Dino S. Cervigni. *Dante's Poetry of Dreams*. Biblioteca dell' "Archivum Romanicum." Serie I, vol. 198. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1986. Pp. 228.

To speak of dreams today is to conjure up one solitary name. Despite Freud's authority, interest in dreams, not unexpectedly though perhaps regrettably, has been pushed to the margins of our 'scientific' materialist culture. For the Middle Ages, however, absorbed in the lessons of the Biblical tradition and of antiquity, dreams and a general concern with the visionary were much closer to the heart of things. The centuries-long effort to explore reality in terms of the relationship between the human and the divine had firmly established that dreams—their nature, categories, and relationship to other forms of cognition and perception—were far from unimportant in the search for 'spiritual' answers to existence. The roll of honour of *auctoritates* on this topic is impressive: Aristotle, Virgil, Cicero, Macrobius, on the one hand; the Bible, Augustine, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, on the other. Nor did this fascination with dreams confine itself to the domains of philosophy and theology; it invaded other areas of intellectual life; enough to remember that quintessentially medieval literary form, the allegorical dream or vision poem, to which some—erroneously in my view—have wished to liken the *Divine Comedy*. Yet, even though Dante's masterpiece should not be read as the account of a visionary experience, the visionary could not but have fascinated the poet of heaven and earth. In fact, evidence of its allure can be found in the very narrative structure of his two major literary works: the *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia*.

It might thus come as a surprise that we have had to wait until now for a book-length study of the implications of this phenomenon in Dante. Dino Cervigni's ambitious book is clearly a timely contribution. His aim is to examine Dante's views on the oneiric in relation to their major sources, while concentrating his focus on a detailed formal, ideological, and contextual analysis of the poet's recourse to dreams and visions in the *Vita Nuova* and the *Comedy*. In addition, he "seeks to explain the oneiric within the totality of the Pilgrim's experience in the afterlife as well as to elucidate its function with Dante's poetry" (10–11). Cervigni's methodological premises are sound, and he is obviously right to concentrate on the 'fictional' works. It is in these that the poet is at his most creative in fashioning his "poetry of dreams," though greater attention at least to the *Convivio* might not have gone amiss.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first begins with a cursory overview of some of the main classical, Biblical, and Christian discussions

of dreams, and then goes on to examine Dante's debts to this "composite legacy," before concluding that "the Dantean dream narratives are neither unjustified imitations of ancient poetic practices nor merely structural and external devices in furtherance of plot and action." Instead, the author suggests, they are "a poetic, spiritual, and essential element of the pilgrim's journey" (36-7). Cervigni's survey—like the rest of the book—is clearly written and organized; however, his scope here is too brief and fragmentary to offer an adequate picture either of the history of ideas on dreams or of Dante's precise contacts with this tradition. He loosely describes the poet's position within a general intellectual field, rather than investigate his sources with any kind of precision. And though Cervigni subsequently develops his individual analyses of the *Vita Nuova* and of the *Purgatorio* in considerable detail, this flaw remains unrectified. His approach, on account of its emphasis on structural and symbolic questions, also tends to isolate Dante's elaborations of the oneiric from the visionary cultural heritage out of which they emerged. Despite some reference to mystic forms of seeing, this dichotomy is especially apparent in the otherwise interesting second chapter on the ways in which the visionary organizes the *Vita Nuova*. Via a careful structural examination, Cervigni brings to light the complex system of inter-relationships between the book's waking *apparimenti* and its various marvellous *visioni*, *immaginazioni*, and *fantasie*, which Dante skilfully embroidered together to display the connections between different levels of experience. He convincingly shows how this patterning helps to bind together the poetry and the prose, and to give the *libello*'s narrative its peculiar 'timeless' qualities; most significantly, he concludes, the visionary is the measure of the protagonist's spiritual progress.

A particularly interesting feature of his discussion are the parallels which Cervigni draws between the oneiric in the *Vita Nuova* and in the *Purgatorio*. This comparison serves as a kind of prelude to the next three chapters—one for each of the dreams of the second *cantica*. Cervigni argues that the three dreams, especially on account of their extensive debts to Biblical events, are fundamental to what he sees as Dante's main inspiration behind *Purgatorio*: the retelling of "the Pilgrim's return to good" (71). Thus, the dreams are deemed to represent different aspects of the salvific process both in history and in Dante-*personaggio*'s eschatological journey. Furthermore, the prophetic status of the dreams is considered axiomatic. I feel that this framework, while not wrong, is too rigid and only yields a partial insight into Dante's views of and recourse to dreams in the *Comedy*. By underlining the symbolic and forward-looking connotations of the dreams, Cervigni marginalizes the contacts they also undoubtedly have with the pilgrim's preceding waking experiences. Even when he does establish links between a dream and the events that have gone before it, as in his analysis of the relationship between the Valley of the Princes and the

dream of the eagle, he again simply confines his observations to the symbolic association they have in common: namely, "the mystical advent of Christ to anyone who is ready to receive Him" (91). In Cervigni's perspective, that unique 'individual'—Dante-character—tends to be supplanted by a universalizing 'abstraction': Dante-Everyman. This both goes against the main thrust of the *Comedy*'s characterization techniques, and obscures the importance of the dreams precisely in fleshing out Dante-*personaggio*. If Cervigni had paid more attention to the Aristotelian-scholastic investigation of the physiology and psychology of dreaming—especially relevant for the fourteenth century—this aspect could not but have emerged. The dreams are intimately tied to Dante-*personaggio*'s intellectual, spiritual, and emotional condition at the moment at which they occur; they are a kind of mental map of his development as he climbs Mount Purgatory. Thus, the dreams are extensively made up from what the pilgrim has seen and heard on his journey, and, as such, they can be considered his reflections on these matters ("e 'l pensiero in sogno trasmutai," *Purgatory* XVIII. 145). Hence, their ambiguities, limitations, and, as regards the first two, their negative elements—all features which Cervigni normally ignores in his optimistic and prospective reading—are evidence of how much Dante-character has still to learn and how far he has yet to travel before he reaches God. Only in his unexpectedly brief analysis of the third dream, when he argues that it presents evidence of the pilgrim's "sinless" condition, can Cervigni be said to be moving in this direction.

The dreams are therefore the highly complex inventions of a master syncretist, and on account of the variety of their polysemy they are—as Contini might argue—typically Dantesque. In addition, thanks to their backward- and forward-looking elements, they fit into the structure of Purgatory in a more sophisticated and coherent fashion than Cervigni's approach suggests. However, let me make it quite clear, that despite my reservations, I believe his book to be of value; in fact, it is the most comprehensive and important discussion at present available of the dreams' allegorical and prophetic qualities. And it is further enhanced by the critic's sensitive original discussion of the pilgrim's two swoons in *Inferno* and of his two losses of consciousness in the Earthly Paradise. These too, he concludes, belong to that same scheme recalling Redemption history which organizes the three dreams in Purgatory.

Given the line developed by Cervigni in this book, it does not come as a surprise that, in the last chapter, he should propose that the *Comedy* as a whole is the account of a *visio* enjoyed by the poet. As I mentioned earlier, I find it difficult to accept this definition, since I believe that Dante supplies ample evidence that his poem is to be read as the true record of a journey which he undertook bodily through the afterlife. However, this is not the place to try to untangle this knotty argument. To return to chapter six, this attempts to tie together the preceding discussion. It looks at the

position of the dreams within the overall narrative and ideological development of *Purgatorio*; it offers a narratological dissection of each dream; it establishes the nature of the dreams as examples of the theologians' *visio spiritualis* or *imaginativa*; and, finally, it touches on their allegorical status. Unfortunately, this last chapter is disappointing. Like the first, it is too sketchy and fragmentary; and, like the book as a whole, it promises more than it actually delivers. Although Cervigni begins from sound general premises, the focus of his analyses remains too narrow. Despite his book's merits, it is not—as he claims at the end—an “extensive analysis on [sic] all aspects of Dante's dream world” (208–9).

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Giovan Maria Cecchi. *I Contrasegni*. Commedia inedita a cura di Bruno Ferraro. Scelta di curiosità letterarie inedite o rare dal secolo XIII al XIX, dispensa 277. Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1986. Pp. lvii, 236, [ii].

Con questa edizione di un'altra commedia erudita di Giovan Maria Cecchi viene ampliato non solo il *corpus* di opere, ma anche il materiale bio-bibliografico disponibile su questo prolifico drammaturgo e simpatico ‘dolcione’ fiorentino del Cinquecento. *I Contrasegni* è di particolare interesse per lo studio del teatro cecchiano poiché, essendo una delle sue ultime opere, viene ad essere quasi un'epitome della produzione teatrale erudita di Cecchi. Come rileva Bruno Ferraro nella sua premessa al lavoro, “*I Contrasegni* del 1585 furono il punto d'arrivo di una quarantennale produzione teatrale, e sono il punto da cui, gettando lo sguardo all'indietro, si può meglio giudicare non solo il *corpus* delle sue commedie ma anche l'insieme della produzione artistica e l'ingegno letterario di questo scrittore forse non ancora del tutto giustamente apprezzato” (vii). Infatti, dopo la ricca fioritura di lavori editoriali e critici su Giovan Maria Cecchi dal 1818 al 1910, si dovette attendere fino a questi ultimi dieci anni circa per un rinnovo di interessi editoriali e critici su colui che venne chiamato, dai propri contemporanei, “il comico.” Recentemente, grazie a lavori intrapresi da studiosi francesi, canadesi, americani e australiani, le opere del Cecchi godono di rinnovata attenzione.

Estesi spogli di materiale d'archivio sia a Firenze che a Siena non hanno, purtroppo, portato in luce i dati biografici tanto desiderati su Cecchi, cosicché fin oggi non si usufruisce dei dettagli necessari ad uno studio approfondito sul drammaturgo. Un tale studio è, infatti, tanto più desiderato quanto più è necessario per dissipare la confusione e eradicare gli errori (anche di fatto) subentrati in alcuni lavori critici di carattere generale