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ANTON FRANCESCO DONI AND
THE BUILDING OF DREAMS

It was in early 1997, in Atwerp, that I found myself participating in a lively and stimulating colloquium on Renaissance European dialogue. While discussing some original traits of certain dialogical texts, ones involving the 'fantastic,' I had occasion to refer in passing to problems related to 'vision' and, to put it in more secular and mundane and, hence, modern terms, to the visual element in Anton Francesco Doni's concept of the theatre of the world.¹ Over the last forty years or so critics have begun more and more to recognize in this singular writer and polygraph not only a representative of the so-called group of minor authors of the sixteenth century — one who was, nevertheless, in a bizarre way well known in his day — but also one of the more surprising and representative figures of the Italian Renaissance at least in its anti-classical aspect.²

In this paper I wish to weave once again the threads of my earlier discussion. I begin with the same basic concepts, but with the goal of carrying out a more careful analysis of the hidden meaning of the relationship between the theoretical-practical elaboration of dreams and the highly salvific function of fantastic writing, which Doni establishes with exemplary clarity. His writing has two levels of meaning: it is designed to achieve both a diegesis of the vicissitudes of life, and a surreal mimesis which is essentially the allegorical dramatization of the entire tradition of oneiric imaginings.

His characters, members of what he calls the Academy of the Pellegrini or Pilgrims, display a highly articulated and ambiguous familiarity with the masters of great visionary literature. In his work entitled *Mondi* (*Worlds*), which refers to an emblematic canon comprising Virgil, Dante, Palmieri, Sannazaro and, marginally, Ovid, Aesop and Lucian, Doni launches, in the mode of a subtle and in truth never explicitly-mentioned skirmish, a permanent challenge to the meaning of their writings. He does so for the sake of a thoroughly deliberate game that does not lack its own cynical ambition. Through the sophisticated mechanism of burlesque discourse, this *lusus* attempts to cast doubt on both the absolute meaning and the moder-

nity of the languages of vision, and it does so while seeking to organize them into a canon.

This undeclared challenge is governed above all by the search for a historically unprecedented dialogue on the possibility of establishing a new cultural form or, as he terms it, a new and untrodden pathway (“nuovo e inusitato cammino”) (*Mondi*, 189), which is presented on the literary stage as a metaphor for a complex intellectual process. This process is conceived as an approach to the meaning of modernity, of that mannerist modernity of the sixteenth century which, even while following the script of a fiction enacted by a burlesque confraternity, involves a collective voyage by the members of the Academy of the Pellegrini. Their voyage exorcises the idea of a mystic immobility, of a solitary conquest: it is a surreal group asceticism, which is carried out in perennial movement³ and is transformed into a sort of multiform promotional campaign in favour of a new playful form of knowledge of the world. Its ambition is to place the subject in a different perspective, in the unprecedented context of plurality and contiguousness. This fictional subject is destined to travel unharmed along the impracticable (and ideologically risky) itinerary of late-Renaissance mannerism, which saw the fading of the dreams of renewal that the severity of the Counter-Reformation attempted to render even darker and more problematic.

First and foremost, it is noteworthy that the debate in Doni's *Mondi* on the nature of dreams (with relevant confirmation in his work entitled *Marmi* [*Marble Steps*] and elsewhere) is, in the end, nothing but a mimesis of that problematic utopia of playful knowledge.

First of all, plurality. From the viewpoint of the Pellegrini, who at the beginning of *Mondi* speak through the character of Elevato, the view is not that of the abstract and remote infinity of worlds handed down by the ancient science of Democritus.⁴ It is, rather, the dimension characteristic of a reality that can be represented as the image of a great machine.

Next, *contiguousness* is the guarantor, in a ‘playful’ cosmography, of the marriage between certainty, which is confirmed by God's word (“si conferma con la parola di Dio”) (6), and a discreet narration which, aware of its limits, does not intend to cause rupture, but is yet the bearer of great and poorly concealed cognitive ambitions. It arranges itself, in the most creative and imaginative part of the performance — that is, the bizarre architecture/sequence *Mondo misto*, *Mondo immaginato*, *Mondo risibile*, *Mondo savio* (Mixed World, Imagined World, Laughable World, Wise World) —, which goes beyond the traditional doctrinal scheme of *Mondo piccolo* (Small World) and *Mondo grande* (Large World), that is, of microcosm and

macrocosm, as a different space for writing. It is a space presented to the readers who, in this situation, are themselves in need of a different imaginative order.

Ora noi seguiteremo di stampare non, come s'era ordinato, il *Mondo Massimo* ma l'*Immaginato*, ... per framettere le piacevoli lezioni al lettore, il quale, stracco tal volta di contemplare le misteriose parole cavate dai profondi dottori ..., lo vogliamo sollevare alquanto con alcune invenzioni curiose. Se vi venisse adunque, lettori spirituali, ancora le piacevolezze a fastidio, il medesimo libro che avete in mano vi potrà sodisfare di dottrina e di spirito, perché, ritrovando le cose scritte a vostro proposito, pascetevi di quelle; e gli altri, che non sono ancora tanto perfetti nelle cose di Dio, si disporranno con questi mezzi, perché avranno alcune scale coperte da salire più alto. Onde si ritroveranno, al par di voi, (per avventura) a godere il bene dell'intelligenza di quest'opera. Ecco che si dà principio al nuovo *Mondo* [i.e. il *Mondo immaginato*], però disponetevi a una immaginazione che voi possiate esser capaci di tutto quel che leggerete. (77-78).

(Now we proceed to print not, as was planned, the *Greatest World* but the *Imagined World*, ... in order to provide pleasurable reading for the reader, who is weary at times of contemplating the mysterious words extracted from the learned doctors We wish to relieve him somewhat with some curious inventions. If, spiritual readers, these pleasantries should bring you some annoyance, the very book which you have in your hands will be able to satisfy you as far as doctrine and the spirit are concerned, because, by finding the things written for your benefit, you may feed on them. And the others, who are not yet so perfected in matters pertaining to God, will make themselves ready with these means, because they will find certain hidden stairways by which to climb higher. Like you, they will find themselves, by chance, enjoying the advantage of understanding this work. Here then begins the new *World* [i.e. the *Imagined World*]; so prepare your imagination so that you will be able to grasp everything you read.)

This composite mode of writing also allows for a different way of reading. As a result, the complex architecture of *Mondi* proves to be faithful to a regime of sagacious and at times ironic nonbelligerency between 'certainty' and the imagination, between the doctrine of the Church Fathers and this new, daring pilgrimage towards knowledge of heaven. This is the logic of the hypertext; that is, of a work capable of ensuring, beside the 'spiritual' reader, the presence of a different reader, on another wavelength, one more attentive to its curious inventions. Only in this way can the 'alchemy' of such an anomalous text be guaranteed or rather protected

from censorship. It is presented, moreover, from the very beginning by Elevato himself as a great mass of writings, some true, some doubtful, and some resolved ("scritti, parte veri, parte dubbiosi e parte risolti") (6).

The addition of meaning, ensured by the hypertext,⁵ is precisely the goal sought by the adventuresome Pellegrini through dream. By means of both practice and narration the playful rhetoric of the harangue, or solemn discourse, distorts the tradition of persuasive oration in a burlesque key. It does so in order to narrate in a fuller imaginative space a *topos* much loved by Doni, i.e. the allegorical figure of the book as the grand representation of a voyage in the great sea of languages.⁶

But if the voyage of the Pellegrini toward the Greatest World was to be, as called for by the ascetic tradition, an upward journey that follows a symbolically linear trajectory, then the author's unforeseen insertion of poetic fictions, abstract imaginings, impertinent and useless things ("finzioni poetiche, immaginazioni astratte, cose impertinenti e disutili") (189), in *Mondo misto* and the other unconventional *Mondi* (*Mondo immaginato*, *Mondo risibile*, *Mondo savio*), introduces a meaningful novelty into the very logic of the ascesis, one that corresponds to a more general departure from the triadic scheme of the traditional cosmological system of small, great and greatest worlds of man, world, and god (*Mondo piccolo, grande e massimo*). It actually aims, in the very spirit of a singular hyper-textual voyage, to create a space for writing that is free and arbitrary. The organic unity of the world, regulated by the *logos* — the rational order of the universe — opens the way to a fantastic multiplicity, to an invisible cosmography. In this way, as Heraclitus had already seen in the relationship between wakefulness and sleep, the norm of daily order is replaced by what lies outside of it — a plurality that is wholly individual and the disorder of dream.⁷

In *Mondo piccolo* (*Small World*) the Pellegrini engage in a grotesque dispute over the best means by which to climb to heaven. It involves a diatribe launched in collaboration with another Academy present on the stage, that of the Vignaiuoli or Vine Dressers of Rome. It ends in an inconclusive manner, and not without a burlesque reminder of other, ancient forms of voyages to salvation (for example, the naval voyage in Lucian's *True History* and the earthly voyage in Dante). This blasphemous taste for controversy in connection with the theme of the mode of ascesis proposes a subtle distinction that involves the very nature of the visionary design:

"Perché non cercavi voi — disse il Divoto, Academico Peregrino — più tosto facendo orazione trovar la strada per mezzo dell'*oracolo*?" "Cotesto, — rispose l'Academico Vignaiuolo, — s'aspetta a voi altri che siate nel

peregrinaggio della santità; noi eravamo nelle facezie e nelle chimere a gola, come s'è veduto nei *Fichi*, nei *Nasi* e altre arguzie vivacissime, e non ne le divozioni. Dovete, adunque, voi far orazione, perché potresti aver qualche *visione*, la qual v'insegnerebbe come potreste andare ne' cieli, o per mezzo del *sonno*, sotto figura, comprendere quanto facile o difficile fia la cosa che ricercate". "Queste tre sorte di sogni, — disse il Divoto, — son tutte delle cose avvenire, dei quali noi ci chiamiamo veramente indegni; noi ne abbiamo nell'insogno, il quale è ordinario degli uomini, avuto molte, le quali credo che non sien vere, perché sono state causate da varii accidenti, misti per le complessioni, perché il sanguigno sogna cose allegre, il malinconico paurose, il collerico infocate e il flemmatico acquose. Non voglio or dire che la fantasma [mi] abbia qualche volta stretto il cuore sul principio del dormire, innanzi che io abbi appiccato il sonno. Ma non più di questo, perché non son mezzi atti a salire sì alto." (*Mondi*, 23-24)

("Why don't you search for the Way?" — said Divoto [Devoted], a member of the Academy of Pilgrims — "by praying instead, by means of the *oracle*." "This" — replied the member of the Academy of Vine Dressers — "is expected of you who are on a holy pilgrimage. We were on a pilgrimage of jests and wild fancies of gluttony, as was seen in *Fichi* [*Figs*], *Nasi* [*Noses*] and other very lively witticisms, and not a pilgrimage of devotion. You, then, should pray, that you may have some *vision*, which will teach you how to get to heaven; or allegorically, through the medium of dream [*sonno*], you could learn how easy or how difficult is the thing which you are seeking." "These three types of dreams [oracle, vision, dream]," said Divoto, "are all about future things, of which we call ourselves truly unworthy. In the *insogno*, which is the ordinary dream of humans, we have had many of these, which I believe are not true, because they have been caused by various accidents, mixed according to one's type of constitution: the sanguine man dreams happy things; the melancholic man frightening things; the choleric man fiery things; and the phlegmatic man watery things. I do not wish to say now that fancy has on some occasion wrung my heart at the beginning of sleep, before I had begun to doze. But no more of this, because they are not suitable means for such a high ascent.")

Out of respect for Saint Augustine (*Mondi*, 5) and also because of the profane nature of both of the Vignaiuoli and the Pellegrini, the way of the the *oraculum*, as well as the way of the classical *visio* and the *somnium* (the speculative and prophetic dream of the wise, the *oneiros*) are rejected. They do not pertain to these pilgrims who are without a fixed sanctuary, as Artemidorus, an authority on the theory of dreams well known to the members of Doni's circle, would have it. There remains only one form of oneiric creativity that is fully human insofar as it is tied to the various acci-

dents of the human physical constitution, namely the *insogno* or *enhyption*.⁸

Thus the risk of heresy is immediately neutralized, but on a level that is merely doctrinal. Another and more complex dimension is the concreteness of Doni's writing, in which the expectation of knowledge and the prospect of artistic synthesis — that is, a *ratio*, even if fantastic in nature, to be put into practice through the representation of dreams — are not by any means discarded. They are still present.

Furthermore, there is an important reference to the same “wise” dream of the pilgrimage in Artemidorus himself, according to whom this is to be interpreted in light of the expectation lying at the depths of consciousness: “non vedrà egli [l'uomo ‘savio’ che s'interpreta] carri o *navi*, ma letti legati, o massaritia avolta, ovvero apparecchio di pellegrinaggio, o che *gli parrà di volare*, o pure vedrà terremoto” (the wise man who analyses himself will not see chariots or *ships*, but beds tied together, or wrapped-up household goods, or else pilgrims' equipment, or *he will think he is flying*, or perhaps he will see an earthquake” [emphasis added].)⁹ This reference, which appears startling for its forward-looking dimension, and which operates here as the precocious intuition of the mechanisms of symbolic exchange and equivalence, appears surprising even to a modern reader-analyst like Musatti.¹⁰

It is a curious fact that the Pellegrini, in their dispute with the Vignaiuoli, had first considered and then evidently rejected the idea of Lucian's sea voyage. Instead the idea of flight was more acceptable. It was more in keeping with the re-invention of scenery that was playfully mystical and aerial, and designed to receive in the intermediate spaces between the *Mondi* (the *Mondo immaginato*, *misto*, *risibile* and *savio*) (Imagined, mixed, laughable and wise Worlds) the old archetypes of the divine *lusus*, namely Jove and Momus. Even in the scenes of flight and Utopia (*Mondo savio*), to cite Musatti directly, oneiric activity plays with words (“l'attività onirica gioca con le parole”).¹¹ Already at an early date Artemidorus had, it seemed, implicitly diagnosed such a fact in the case of the dream of Alexander the Great, reconstructed as an object of analysis in a chapter of his treatise.¹² Oneiric activity, that is, allows for a ludic use of discourse and an approach to *logos* intended to simplify and unveil it.

The mediator-shaman himself is authorized to solve on a playful level (in reality with desperate irony and disenchantment) the enigma of visions, of the world seen from outside. This is because in *lusus* there is hidden an evidently inescapable truth content, even if at times it is inexpressible insofar as it is outside reason and, so to speak, officially extraneous to the *logos*.

The entire project of *Mondi* takes shape in this zone of an apparently peaceful, but in reality provocative, contiguousness of dream and wakefulness, folly and reason, abstract things and *logos*.

In *Mondo savio*, together with the utopia of *Mondo nuovo*, dream and play call into question — in the wake of Filarete, More, Guevara and the common Platonic archetype¹³ — an ethical and political problem which in reality is little cause for laughter.

In the imagination of the Pellegrini dream hardly ever evokes the idea of solitude. It always takes the form of a socializing story that turns quickly into an emblem, and becomes the subject matter of collective narration. At times, in fact, its oneiric derivation is recognized and certified *a posteriori*, after having been already received as a story. This occurs in the first dialogue of *Mondo imaginato* between the characters Leggiadro (Graceful) and Pellegrino (Pilgrim). Leggiadro utters the following: “il Sonnacchioso e lo Smarrito ... una notte ci apparvero in sogno e ci dissero il ragionamento che avete inteso” (90). (Sleepy and Bewildered ... appeared to us one night in a dream and told us the story you just heard.)

But the most active and significant concentration of Doni's antinomies occurs in *Mondo savio*, which not by accident has the task of completing, in the form of a climax, the itinerary of the intermediate worlds; it is the epilogue of a discourse which, with the dialogue between Pazzo (Madman) and Savio (Wise man), has reached the highest level of concentration and, so to speak, of symbolic inflation. When it comes time to reach some provisional conclusion about this rapid *excursus*, then the truly fundamental significance which this inflationary result assumes for the entire development of the discussion on meaning and currency should become clear.

In the universe of dream, there is no *logos* that provides reassurance about the unity of the world, and the word can do nothing more than predicate an eternal plurality and disorder of meaning. It is not surprising, then, that the mediator-shaman Savio himself remains trapped in the insurmountable dilemma of the antinomic rapport between Wisdom and Folly. He is uncertain as to *how* to name the reality of utopia, that is the new world. On the threshold of recounting a new vision, he demonstrates his vexation to the readers through another of the numerous harangues:

Voi avreste forse piacere di sapere quello ch'io aveva pensato in tanti rivoltamenti ... Prima inalberai con il nome, se io doveva chiamarmi il Savio o il Pazzo: s'io mi battezzava per matto, tutto quello che io avessi scritto le Signorie Vostre l'avrebbero avuto per materia. O il dirti savio non monda nespole: a questo si risponde che ancora i matti spacciati non si tengano pazzi, ma savi. Se adunque voi mi chiamaste per il nome mio,

non sarebbe gran fatto, perciò che savio letteralmente vuol dire in lingua italiana pazzo pubblico. La seconda cosa che io strologai nel mio cerebro fu del titolo di questo nuovo *Mondo*, e quando l'ebbi aburrato forse sei o sette ore, colpì sul nome del *Mondo de' Savi*, al qual nome se gli pone la briglia sul collo, che possa correre alla scapestrata fra i savi e pazzi, e che chiamate lui e me pazzo e savio, savio e pazzo [come] voi volete. Se ben voi lo chiamaste ermafrodito, non ve ne darei una castagna. (*Mondi*, 158).

(You would perhaps like to know what I had thought during many ruminations ... First I took issue with my name, whether I should call myself Savio [Wise] or Pazzo [Mad]: if I were to christen myself as mad, everything that I had written Your Highnesses would have served as proof. Or to tell you I am wise won't make any difference; the response to this is that the insane do not consider themselves mad, but wise. If, then, you were to call me by my own name, it would not be of any significance, because "wise" in Italian literally means a "public madman." The second thing that racked my brain was the title of this new *Mondo*, and when I had sifted names for six or seven hours, I came upon *Mondo de' savi* [*World of the Wise*]. If you were to put a bridle around the neck of this name, it could run recklessly among the wise and the mad, so that you may call it and me mad and wise, wise and mad, as you wish. If you were indeed to call it hermaphrodite, I wouldn't care.)

The Erasmian antinomy that vexes Savio for a while has its own paradoxical precision ("six or seven hours"), a duration that is grotesquely incompatible with the pace and rhythm of a type of writing that is instinctive and rapid and is in fact produced amid the noises of the printing press ("fra i rumori della stampa"), as a letter of Marcolini reminds us (*Mondi*, 255). It is, nonetheless, a fixed time, an ironic fiction, one that jokingly suggests the futility of the dilemma.

The *incipit* of Savio's account of his vision in the utopian *Mondo nuovo* is a rapid attack, a quick change of scene that is decidedly theatrical:

Savio: Ben mi pareva sogno, ben diceva io: la non è cosa che possi essere; ma pure ella aveva tanto del proprio, del vivo e del buono che la mi tratteneva con grandissimo diletto.

Pazzo: Tal volta vengano veri i sogni, ma se tu mi vuoi fare un piacer grandissimo, da che tu mi hai detto tanto inanzi, cioè che tu non vedesti mai la più bella cosa, comincia da capo e disegnati il luogo e a cosa per cosa dimmi il tutto particolarmente. Mi par gran novità veramente che si ritrovi un mondo che ciascuno godi tutto quello che si gode in questo nostro, e che non abbino gli uomini se non un pensiero, e tutte le passioni umane sien levate via. Comincia adunque insino dal principio del sogno. (162)

(Savio: Clearly it appeared to me to be a dream, and indeed I said: that cannot be true; yet it had so much life and goodness, that it captivated me with great delight.

Pazzo: Sometimes dreams come true, but, from what you had said before — that is, that you had never seen such a beautiful thing —, you can, if you wish, do me a great favour: begin from the top, describe the place and tell me everything in detail. It truly seems to me a great novelty that there exists a world in which everyone enjoys all that we enjoy here in our own world, and that men have a single thought, and all human passions are taken away. Start, then, right from the beginning of the dream.)

A single stage direction was enough for Doni, at the opening of the dialogue between Savio and Pazzo, to inform the reader that the object of this umpteenth reverie—demonstrated by Jove, its inventor, dressed as a Pilgrim along with Momus—was in this instance undoubtedly a vision, despite all doctrinal distinctions. It is above all a vision that produces delight; it is unpredictably capable again of evoking a possibility (“Tal volta vengano veri i sogni,” sometimes dreams come true), a logic of a sense of perspective, a prophetic force, which here renounces any diminution of the ordinary, common, and bestial *insogno*. “Voi parlavi dei sogni per il sogno fatto, ma chi dubita — conferma Giove, che si è intanto rivelato al Savio e al Pazzo — che, quando noi Dei ci intrinichiamo con le cose vostre, tutto non succeda? A conferma del sogno vostro e della città da noi mostratavi, ve ne racconterò alcuni” (178). (You were speaking of dreams in the sense of dreams that have come true, but who doubts—confirms Jove, who had in the meantime revealed himself to Savio and Pazzo—that, when we gods intervene in your affairs, everything does indeed happen? As confirmation of your dream and the city that we have shown you, I’ll tell you about some.) This is the introduction to a review of ‘historic’ visions, one of many in *Mondi*, which tends to represent a kind of series of imaginative events that are linked together: the anthropological universe of dream as routine and as the inflation of meaning.

After the detailed digression on the marvelous architecture of the great city built in the shape of a perfect circle, and on its natural and communitistic customs, one can understand why Savio counters Pazzo’s desire for philological precision with subtle perplexity. Pazzo would love to see books and sources quoted for that utopian depiction.¹⁴ This subtlety at first refutes and then accepts, diminishes, and, at the same time, sums up—even if elliptically—the reference to authorities and sources:

Savio: Che rilieva cotesto? Chi è dotto, che abbi letto la *Repubblica* di Platone, la legge de’ Lacedemoni, dei Ligurghi, de’ Romani e insino de’

Cristiani, sa dove il diavol tien la coda, ma chi non è esperto *in libris*, non accade fargli più pataffi di novelle; basta che questo è sogno, questa è saviezza, questa è opinione degli uomini, questa è pazzia. (167-168)

(Savio: What does this matter? He who is learned, and has read Plato's *Republic*, the laws of the Lacedemonians, of the followers of Lycurgus, of the Romans, and even of the Christians, knows where the devil keeps his tail; but he who is not an expert of books, has no need of official introductions. It suffices for him to know that this is a dream, this is wisdom, this is the opinion of men, this is folly.)

The very logic of dreams — this time of dreams in general — belongs to a dimension that is wholly human, even when, in the light of the same phenomenon in ancient civilizations, it is revealed to be a pure anthropological fact, in its fundamentally demoniac quality.¹⁵ Beyond the classical fable of the two doors and of the distinction between true and false visions—with which Doni naturally is familiar, as certain pages of *Zucca* (*Squash*) demonstrate¹⁶—the logic of human dreams as such, obscuring the boundaries between reason and folly, is not subject to the judgment of truth or moral verdict; rather it is associated with movement and change, like the transformation undergone by the chameleon, as it slips into a space in memory that is not governed by the *logos*. In that crowded region of the memory, which is the memory of civilization, of the construction or machine of the world, the word, following in the footsteps of Giulio Camillo, retains both the free flux of narration as well as oneiric condensation, and it frees itself from the risks of becoming a mere catalogue of solemn tales.

To dream in *Inferni*, instead, is to experience the labyrinth, but without a guide. This is what Disperato (the Desperate One) complains about to Pluto from the very beginning. It is a journey without structure, one that instead grows and expands upon itself through a chaotic accretion of materials that flow according to a new kind of allegory into the general aggregate of the book. The emphasis on the power of new scenarios, and of new subjects, aims to exalt this disquieting visionary experience as an unavoidable occasion for knowledge, and for the foreshadowing of death (“premeditazione della morte”), and revelation:

Adunque, per via di sonno vi sono ito in sogno: per non dir le bugie come molti altri, perché non ho trovato chi mi conduca là giù, in quei bui, più facilmente che il sonno (e il morire, che io doveva dire in prima), e il sonno so che egli è una premeditazione della morte. (215)

(Thus, through sleep, I have gone there in dream; and, not to tell lies, as many others have done, I found no one to take me down there into that

darkness more readily than sleep, or should I say death, and I know that sleep is a foreshadowing of death.)

But in the foreground there is constantly present the problem of *relevance*, of the very qualifications of the guides. It is a dilemma that concerns the validity of the authorities:

Leggendo adunque lo stupendo poeta, il nostro Dante, mi son creduto un tempo di trovar quella selva e caminar dietro alle sue pedate Ma indarno ho caminato e in vano ho fatto i miei viaggi per questi boschi della vita, onde ho per fermo che la selva che egli trovò sia stata tagliata e spiantata, che mai più alcuno la saprà trovare.

La Sibilla di Vergilio né per pelaghi, per grotte, caverne o laghi, né per terribil montagne ho trovato alcuno che me ne dia notizia.

Menippo ebbe al suo tempo quella ventura d'uno incantatore, d'un negromante che lo volle servire; adesso va', trovalgi tu, chi sa far fare i diavoli a suo modo non si cura che gli altri abbino questo contento.

Orfeo aveva quella virtù di saper sonare la ribeca e diceva provisi stupendi. A quest'impresa non accade che io mi ci metta, perché non avrei alcuno onore. Egli poi *sapeva la via*, che è il nerbo di questa mia stravagante voglia [emphasis added]. (214-215)

(Reading then this magnificent poet, our own Dante, I believed once that I could find that wood and walk in his footsteps But in vain I walked and in vain I made my voyages through these forests of life, and I am now convinced that the forest that he found has been cut and cleared, and that no one will ever be able to find it again.

I have found no one, either on the high seas, in caves, in caverns or lakes, or in the terrifying mountains, who can give me news of Virgil's Sibyl.

In his day Menippus had that adventure with a magician, a necromancer who wanted to serve him. Now you go find him; he who knows how to make devils do what he wants does not care that others have this satisfaction.

Orpheus had the virtue of knowing how to play the rebec, and he made marvellous compositions. There is no need for me to get involved in this undertaking, because I would not get any honour from it. Moreover, he *knew the way*, which is the core of this extravagant desire of mine. [emphasis added])

Amid the spectres of ancient ascetics, poet magicians, and prophetic Sibyls, the dawn of the modern age in reality does nothing else here but testify to the disquieting (and perhaps ambiguous) fact of *not* "knowing the way." It is a denial which, beneath this extravagant desire for knowledge ("questa stravagante voglia di sapere"), is combined, without conflict, with

a sense of being saturated with civilization and with literature, and also of being at the end. In the opening pages of *Mondo grande*, Doni had made the following assertion:

Pare che questa sia l'ultima età e che poco ci debbi restare di tempo a risolvere questa mole, essendo passato tutti i regni e adempiuto le profezie. Ancora non la sa nissuno se non il grande Iddio, questo a punto, ma per quanto e' si può conietturando comprendere, noi siamo appresso a questo fine, ogni virtù è al colmo e ogni vizio all'estremo.¹⁷ (*Mondi*, 59)

(It seems that this is the last age and that little time is left for us to resolve this mass, since all kingdoms have passed away and all prophecies have been fulfilled. No one can know this yet except God most high; but, as far as one can comprehend through conjecture, we are close to the end, for every virtue has reached its height and every vice its extreme.)

It is not fortuitous that Doni, at the very beginning of *Inferni*, should take up once again the discussion of the nature of dreams and their changeable truth content (which again raises the problem of "knowing the way"), a subject which he approaches on the basis of Saint Augustine's distinction between sensorial vision, spiritual vision, and intellectual vision. Following Saint Augustine and for the reasons already cited even by Artemidorus, Doni re-affirms that divine dreams are always true ("il divino sogno è sempre vero") and that human dreams contain in themselves no astonishing mystery ("l'umano non ha alcun misterio stupendo in sé") (217). Yet, however much these infernal dreams may be very lowly things ("bassissime cose"), and considering that, as Doni claims, some dreams, in his opinion, seem to him to have a divine origin, but, like the good seed that is overshadowed by thorns, they are not seen clearly ("Alcuni altri sogni, al mio giudizio, mi par ch'abbino principio dal divino, ma, offuscati come il buon seme dalle spine, non vengano a luce chiara") (218), the perspective offered by demoniac visions appears to be much more open than the Augustinian premise would authorize us to believe. This openness, in fact, inspires the liminal notice proffered by Disperato: "Le visioni che io ho vedute in sogno, io ve le narrerò tutte scrivendole a una a una, e lascerò nel vostro giudizio il giudicare di che specie le sieno. Utili credo ben io che le saranno ..." (218). (The visions that I have seen while dreaming I shall narrate them all to you, writing them down one by one, and I shall leave it up to your judgment to decide to which categories they belong. I truly believe that they will be useful)

And yet, still on the threshold of this great medley of dreams—umpteenth prelude to the actual presentation of the visions—a page appears loaded with names, and only names, in the manner of Rabelais: a

simple and provocative list of travellers in dream. Disperato, Perduto, Smarrito, Pazzo, Ardito, Savio, Ostinato (Desperate, Lost, Bewildered, Mad, Bold, Wise, Obstinate) are the names of those in the labyrinth), of infernal zones joined together to form their route,¹⁸ and of shadows that are the guides of the Academicians for visiting the infernos ("ombre che sono *guida* agli Academici a veder gl'Inferni"): Virgil, Dante, Matteo Palmieri, Menippus, the fairy of Fiesole, Orpheus, the Sibyl of Norcia.¹⁹

This unforeseen reappearance of the guides and the burlesque sequence of portions of their voyage are indications of a new challenge to meaning. The first thing that strikes us is the serialization of the guides.

But in the miraculously constructed theatre ("teatro mirabilmente fabbricato") (220) of *Inferni*, the decodification of the visionary allegories is resolved with a direct appeal to the Fathers of the Church. In the declaration of the first vision for example, Augustine, Chrysostom, Bernard, Hugo, and Gregory are invoked. With the guides, the game is a different one, as is seen in the exchange between Momus, Disperato, and Dante. The hierarchies disappear, and it is the guide who desires to know: "Come avete trovati tanti Inferni?" (How did you find so many infernos?), Dante asks the pair. "Io per me non arei giudicato mai che si potesse passar più inanzi. I nostri antichi non ne penetraron già sì profondamente" (I personally would never have thought that one could go farther. Our ancients did not penetrate so deeply). Momus, who has the task of responding, signals a profound change of horizon: "Né ancora i nostri moderni naviganti averebbon trovato tanti novi paesi, se si fossero stati al detto e al fatto degli antichi" (224) (nor yet would our modern navigators have found so many new countries if they had adhered to the teachings and deeds of the ancients). And Disperato has the task of explaining the novelty of the strange vision:

Voi [Dante] salisti, se ben mi ricorda, per tornare all'emispero nostro, su per Lucifero e v'apicaste al collo di Virgilio; io, che v'era dietro, entrai, per la paura, per il bellico di Lucifero nel suo corpo, il quale era tanto grande di cerchio quanto è la larghezza del centro. (224)

(You [Dante], if I remember well, in order to return to our hemisphere, climbed over Lucifer, and you hung onto Virgil's neck; I, who was behind you, entered out of fear through Lucifer's umbilicus and into his body, which was as big around as the centre.)

The promise of a new kind of allegorical dream, through the imaginative variation of the 'endoscopic' contact with Lucifer (which again recalls Rabelais), translates into a surreal distorting of the archetype (Dante,

Inferno, 34.70ff). If in the “new manner,” as Dubbioso reveals, Lucifer signifies the world (“Lucifero ... significa il mondo”) (227), then the voyage takes place within the body of the world or the great “theatre,” in search of the eternal lament and of human suffering.

But his tale is the partial result of a word pronounced on the threshold. It retells the experiences of a character who has reached the vision by another road (“per un'altra strada”), one who is incapable of judging and unable to mete out punishments.²⁰ He is one who—considering the gloomy times—cannot tell everything through and through, that is, “menar la falce tonda tonda” (swing the scythe around 360 degrees) as in Dante's inexorable representation, without risking “una mala stretta” (Ibid.). This is the other indication — the most remarkable perhaps in the autumnal condition of sixteenth-century mannerism²¹—of a hidden truth, one that the allegory of the body of Lucifer portrays as a great implosion, as the effect of the end of a cycle.

In conclusion, what matters is that Savio-Doni's repeated metaliterary approach, that is his distanced, ironic, and burlesque mode of treating the *topos* of vision, is intimately connected to the fundamental disenchantment (and demonic cynicism) that circulates in the author's oneiric universe. The more advanced phase of the voyage, in fact, is dominated, in an ever growing fashion, by a game of unveiling, one which is designed grotesquely to lay bare the mechanisms and structure of vision, beginning with Menippus and the incredible, futile, invention of wings and of flight:

Savio: Lo esser tanto curioso come sei stato tu non mi va per fantasia. Che accadeva far quei trovati d'ale e dir di essere stato in Cielo, se non era vero? Poi finger d'andare all'Inferno per sì poca cosa non era credibile né poco né assai. (288)

(Savio: Being so full of curiosity as you were does not suit my fancy. What need was there to invent those wings and to say that you went up to Heaven, if it wasn't true? Then, to pretend to have gone to the Inferno on such a minor pretext was not at all believable.)

To name the instruments and techniques, to burst as a desecrator into the laboratory of the great builders of dreams and voyages, means to demythologize and reify the charisma and the very act itself of fantastic creation, that is of the fiction, and to put them back into contact with the adult and disenchanted reality of the moderns.

Metaliterary irony is thus in Doni the result of a profane scepticism. At a certain point, this scepticism manifests itself in Savio as the unresolved contradiction between the two ambiguous faces of visionary experience. It is a contradiction between, on the one hand, the “mad” usage of words on

the infernal stage (a usage to be unveiled through the mechanisms of its fiction), and, on the other, the wise inexpressibility of true knowledge: a contradiction — as occurs in the following soliloquy by Savio — capable of putting the meaning and the very necessity itself of the voyage in doubt:

Io voglio, poiché mi trovo solo in questo Inferno ... ricercarmi ed esaminarmi molto bene s'io mi posso chiamar savio, e, ritrovandomi tale, s'io debbo come savio andare più inanzi per questo Inferno. Ultimamente, quando mi sarò risoluto d'ogni cosa bene, vedere se sia ben fatto scriver qualcosa di questo Inferno che sia utile. Prima, io so certo che colui non può pervenire alla vera sapienza che si lascia ingannare dal suo sciocco sapere, so che la prima sapienza dell'uomo ha da essere la vita lodata appresso Iddio. A che siamo, o Savio? andiamo più innanzi. La chiara sapienza non è quella che porta la fama attorno in parole, ma quella che si conosce in fatti. (290)

(Since I find myself alone in this Inferno, I want to ... investigate and examine myself thoroughly to see if I can call myself wise, and, finding myself to be such, whether I must as a wise man proceed in this Inferno. Ultimately, when I have resolved everything, I must decide whether it would be a good thing to write something useful about this Inferno. First, I know for certain that he who allows himself to be deceived by his own foolish knowledge cannot arrive at true wisdom. I know that man's primary wisdom must be the life that is praised by God. Where are we, oh Savio? Let's go on further. True wisdom is not that which carries fame around in words, but that which is recognized in facts.)

Thus, from the point of view of an anomalous wisdom (that of Savio), the discussions on the threshold of hell testify to the meaninglessness of words, to their saturation through an absence of wonder in the face of the peak of civilization, at which point everything has already occurred.

Egli è vero ch'io ho del sapiente in un certo che, che non si può da me esprimere, come sarebbe a dire che io non mi maraviglio di cose che accaggia, perché sempre ho veduto inanzi ciò che si può vedere e non m'è nuova materia alcuna che succeda al mondo. (Ibid.)

(It is true that I have a certain something of the wise, something that I cannot express, which is to say that I do not wonder at anything that may occur, because I have always seen beforehand whatever is to be seen, and for me nothing new ever happens in the world.)

And yet dream, like life, does not live except in the word, that is, in writing. Of this human obstinacy, Savio warns, "Non vi stupite altrimenti, perché le cagioni che fanno scrivere alle persone sono assai. Prima c'è il capriccio, il furore, l'abondanza della parole e la materia. Poi c'è l'amore,

l'odio e la necessità" (299). (Do not be at all amazed, because the reasons that make people write are many. First there is whim, furour, the abundance of words and subject matter. Then there is love, hatred, necessity.) And in the end, naturally, there is madness, smoke, and the conceit of knowing ("la pazzia, il fummo e l'opinione di sapere") (299).

The umpteenth and final image of Doni's chameleon is precisely that of Ostinato (Obstinate). Occurring in the epilogue to the voyage in hell, it is charged with an extreme, disenchanted warning to the readers:

Perché credete voi ch'io mi chiami l'Ostinato? Non per altro, se non per aver veduto che l'ostinarsi è un risolversi a fare una cosa in ogni modo, ma, per dispor l'animo suo a metterla a effetto, non ho trovato il miglior mezo che aver tutte le cose del mondo per favola, tenerle per una dipintura, creder che le sieno fumo, e stare sempre d'un'opinione che questo vivere sia una girandola o uno svolazzare intorno a un lume; e sopra questo viluppo di vivere in travaglio io voglio scorrere alquanto. (359)

Why do you believe that my name is Obstinate? For no reason other than for having understood that obstinacy is a resolve to do something at all costs; but I have not found a better means of disposing one's soul to do this than to deem all the things of the world to be a fable, to consider them a painting, to believe that they are smoke, and to be always of the opinion that this life is a spinning toy or a fluttering around a light. And over this tangle of life in distress I wish to glide for a while.

Thanks to the multiform and illusionistic prodigy of the hypertextual voyage, the whimsical chameleon was able to "glide" on the great sea of life (life as seen through books) and through the Babel of languages, with the proviso that the control over the world seen "from outside", that is, dreams in the infinite mass of their fable-like simulacra (or in their disenchanted and playful sequences), should become, more than an exception, the total form of reality itself — perhaps the only one capable of representing it.

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Translated from Italian by Mario D'Alessandro

NOTES

¹Girardi, "Dialogue 'fuori del nostro intendere,'" 99-113.

²The last indication of this good fortune, and, presumably, an incentive for a new series of studies, is the recent edition of Doni's *I Mondi e gli Inferni*, with an introduction by Marziano Guglielminetti and a rich apparatus of sources, bio-bibliographical notes and commentary by Patrizia Pellizzari. I will cite from this edition from here on, calling it *Mondi* or indicating in parentheses only the page

numbers. To Pellizarri's bibliography one needs to add, for the editions and for the criticism on Doni before 1960, the book by Cecilia Ricotini Marsili Libelli.

³The importance of the idea of movement is to be found first in Doni's doctrinal background even before it is found in his narrative. It is detected, for example, in a bizarre discussion in *Marmi* on madness and on the revision of the theory of the immobility of the earth: "Carafulla: L'opinione mia è, Ghetto, che pazzo voglia dire zoppo del cervello e cervello a pezzi. Ghetto: Se tu non hai il cervello storpiato tu e partito in mille parte, non vaglia. Oh tu ti fai strolago! Or vedrò se tu ne sai un buon dato. Come gira il sole? Carafulla: Il sole non gira, noi giriamo; la terra è quella che si volge: non sai tu che il cielo si chiama fermamento?" (Doni, *I marmi*, 1.16). (Carafulla: My opinion, Ghetto, is that mad means lame in the brain and having the brain in pieces. Ghetto: If you don't have a crippled brain, one divided into a thousand pieces, it doesn't count. Oh you want to be an astrologer! Now I'll see whether you know a fact or two. How does the sun move? Carafulla: The sun doesn't move, we move; it is the earth that turns, don't you know that the sky is called firmament?)

⁴"Sopra queste desiderate e dolci fantasie di saper quello che sta in noi, sotto e sopra ... molti uomini si sono posti, imaginandosi con l'intelletto e lambiccandosi il cervello come ora fanno i nostri Academici, a scriver non solamente di questo, ma di diversi mondi (non già come posero Democrito e l'Epicuro)" (*Mondi*, 5). (Focussing on these sweet and desired fantasies to know that which is in us, above and below ... many men, imagining with the intellect and racking their brains as our Academicians now do, set out to write not only about this world, but about different worlds [not however as Democritus and Epicurus had once postulated].)

⁵On the logic of literary hypertextuality, see Genette, 7-77, and for the "travestissement burlesque," 77-87.

⁶"Questo libro non è altro che una nave, la qual solca l'acque del mare delle lingue" (*Mondi*, 188) (This book is nothing but a ship, which ploughs the sea of languages.)

⁷Cf. Mathieu 19-20.

⁸"A dream that has no meaning and predicts nothing, one that is active only while one sleeps and that has arisen from an irrational desire, an extraordinary fear, or from a surfeit or lack of food is called an *enhyption*. . . . You must bear in mind, moreover, that men who live an upright, moral life do not have meaningless dreams (*enhyptionia*) or any other irrational fantasies, but rather dreams that are by all means meaningful (*oneiroi*) and which generally fall into the theorematic category. For their minds are not muddled by fears or by expectations but, indeed, they control the desires of their bodies. In short, *enhyptionia* and other irrational fantasies do not appear to a serious man. And so that you are never misled, the masses do not have the same dreams (*enhyptionia*) as men who know how to interpret dreams. For whatever the masses desire or dread, they also see in precisely that form in their sleep. (Artemidorus 160-161).

⁹Artemidorus: "If he [i.e. the expert man] is about to take a trip, he will not see carriages, ships, knapsacks, baggage and luggage that has been gathered together, or preparations for a trip. Instead he will dream that he is flying or he will see an earthquake, a war, a thunderbolt or anything else that symbolizes a dream" (185).

¹⁰Musatti, "Introduzione," in Artemidoro di Daldi, *Dell'interpretazione de' sogni*, 16-17.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 19.

¹²"And it seems to me that Aristander also gave a most felicitous interpretation to Alexander of Macedonia when he had blockaded Tyre and was besieging it. Alexander was feeling uneasy and disturbed because of the great loss of time and dreamt that he saw a satyr dancing on his shield. Alexander was in Tyre at the time, in attendance on the king while he was waging war against the Tyrians. By dividing the word *Satyros* into *sa* and *Tyros* (Tyre is yours), he encouraged the king to wage the war more zealously with the result that he took the city" (4.24.196).

¹³For a review of the principal sources and secondary treatments related to the general question of the utopian city that emerges from *Mondi*, see Del Fante 1980.

¹⁴"Pazzo: S'io non avessi paura di fastidire te e me a un tratto, io allegherei sempre a ogni cosa che tu di': il tal che dette la tal legge v'era cotesto medesimo, il quale che dette quell'altra, ancor lui ordinò così" (*Mondi*, 167). (Pazzo: "If I weren't afraid of annoying both you and me at the same time, I would always cite for everything you say: the person who established that law was so and so, the one who made the other, was also he.")

¹⁵"Pazzo: Cose tutte da demoni e da pazzi, proprio da fare un mondo di pazzi. Savio: Già che non erano altri che demoni quei che facevano simil prove; i nostri antichi gli chiamaron Iddii, altri Demoni e uomini, poi un altro savio ci aggiunse gli Eroi, credendo che quegli uomini i quali furono al tempo di Saturno in quell'età dell'oro, che dopo la morte, per ordine di messer Giove, fossero trasformati in demoni buoni terreni, i quali fussino a guardia degli uomini, e così se ne vadino circondati d'aere per tutto, ponendo cura a tutte le opere buone e cattive; e più dicano che danno delle ricchezze a noi altri" (177-178). (Pazzo: These are all things of demons and of madmen, things with which to construct a world of madmen. Savio: Those who did similar things were none other than demons; our ancients called them Gods, others demons and men; then another wiseman added Heroes, believing that the men who lived at the time of Saturn in that golden age were, after death by order of Jove, transformed into good earthly demons, who were the guardians of men, and thus they go about all surrounded by air, taking care of all good and bad works; and, what's more, they say they give riches to us.) For the allusion to Hesiod in this passage, mediated by the modern reading of Lupano in his *Torricella*, and for other borrowings of a Neoplatonic stamp by Doni, see Masi 1992.

¹⁶For these intertextual relationships and in general on the presence of dream in the writings of Doni, see Masi 1988, 30ff.

¹⁷On the hermetic and cabalistic assumptions which underlie this idea of the end of the cycle in the Manner of the high Renaissance, see Garin 47-48.

¹⁸In this infernal zone there is another instructive taxonomy, one which no longer traces an objective map, a culture of sin, but the evident individuality and the arbitrary dream of a life journey through guilt. Consider the following: "Inferno degli scolari e de' pedanti; Inferno de' mal maritati e degli amanti; Inferno de' ricchi avari e de' poveri liberali; Inferno delle puttane e de' ruffiani; Inferno de' dottori ignoranti, artisti e legisti; Inferno de' poeti e compositori; Inferno de' soldati e capitani poltroni etc." (219). (Inferno of students and of pedants; of the unhappily married and of lovers; of the greedy rich and of the generous poor; of whores and ruffians; of ignorant doctors, artists and lawmakers; of poets and composers; of lazy soldiers and captains, etc.)

¹⁹This "infernal" canon too has been carefully analysed by Doni critics from the point of view of its animistic and fantastic matrix. See Del Fante 1976, 171-210 and now the rich apparatus of bibliographical references offered in the commentary of Pellizzari. In reference to the *Fata fiesolana* (obvious sister of the *Ninfe fiesolane*), I limit myself to adding — in order to provide a more precise characterization of the complex anthropological and literary meaning contained within the Orphic-popular syncretism of Doni (apart from the already invaluable references given by Pellizzari 219n) — the probable presence of *De antro nympharum* of Porphyry (on whom see Pézard), in the Tuscan tradition which, from the *Ninfe fiesolane* of Boccaccio, extends to the carnival song of Giambullari (on whom, apart from a more profound 'hermetic' reflection on languages, linking him to Doni, see, for example, his *Canzona delle ninfe fiesolane*, now published in Bruscagli's edition of *Trionfi e canti carnascialeschi del Rinascimento*, 1.277); but it also extends, on the Neoplatonic side, to the "mysteriosophic" association of nymphs and demons in the *Conclusiones cabalisticæ* of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (see Semprini). But there is also a nymphaean animism of a Delminian matrix (see Bernheimer 227).

²⁰"Ancora — precisa Momo nell'Inferno del Pazzo — gli Academici si son mossi per lodar chi n'è degno e biasimare gli indegni, ma sono andati per un'altra strada, che il voler dar pene e tormenti come ha fatto Dante, unico intelletto, non istà bene, ché si sarebbe potuto gridar: al ladro! al ladro! Ma sono entrati, come vedete, per un'altra porta, e mettono, con questo dar fuori una parte per *Inferno*, il piè su la soglia dell'uscio" (266). ("Moreover," Momus points out in the Inferno of the Madman, "the Academicians moved to praise the worthy and to blame the unworthy, but they went by a different path, for the wish to hand out punishments and torments as that remarkable intellect Dante had done, is not good, because one could have yelled out: stop thief! stop thief! But they entered, as you see, by another door, and they put their foot on the threshold of the doorway.")

²¹This and other allusions to the autumnal image of literary civilization are from Ossola.

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