrors and brings light to medieval theoretical and literary descriptions regarding dream visions. It is from this perspective that we harbor the suspicion that a certain type of visions —according to medieval treatises— had a specific role in the reflection of imaginary processes in literary fiction, and specifically, in monastic compositions. Therefore, we will explore how the dream vision strikes a balance in its imaginary —between divine perfection and demonic vice— as well as its advantage as a tool for the epistemological appreciation of the mind's creative process. We aim to prove how literature takes the opportunity to think itself in its own mechanisms of composition through the evidence that can be found in certain iconographic peculiarities and the narrative structure of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphilli* (HP)[1] by Francesco Colonna.

Within said framework, there is not a resistance bigger for the study of an oneiric work such as the HP than the temporal limits that define a medieval work: for it to have been produced between the 5th and 15th centuries. Although this novel was written in 1499 in Venice, and it therefore is in the threshold of the Renaissance, it unequivocally belongs to what is known as the Low Middle Ages. Thus, by renouncing to the neoplatonic and Renaissance neopaganism lenses through which this book is often examined, we hope to contribute to its study by unveiling the purely Christian roots of this work, namely patristic literature, and medieval monasticism. In that sense, we endeavor to prove that the visions of its protagonist —Poliphilo— are fictitious recreations that invoke the oneiric typologies defined by medieval theological treatises. To fulfill that goal, we are basing our research on two elemental premises:

1) Firstly, that the HP's author was a monk. The thesis concerning the professional identity of the author dates to the 17th century, and it is currently supported by a wide part of the erudite community focused on the study of this work.[2] However, this acceptance has not promoted the study of the HP under a Christian lens. Inserting the ouvre of Colonna —the monk— within the margins of medieval Christian thought allows for a reinterpretation of the novel as a representation of a possible road for the soul's redemption.

[1] This research will present quoted passages from the *Hypnerotomachia. The Strife of Love in a Dreame,* trans. Joscelyn Godwin (New York, 2005).

[2] This theory has been accepted by Lucia A. Ciaponi, Giovanni Pozzi, and Pilar Pedraza. Although Marco Ariani and Mino Gabriele legitimized this theory in their *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili. Tomo II*.

2) Secondly, a premise in Aristotelian origins ("Acerca del alma", II-I.7.431a.10-15): 'without images there cannot be thoughts.' This includes the world of dream visions, allowing the use of the fictional constructions of mental and creative processes, which at some point are influenced by certain pathologies of the soul and body.

Antecedents regarding dreams for the composition of the HP

Although dreams and visions had working against them the biblical warning that installed them in the limit of the abomination (Dt.18:10), dreams proved to be a favorable instance for literary exercises and judgements involving consciousness of the self; thanks to the versatility of the mental images provided, and the multiplicity of topics that could be developed. Synesius, a pagan philosopher turned bishop in the 5th century, was a supporter of these practices. In "Sobre los Sueños" Synesius emphasizes the enormous challenge of transporting the fantasies seen by the mind's eye while sleeping to common language (Sinesio, "Sobre los sueños", 294-295). The incoherences and mixtures belonging to dream visions had to be described correctly to be efficiently communicated. In that sense, in the HP certain marks that reveal the dream as a source of rhetoric inspiration have already been observed.

The HP is a tale of autobiographical pretensions which, from the construction of its title to the misconnections of its plot —an inventory of images and neologisms that have led to questioning the compositional quality of the work[3]— answers to an oneiric reality. In fact, Ariani and Gabriele highlight the fictional importance of dreams in the novel and identify the pertinence of Synesius's treatise as a philosophical source for Colonna in passages of their erudite "Commento a la HP" (2015). There, both authors discuss the hypothesis that the HP could be the result of a 'nightly diary,' an instrument for the rhetorical perfectioning recommended by Synesius ("Sobre los Sueños", 294). But, despite this connection, they abstain from remarking upon the medieval origins of the treatise, or its having been written by a Christianized pagan (Ariani y Gabriele, 2015, 1158).

[3] For further detail on the hybrid language that characterizes the HP revise Liza Piña-Rubio, *Los espacios insondables del hombre interior en la Hypnerotomachia Poliphili de Francesco Colonna. Lección monástica, visión y memoria medieval* (Santiago, 2017, pp. 146-148, note 46).

That said, in respect to the HP being an exercise in consciousness of the self, Steven Kruger observes in his article "Dream Space and Masculinity" that the oppressive temporal circularity of the novel (Kruger, "Dream Space and Masculinity", 11-16) is a consequence of its oneiric inspiration, which he interprets as a method for the humiliation and scorn of the protagonist's masculinity ("Dream Space and Masculinity" p. 13). From our perspective, what he detects in the novel is the representation of an internal battle in visions were caused by the fearful soul, which —unable to rest while in sleep— maintained an arduous battle the style of the Desert Fathers.[4] That emasculation is the humiliation of the flesh —the battle against the libidinous inclinations personified by demons— a scare tactic that allowed for the anchorite to get closer to God. For example, for Saint Anthony (fig. 1), visions were caused by the fearful soul, which —unable to rest while in sleep— fighting against the evil powers inhabiting the air defeating demons through the shame inherent in revealing the deepest of one's thoughts to others. Thus, he said: "Examinémonos constantemente, y esforcémonos por alcanzar lo que nos falta. Tengamos también esta precaución para estar seguros de no pecar; que cada uno *escriba* sus actos e impulsos del alma […]" (Athanasius, 98-99).

Fig. 1. *Saint Anthony Abbot. Andrea Previtali ca. 1470. Detail of cherub* feeding acorns to a pig (Photograph by Mirella Levi D'Ancona, In *The Garden of the Renaissance. Botanical Symbolism in the Italian Painting*. Florence: LSO,1977, 36.)

[4] The Desert Fathers were those Christians who, during the 4th century, left the cities behind towards the deserts of Syria and Egypt, to live in spiritual reclusion.

What is more, iconographies representing Saint Anthony's temptations are well known,[5] depicting him being constantly attacked by demons flying over him. He recommended defeating demons revealing the deepest of one's thoughts to others. Certainly for Anthony, as for Synesius, "[…] la narración [mediante la escritura o simple confesión] de estos sucesos [visiones] era útil para que aprendieran [los monjes] que el fruto de la ascesis es bueno[ya] que las visiones son muchas veces consuelo de las fatigas." (Atanasio, *Vida de Antonio*, 100). From these words, the instrumental value he attributed to dreams emerges. In this way, in the face of divinatory practices, Christianity found the oneiric experience as an instance for the 'disciplining of virtue.'

It is no surprise, then, for the HP to start with an insomniac and feverish Poliphilo, who falls asleep at dawn: "[…] I, Poliphilo, was lying on my couch, the timely friend of my weary body […]I passed the long and tedious night sleeplessly […]" and just at dawn "[…] my reddened eyelids began to close upon my wet eyes, I was *between bitter life* and *sweet death.* And gentle sleep invaded and occupied that part of me that is not united with my mind […]" (Colonna, HP, 12). Here, for Colonna, dreaming is caused by a physical ailment, one that obfuscates reason at the very beginning of the story. The dreaming state allows for the unprejudiced visualization that characterizes the oneiric experience. And although monasticism freed the dreamer of guilt (Colombás, *El monacato primitivo*, 583) at least to a certain extent, it did demand he made good use of such instance:

1) In the short term, the monk should interpret the dreams' sinful images as a symptom of his still imperfect soul.
2) In the long term, it implied the exercise of discerning the value/validity of dreams in proportion to the message of which they were a vehicle. This ability was a must have for any monk, as said exercise of wisdom allowed him self-knowledge regarding vices and virtues.

Several renowned erudites have pointed how in the Middle Ages the etiology of illness was linked to sin, which furthered the idea of

[5] The following include passages of Athanasius' work, *Vida de Antonio*, 5.1 with: *Tríptico de las tentaciones de san Antonio* (ca.1501) and *Las tentaciones de san Antonio abad* (ca 1510) both painted by Hieronymus Bosch; *Las tentaciones de san Antonio* by Matthias Grünewald (ca.1516) and Martin Schongauer's engraving also called *La tentación de san Antonio* (ca. 1475).

spiritual salvation through physical penance (Le Goff y Truong, 99). Given this context, we must understand that monk-Poliphilo is sick due to his vices, weary from the battle against the lustful memories of his beloved Polia. His insomnia is that wretched and of the fatigues of a religious penitent.

Biblical and monastic marks in the HP

From monasticism, and Christianity in general, it is possible to illuminate some novel's more obscure aspects. For example, the identity of its author —who more due to coherence than mere fancy— decides to entwain his identity with the tale's protagonist.[6] In this respect, the title's neologism[7] (*hypnos* + *eros* + *machia*) is used to allude directly to the protagonist's fighting two simultaneous battlefronts: the disciplining of virtue, along with the rhetorical training of the author-monk. What is more, just in the title, Colonna presents his novel as a spiritual battlefield (*machia*), where virtues face Poliphilo's bad inclinations: the ghosts of his lust (*eros*) towards Polia during his dream visions (*hypnos*). At the same time, the novel's title —as the Greek neologism that it is— puts in evidence the close link between the book and treatises on dreams of the helenistic period.

In *Sobre los sueños* by Philo of Alexandria we find the distinction of terms related to sleep —similar in appearance— extracted from his meticulous Biblical interpretations. Said terms were: *hýpnos*, *óneiros* o *enýpnion* (Filón, *Sobre los sueños*, pp. 87-89). For Philo, *hýpnos* is the dream of an insensate man, in direct contrast to the dream of the austere Jacob (Gn. 28:11; Fig. 2). Jacob experiences *óneiros,* which leads him to spiritual enlightenment. However, the lack of virtue of those who experience *hýpnos* does not make them as despicable as those in *enýpion*, a physiological dream lacking any meaning (dreams produced during food digestion).

[6] See Liza Piña-Rubio, *Los espacios insondables del hombre interior en la Hypnerotomachia Poliphili de Francesco Colonna. Lección monástica, visión y memoria medieval* (Santiago, 2017, pp.16-17).

[7] The reach of the term '*Hypnerotomachia'* persists in the English (*Strife of Love in a Dream)* as well as Spanish (*Sueño de Polífilo)* translations. Furthermore, its peculiar rhetoric legitimizes the biblical marks used in the construction of text in the HP. For further detail about hybrid language revise Liza Piña-Rubio, *Los espacios insondables del hombre interior en la Hypnerotomachia Poliphili de Francesco Colonna. Lección monástica, visión y memoria medieval* (Santiago, 2017, pp. 183-200).

Fig. 2. Jacob's Dream. In Ms. KB, 78D43. Netherlands National Library (ca.1375). <http://www.xtec.cat/sgfp/llicencies/200203/memories/prodriguez/antiguotestamento/imagenes/jacobsue%F1ominiatura.jpgFlorence>

This taxonomy provides the reach of *hýpnos* in the interpretation of the HP for more than evident reasons: the novel's title can be translated as 'a combat of love during a dream.' But that is not all, the biblical model given by Jacob and his *óneiros* is also a biblical mark present within the HP. Certainly, the HP is a narrative and iconographic representation of visions in a dream, born from the daze affecting the author/protagonist. However, the title and contents of the novel present a contradictory relationship. The dubious moral status of a deeply eroticized protagonist (Poliphilo), predetermined by the words that construct the novel's title (*hypnos* + *eros* + *macchia* = *Strife of love in a dream*) comes into conflict with the traditional topic of the virtuous Jacob's dream on a stone.[8] We can corroborate, comparing figures 2 and 4, that engraving printed by Manutius in 1499 was inspired by the common elements from the compositional scheme (or iconographic types) about this biblical passage, however, with opposite meaning. In effect, the engraver or artist used the same motive but in a different reading context,

[8] To fully understand the relationship proposed in the present research between the title of the novel (*hypnos* + *macchia*), the author's last name (Colonna, a monk) and the **biblical symbol of the stone = column** on which one sleeps as a visionary testimony, review passages from thesis "Los espacios insondables del hombre interior en la *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* de Francesco Colonna. Lección monástica, visión y memoria medieval" (2017, pp. 160-162 and pp. 229-230).

which introduced a new theme under the direction and care of the same author of the manuscript.[9] Poliphilo asleep under a holm oak (or the author's alter ego, a monk) did not have a virtuous dream vision as happened with Jacob.[10] Within the reaches of *hypnos*, Poliphilo experiences another type of dream when he rests under the tree; in it and inspired by Jacob's model gesture (*óneiros*), we observe a particular event caused directly by the monastic context of the novel: the apparition ('dream vision') of a formidable dragon in chapter VI. In a moment of distraction, Poliphilo —who is marveling at the sumptuous decorations of a grand portal belonging to a great pyramid— relates to us the encounter with the beast:

> [...] I Heard a sound in the ruins like breaking of bones and the cracking of branches. I stood stock still, my delightful recreation shattered, and then hear closer to hand, a sound like the dragging of a great bull's carcase [...] Suddenly there appeared on the threshold of the portal [...] a frightful and horrific dragon! Its triple tongue trembled in its jaws, which were full as comb with sharp, serrated teeth. Its fat, scaly body slithered over the tiled pavement, and as it glided, its wings slapped its furrowed back, while its long tail wound itself in serpentine fashion into tight [...] I noticed that the monster was spewing out foul smoke, which I immediately suspected to be deadly, but I had no way of scape from this mortal peril. With my poor soul almost spiritless, in my fear and trembling I devoutly invoked every divine power (Colonna, 61-62).

The description is clearly inspired by an anecdote by Gregory the Great in book II of his *Dialogos* (95-142), which is dedicated exclusively to the life of Benedict and his miracles. Here, we transcribe in in its entirety, due to its briefness:

> One of [Benedict's] monks had given his mind over to wandering and no longer wished to stay in the monastery. Though the man of God faithfully rebuked

[9] The statement is based on studies developed by Ariani and Gabriele on the authorship and graphic design of the manuscript. See chapters "L'autore del "Polifilo" and "Le illustrazioni", *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili. Traduzione e apparati. Tomo secondo. Introduzione, traduzione y commento di Marco Ariani e Mino Gabriele*, Milan: Adelphi, 2015.

[10] In section 2.2 "Consideraciones sobre el autor-protagonista" from thesis *Los espacios insondables del hombre interior en la Hypnerotomachia Poliphili de Francesco Colonna. Lección monástica, visión y memoria medieval* (2017), I argumented that Francesco Colonnna's religious identity is a key aspect to facilitate the identification between the protagonist and the author of the novel.

> him, frequently admonished him, in no way would he consent to stay with the community but with obstinate requests insisted that he should be released, until one day, fed up with his constant whining, the venerable father angrily ordered him to depart. As soon has the monk has gone outside the monastery, he discovered to his horror that a dragon with gaping jaws was blocking his way. And when the same dragon that had appeared to him seemed to want to devour him, trembling and shaking he began to call out in a loud voice, "Help me, help me, for this dragon wants to eat me." His brothers, running up, could not see the dragon at all, but they led the trembling and shaking monk back to the monastery. He immediately promised never to leave the monastery again, and from that moment he kept his promise, for because of the holy man's prayers he had seen, standing in his path, the dragon that previously he had followed without seeing it (cit. por Carruthers, 185).

The dragon and the serpent correspond to a demonic manifestation in hagiographic literature (San Gregorio, *Diálogos,* 139). Both animals are mentioned by Colonna and within the text they function as theriomorphic symbols (Durand, *Estructuras antropológicas*, 73-93). In this respect, we agree with the comments made by J.P. Galán —translator to Spanish and commenter of the cited text— and Mary Carruthers (185) along whom we detect that the vision of the dragon appears due to the miraculous intervention by Benedict, 'whose art' makes the demon stalking the wayward monk visible. In other words, through meditation,[11] Benedict creates/composes a dream vision of evil —or a mental image of the dragon, as it is only seen by the deserter of the monastic order— with the objective of encouraging repentance and the salvation of a soul. Although the more vivid description of the dragon is in the HP rather than in the *Diálogos* by Gregory, in both cases the one affected experience his terror through trembling and spasming. Furthermore, in both tales, the dragon functions as an interference and as a warning to the one who sees it, both negligent monks who must be set straight. In one case, the envisioned dragon is relative to the devoted prayer of Benedict, who recreates it, composes, or constructs it. In the second case, the dragon is received by the protagonist in the form of a vision, a compositive product of Colonna's creation.

[11] It must be clarified that meditation is just one part of the *lectio divina,* along with the *oratio*, *compositio,* and *ruminatio*.

The monastic lesson and the meditations regarding dream visions in the HP

To summarize, dreams and writing have been connected since the times of Anthony and Synesius. The Eastern hermetism of the Egyptian Desert Fathers would be imitated by Latin Christianity at least since the 6th century. From that moment onwards, the ways of praying, meditating, and thinking God grew in sophistication: the source of said lessons was holy, as it came exclusively from biblical texts. Prayer (*oratio*) and meditation or are even today known as the divine lesson (*lectio divina*).[12] It is harder to define what the divine lesson is (Piña-Rubio, *Los espacios insondables del hombre interior*, 74-84) than it is to understand it through contrast with the monastic lesson or meditation. The divine lesson consists of an exercise of meditation based purely on reading of the Sacred Scriptures; the monastic lesson has a wider bibliographical scope, including edifying and exegetical treatises along with the Bible. While whether the divine lesson can benefit from this expanded scope is still up for debate, what is not up to discussion is that, in its origins, the *lectio divina* was an exclusively Monastic exercise. It was only after the 10th century that it became a practice shared by the entirety of the Christian community. Thus, Western Christianity democratized the revelation of God to humanity (Guigo, *Scala claustralium,* 7-9).

To simplify the reader's understanding of such matters, in the present work we will assimilate the divine lesson with the monastic one as meditation. This, to emphasize its processual nature —creative and cognitive— and thus, how it is visionary at its very core. In consequence, it must be borne in mind that during the Middle Ages the mechanisms of thought and/or imagination were thought to involve images similar in their immaterial condition —ethereal or spiritual— to those in dreams. The lesson/meditation resulted in the intellectual and literary exercise of *compositio* or writing: from simple glosses of a text to exegetical manuscripts or treatises on several topics.

In *The Craft of the Thought,* Mary Carruthers alludes to the *lectio divina* through the term *sacra pagina* (2-3) and she connects it directly to writing and the functions of the mind (memory). The author posits that monastic meditation was an art, an artifice (*craft*). This art, defined also as *orthopraxis*, formulates meditation as an exercise of compositional

[12] Gregory the Great in "Homilías sobre la profecía de Ezequiel" I, 10.3-14, refers to the divine lesson as "sacred lesson," which he uses to liken the understanding of the Sacred Scriptures to a gastric exercise.

invention: new thoughts are invented and constructed. This meant that monastic meditation was not limited to repeating what was read or known in the Sacred Texts. In consequence, we find the closeness between the dream vision and the monastic lesson/meditation. Dream-books and monastic manuscripts were documents of a mental nature, visual constructions of [tr]ascendent aspirations, and products of thought promoting writing (or creation). This is why the dream-book was perceived as a legitimate road for [self]knowledge and getting closer to God. At the same time, dreams visions (be these of type *hypnos*, *óneiros* or 'middle dream') and monastic meditations were mental experiences, memory exercises susceptible to written and pictorial recording. In both cases, the dream vision and the monastic meditation functioned as ways of introspection that brough God closer. The novelty of Colonna's book consisted, then, using this type of spiritual and healing records in the service of literary fiction.

The first treatise to systematize the *lectio divina* was the *Scala claustralium* by the Carthusian Guigo II, in the12th century, describing it as a process of four ascending steps: reading-meditation-prayer-contemplation (Guigo, 6). Furthermore, for Guigo, *lectio* was a process destined for the spiritual and subjective unveiling of the Bible, analogous to a desire of possession and insatiable degustation of the word. The monk —like a lover— desired the incarnate word as the truth hiding behind each word; the monastic love for God was expressed through images relative to human sensuality and 'heated' discourse, like the one expressed by Poliphilo. Such is the case of the desperate desire he feels to quench his thirst at the beginning of the tale,[13] like the novel monk who according to Guigo, burned for the divine during meditation. Observe the side-by-side reading shown in table 1.

[13] Poliphilo's sexual inclination towards Polia is also manifested as an "appetite disordered and inflamed" [ardiente apetito; *disordinato et succenso appetito*] and the devouring desire of his "roving eyes" [ojos insaciables; *furatrini ochii, infestissimi ochii mei*].

Table 1

Comparison between psychophysiological states during the *lectio divina*

Scala claustralium	*Hypnerotomachi Poliphili*
¿But what can be done? **He** [the apprentice] **burns with the desire to possess it** [grape licor] but does not find it in himself to have it and **the more he looks for it, the thirstier he gets**. While he gives himself to meditation, he also knows pain, because he **thirsts for the sweetness** [offered by the Sacred Scriptures] shown by meditation which occurs in purity of heart [mind free of impure thoughts] but **cannot taste it**. Feeling such sweetness is not for he who reads or meditates unless it be granted from above. "With these and other **inflamed thoughts the soul fans its desire** and shows its affection in this way. With these charms calls for its husband. [translated from Guigo, *Scala claustralium*, II, p.11]	**My thirst was so great that the fresh breezes could not cool me** or satisfy my parched heart: **I tried in vain to swallow my own saliva, but that had dried up, too.** But when I had somewhat recovered, and my spirits began to revive a little within me, though **my breast was overheated** by **many sighs, by anxiety of mind** and exhaustion of body, I decided that I must at all costs **satisfy my burning thirst.** Therefore, I searched the tract carefully in the hope of finding some water, and a very tired of exploring when a **glorious spring** presented itself to me […] I, Poliphilo, was terrified and anxious to escape […] and to drink **the water I longed for**. I threw my fingers and hollowed palms made myself a cup to drink from, dipping it into the stream and filling it with **water to offer to my raving and panting mouth and to refresh my dry and burning breas**t […]But just as I was raising my hands with the **delicious and longed/for water** to mu open mouth, at that very instant a Doric song penetra ted the caverns of my ears […] I filled my **disquieted heart** with […] sweetness[…] (Colonna, 16 -17).

This parallel allows us to establish that the heated concerns —caused by the desire of God symbolized by the manantial in the HP— are equivalent in both passages: thirst and flaming sensations. Because of this, we affirm that the *divine lesson* activates a sensorial and intellectual machinery

of thought in relation to God, allowing for the monk's spiritual ascension or advancement up the steps (reminiscent to the one in Jacob's dream), as it executes the actions of perfectioning oneself through composition.

Monastic discernment: Prudence and middle dream in the HP

Philo's etymological tradition was furthered in its type and intrinsic values in the *Oneirocritiká* by Artemidorus (2nd century A.D.); the theory gained complexity in the Latin tongue (4th century B.C.) with the *Comentario al Sueño de Escipión* by Macrobius, whose taxonomy has as its Christian counterpart the *Comentario sobre Timeo* by Calcidius. Thusly, towards the beginnings of the Middle Ages in the 5th century, the *hypnos* and *óneiros* as described by Philo had diversified into a set of specialized terms: the oracular dream (*oraculum*), the mundane dream (*somnium*), and the dream of truths beyond earthly ones (*visum*). However, in the midst of all this terminological specificity concerning dreams, the Middle Ages would keep the elemental antithetical distinction between true and false dreams; a remembrance of the Homeric allegory about the marble doors or of a horn, which determine the nature of dreams (*The Odyssey*, 19.560-564). The antithesis of this classic image responded to the religious needs of the time —the tension and antithesis in medieval culture: the knowledge of how to discern between the evil or divine, false or truthful, origin of visions (Le Goff y Truong, 70).

Monastic tradition found in oneiric reality the perfect field for training monks about self- control over natural instincts. Keeping watch over the dreaming experience, by interpreting and understanding its message, a channel towards divine revelation was opened to them. This wisdom was known as the power of discernment or *diacrisis* (Colombás, *El monacato primitivo,* 441). Thanks to the *diacrisis,* medieval treatise writers were able to elaborate conscientious typologies regarding visions. Therefore, those dreams that achieved an intermediate status —between hoax and truth— were left to the wise allegorical interpretation by the seer-subject, a matter depending entirely on his prudence. The 'middle dream' exists, then, in a direct relationship with this virtue.

According to Mino Gabriele in "*Il viaggio dell'anima*" (XLII and XXXVII) prudence is established in Colonna's work as the search for an equilibrium between body and soul, which he identifies as

"Cicero-Aristotelian *medietas*" or "Aristotelian *mesotes*".[14] From this idea, it is possible to assert that the middleness or equilibrium is the structural support that creates a gradual ascending road for Poliphilo; one just like the steps modelled by Guigo, or the ones in Jacob's stairs. It was considered that prudence[15] occupied the middle point between two moral poles which debated between the earthly and the celestial. The thinkers of old knew well that this intermediate space could be explored during dreams, reason for which Kruger —after a detailed study of the works of Calcidius, Macrobius, Agustine, Gregory the Great and Albertus Magnus— concluded that: "[…] the dream becomes an important way of exploring betweenness" (Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages,* 65).

From the study of the treatises it is possible to understand that, in the same way in which the ascending symbolism worked, these authors applied symbolic and moral degrees (ascending or descending) to the appraisal of vision's value. Prudence worked in the same manner of monastic discernment in search of equilibrium. It is not strange, then, for Kruger to observe that in said structures of oneiric grading, there is a persistence of what he calls 'middle dream' a visionary state in a perfect middle ground. The middle dream should not be discarded because of its falseness or venerated as a revelation or epiphany, as it is a dream of enigmatic content, susceptible to interpretation. From Kruger's theory, it is possible to make the connection between the middle dream and the triadic classification of visions according to Augustine, without losing sight of the general context given by the 'dream vision' as a genre of medieval literature, mentioned at the beginning.

Dream visions and free will in the HP

Reading different treatises by Saint Augustine facilitates the identification of tripartite structures inspired by the Holy Trinity, which

[14] The middle point —the Aristotelian *medietas*—corresponds to the exersicing of sound judgement through prudence "la moderadora de todas las demás virtudes", "aquella que prepara el camino y dispone de los medios" as Saint Thomas concludes in *Suma Teologica* III parte II-II(a) C.47 a.4; a.6.

[15] "Por la *prudencia* distinguimos en las cosas lo malo de bueno" affirms Isidore in *Etimologías*, II.24.6.

the bishop of Hippo projects to the categorization of dreams. Among them, there is a vision of an intermediate type produced in a state between vigil and sleep: the waking dream. It is specifically in his "Del libre albedrío", where Saint Augustine observes that —just as the stairs that grade the steps from ignorance to wisdom— intermediate visions offered opportunities for the pursuit of spiritual perfection depending directly on human will ("Del libre albedrío", 405-406). But it is in his "Del Génesis a la letra" which allows us to understand the concordance between Kruger's 'middle dream' and the 'spiritual vision' that Augustine locates between the other two genres of vision remaining: the corporal and intellectual.[16] The spiritual vision is completely different from purely misleading visions or the mental illusions that Poliphilo's dream under the holm oak. We want to underscore the words 'lay on' e 'incubate', as those were the terms used by Isidore of Seville to refer to devout meditation as related to monastic lesson.[17] In this sense, it is possible to refer to the 'nesting', 'laying on' or 'incubating' of a dream vision within others.

Fig. 3 Diagram of the nesting of fictional dreams.

[16] "Del Génesis a la letra" XII. 25-26: "[…] A la primera *visión llámese corporal*, porque se percibe por el cuerpo y se muestra a los *sentidos corporales*. A la segunda, *espiritual*, pues todo lo que no es cuerpo y, sin embargo, es algo, se llama rectamente espíritu y ciertamente no es cuerpo, aunque sea semejante al cuerpo, la *imagen del cuerpo ausente* [*spiritus* o imagen mental] y la mirada con que se ve la imagen [*memoria*]. La tercera clase de visión se llama *intelectual,* del origen de donde procede." Our emphasis.

[17] There are two meanings for the Latin term *incumbere*, which alludes to the love act or fornication as shown in *Etimologías* VIII.11.103. But *incumbere* is also used to mean "laying on," to express closeness and devotion to God.

Jacob's dream as an incubating dream in the HP

To synthesize, both 'dream vision' and 'middle dream' correspond to a category of betweenness or middleness. They allude to products of human imagination, considered to be cognitive within the medieval monastic community. Through them, those belonging to this group aspired to be closer to divine reality through the exercise of writing. The 'oneiric betweenness' of the HP's literary framework allows us to conclude that communication with the divine was possible, even for imperfect souls such as Poliphilo's and Colonna's. From this perspective, we can affirm that the novel is the fictional proposal of a modest revelation (through nesting dream visions) with therapeutic functions but lacking any mystic-contemplative or propaedeutic pretensions. In fact, as we will verify below, the novel is the product of a corrective and healing instance, which has an autobiographical or personal nature, which adheres to the ancient postulates of Synecious or Saint Anthony that we mentioned before.

The nesting of fictional dreams obeys a structure of grading levels, analog to the figures illustrating the monastic experience of spiritual progress. The image of the stair, the steps or levels of ascension allowed Saint Guigo to explain the workings of the *lectio divina* in his *Scala Claustralium*. Similarly, they were images shared by Smaragdus in his *Diadema monachorum* and by Benedict in his *Regula,* with his "twelve degrees of humility" (caps. V-VII). Colonna stays true to this symbolic-figurative tradition when he remembers Jacob's dream, with a tired Poliphilo who decides to rest under a holm oak:

> Finally exhaustion overcame me; my whole body felt cold and torpid, and I stretched myself out on the dewy grass beneath an ancient, furrowed oak. It was laden with clusters of acorns […] with knobby, spreading, leafy branches that made cool shade above its hollow trunk. There I rested, lying on my left side, drawing the cool air in shallow breaths between my wrinkled lips […] I felt no more than half-alive as I took as my last comfort the damp and dewy leaves that lay beneath the fronded oak, pressed them to my pale, cracked lips, and greedily sucked the moisture from them to cool my parched throat […] I staggered again beneath the oak-tree's shade and the comfortable spreading cover of its branches. An overwhelming drowsiness came over me, a sweet lassitude spread through my members, and it seemed to me that slept again (Colonna, 18-19).

For Gabriele —in his commentary of the HP "*Il viaggio dell'anima*"— this scene presents a pagan practice of incubation (XI). Indeed, the *incubatio* or incubation was a healing method quite popular in ancient times, consisting in healing illness through dreaming. The ill person had to sleep at certain sacred spaces destined to the cult of thaumaturgic deities. In this tradition, the dreams incubated by the ill were considered as messages of healing, sent directly by the respective god of the sanctuary where the dream occurred.[18] With this historical background in sight, the author's knowledge about incubation as a healing method is evident, considering the Polifilo's sickly state at the beginning of the story: his psychophysiological condition is described such as 'half-alive' and 'cold and torpid.' Poliphilo would understandably be feverish due to his vigils and exhausting prayer, which is why he falls asleep under the generous shade provided by the holm oak.[19]

The best ritual centers devoted to the *incubatio* were those belonging to Asclepius, in Epidaurus and that of Isis, in Egypt. Another well-known place was the oracle of Dodona as consecrated to Zeus and the "high-crested oak of the god" (Homer, *The Odissey*, XIV 327-330) which, unlike the others mentioned above, was an open space field consecrated to Jupiter that only had an old holm oak as its sacred element. This historical antecedent is what leads Gabriele to linking said place to the one described in the HP. In fact, the holm oak is key, because of Colonna's insistence to characterize it by its advanced age, shade, and fruit. It is not strange that said qualities were frequent in the emblematic literature developed after the HP's publication. For example, an epigram which has the holm oak as an emblem reconstructs a cultural

[18] In *Thaumata de Sofronio. Contribución al estudio de la incubatio Cristiana,* Fernández M. mentions that during dreams 'visitations' from the patron deity of the sanctuary to the ill supplicant occurred. Certain foods were recommended, as well as specific medicines, or even the dreamer was instantly cure upon waking.

[19] Cassian in *Instituciones* VI.IX.XII sees in the monk's dreams an instance for self-evaluation. All vices hiding silently in the soul are manifested during dreams. As Cassian considers even the most perfect of monks unable to subtract themselves from the natural movements of the flesh, nightly rest is the sanctioner of negligence. In fact, for Cassian in *Instituciones*, VI.IX.XI, what is incubated within dreams is vice: "[…] si ocurre alguna ilusión durante la noche, la falta no está en el sueño […] es síntoma de un vicio que está incubándose interiormente […]El sueño no ha hecho más que producirlo, empujándolo a la superficie. Ha puesto en evidencia la fiebre maligna que habíamos contraído durante la jornada […]"

and symbolic cultural background that can also be found in Colonna's work:

> Fue querida de Júpiter la Enzina,
> el cual ansí de aquí piensan llamarse, porque a nuestro favor
> siempre se inclina.
> De Enzina una corona solía dares
> a quien en batalla repentina
> librando un ciudadano pudo honrarse.
> Y aunque ahora sólo por sombra aprovecha
> por eso Júpiter no la desecha. (Bernat y Cull, 299)

This *subscriptio* confirms how the holm oak or *quercus* belongs to Jupiter. Although the healing dream itself is not mentioned, the tree is linked to battles and heroes, reinforcing its meaning as a symbolic element. Now, Colonna's novel uses all this traditional knowledge by introducing us, first, to the sick protagonist who, progressively through sleep, achieves his healing. Colona's novel begins with Polifilo's description of his emotional and physical breakdown due to his ill-fated love for Polia. He stablishes that: "I, Poliphilo, was lying on my couch". Sleep overcomes him; however, his obsessive thoughts of love haunt him: "I passed the long and tedious night sleeplessly, altogether disconsolate about my fruitless fortune and my adverse and evil star. I sighed and wept for my importunate and unsuccessful love" (Colonna, 12). His extreme exhaustion makes him understand and desire elusive sleep as a rest from sweet death, an analogy that we find in Tertullian, that we will comment on a little later:

> Thus, like a man exhausted by the labours of the day, with my sad complaint scarcely soothed, the source of my welling tears scarcely dried and my cheeks hollow with amorous pining, I now wanted my natural and timely rest. As my reddened eyelids began to close upon my wet eyes, I was between bitter life and sweet death. A gentle sleep invaded and occupied that part of me that is not united with my mind and with my loving and vigilant spirits, and cannot participate in their lofty operations […] (Colonna, 12).

When the protagonist manages to sleep, in his dream he describes himself as wandering in a dark jungle from which he escapes only after having addressed a prayer to divinity: "Oh Jupiter greatest and best, omnipotent and succouring" (Colonna, 15). In the midst of his sufferings, Poliphilo affirms

that he falls asleep again, that is, that Colonna constructs a fictional story using the principle of the dream nested in another dream that, as we can be seen in the following quote. The tradition conceived the dream vision experienced within a consecrated space, such as under the shade of an oak tree:

> I remained in these painful agitations, my strength at its lowest ebb, finding no help but in the steady and frequent gasping of air, collecting it in my breast where a particle of vital heat still throbbed and warmed it, and exhaling it through my throat as though retching. I felt no more than half aliveas I took as my last comfort the damp and dewy leaves that lay beneath the fronded oak, pressed them to my pale, cracked lips, al1d greedily sucked the moisture from them to cool my parched throat. […] Stunned and mindless after my heavy thoughts, indeed almost insane, I staggered again beneath the oak-tree's shade and the comfortable spreading cover of its branches. An overwhelming drowsiness came over me, a sweet lassitude spread through my members, and it seemed to me that I slept again (Colonna, 18-19).

This scene appears illustrated in Colonna's book. It is interesting to note the engraving (fig.4) that accompanies the previously exposed text adds a stone on which the sleeper rests his head, such as established the story of Jacob's dream, but is an inverted composition (by a mirror effect) with respect to fig. 2.

Fig. 4. Poliphilo incubating his second dream under a holm oak. Woodcut.
In *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili.* (Venice: Aldus Manutius, 1499).
<https://archive.org/details/hypnerotomachiap00colo/page/n4/mode/2up>

With the nested dream strategy, Colonna composes his own "battle or fight of love in dreams" (*machia*), without downplaying how it also depicts a monk in open confrontation against demons.[20] Returning to the aforementioned epigram compiled by Bernat and Cull (299), this reveals another key aspect about the *quercus* belongs to Jupiter: this expresses the idea that the "old sustains the new," it justifies both the survival of paganism in the HP —as defended by Gabriele— and the medieval monastic roots defended in the present research. The epigram, just as Colonna's text, highlights the enjoyment of the pleasing shadow of the "fronded oak" and its "leafy branches that made cool shade", in direct contrast to the displeasure of tasting the acorn, described in the HP as a floury or farinaceous fruit.[21] The figure 4 shows Poliphilo sleeping under an oak tree. The composition of the engraving aligns with traditional representations of Jacob's dream, versing his body position. In ancient times, acorns were thought as a treat craved by the men of the Golden Age (Ovidio, "Libro I", *Metamorfosis*, 7-10), and which had become a food prized only by pigs. In that regard, the botanic-encyclopedic work *The Garden of the Renaissance. Botanical Symbolism in the Italian Painting*, Mirella Levi D'Ancona presents a series of literary references illuminating the symbolic reach of this floury fruit. The acorn "was called "**food of devil**" by Rabanus Maurus […] **symbol of lust** because it has the shape **of penis** […], and according to Hugh of S. Cheer, the oak **symbolized sterility in good works** because it only produces food for pigs" (35-36). Projecting this negative symbolism —of Christian origin— attributed to the acorn on the HP reveals in rich detail the state of Poliphilo's moral condition. Demonic temptations —manifest through the vice of lust— afflict this negligent monk, whose lack of virtue only allows him a precarious observation of the monastic *Regula*.

If there were still doubts regarding our interpretative proposal of the HP, Levi D'Ancona also provides us with a fundamental iconographic element: *S. Anthony Abbot*, a painting by Andrea Previtali circa 1470, and which belongs to Colonna's time (fig.1). Previtali portrays the Father of the Desert —Saint Anthony— in a throne, at whose feet we see a cherub feeding acorns to a pig. The symbolic tension between the elements that are located above and below in the pictorial composition —the high and pure

[20] Cassian, *Colaciones* I.VII.V. A monk is analogous to a soldier, a centurion. He is considered as a spiritual hero because he had to face evil spirits in battle.

[21] In the original HP, the acorn is not directly mentioned, but instead referred to as "paniculato fructo" which, in Spanish is the "harinoso fruto".

in Saint Anthony, and the low and nefarious of sin, in the pig, symbol of lust and lower passions— offers a conclusive image, analogous to the moral negligence afflicting the HP's protagonist, who feeds sadly from the holm oak fruit, as if he were a pig. The 'dream vision' under this tree presents us with the motive of what must be corrected in Poliphilo, as well as with the promotion of spiritual healing through writing for Colonna.

Returning to the *incubatio,* it must be noted that while N. Fernández M. research in *Thaumata de Sofronio* defines it as the dream obtained within a holy space (32), Mercedes López Salvá in her article "El sueño incubatorio en el cristianismo oriental" (147-188), relativizes said claim as applied within the Christian context. This incubatory dream is different from its predecessor mainly in that the healing offered was directed upon the soul. Furthermore, Christianity promoted the *incubatio distance*, or the contact with an extraordinary reality without the necessity of sleeping in a temple. This means that once Christianity adopted this dream therapy, the incubation went from being a merely physical form of therapy, to one mainly related to the spiritual. This, because the ailments of the body were thought as evidence of the ailments of the soul attributed to demonic interference. Oftentimes, the expected payment for the reestablishment of the sick person's health was the conversion to the faith by the beneficiary or visionary (Fernández, 50-54). This context allows us to understand that the incubation experienced by Poliphilo could be, furthermore, a case of *incubatio distans*, and the meaning of the fictional dream in the HP chases after a symbolic return to faith, after its loss as experienced by the author/protagonist. Now, the iconographic tradition of Jacob's dream (Gn. 28: 10-16) participates both from what characterizes the *incubation* —the stone where he lays his head to sleep, later established as a sacred place or Bethel (bethel = stone = temple's column); or the tree under which he sleeps, detail that is not of the biblical tale, but which alludes to the potential ubiquity of the oneiric experience, as what characterizes the *incubatio distance*. Jacob's dream and its iconographic recreation in the HP correspond to Saint Augustine's type of spiritual vision through which an epiphany is reconfigured fictionally.

In another epigram compliled by Bernat and Cull (307) under the motto (*inscriptio*) *Emblema de la Scala Iacob*, the *subscriptio* or epigram said about the *pictura* (fig. 5): "No ha de subir esta escala/Ángel por naturaleza/No siéndolo en la pureza". The text is accompanied by an image where ascending angels and crawling or falling demons are observed.

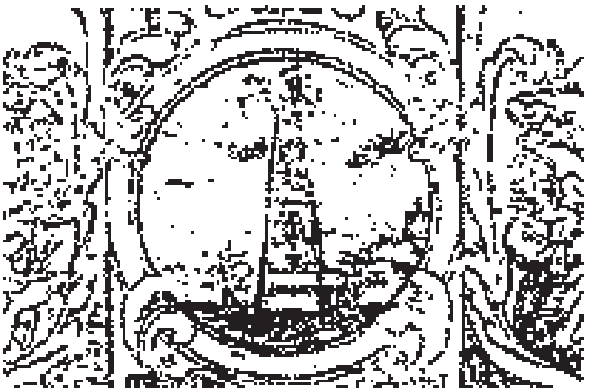

Fig. 5. Emblema de la escala de Jacob.
Jacob's ladder, God, angels, demons. Engraving from *Enciclopedia de emblemas españoles ilustrados* (1999) by Bernat and Cull, p. 307.

The sense of Jacob's dream is overstated then: the stair is symbol of path towards God, where the mundane and filthy fall by their own weight. Only those light soul, free of sin ascended. This implies that being a monk did not guarantee neither virtue nor salvation. Because of this, Poliphilo-monk must hard towards prudence and discernment. In addition, the emblem in question participated in the medieval tradition which codified the oneiric instance mentioned. As concluded by Le Goff and Truong in "Cuaresma y carnaval" regarding the gestures of dreams during the Middle Ages, specifically on the topic of the iconography pertaining to Jacob's dream: "Poco a poco se va instaurando una gestualidad onírica. En la mayor parte de las imágenes medievales, el soñador se encuentra acostado en una cama sobre su lado derecho, con el brazo derecho bajo su cabeza". (Le Goff y Truong, 74). The woodcut present in the HP participates in the iconographic system of Jacob's dream and invites the thematic remembrance of a missing element: the vision of the stair ascending towards the sky (see and compare figs. 2 and 5). Poliphilo —like an inverted reflection of Jacob— rests, but on his left side. By the simple inversion of the established codes,[22] the image presented in the HP could completely disrupt the austerity of Jacob, just as interpreted by Philo. Nevertheless, in search for a less radical interpretation —a prudent one— we can follow the

[22] The inversion might have been caused by the representational artifice used. Transferring a drawing for woodcutting necessarily inverts the image.

influence of Tertullian in a particular detail of said inverted image, if one keeps in mind that this author affirmed that dreams were a mirror of death (*El alma,* 286-287):

> Así, cuando se despierta el cuerpo, devuelto al servicio de ella [el alma], te confirma la resurrección de los muertos. Esta sería la razón natural y la naturaleza racional del sueño. Incluso con la *imagen de la muerte* te inicias en la fe, te entrenas en la esperanza, aprende a morir y a vivir, aprendes a velar mientras duermes (Tertuliano, *El alma,* 394-295).

What Tertullian emphasizes about dreams being reflection or image of death is the training in virtue offered by the human condition, with the objective of recovering the hope of eternal life and activating vigil as discernment. Colonna hints at his acceptance of dreams as a prefiguration of death, due to their liminal character and the antithetical sensibility which defines Poliphilo's vigil (= "bitter life") in contrast to the one that defines his dream (= "sweet death"). For Tertullian, death is caused by man —not due to natural causes— because of the bad administration of determination and his free will (*El alma,* 332-335). In other words, death —understood as the irredeemable loss of one's soul— is a consequence of errors in discernment or lack of prudence. This situation is also represented in the novel, when our author/protagonist must choose one of the three bronze doors at the borders of Telosia kingdom, that we will be analyzed in sections 7 and 8.

Finally, the last point of connection we wish to highlight between Tertullian and Colonna is the side on which Poliphilo lies —the left one. The explanation for this choice can be found in another passage of Tertuliano's work: "En cuanto a la posición durante el reposo mismo, [afirman que] pasa lo mismo [= se sueñan cosas más apacibles] si uno no se acuesta de espaldas ni del lado derecho [...]" (*El alma,* 314-315). The inversion of the traditional gesture of dreams —from right to left— in the HP obeys, then, ancient monastic advice, but also follows the theoretical effort to conceive dreams as a creative and intentional product, over a mere visual product born from a physiological state, when the belly that is too full or too empty, as Gregory the Great once explained *Diálogos* (Libro IV, pp. 264-265).

In summary, Colonna was able to depict the depuration of Poliphilo's soul from his vices, inspired by this type of diairetic imaginary

(Durand, *Estructuras antropologicas*, 165-184)[23] —Jacob's dream, where the tension between up and down, the good and evil is visually resolved in figs. 2 and 5. The vision of the stairway to heaven is included in the figure 4 by the remembrance induced on the reader as a mental image that must be projected upon the woodcut itself.[24] Although Jacob's ladder is not present in the woodcut, Colonna's descriptive interest for the mechanical contraptions of his time[25] act as indirect evidence. In the same way that Gregory understood meditation as a kind of machine for spiritual ascension *in Expositio canticum canticorum* (§2-4)[26] —which lifted the monk's heart and thoughts towards God— scaffolds, pulleys, and other similar mechanisms present in different passages of the HP —allude to monastic discipline and the spiritual progression desired. From this perspective, Poliphilo might very well be considered a 'technological sleepwalking hero'[27] because he accommodates some of his time's most sophisticated inventions as religious metaphors for an interior or spiritual reality.

[23] Durand distinguishes, in this imaginary, archetypes and symbols that function dialectically through the opposition of contraries or polemic. It includes he "ensoñaciones ascensionales".

[24] Further information regarding the projection of mental images on engravings in the HP are developed in our paper: "La imagen mental en visiones y libros: memoria y tecnologías de visualización enla novela *Sueño de Polífilo". Revista Círculo Cromático, Notas de Historia del Arte y Pintura,* n°03, Santiago, 2020, <https://revistacirculocromatico.wordpress.com/publicaciones/num-03/>.

[25] Good examples of these mechanical artifacts can be found in chapters III-V; IX-X; XIX, XXII-XXIV of the HP.

[26] In this treatise, he refers to the *machina ut leuet,* which elevated the monk's heart and thoughts towards God. This figure of spiritual elevation is inspired by the 'máquina escansoria' described by Vitruvio in *De Arquitectura* X.I.1.

[27] 'Technological sleepwalking' is an expression coined by Langdon Winner in *La ballena y el reactor. Una búsqueda de los límites en la era de la alta tecnología*, p.17. It is a term that calls for reflecting upon the degree of lack of consciousness affecting humanity respect to our relationship with technologies, and how these are part of how we reconstruct our existence. Winner emphasizes the study of poetic language as mediator our relationship with the sophisticated tech of today. Following this line of thought, an archaic seed of these mechanisms can be found in the HP. Poliphilo, as well as being insomniac, embodies the proto-sleepwalker. Although fascinated by the illusionist display of his time technological advances the protagonist lets himself be pulled into this poetic background. This semi-conscious state or awake-dreaming of the protagonist is, the strategy used by Colonna to express his religious-literary concerns.

Queen Eleuterillide in a Christian key/code

For Cassian human will —free will— was a human conduct of intermediate nature, a dialectic between the hungers of the flesh and the spirit, a battle, antagonism, which allowed for the search of inner balance (Cassiano, 170-173). For Augustine, in "Del libre Albedrío" will depend directly on prudence (Agustín, 201-409); it was a virtue underneath the superior virtues, but above the external goods of inferior quality. For medieval authors, will was a gift which did not exclude the sinner's soul. In that sense, the blessing or capacity to regain lost dignity were never lost (Agustín, 388): "porque mejor es desviarse del camino por propia voluntad que carecer de ella" —as asserted by Saint Augustine. Human will —free will and freedom— "investiga" y "vence" a la ignorancia y las dificultades", (Agustín, 387) looking for true knowledge (Agustín, 400) —God— even through the mistakes of sinning and temptation.[28]

Meanwhile, Eleuterillide being the queen of liberality in the HP —described with the epithets of "pious" and "wise"— has been justification for Ariani and Gabriele's interpretation in their "Commento" of Colonna's work. Both see in this character the representation of **free will and liberality** (Ariani y Gabriele, 674-678). Liberality consists of the exercise of prudence, implying an equilibrium and middle ground in the process of decision-making. The significance of Eleuterillide is unveiled in her own voice:

> [...] I wish you to know that neither the almighty Creator nor orderly Nature herself could have shown you a greater treasure than to reach my divine presence and ample munificence. For skillful Nature could not heap up greater riches than to obtain and follow my benign grace and to be a participant in such blessings. Thus, you can judge accurately that no treasure in the world could possibly compare with that which you truly find in me: a celestial talent veiled from mortals (Colonna, 122).

[28] Regarding the usefulness of temptation, see Cassian, *Colaciones* XII.V and XXIV.XXV. On thoughts about sin as the origin of monastic vocation see the first epistolary attributed to Saint Anthony and the chapter titled "Renuncia y apartamiento del mundo" by García in *El monacato primitivo*, pp. 475-478.

Fig. 6 Eleuterillide's Jewel. Allegory of Free Will. Xilografía.
In *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili.*
(Venice: Aldus Manutius, 1499). https://archive.org/details/hypnerotomachiap00colo/page/n 4/mode/2up

Just as Saint Agustine expressed in the previously mentioned "Del libre albedrío", freedom of choice has been granted to sinners as the highest treasure; and the reason behind its biggest downfall is the weakening of a person's will (Agustín, 309-313.). For this reason, the origin of sin and death underlies in the human choice between reason and concupiscence, because "Todo hombre tiene mente, pero no todos ejercen su señoría o principado." Human wisdom is then the manifestation of an order where "donde lo más digno subordina lo menos digno." (Agustín, 223-225). In the HP Eleuterillide represents this potential in Poliphilo's soul. Eleuterillide is manifestation of an allegory for the potential for Poliphilo's spiritual development towards perfection, a potential that Colonna is thinking through the act of writing. Furthermore, this allegoric meaning is replicated inside a jewel that adorns Eleuterillide and that arouses a lot of curiosity in Poliphilo. The allegory carved in her jewel (fig.6) alludes to Genesis, the original sin of pride committed by primitive forefathers. In fact, the carved motive alludes to the opportunity of choosing undying possessions (the flame of knowledge) and fleeting ones —material pleasures represented

by the cornucopia. It is Logistica —one of the nymphs serving queen Eleuterillide— who is tasked with deciphering the obscure meaning behind this jewel or diamond to Poliphilo. Meanwhile, Thelemia contributes explaining the specific meaning of the attributes of this emblematic figure, Logistica, understanding his honest request, and immediately replied, saying to him:

> 'Know, Poliphilo, that this gem is engraved with the image of the almighty Jupiter, sitting crowns on his throne, while under his majestic and holy footstool are vanquished giants who wanted to reach his high threshold, to seize his scepter and to be equal to him; and he struck them with lightning. In his left hand he holds a flame of fire, in his right he has a cornucopia filled with good things, and he holds his arms apart. This is all that is contained on that precious jewel.' Then I said, 'What is the significance of this two such different things that he holds in his divine hands?' Thelemia replied knowingly, 'Through his infinite goodness, immortal Jupiter indicates to earthlings that they can freely choose from his hands whichever gift they wish' (Colonna, 131-132).

Once Eleuterillide brings her interview of Poliphilo to an end, she directs him to depart in company and under the counsel of her two nymphs towards Telosia's kingdom, with one final warning:

> […] they Will present you another queen, a very splendid and venerable one. If she acts kindly and helpfully toward you, you will be blessed; if the contrary, you will be unfortunate. Nevertheless, one can tell nothing from her face, for sometimes she seems to be showing well-bred urbanity and agreable jollity, and sometimes malice, ill-will and contempt, with unstable humor (Colonna, 122).

Translating the passage to monastic language, the nymphs Logistica and Thelemia have the mission of illuminating Poliphilo's discernment in the presence of the shapeshifting —and treacherous— queen Telosia, whose name alludes to one's own destiny.[29] The antithetical functions served by the nymph-counselors are predetermined by Eleuterillide, as allegorical manifestation of Poliphilo's moral inclinations: good and ill will, good and bad discernment, virtues and vice, because:

[29] That Telosia's name and character mean "end" or "causa finalis" indicates direction and destination (gr. *telos* = objective, purpose); the horizon towards which Poliphilo is heading.

> But she kindly noticed [Eleuterillide] this turned in motherly fashion, with natural superiority and royal gravity, to two noble girls next to the imperial throne to the one on the right and spoke her command. 'Logistica, you shall be one of those to go with our guest Poliphilo.' Then in a holy, religious and reverent fashion she turned to the left, saying: 'Thelemia, you will also go with him; and both of you will give a clear indication of the portal in which he should remain (Colonna, 122).

> 'Take note, then, O Poliphilo, that these two girls of mine whom I consign and confide to you will suggest which portal you should enter and abide in. Whichever companion you prefer to listen and hearken to, you may follow her advice unreservedly, thanks to the free and excellent gift and the permission I have granted you; for each of them has some notion of what to do' (Colonna, 123).

Monastic discernment at Telosia's door

After crossing extensive landscapes, Poliphilo accompanied by the nymph—advisors faces the side of a very tall and steep mountain:

> We reached a rocky and stony place where the high mountains rose up steeply […] It was eroded and full of rugged outcrops, rising to the sky […] And here were the three brazen portals, crudely hacked into the living rock: an ancient work of incredible antiquity […] (Colonna, 134).

They have finally arrived at Telosia's kingdom. There, three options are offered to our protagonist, as there are three doors inserted in the rock. On his choice depends on his joy or misery. Each bronze doorway leads to domains announcing a type of life, signaled by the presence and speech of its respective hosts and companions. We synthesize in table 2 the information found in this extense passage through images, names and ideas extracted directly from the HP.

The choice determines how the images that will follow in the novel will be constructed and portrayed. To the eyes of the reader, Colonna composes alternatives that are as obvious as they are misleading, to lead us to easily guessing which one will be Poliphilo's choice. In fact, the middle door presenting the attire of sensuality and idleness —column II, the chosen door— is no more than a veil, a distraction from its fundamental architectural condition: its centrality or betweenness between two other entrances. In fact, the prudent person is insightful and sharp-eyed in front of destiny's

trickery —represented by the ever-changing Telosia; he can foresee the uncertainty of events, as Saint Isidore describes in his *Etimologías* (II, 24.6).

Poliphilo is reticent to choose the first door and, the feelings encouraged by Logistica, he prefers listening to Thelemia, who has a better sense of the right approach to convincing him:

> Logistica, sensing that I was appalled by the first sight of this places aid to me almost sadly, 'Poliphilo, this path is not known until the end is reached.' Then the holy and venerable Thelemia added knowingly, 'O Poliphilo, the love of this laborious woman is not yet for you' (Colonna, 136).

Table 2
Comparison and synthesis of the three doors
to queen Telosia's kingdom

Woodcuts in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venecia: Aldus Manutius, 1499). <https://archive.org/details/hypnerotomachiap00colo/page/n4/mode/2up>

I RIGHT DOOR	II CENTER DOOR	III LEFT DOOR
NAME OF THE HOST OF THE EACH DOOR		
THEODOXIA	**EROTROPHOS**	**COSMODOXIA**
		
MOTTO CHARACTERIZING EACH DOOR		
"God's Glory"	"Mother of love"	"World's Glory"
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DESTINATION TO WHICH EACH DOOR LEADS		
Fasting and poverty. Humility.	Beauty and pleasures. Lust.	Exhausting physical labor. Honor, strength.

Logistica, instead, proves unable to foresee Poliphilo's inclinations and does not choose a suitable strategy for making him choose the doors she counsels: the left or right ones, guarded by Theodoxia and Cosmodoxia.

> [Philtronia and her Friends] seemed supremely gracious and lovable. But honest Logistica, seeing me so readly disposed and diverted into a servile love of them, said to me in a sad voice: 'O Poliphilo, theirs is a feigned and cosmetic beauty, deceitful, insipid and vain! […] O delight adultareted by misery, containing as much bitterness as the honey that drips from the leaves of Colchis! O foul and meanest of deaths, how sweet is your poison! What

> dangers and mortal perils, what foolish cares the blinded lovers suffer as they plunge headlong, while you are standing right before their eyes, yet wretches see you no! […] O defrauded senses […] O wild and vain desire that causes such errors and torments […] O savage monster who cleverly veils and befogs the eyes of unhappy lovers! (Colonna, 139).

Colonna distracts us, unwary readers, when Logistica completely loses her bearings at seeing Poliphilo so thoroughly seduced by Philtronia's door. She points out Poliphilo's mistaken choice with a lengthy speech regarding the mortal perils of love's sweet poison:

> Logistica spoke these and similar words in vehement agitation, with angrily wrinkled brow, then threw her lyre to the ground and broke it. Thelemia, alert and unperturbed by this tirade, similed and made a sign that I was not to listen to Logistica. Then, later, as soon as she grasped my wicked intentions, was filled with contempt; she turned her back, sighed, and ran speedily out and away (Colonna, 139).

Logistica's ire denaturalizes her. The very moment she breaks her lyre, she destroys, quite literally, the harmony and sense of proportion that constitute her essence. Does she annihilate herself with the gesture, or does she reveal herself as a false allegory? The truth is that Poliphilo does not heed her advice, and she proves to be something different from what she appeared to be. The measured betweenness occupied by Philtronia's door, embedded within the artless rocky frontis, and the prudent —to a sinner like Poliphilo, at least— attitude could not be represented in another manner than with this road to temptation; which is, however, legitimized by God himself, as a road for our protagonist's own betterment. What is shown as an entrance to a world of pleasure is actually an entrance to an arduous battlefield against demons. Towards that place is Poliphilo headed, ignorant still of his own heroism.

Final thoughts

We hope to have convincingly argued that the HP belongs to the monastic literary tradition, where self-reflection is fundamental. Colonna frames, within a fictional oneiric experience, the fatigue experienced by the unfathomable desolation of the one who does not know God, and in

consequence, does not know himself. This is the anguish a sentiment shared with Augustine, for whom the soul (mind) cannot be (exist) without being thought. In fact, in his *Tratado sobre la santísima trinidad* he said: "[…] cuando la mente busca conocerse, conoce que es mente." (Agustín, 585). This idea is a recurring element in his oeuvre: "¿Para qué se le preceptúa [al alma/mente] conocerse? Es, creo, con el fin de que piense en sí y viva conforme a su naturaleza; es decir, para que *apetezca ser moderada* […]" (Agustín, *Tratado sobre la santísima trinidad,* 587).

Colonna describes this road towards perfection —in virtue and self—knowledge— through a complex literary architecture of nesting visions. Dream visions are an epistemological and literary instrument adopted by Colonna to think the creative mechanisms of literary visualization, which are the HP's very reason for being.

Poliphilo, the visionary and dreamer —a broken Jacob— could easily be the target of mockery from the contemporary reader, removed from these spiritual matters. A reader not attuned to the HP will only be able to see a 'an annoying crybaby' —as expressed by Legrand in the 1804 (*Le Sogne de Poliphile*, 176)— when there is not an understanding of the profoundly human quality represented by its protagonist: the extreme courage of showing the darkness of one's consciousness to others and accepting one's own vulnerability. That is why San Efrén declared: "No declaréis vuestros pensamientos indiferentemente á toda especie de personas, sino solamente a las espirituales […]" (Tricalet, 1790, 27).

The understanding of the HP requires then, the recognition of a shared and omnipresent symbolic code —Christianity— as a necessary requisite for tuning the author to the reader. Within the margins of monastic thought, every time Poliphilo stumbles is a favorable event for his road to spiritual betterment and perfection. By the end of the novel, we are assured that the protagonist has been freed.[30] The HP is then installed in a blurry limit between fiction and reality, the *betweenness* between character and author.

With all the fictional machinery born from incubation and the nesting of dream visions, Colonna proves to be a loyal follower of the teachings of Gregory the Great, for whom pretending was composing: "*Fingere namque componere dicimus; unde et compositores luti figulos vocamus*" (*Obras de Gregorio Magno*, 173).

[30] "At Treviso [Calendas May 1467], when wretched Poliphilo was freed from the precious bindings of *Polia's love*."

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