

Max Marmor

“... *par che sia mio destino...*”:

The Prophetic Dream in Leonardo and in Dante

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Questo scriver sí distintamente del nibbio par che sia mio destino, perchè ne la prima ricordazione della mia infanzia e' mi pareva che essendo io in culla, che un nibbio venissi a me e mi aprissi la bocca colla sua coda, e molte volte mi percuotessi con tal coda dentro alle labbra.⁽¹⁾

Leonardo's notebooks performed multiple roles for their author. Scattered across the thousands of pages of his surviving manuscripts we find mundane notes, like his recitations of the serial misdemeanors of his notorious apprentice, Salai; heuristic exercises, like the famous Latin vocabulary lists in the Codex Trivulzianus; and the fables, facetiae, parables, prophecies and riddles that provide a helpful reminder of the extent of Leonardo's familiarity with – and borrowings from – vernacular Italian literature in a range of genres, both “high” and “low.”⁽²⁾ The majority of Leonardo's

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⁽¹⁾ Codex Atlanticus fol. 186v ex 66v.b. I quote the modernized Italian text from C. Vecce, *Leonardo*, Rome, 1998, p.30. Here and in subsequent references to the Codex Atlanticus, I cite the new folio numeration as established in A. Marinoni, *Il Codice Atlantico della Biblioteca Ambrosiana di Milano*; trascrizione diplomatica e critica di Augusto Marinoni, 12v., Florence, 1975-80; new ed. in 3v., 2000. I also cite the traditional numeration used in the standard anthologies, using “ex” to indicate the latter. Throughout this article, in instances where I wish to make a telling point about Leonardo's precise language, I have consulted, but sometimes slightly departed from, the standard anthologies in offering English translations. See *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, compiled and edited from the original manuscripts by Jean Paul Richter, 3rd ed., 2v., London, 1970, and E. McCurdy, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, New York, 1956. C. Pedretti, in his *Commentary* on Richter, 2v., Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1977, v.2, p.311, dates the “childhood memory” to 1505.

⁽²⁾ Leonardo's more literary compositions are discussed helpfully in A. Marinoni, ed. *Leonardo da Vinci: scritti letterari*, 2nd ed., Milan, 1974, and in C. Vecce, ed., *Leonardo da Vinci: scritti*, Milan, 1992. Vecce (p.226, n.7) also reproduces Leonardo's “childhood memory.” Both Marinoni (pp.239-57) and Vecce (pp.255-66) reproduce and discuss the two manuscript lists of books that Leonardo had stored away at various critical junctures. One (Codex Atlanticus fol. 559r ex

writings are, of course, broadly speaking “professional,” and deal with anatomy, botany, geology, hydraulics, mechanical engineering, optics, perspective, painting, sculpture, and architecture, alongside a host of other subjects, including – as in the passage quoted above and its immediately affiliated manuscript texts – the physics of flight.

The *ricordo* quoted above is, famously, among the remarkably few surviving notebook entries by Leonardo that seem autobiographically revealing – though by no means transparent. That Leonardo’s diaries at least occasionally played a personal role is further attested by a notebook entry of 1504 – an entry thus roughly contemporary with the “childhood memory” of 1505 – in which the 52-year-old artist registers the news of his natural father’s death. This note, impersonal as a coroner’s report, is composed in the kind of formal “legalese” we associate with his father’s profession of notary. This had been the profession of his forefathers as well, but it had been closed to the illegitimate son of Ser Piero da Vinci. Leonardo’s lapidary death notice reads:

Addì 9 di luglio 1504 in mercoledì a ore 7 morì ser Piero da Vinci notaio al palagio del Podestà. Mio padre, a ore 7. Era d’età d’anni 80. Lasciò 10 figlioli maschi e 2 femmine.⁽³⁾

In his controversial 1910 study of Leonardo’s “childhood memory,” Freud⁽⁴⁾ – to whom we owe this conventional way of referring to Leonardo’s famous *ricordo* – discussed this slightly earlier obituary notice. He proposed that its stiff formality – as well as its striking pleonastic repetition of the hour of death, seemingly at once formulaic and fraught – cloaks a deeply emotional, if deeply conflicted, response to the news of his father’s death.⁽⁵⁾ As Freud further noted, the same is arguably true of Leonardo’s earlier

210r.a) was composed toward the end of Leonardo’s first Milanese sojourn (ca. 1495; 41 titles); the other (Madrid Codices, fol. 2v-3v; 116 titles, 98 of them “locked up in a chest” and the rest “in a box”; plus 50 unnamed books classified by size, format and binding) was composed in Florence ca. 1503. Vecce also discusses other books referenced in Leonardo’s notebooks and manuscripts. It is important to note that the books on both of Leonardo’s two surviving book lists are, in all probability, “testi di qui non ha immediato bisogno” at the time (Vecce, 1998, p.233; cf. p.158). Almost by definition, then, these lists would *not* include books Leonardo consulted frequently enough to warrant keeping them near at hand even when he traveled, relocated, etc., a point that will come up in the discussion of Leonardo’s knowledge of Dante (see note 31 below).

⁽³⁾ British Museum, Codex Arundel fol. 272r. Citing the modernized Italian version in Vecce, 1998, p.249. See also Richter, 1970, v.2, p.344 (no.1372); McCurdy, 1956, v.2, p.562.

⁽⁴⁾ S. Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood*. Trans. By A. Tyson, New York, 1964, p.69-72. First published as *Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci*, Leipzig, 1910, in the series “Schriften zur angewandten Seelenkunde” Heft 7. For an accessible, balanced review of the literature prompted by Freud’s Leonardo, see B. Collins, *Leonardo, Psychoanalysis, and Art History: a Critical Study of Psychobiographical Approaches to Leonardo da Vinci*, Evanston, 1997.

⁽⁵⁾ A second, abbreviated version of this *ricordo* features the same pleonastic repetition of the time of death. This note appears at CA fol. 196v ex 71v.b: “Mercoledì a ore 7 morì Ser Piero da Vinci a di 9 di luglio 1504, Mercoledì vicino alle 7 ore” (modernized Italian version from Vecce,

but similarly impersonal – and strangely painstaking – manuscript tally of his out-of-pocket expenditures related to the burial of his mother.⁽⁶⁾

Above and beyond these few and uniquely personal notices, it is safe to further assume that Leonardo's manuscripts and notebooks played, more generally, an essential emotional role for their author. They surely lent what was, finally, a life-long intellectual monologue at least the semblance of being a dialogue.⁽⁷⁾ And yet the fact remains that only in rare instances does Leonardo adopt a more explicitly autobiographical mode, as in his parental death notices and, it would seem, in the "childhood memory" to which I now wish to return.⁽⁸⁾

Characteristically, this particular – and particularly tantalizing – "flash-back" to the writer's infancy⁽⁹⁾ appears unannounced, "out of the blue," to use a phrase appropriately evocative of its narrative context: an abstract yet detailed discussion of the

1998, p.249). See Richter, 1970, v.2, p.344 (n.1373); McCurdy, 1956, v.2, p.562. Instructively, Leonardo's "childhood memory," too, features a similar pleonasm, the repetition of the word "che" which serves no grammatical or syntactic purpose: "... mi parea *che* essendo io in culla, *che* un nibbio venissi a me ...". J. Beck has studied Leonardo's relationship with his father in *Ser Piero da Vinci and his Son Leonardo*, "Source: Notes in the History of Art" V, n.1, 1985, pp.[29]-32; the same article appears in a fuller form in Beck, *Leonardo's Rapport with his Father*, "Antichità viva" XXVII, n.5-6, 1988, pp.5-12. Drawing attention to the fact that the fuller version of the death notice, quoted in the text above, is written from left to right rather than in Leonardo's normal *mancino*, "mirror-writing" style, Beck suggests that this, along with the canceled text with which this *ricordo* begins and which breaks off at the word *morì* (died), is evidence of Leonardo's "distressed" state of mind. Of course, when Leonardo wrote from left to right it was typically because he was writing for a reader other than himself or writing of something of particular importance, and given the existence of a second, briefer *mancino* version of this *ricordo*, one wonders whether his handwriting in the fuller version as well as the presence of a cancellation might suggest he was drafting a fair copy. Vecce, for example, suggests that "qui Leonardo abbia voluto diligentemente riportare in bella copia la notizia, utilizzando l'elegante scrittura regolare, da sinistra a destra, che da giovane usava per le note più importanti; di più, il testo è esteso, come se fosse un necrologio ufficiale, con l'indicazione esatta della professione del defunto, dell'età, e dei figli a lui sopravvissuti" (Vecce, 1998, p.249).

⁽⁶⁾ Freud, 1964, pp.54f. Vecce, 1998, p.143, who transcribes the note, is convinced that the Caterina referenced in the *ricordo* is Leonardo's natural mother. For the manuscript passage in question (Cod. Forster II.2 64b,c) see Richter, 1970, v.2, p.379 (n.1522); McCurdy, 1956, v.2, p.560; Vecce, 1992, p.225 (n.3). According to Pedretti's commentary on Richter, 1970, v.2, p.376, this note is datable ca. 1495.

⁽⁷⁾ I. del Lungo has written of Leonardo's prose that "anche quando egli si indirizza a un lettore o ascoltatore ideale, egli parla di fatto fra sè e sè" (*Leonardo scrittore*, in *Leonardo da Vinci: conferenze fiorentine*, Milano, 1910, p.266). One is reminded of Nietzsche's comment in a postcard to his close friend Franz Overbeck (July 30, 1881). His chance discovery of Spinoza, he writes, at least turned his lonesomeness (*Einsamkeit*) into a "twosomeness" (*Zweisamkeit*).

⁽⁸⁾ Vecce, 1992, p.25, draws particular attention to "l'inflessibile autocontrollo che s'avverte sempre nelle pagine vinciane."

⁽⁹⁾ The apt term is from Vecce, 1998, p.30.

avian and general mechanisms of flight. And characteristically, Leonardo – who so often addresses himself in the second person in his notebooks – is speaking more to himself than to any other conceivable reader, present or future. This unique autobiographical *ricordo* has, of course, prompted a large body of commentary, starting with Freud and with no conclusion – nor any firm conclusions – in sight. Notoriously, it raises more questions than it answers. Has Leonardo’s technical discussion of the mechanics of the flight of birds prompted him to finally jot down an associated recollection that he has retained in living memory since early childhood? Or did this “childhood memory” itself re-surface only in the act of writing, conjured into consciousness by the intensity of his current preoccupation with the flight of birds and crying out to be recorded while the memory remained fresh? More fundamentally, should we assume (as Freud did) that Leonardo intended to record what he himself believed to be the memory of an actual childhood experience?⁽¹⁰⁾ Or did he believe rather that he was recording a dream from his childhood?⁽¹¹⁾

In the present article, I suggest that in composing this *ricordo*, Leonardo sought to craft an autobiographical dream narrative set in his earliest infancy. This dream narrative is a self-conscious, though conceivably spontaneous, literary exercise rather than an attempt to record a memory of a genuine childhood experience or even a recollection of an actual childhood dream. It is thus closer in genre to Leonardo’s stylized literary “prophecies” (*profezie*) than to “autobiography” as we find it in his notices related to the death of his parents. It also invites comparison with Leonardo’s *profezie* in another respect: it was evidently intended to accredit and account for Leonardo’s abiding adult interest in the flight of birds by suggesting that it was his “destiny” (*mio destino*) to understand – and perhaps to master – the physics of flight.

I will further suggest that Leonardo’s prophetic dream narrative reflects, in its specific language, poetic conventions familiar to Leonardo from his reading of Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, and especially from Dante’s prominent narratives involving prophetic dreams. In his famous critique of Freud’s *Leonardo*, Meyer Schapiro drew special attention to the element of prophecy with which Leonardo’s “childhood memory,” with its prominent reference to “my destiny,” is introduced. Schapiro reminded us of the

⁽¹⁰⁾ Freud, 1964, dismisses the notion that such an event had in fact occurred, and assumes that what Leonardo presented as (and may himself have believed to be) a memory of an actual childhood experience was in fact a fantasy. In a lecture on “Das berühmte leonardeske Lächeln” (“The Famous Smile of Leonardo”), delivered December 1, 1909 at a weekly meeting of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, Freud already referred to Leonardo’s anecdote as a “fantasy” (*eine Phantasie*) rather than an account of an actual childhood event. See H. Nunberg and E. Federn, eds. *Protokolle der Wiener Psychoanalytischen Vereinigung: 1906-1918*, 4v., Frankfurt a.m., 1976-81, v.2, pp.306-19. The possibility that Leonardo was recording an actual event is similarly dismissed by J. Beck in *I sogni di Leonardo*, Florence, 1993 (“Lecture Vinciane” XXXII), and in *The Dream of Leonardo da Vinci*, “Artibus et historiae” XIV, n.27, 1993, pp.185-98. And while such an event seems improbable at best, Pedretti has reminded us that it is not inherently impossible in the context of a hot Tuscan summer (C. Pedretti, *Il “bello spettacolo”*, “Achademia Leonardi Vinci” V, 1992, pp.163-65).

⁽¹¹⁾ Marinoni, in his commentary on the “childhood memory,” speaks of “il famoso ricordo del nibbio nel sogno infantile.”

prevalence of such childhood omens in legend, myth and literature, and he drew attention to the similarities between Leonardo's *ricordo* and a range of earlier secular and religious texts. And indeed, in many works in this genre, future greatness is forecast precisely by childhood events specifically involving the infant's mouth or lips, especially as the locus of divine inspiration.⁽¹²⁾ Leonardo would have been familiar with – and indeed he owned – some of these texts. More recently, both James Beck and Daniel Arasse have drawn attention to further literary analogues to – and possible literary sources of – Leonardo's anecdote. Both Beck and Arasse focus less on the element of prophecy, which so engaged Schapiro, than on the range of associations that the kite might have held for Leonardo and his contemporaries, especially meanings mediated by popular vernacular literature.⁽¹³⁾

Here I follow these distinguished scholars in exploring literary influences that might have shaped Leonardo's *ricordo*, but I also return to the way Leonardo's *ricordo* both invokes and seeks to explain and affirm the artist's "destiny." I explore the ways in which Leonardo's invocation of his destiny echoes prophetic dream narratives found in Dante's works.⁽¹⁴⁾ In the course of this exploration, I briefly consider the possibility that Leonardo's last paintings, too, might bear some relationship to Dante's narrative techniques. Finally, by way of conclusion, I will ask whether Leonardo's "childhood memory" might after all encode other "latent" meanings that point us back to the recent death of his father.

Dante's Prophetic Dreams

⁽¹²⁾ M. Schapiro, *Freud and Leonardo: an Art Historical Study*, "Journal of the History of Ideas" XVII, n.2, April 1956, pp.147-78, conveniently reprinted in Schapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society*, New York, 1994, pp.153-92, along with a new postscript, *Further Notes on Freud and Leonardo (1994)*, pp.193-99

⁽¹³⁾ Beck, *I sogni di Leonardo*, and *The Dream of Leonardo*; D. Arasse, *Léonard et la culla del nibbio: pour une approche historique du 'souvenir d'enfance'*, in *Symboles de la Renaissance*, Paris, 1982, v.2, pp.[59]-69; Arasse, *Leonardo da Vinci: the Rhythm of the World* New York, 1997, pp.488-93.

⁽¹⁴⁾ To my knowledge, only C. Johnson, *Leonardo and Dante*, "American Imago" XXIX, 1972, pp.177-85, has previously suggested that Leonardo's *ricordo* reflects his reading of Dante. Johnson suggests that Leonardo's "model" may be found in the fourth and (especially) fifth cantos of the *Inferno*. Her argument, however, rests merely upon the recurrence of two words which, while indeed found in both texts, are separated, in the *Commedia*, by 16 verses unrelated by narrative or rhetoric. In verse 11, Minos "cignesi con la coda" and in verse 27 Dante writes: "or son venuto là dove molto pianto mi percuote." While the word *coda* and a different conjugation of the verb *percuotere* do occur in Leonardo's *ricordo*, these echoes seem less than compelling. Nevertheless, Johnson, whose primary interest is less Leonardo's literary antecedents than their bearing on the psychoanalytic meaning of his "childhood memory," deserves credit for sensing the possible relevance of the *Divina Commedia* to Leonardo's *ricordo* and the precise way in which it is formulated.

One reason Leonardo's *ricordo* has generated so many – and such conflicting – readings is surely that it seems so tentative in its very language. He appears to introduce the entire anecdote obliquely, suggesting merely that it “seems to be” – *par che sia* – his “destiny” to write so clearly about the kite. And why does this merely “seem” to be the case? Because, he continues, “it *seemed* to me that” – *mi pareva che*⁽¹⁵⁾ – “as I was in my cradle, a kite came to me...” Thus, both in introducing the episode and in rehearsing its details, Leonardo employs the Italian verb *parere* (to seem). This reiterated use of “seems” lends the entire anecdote an air of tentativeness and hesitation, at least to our relativist modern ears. But Leonardo is in fact not being tentative at all, neither about the nature of this anecdote nor about its prophetic meaning. Rather, he is employing a poetic convention that was familiar to him from Dante's *Divina Commedia*, in which prophetic dreams and the rhetoric of “seeming” play a prominent role.

Dante describes or alludes to prophetic dreams no fewer than five times in the *Divina Commedia*, twice in the *Inferno* and, famously, three times, always at critical passages in his narrative, in the *Purgatorio*.⁽¹⁶⁾ Particularly significant in our context are the three prophetic dream narratives in the *Purgatorio*. These key passages are pivotal to Dante's narrative, as even his earliest commentators rarely failed to emphasize, and they culminate in the final cantos of the *Purgatorio* with the famous Dream of Leah, on the eve of the poet's entry into the Earthly Paradise.

The first of the three prophetic dreams in the *Purgatorio* occurs just before the poet awakens at the gates of Purgatory. Like Leonardo in his *ricordo*, Dante here employs the distinctive verbal phrase *mi pareva* – indeed he uses it no fewer than five times in this single dream narrative. I italicize the relevant passages:

Ne l'ora che comincia i tristi lai
la rondinella presso a la mattina,
forse a memoria de' suo' primi guai,
e che la mente nostra, peregrina
più da la carne e men da' pensier presa,
a le sue vision quasi è divina,⁽¹⁷⁾

⁽¹⁵⁾ Marinoni's literal transcription reads “emj pareva che.”

⁽¹⁶⁾ The following discussion is based on C. Speroni, *Dante's Prophetic Morning Dreams*, “Studies in Philology” XLV, 1948, pp.50-59, conveniently reprinted in R. Clements, *American Critical Essays on the Divine Comedy*, New York, 1967, pp.182-92. For dreams in Dante more generally, and especially his medieval antecedents, see N. Busetto, *Il sonno, i sogni, e le visioni*, “Giornale Dantesco” XIII, 1905, pp.143-155. For the role of prophetic dreams within the narrative and allegorical structure of the *Purgatorio*, see R. Hollander, *Allegory in Dante's Commedia*, Princeton, 1969, especially Chapter IV on *The Women of Purgatorio: Dreams, Voyages, Prophecies* (pp.136-91). I am most grateful to Professor Hollander for an enlightening email correspondence on various points addressed below.

⁽¹⁷⁾ For Dante, the prophetic nature of these dreams is related to their having occurred in the early morning when “la mente nostra, peregrina / più de la carne e men da' pensier presa, / a le sue vision quasi è divina.” Dante is here echoing the conventional medieval belief that morning dreams are especially likely to be prophetic. In a text at Christ Church, Oxford (inv. JBS 17r and v), closely associated with an important group of allegorical drawings, Leonardo might almost be regarded as offering a critique of this traditional belief in the special nature of morning dreams –

in sogno mi pareva veder sospesa
 un'aguglia nel ciel con penne d'oro,
 con l'ali aperte e a calare intesa;
 ed esser *mi pareva* là dove fuoro
 abbandonati i suoi da Ganimede,
 quando fu ratto al sommo consistoro.
 Fra me pensava: 'Forse questa fiede
 pur qui per uso, e forse d'altro loco
 disdegna di portarne suso in piede'.
 Poi *mi pareva* che, poi rotata un poco,
 terribil come folgor discendesse,
 e me rapisse suso infino al foco.
 Ivi pareva che ella e io ardesse;
 e sì lo 'ncendio imaginato cosse,
 che convenne che 'l sonno si rompesse. (Purg. IX, 13-33)⁽¹⁸⁾

Now above and beyond its dependence on the verb *parere* and its reiterated use of the characteristic phrase *mi pareva*,⁽¹⁹⁾ this particular dream sequence obviously shares other narrative elements with Leonardo's "childhood memory." Dante writes, "*I seemed to see*, in a dream, an eagle poised in the sky, with feathers of gold, its wings outspread, and prepared to swoop. And *I seemed to be* in the place where Ganymede abandoned his own company, when he was caught up to the supreme consistory; and I thought within myself, 'Perhaps it is wont to strike only here, and perhaps disdains to carry anyone upward in its claws from any other place.' Then it *seemed to me* that, having wheeled a while, it descended terrible as a thunderbolt and snatched me upwards as far as the fire: there it seemed that it and I burned; and the imagined fire so scorched me that perforce my sleep

and he certainly has no patience for the idea that in the early morning our minds are "more a pilgrim from the flesh." "In Tuscany," he writes, "reeds are put to support beds, to signify that here occur vain dreams, and here is consumed a great part of life; here is squandered much useful time, namely that of the morning, when the mind is composed and refreshed, and the body therefore is fitted to begin new labours. There also are taken many vain pleasures are taken, both with the mind imagining impossible things, and with the body taking those pleasures which are often the cause of the failing of life..." (McCurdy's translation, 1956, v.2, p.493; see also Richter, 1970, v.1, p.395 [n.676]). One suspects that Leonardo has in mind erotic dreams and fantasies ("vani sogni," "vani piaceri"), and his comments recall Dante on the topic of *acedia* (see Purgatorio XVIII, 88ff. and note 48 below); but one wonders whether he might also be expressing at least a passing disgust not only with Eros but also with (as it surely must at least occasionally have seemed to him) his own "idle" speculations about such "impossible things" as human flight.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Dante's *Divina Commedia* is quoted throughout in the edition, with English prose translation, of Charles Singleton, with commentary, 3v., Princeton, 1970-75. Shortly after this we learn that this dream was a premonition of Dante's entry into Purgatory: "tu se' omai al purgatorio giunto" (Purg. IX, 49).

⁽¹⁹⁾ In his commentary on verse 19, Singleton notes: "Typically, the verb *parere* is repeated in later verses (vss. 28, 31) to stress the fact that this is indeed a dream."

was broken.” Not only is this a prophetic dream the meaning of which is embodied in a bird “poised in the sky ... prepared to swoop”; the aggressiveness of the eagle, about to “strike,” is expressly compared to the rape of Ganymede in that it “snatched me upwards.” In all these respects, this dream clearly invites comparison with Leonardo’s *ricordo*, in which a kite “seems” to descend from the sky and “strikes” the infant Leonardo “several times with its tail inside my lips.”⁽²⁰⁾

In Purgatorio XIX, to which we will return below, Dante has a second prophetic dream, in which he beholds a Siren:

Ne l'ora che non può 'l calor diurno
 intepidar più 'l freddo de la luna,
 vinto da terra, e talor da Saturno ...
 mi venne in sogno una femmina balba ... (Purg. XIX, 1-3, 7)

The series of prophetic dreams in the Purgatorio culminates with the climactic Dream of Leah in Canto XXVII. Here Dante “seems” to behold in another early morning dream the biblical figure of Leah. For Dante, as for his early commentators, Leah was the embodiment of the *vita activa*, much as her sister and companion Rachel was an emblem of the *vita contemplativa*. Dante’s Dream of Leah is a premonition of his imminent encounter with Matelda, the resident spirit of the Earthly Paradise, atop Mt. Purgatory:

... mi prese il sonno; il sonno che sovente,
 anzi che 'l fatto sia, sa le novelle.
 Ne l'ora, credo, che de l'oriente
 prima raggiò nel monte Citerea
 che di foco d'amor par sempre ardente,
 giovane e bella *in sogno mi pareva*
 donna *vedere* andar per una landa
 cogliendo fiori; e cantando... (Purg. XXVII, 92-99)

Here Dante introduces his dream narrative with the same phrase he had employed in Purgatorio IX: “in a dream I seemed to see” – *in sogno mi pareva ... vedere*. Dante in fact uses variations on this phrase almost as a *leitmotif* when he is relating a dream experience, not only in the *Divina Commedia* but elsewhere as well. Robert Hollander, a leading Dante scholar, has made a close study of the vocabulary and rhetoric of the dream sequences in Dante’s *Vita Nuova*. From this study, Hollander deduces that “it is evident that in the *Vita Nuova* even common words like *vedere* and *apparire* are ... used ‘technically’ in a vocabulary ... that is impressively careful.” Hollander further demonstrates that “when Dante uses *vedere* in conjunction with *parere* (e.g., *mi pareva*

⁽²⁰⁾ The reference to the rape of Ganymede is one of several allusions to literary or mythological episodes of rape in Purg. IX. But this allusion, in particular, seems to resonate not only with the precise imagery of Leonardo’s *ricordo* but also with the latter’s implicitly homoerotic overtones. And it is worth noting that in illustrating this episode, Botticelli, whose magnificent Dante illustrations Leonardo might well have studied during the period in which the “childhood memory” was composed (see note 47 below), allowed the beholder to experience Dante’s dream, showing the eagle descending to lift him upward.

vedere) it is always in describing things seen in dream ... or fantasy.”⁽²¹⁾ These words could have been written about the *Commedia* as well.

To summarize, this sequence of prophetic morning dreams, which does so much to define and advance the narrative and allegorical structure of the Purgatorio, invites comparison with Leonardo’s *ricordo* in two ways: first, these passages consistently and recognizably employ a characteristic vocabulary and rhetoric that depends heavily on the notion of “seeming” and “seeming to see” – *parere; mi pareva vedere* – and that is entirely characteristic of Dante’s narratives of prophetic dreams; and second, the initial dream narrative in Purgatorio IX, with its powerful imagery of an eagle “poised to swoop,” quite specifically recalls the particular imagery of Leonardo’s *ricordo*.

That the rhetorical parallels between Dante’s prophetic dream narratives and Leonardo’s *ricordo* are not merely coincidental is strongly suggested by Leonardo’s famous *profezia* on the subject “Of Dreaming”:

Del Sognare

Alli omini *parrà vedere* nel cielo nove ruine, *parrà* in quello levarsi a volo e di quello fuggire con paura le fiamme che di lui discendano, sentiran parlare li animali di qualunque sorte di linguaggio umano, scorreranno immediate colla lor persona in diverse parte del mondo senza moto, vedranno nelle tenebre grandissimi splendori. O meraviglia delle umane spezie! Qual frenesia t’ha sì condotto? Parlerai cogli animali di qualunque spezie, e quelli con teo, in linguaggio umano, vedrati cadere di grande alture sanzo tuo danno, i torrenti

⁽²¹⁾ See Hollander, “*Vita Nuova*”: *Dante’s Perceptions of Beatrice*, first published in “Dante Studies” XCII, 1974, pp.1-18; reprinted in A. Bartlett Giamatti, ed., *Dante in America*, Binghamton, 1983, pp.372-89, and again in Hollander, *Studies in Dante*, Ravenna, 1980, pp.[11]-30. I quote p.17 (text and n. 13) of this last edition. In the same note, Hollander quotes the supporting opinion of A.Rossi: “Ma ormai bisogna ammettere che ci troviamo di fronte ad uno stile istituzionalizzato, propriamente allo *stile visionario*, il cui distintivo consiste nel marcare ogni membro rilevante della narrazione con l’avvertimento che di visione si parla (verbo *parere*)...”; citing Rossi, *Dante nella prospettiva del Boccaccio*, “Studi Danteschi” XXXVIII, 1960, p.72. That Leonardo would not have been the first in registering Dante’s rhetorical use of *parere* in his dream narratives – and especially his reiterated use of *mi pareva* in dream narratives set in the first person – is shown by Boccaccio’s *Corbaccio*. The phrase *mi pareva* appears here no fewer than seven times in dream contexts (thanks to Murtha Baca for drawing this to my attention) and it is not unreasonable to regard this as a deliberate *imitatio* of Dante. In his standard study of *Boccaccio’s last fiction: “Il Corbaccio”*, Philadelphia, 1988, R. Hollander has traced “the extensive presence of Dante’s texts in the *Corbaccio*” (p.39). In a detailed appendix on *Texts in the Corbaccio reflecting passages in Dante* (pp.59-71), he provides chapter and verse for this “presence” in the form of a list of 125 plausible echoes of Dante’s works in the 412 paragraphs of the *Corbaccio* (counting according to Padoan’s standard critical edition, Milan, 1994). While Hollander has analyzed Dante’s use of this vocabulary in the *Vita Nuova* (see above), he does not discuss Boccaccio’s reiterated use of the phrase *mi pareva* in his dream narratives; and yet this surely offers further evidence of Dante’s “extensive presence” in this late work. While a broader study of these rhetorical conventions would be worthwhile, it seems safe to assume that Leonardo, like Boccaccio, would have known them best from, and associated them pre-eminently with, Dante’s prophetic dreams.

t'accompagneranno e misteramente col loro rapido corso, useranno carnalmente
con madre e sorelle...⁽²²⁾

Here, in what is clearly a self-consciously literary “prophecy” devoted precisely to the subject of dreams, Leonardo employs – appropriately, in the future tense – exactly the same dream rhetoric and vocabulary that we found in Dante’s prophetic morning dreams and in Leonardo’s own “childhood memory.” In their dreams, men will “seem to see” – *parrà vedere* – the calamities Leonardo describes. These parallels show that Leonardo registered the characteristic rhetoric and vocabulary of Dante’s prophetic dream sequences and duly employed them in his own *profezie* – including not only the prophecy “Of Dreaming” but also the prophetic *ricordo* we call the “childhood memory.”⁽²³⁾

Leonardo and Dante

How much weight we assign to these rhetorical and poetic parallels will depend upon how close a student of Dante we believe Leonardo to have been. Scholarly opinion varies, but we have literary, historical and iconographic evidence that, in the aggregate, suggests that Leonardo was a serious student of his great Florentine precursor. Nor would this be surprising. Leonardo, the “omo senza lettere,” would surely have appreciated Dante not least for having championed the vernacular in an age of self-conscious classicism, and it stands to reason that he would have felt a greater kinship with the poet than he did with his humanist contemporaries.

Like his Florentine colleague, Sandro Botticelli, Leonardo seems to have produced a set of illustrations to the *Divina Commedia* during the 1470s. And like Botticelli’s early Dante illustrations, Leonardo’s have not survived, and we have only

⁽²²⁾ CA 393r ex 145r.a. I cite the modernized Italian version in Vecce, 1992, p.124 (n.4). The final phrase, truncated by a tear in the paper, was reconstructed in Pedretti, 1977, v.2, p.279. Pedretti’s basic reading is accepted by Vecce, 1998, by Marinoni in *Codex Atalanticus*, v.2, p.705, and by Beck, *I sogni di Leonardo*, and *The Dream of Leonardo*. An abbreviated version of the same “prophecy,” also in the *Codex Atlanticus*, reads: “Men shall walk without moving, they shall speak with those who are absent, they shall hear those who do not speak” (CA 1033r ex 370r.a). See Richter, 1970, v.2, p.299 (n.1295); McCurdy, v.2, p.504. For versions of both texts in modernized Italian see also Vecce, 1992, p.124 (n.4) and p.115 (n.33), and Marinoni, 1974, p.131 (n.126) and p.124 (n.77). Vecce, 1992, in his introduction (p.25), notes in passing, without elaborating, the kinship between Leonardo’s prophecies about dreaming and the childhood memory.

⁽²³⁾ Freud’s staunch champion, K.R. Eissler, *Leonardo da Vinci: Psychoanalytic Notes on the Enigma*, New York, 1961, p.13, n.1, has commented on “the translation of *parea* as ‘it seemed’.” See also J.-P. Maïdani Gerard, *Léonard de Vinci, mythologie ou théologie?* Paris, 1994, pp.12f., who contrasts *parere* with the more tentative *semblare* and also notes (unlike Eissler) that Leonardo uses *parere* twice in his “childhood memory.” Both writers suggest that Leonardo’s use of *parere* lends his text a strong visual force inadequately conveyed by the word “seem.” But neither writer recognizes the roots of Leonardo’s usage in Dante or the related rhetoric of his *profezia*, “Del Sognare.”

illustrations derived from them to testify to their existence and their nature.⁽²⁴⁾ Leonardo might well have observed Botticelli at work on his drawings, commissioned as they were for the first Florentine printed edition of the *Commedia*, and conceivably he took inspiration from Botticelli's example. However that may be, Botticelli's prolonged engagement with Dante culminated, of course, two decades later with the famous series of Dante illustrations now shared between Berlin and the Vatican. Leonardo's interest in Dante seems similarly to have flourished anew during his later years, beginning with his return to Florence in 1503 and culminating, probably, in his final years in France.

The literary evidence for Leonardo's knowledge of Dante, assembled by Edmondo Solmi decades ago, is familiar to specialists. It takes the form of a series of echoes and close paraphrases of Dante, found throughout Leonardo's manuscripts and notebooks; and it strongly suggests that Leonardo took an abiding and serious interest in Dante, particularly in the *Divina Commedia*, but also in the *Convivio*. Observing that "quando lo studio di uno scrittore è assiduo corrono sotto la penna, anche inconsciamente, delle immagini e delle movenze tratte da quello," Solmi proposes that this applies to Leonardo's reading of Dante. Having laid out the evidence, he concludes that "Leonardo da Vinci fu studioso appassionato delle opere dell'Alighieri."⁽²⁵⁾

⁽²⁴⁾ B. Degenhart, in a book-length article, *Dante, Leonardo und Sangallo: Dante-Illustrationen Giuliano da Sangallos in ihrem Verhältnis zu Leonardo da Vinci und zu den Figurenzeichnungen der Sangallo*, "Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte" VII, 1955, pp.101-292, argued that the marginal illustrations in a copy of the 1481 Landino Dante in the Biblioteca Vallicelliana, Rome, attributed to the Sangallos, are based on a lost set of Leonardo illustrations dating from the 1470s. The lecture on which that article is based was first summarized in Degenhart, *Dante, Leonardo, Sangallo in einem Zeichnungstyp der Renaissance*, "Kunstchronik" VII, 1954, pp.131-34. A. Parronchi, *Come gli artisti leggevano Dante*, "Studi Danteschi" XLIII, 1966, pp.97-134, agrees (p.126) that the model can only have been drawings by Leonardo, and suggests that the illustrations, which mostly relate to Dante's descriptions of natural phenomena, invite comparison with those in the Vatican manuscript derived from Leonardo's treatise on painting (Codex Urbinas Latinus 1270). Parronchi's article remains the best introduction to "how artists" – including Leonardo and his contemporaries – "read Dante." See also the programmatic note by C. Pedretti, *Leonardo & Dante*, "Accademia Leonardi Vinci" IV, pp.206-[10]. The first volume of A. Rossi's imposing *Da Dante a Leonardo: un percorso di originali*, Florence, 1999, contains a chapter (pp.70-74) on *La bottega del Verrocchio* that does not contribute much to our subject; but the second volume will evidently (see p.429) conclude with a chapter on *Leonardo e Michelangelo nella prospettiva filologica e freudiana: le varianti 'virtuali' dell'Ultime Cena e del Mosè per la tomba di Giulio II*.

⁽²⁵⁾ Solmi compiled many of the references to Dante from Leonardo's manuscripts in his classic study of *Le fonti dei manoscritti di Leonardo da Vinci: contributi*, first published in 1908 and now conveniently available in his *Scritti Vinciani*, Florence, 1976, pp.1-344, esp. pp.130-35 on Dante, along with his supplemental *Nuovi contributi*, in the same volume, pp.345-405, esp. p.354 on Dante. For the two passages quoted in the text see *Scritti Vinciani*, p.132 and 130 respectively. Solmi demonstrates that in Leonardo's notebooks there are close echoes and paraphrases of all three books of the *Divina Commedia* as well as the *Convivio*. Most relate to the poet's naturalistic descriptions of landscape, the movement of water and air, etc. An allusion in Leonardo's manuscripts to "the Dante of Niccolò delle Croci" may refer to a copy of the *Quaestio de Aqua et Terra*, published in Venice in 1508 by Manfredo di Monferrato; see Solmi, 1976, pp.134f., as well as Vecce, 1998, p.288, Vecce, 1992, p.265.

Contemporary, albeit anecdotal, evidence of Leonardo's interest in Dante is provided by the so-called "Anonimo Magliabechiano." The Anonimo relates the following anecdote, set in Florence after Leonardo's return there in 1503. It seems that a group of educated men, engaged in a conversation about Dante outside the Palazzo Spini, glimpsed Leonardo passing by, perhaps on his daily itinerary from S. Maria Novella, where he was living, to the Palazzo della Signoria, where he was working, in competition with Michelangelo, on his *Battle of Anghiari* mural. Seeing Leonardo approaching, the group invited him to elucidate a few difficult lines of Dante. When Michelangelo then turned up, Leonardo declined their request, deferring (perhaps with sarcasm suppressed by our source) to his great rival and eliciting a characteristically sarcastic riposte. The testimony of the Anonimo suggests that by the time he composed his "childhood memory" (ca. 1505), Leonardo was popularly regarded as an authority on the *Divina Commedia*.⁽²⁶⁾

Leonardo seems to have been increasingly immersed in the *Commedia*, and especially in the imagery of Dante's Earthly Paradise, during the final two decades of his life. Peter Meller has persuasively argued that Leonardo's captivating drawing of the *Pointing Lady* at Windsor Castle depicts Dante's encounter with Matelda, the presiding spirit of the Earthly Paradise, with the beholder cast in the poet's role.⁽²⁷⁾ Meller further proposes that the *Pointing Lady* is one in a series of drawings illustrating Dante's Earthly Paradise and reflecting a close study of the poem. While Meller dated most of these drawings to Leonardo's second Florentine period, between 1503 and 1506, current scholarly opinion tends to assign this group of drawings to the period after 1513, and the *Pointing Lady* might have been executed as late as Leonardo's final years in France.⁽²⁸⁾

⁽²⁶⁾ See *Il codice magliabechiano cl.xvii. 17*, ed. C. Frey, Berlin, 1892, reprinted Farnborough, 1969, p.115. See also Solmi, 1976, pp.131f. For the suggestion that Leonardo's response might have been sarcastic, see Parronchi, 1966, p.131.

⁽²⁷⁾ For the *Pointing Lady* (Royal Library, Windsor Castle, RL 12851) see P. Meller, *Leonardo da Vinci's Drawings to the Divine Comedy*, "Acta Historiae Artium" II, 1955, pp.135-68. Kenneth Clark strongly endorsed this "convincing" reading in his classic monograph, recently re-issued with an introduction by Martin Kemp as *Leonardo da Vinci: An Account of his Development as an Artist*, New York, 1988, p.227, and in the revised edition of his landmark catalog of the Windsor drawings, *Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci in the collection of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle*, 2nd ed., rev. with the assistance of C. Pedretti, 3v., New York, 1968. Pedretti himself observed shortly thereafter that Meller's is "the kind of theory that can be replaced only by a better one" (C. Pedretti, *The Pointing Lady*, "Burlington Magazine" CXL, 1969, pp.339-46; for this quotation see p.340). Pedretti continues to regard Meller's thesis as relatively "convincing" and "compelling as any such interpretation can possibly be"; see his essay in the exhibition catalogue, *Leonardo da Vinci, Master Draftsman*, ed. C. Bambach, New York, 2003, p.99, n.11. J. Roberts, in her discussion of Leonardo's drawings of "Nymphs" in the exhibition catalog, *Leonardo and Venice*, Milan, 1992, pp.292-97, has strongly endorsed Meller's thesis, as has Arasse, 1997, pp.185-87.

⁽²⁸⁾ Clark and Pedretti, 1968, v.1, p.114, regarded the drawing as "datable after 1513." Pedretti has recently reiterated his belief that the *Pointing Lady* is "one of Leonardo's latest drawings, possibly made in France" between 1516 and his death in 1519 (see Bambach, 2003, p.90). For Leonardo's related black chalk drawings more generally, see F. Ames-Lewis, *Leonardo da Vinci*

These drawings may be regarded, then, as representing, like Botticelli's surviving Dante drawings, the culmination of the mature artist's engagement with Dante.

Like most readers through the centuries, Renaissance readers of Dante studied the *Divina Commedia* with the aid of a scholarly commentary, and the mature Leonardo would almost certainly have read Dante with the help of Cristoforo Landino (1424-1492). The teacher of Angelo Poliziano and Marsilio Ficino, and one of the leading Florentine humanists, Landino excelled at the explication of epic poetry. His important commentaries on the classical poets – on Persius and Juvenal (1462), on Horace (1482) and on Vergil (1488) – are characterized by careful linguistic, philological, rhetorical and stylistic analysis. But Landino is best known today – and was most valued by his contemporaries – for his magisterial vernacular commentary on the *Divina Commedia*. This commentary was printed alongside the text of the poem in the first Florentine edition of the *Commedia*, which appeared in 1481 with a selection of illustrations based on the lost set of drawings by Botticelli. The Landino Dante was the product of a prolonged, public engagement with Dante, which also found expression in Landino's popular public lectures on the *Commedia*, delivered at the Studio Fiorentino for the better part of two decades, starting during Leonardo's formative years.⁽²⁹⁾ Landino demonstrated an extraordinary interest in contemporary Florentine art, and one wonders whether artists such as Botticelli and Leonardo might have attended his public lectures on Dante.⁽³⁰⁾

e il disegno a matita, "Raccolta Vinciana" XXIX, 2001, pp.[3]-40; and his *La matita nera nella pratica di disegno di Leonardo da Vinci*, Florence, 2002 ("Lecture Vinciane" XLI).

⁽²⁹⁾ See A. Field, *Cristoforo Landino's first lectures on Dante*, "Renaissance Quarterly" XXXIX, 1986, pp.16-48. Landino himself described his early lectures on Dante, and his reasons for wishing to publish a written commentary, in the Proemio to the 1481 edition: "... perche le parole non commesse alla lettere presto volano de' pecti umani e spesso nessuno vestigio di sé lasciano, tentai quelle medesime sententie mandare alle lettere, le quali avevo molti anni nel vostro celeberrimo gymnasium a voce via expresso." See P. Procaccioli's admirable new critical ed.: C. Landino, *Comento sopra la Commedia*, 4v., continuously paginated, Roma, 2001, p.110, ("Edizione nazionale dei commenti danteschi" XXVIII); the Proemio is also available in C. Landino, *Scritti critici e teorici*, ed. R. Cardini, 2v., Roma, 1974, v.1; see p.171 for the passage quoted.

⁽³⁰⁾ The Proemio to Landino's commentary includes (Landino, 2001, pp.240-42) a brief survey of the principal Quattrocento Florentine painters and sculptors, in which he develops a critical language, based on Pliny, for the description of painting.. M.Baxandall has used Landino's text as a lens for studying contemporary ways of experiencing Renaissance art in *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, 2nd ed., N.Y., 1988, pp.114-53. Landino's close engagement with contemporary painting surely provides part of the context for Botticelli's keen attention to his reading of Dante. For Landino and the visual arts see also O. Morisani, *Art Historians and Art Critics, III: Cristoforo Landino*, "Burlington Magazine" XCV, 1953, pp.267-70. It does not tax the imagination to suppose that Landino's survey of Florentine painting might have fired the ambition of artists like Botticelli and Leonardo to be included in future surveys of such Florentine *uomini illustri*. Long ago, the great Leonardo scholar, P. Müller-Walde, drew attention to this current in late Quattrocento artistic culture: "The study of domestic poetry, above all the occupation with Dante's Divine Comedy, required by his commerce with Sandro Botticelli and the whole direction of Florentine intellectual life, assumed a large place in Leonardo's activities after the middle of the 1470s." As Meller, 1955, p.162, n.10, notes, Müller-Walde even

However that may be, it would have been very hard indeed for either artist to have escaped Landino's influence in later years.⁽³¹⁾

Landino's commentary on Dante, though "Neoplatonic" in its approach to allegory, is also, like his other commentaries, unfailingly attentive to the poet's narrative devices, stylistic, rhetorical and allegorical. Landino pays particular attention to the prophetic nature of Dante's dreams in the *Purgatorio*, and consistently describes them as "visioni."⁽³²⁾ If Leonardo's "childhood memory" attests to his awareness of Dante's "rhetoric of dreams," we may reasonably assume that Landino's commentary helped foster this awareness.

The evidence, then, while it clearly deserves fuller study, warrants the conclusion that Leonardo was a close student of Dante; that while Leonardo's study of the *Divina Commedia* might, like Botticelli's, have its roots in the 1470s, he was in all likelihood particularly engaged with Dante – and indeed specifically with the imagery of the *Purgatorio* and the Earthly Paradise – during his later years; and that in his maturity he

wrote that "the most eloquent witness to the great power exerted on him by Dante's creations is the majestic female figure ... that we can hardly designate as anyone other than Beatrice." See P. Müller-Walde, *Leonardo da Vinci: Lebensskizze und Forschungen über sein Verhältnis zur florentiner Kunst und zu Rafael*, Munich, 1889, p.75; quoted in the original German by Meller, p.162, n.10; my translation.

⁽³¹⁾ Discussing Leonardo's book list of ca. 1495, Vecce, 1992, p.23, writes that despite the absence of Dante from the list, "non poteva mancare Dante, e soprattutto la *Commedia*, col commento del Landino, e il *Convivio*." Parronchi, 1966, p.124, has similarly pointed out that "la mancanza del '*Dante*' in questo elenco non è indicativa. Forse il '*Dante*' non figura ... perché al momento in cui lo stese non era nella scaffale ma sul comodino." As Parronchi notes, the same point was made previously by C. Dionisotti, *Leonardo uomo di lettere*, "Italia medioevale e umanistica" V, 1962, pp.183-216. I have recently discussed Botticelli and Landino in a pair of articles in which I suggest that Botticelli's *Primavera* emerged from a late Quattrocento Florentine milieu in which Landino's views of Dante and the visual arts were in the ascendant, and that the painting reflects Botticelli's attempt to express visually Landino's allegorical reading of the Earthly Paradise episode. See (for Botticelli's literary sources) M. Marmor, *From Purgatory to the Primavera: Some Observations on Botticelli and Dante*, "Artibus et historiae" XXIV, n.48, 2003, pp.199-212, and (for a possible visual model in a 15th-century manuscript painting of the Earthly Paradise), Marmor, *A Pattern for the Primavera*, "Source: Notes in the History of Art" XXIII, n.1, 2003, pp.[9]-16.

⁽³²⁾ E.g. Landino, 2001, p.1182 (on *Purg.* IX, 19ff.), p.1447 (*Purg.* XXVII, 97ff.). Landino observes at the very outset (commentary on *Inf.* 1, verses 1ff.) that the whole of the *Commedia* is a "vision": "questo poema non sia altro che una visione che gli [Dante] apparve dormendo." Landino's use of "visioni" might reflect his awareness of the fact that in the *Vita Nuova*, Dante himself characterizes his dreams of Beatrice in this way, and thus offer further evidence that Dante's *stilo visionario* (to cite Aldo Rossi's phrase; see n.21 above) was of particular interest to Landino. Landino's commentary is Neoplatonic in its approach to Dante's use of allegory, and he treats Dante's narrative as an epic allegory of the soul's passage from the *vita voluptuosa* through the *vita activa* to the *vita contemplativa*. See below for a discussion of ways in which this approach might have appealed to Leonardo. For an excellent study of Landino's commentary on Dante, see M. Lentzen, *Studien zur Dante-Exegese Cristoforo Landinos*, Köln, 1979.

very likely read Dante with the help of Landino, who was particularly attentive to Dante's rhetorical and narrative devices and who stressed the importance of prophetic dreams in the *Divina Commedia*. With this context in mind, it seems reasonable to propose that Leonardo's unique *ricordo*, with its suggestive echoes of Dante's imagery and rhetoric, was shaped fundamentally by the prophetic dream narratives in the *Purgatorio*, particularly as interpreted by Landino.

The Great Swan

The very last of his *profezie*, the famous fable devoted to the "Great Swan," reminds us that the "destiny" Leonardo hoped to claim as his own went well beyond the science of flight. This prophecy – dated 1505 and thus precisely contemporary with Leonardo's "childhood memory" – is inscribed twice in his Codex on the Flight of Birds in the Royal Library, Turin. It is first sketched out briefly on folio 18 recto of the Codex – the final folio – and then given definitive form and emblematically placed opposite the first version, on the inside back cover of the Codex.⁽³³⁾

The prophecy of the Great Swan is, of course, nothing less than a vision of the first attempt at human flight, to be launched from Monte Ceceri (Florentine dialect, from *cigno* = swan), near Florence, above the Arno River. The first draft on folio 18 recto reads: "Del monte che tiene il nome del grande uccello piglierà il volo il famoso uccello ch'empierà il mondo di sua gran fama." The final, reworked version reads:

Piglierà il primo volo il grande uccello sopra del dosso del suo magno Cecero, e empiendo l'universo di stupore, empiendo di sua fama tutte le scritture, e gloria eterna al nido dove nacque.

Leonardo surely envisioned Monte Ceceri, the "Great Swan," as the site of mankind's maiden flight principally because of its prominence in the Tuscan landscape he knew so well from earliest childhood. But this *profezia*, like the contemporary "childhood memory" with which it is so closely associated thematically, might similarly retain echoes of Dante's *Purgatorio*.

In *Purgatorio* XIX, immediately preceding Dante's second prophetic morning dream, referred above, the poet is urged to resume his ascent of the Mt. Purgatory by an Angel (*l'Angelo della sollecitudine* or Angel of Zeal). The Angel appears suddenly, as Dante is struggling to "find the opening" and a path forward amidst the rocky landscape of Purgatory. The Angel points the way:

Io mossi li occhi, e 'l buon maestro: "Almen tre
voci t'ho messe!" dicea, "Surgi e vieni;
troviam l'aperta per la qual tu entre."
Sù mi levai, e tutti eran già pieni
de l'alto dì I giron del sacro monte,
e andavam col sol novo a le reni.
Seguendo lui, portava la mia fronte

⁽³³⁾ Vecce, 1998, p.255. See also Vecce, 1992, p.128 (no.22-23); Marinoni, 1974, p.175.

come colui che l'ha di pensier carca,
 che fa di sé un mezzo arco di ponte;
 Quand'io udi' "Venite; qui si varca"
 parlare in modo soave e benigno,
 qual non si sente in questa mortal marca.
 Con l'ali aperte, che parean di cigno,
 volseci in sù colui che sì parlonne
 tra due pareti del duro macigno.
 Mosse le penne poi e ventilonne,
 "Qui lugent" affermando esser beati,
 ch'avran di consolar l'anime donne. (Purg. XIX, 34-51)

The poet is thus summoned to continue his ascent of the "holy mountain" by the Angel, whose "open wings ... seemed" – "*parean*," from *parere* – "like a swan's." This particular passage, with its graphic description of Dante's groping effort to find an "opening" amidst the rocks, evidently left a deep impression on Leonardo's imagination early on. This is shown by one of Leonardo's earliest and most cryptic fables, that of "The Cavern." This tale recalls, not merely in its general atmosphere but even in its precise vocabulary and rhetoric, the verses above:

La Caverna

E tirato dalla mia bramosa voglia, vago di vedere la gran copia delle varie e strane forme fatte dalla artificiosa natura, raggiratommi alquanto infra gli ombrosi scogli, pervenni all'entrata d'una gran caverna. Dinanzi alla quale, restato alquanto stupefatto e ignorante di tal cosa, piegato le mie reni in arco, e ferma la stanca mano sopra il ginocchio, e colla destra mi fece ten<ebre> alle abbassate e chiuse ciglia, e spesso piegandomi in qua e in là per <ve>dere se dentro vi discernessi alcuna cosa, e questo vietatommi la grande oscuri<t>à che là dentro era. E stato alquanto, subito sa<l>se in me due cose, paura e desiderio: paura per la minac<cian>te e scura spilonca, desiderio per vedere se là entro fusse alcu<na> miracolosa cosa.⁽³⁴⁾

Leonardo's anxious hesitation, assailed by "fear and desire" – *paura e desiderio* – at the "entrance of the great cavern" recalls Dante's similar hesitation before "the opening by which you may enter ... between the two walls of hard rock." Especially striking are the remarkably similar descriptions of the respective protagonists' groping efforts to find their way forward. Dante writes: *portava la mia fronte / come colui che l'ha di pensier carca, / che fa di sé un mezzo arco di ponte*. Compare Leonardo: *piegato le mie reni in*

⁽³⁴⁾ This is the fourth of four fragments from Codex Arundel, fol. 155r. I reproduce the modernized Italian version from Vecce, 1992, p.162; see also Richter, 1970, v.2, p.324 (n.1339); Marinoni, 1974, p.184f; McCurdy, 1956, v.2, p.526. For a discussion of this and Leonardo's other early fables, see Vecce, 1998, p.68ff.

arca ... e colla destra mi fece ten<ebre> alle abbassate e chiuse ciglia. These echoes – the coupling of the arched back and the brow alternatively “burdened with thought” or “downcast and contracted” – are surely too close to be coincidental.⁽³⁵⁾

The fable of “La Caverna” is one of Leonardo’s earliest literary efforts,⁽³⁶⁾ and its echoes of Dante’s *Purgatorio* are readily identifiable and, accordingly, relatively compelling. It reminds us again of Leonardo’s lost Dante drawings of the 1470s. To judge from the surviving copies, in these drawings Leonardo sought to render literally, for the eye, Dante’s poetic descriptions of natural phenomena, such as the movements of water, air and light. By the time when, nearly three decades later, Leonardo came to compose his “childhood memory” and his “prophecy” of the Great Swan, the deep impression left on his mind and imagination by Dante’s narrative style and by particular narratives like those we have been considering had been more fully assimilated. His allusions to Dante – in his notebooks and, as I will suggest below, in his art – have become correspondingly more difficult to identify with confidence, but no less significant for that, especially when we bear in mind the likelihood that Leonardo’s interest in Dante seems only to have grown with time.⁽³⁷⁾ Seen in this context, the fact that Dante’s Angel

⁽³⁵⁾ Del Lungo, 1910, p.264, has previously suggested, rather obliquely, that the fable of “La Caverna” contains echoes of Dante. Quoting the phrase “e spesso piegandomi in qua e in là per vedere se dentro vi discernessi alcuna cosa,” del Lungo comments parenthetically: “la stessa frase ha Dante nell’affacciarsi, ma affidato dal mistico Virgilio, all’abisso infernale.” Del Lungo does not cite any specific passage from the *Inferno* but seems to have in mind *Inf. IV*, 10-12, where Dante descends into the “abisso dolorosa”: “oscura e profonda era e nebulosa / tanto che, per ficcar lo viso a fondo, / io no vi discerneva alcuna cosa.” Parronchi, 1966, p.129, has similarly suggested that the beginning of “La Caverna” is reminiscent of the beginning of *Purgatorio XXVIII*. It is encouraging that such fine Dante scholars have previously sensed echoes of the *Commedia* in Leonardo’s fable, but I believe the parallels to *Purgatorio XIX* are both closer and, in context, more compelling.

⁽³⁶⁾ Pedretti, 1977, v.2, p.293, says it might date “as early as c. 1480.” He further (p.294) observes that “the series of Leonardo’s early writings to which this text belongs contains occasional glimpses of personal experiences ... Their style has the youthful exuberance of a poetic fantasy, much in keeping with the style of his drawings of the same time. They also anticipate his extensive geological investigations of thirty years later.” I suggest that this element of “poetic fantasy” owes more to Dante than to a still embryonic scientific interest in geology.

⁽³⁷⁾ In his study of Dante’s influence on Boccaccio’s *Il Corbaccio*, Hollander, 1988, p.41, has aptly described the methodological dilemma this poses. He writes that “Boccaccio obviously treated Dante’s texts with a respect hitherto reserved in early modern Europe for the works of Latin antiquity. And he equally obviously knew Dante’s language so well that he sometimes forgot that he was speaking it. Insofar as this is true, it makes a critic’s task difficult, at best. When do we confront a ‘crucial’ borrowing ... When a ‘significant citation which throws light on the present text by reminding us, at least in large contours, of a moment in the precursor’s? When a ‘glancing’ reference? When an ‘unconscious’ regurgitation? We have no sure, firm rules to govern such exercises of our judgment.... These difficulties do not urge us to give over such enterprises; they do urge us to undertake them with care.” While I would not claim that Leonardo’s knowledge of Dante approached Boccaccio’s, these methodological caveats surely do apply to the study of Dante’s influence on Leonardo as well. And so I would paraphrase

of Zeal makes his appearance immediately following the verses echoed in Leonardo's fable about "La Caverna"; that the Angel's most distinguishing features are his "open wings that seemed like a swan's"; and that he points Dante's way forward at a crucial moment in his ascent of Mt. Purgatory – all this suggests that Dante's Angel might conceivably have cast a shadow long enough to have colored Leonardo's prophecy of the Great Swan, much as Dante's related dream sequences helped shape Leonardo's contemporary "childhood memory."

And yet Dante's influence on the prophecy of the Great Swan was perhaps as much poetic as iconographic. Augusto Marinoni has observed that the more polished version of Leonardo's prophecy about the Great Swan is, among the thousands of pages of Leonardo's writings, uniquely literary, featuring as it does an unmistakable and, for Leonardo, singularly poetic rhythm.⁽³⁸⁾ As J.-P. Maïdani Gerard points out,⁽³⁹⁾ the poetic structure of this narrative is most easily appreciated and scanned if Leonardo's text is parsed and its rhythm rendered explicit:

Piglierà / il primo volo / il grande uccello
sopra del dosso / del suo magno / Cecero,
e empiendo / l'universo / di stupore,
empiendo / di sua fama / tutte le scritte,
e gloria eterna / al nido / dove nacque.

The vaulting ambition embodied in these "verses" about the Great Swan – the aspiration to pioneer human flight, "filling the universe with wonder, and filling all the chronicles with its fame" – seems to have occasioned Leonardo's attempt to articulate his own "destiny" through a prophetic dream narrative set in his earliest childhood, a narrative rich in associations with the prophetic dreams he knew so well from Dante's Purgatorio. Perhaps Leonardo's "verses" assumed the uniquely poetic shape they did because Leonardo had come to associate his eventual ascent of his own "sacro monte" – and his anticipated flight from its summit – with Dante's poetic narrative of his ascent of Mt. Purgatory.

"Venite; qui si varca"

If Dante's narrative style had a perceptible influence on Leonardo the writer – an influence that found expression as early as "La Caverna" and as late as Leonardo's second Florentine period ca. 1505, when both the "childhood memory" and the *profezia* of the Great Swan were composed – one may reasonably wonder whether that influence also left traces in his paintings, and perhaps especially in his later works. We have seen

Hollander's conclusion: "Perhaps nothing is as important about the frequent presence of Dante in [Leonardo's notebooks] as the fact itself."

⁽³⁸⁾ Marinoni, 1974, p.175.

⁽³⁹⁾ Maïdani Gerard, 1994, p.278ff.

that the late, bewitching drawing of the *Pointing Lady* at Windsor Castle, along with a series of related drawings, can be persuasively associated with Dante's Earthly Paradise episode. She is Matelda and points the poet's way forward. Her characteristic gesture and motion remind us of Leonardo's striking concentration, in his late paintings, on single figures who similarly engage the beholder directly, through their glance and gestures, powerfully drawing the viewer into the painting in a way reminiscent of the contemporary *imago pietatis*. These paintings are, in a meaningful sense, composed in the "first person"; they make the beholder's experience the real subject of the work.⁽⁴⁰⁾

One could scarcely ask for a more powerful verbal evocation of this kind of direct engagement with the beholder than the words and gestures of Dante's Angel in Purgatorio XIX. "Come," the Angel urges Dante, "here is the passage" – *Venite; qui si varca*; words "spoken in a tone gentle and kind, such as is not heard in this mortal region" (verses 43f.). Dante endows the Angel and his words with a numinous quality that is also a defining characteristic of the mysterious visitants in Leonardo's late paintings. And the Angel's particular gesture, too – Dante describes him as "turning us upward" (*volseci*; verse 47) – invites comparison with these figures.

"Turning us upward": this phrase admirably describes the gesture of the Angel in a lost painting, probably executed during Leonardo's second Florentine period and thus contemporary with the "childhood memory"; this lost painting is usually equated with a "testa d'uno angelo" that Vasari saw in the collection of Cosimo I. Only three studio studies – including especially a studio drawing probably reworked by Leonardo, on a sheet of studies for the *Battle of Anghiari* and thus datable ca. 1505 (Windsor Castle RL 12328r) – and a handful of copies of this lost painting have come down to us.⁽⁴¹⁾ This painting – invariably referred to by scholars as an *Angel of the Annunciation* – is generally treated as, in effect, the "missing link" which, had it come down to us, might have helped scholars to chart the profoundly puzzling evolution of Leonardo's last paintings.

Scholars have long been mystified by the fluid iconological boundaries that allowed Leonardo, in these late paintings, to cast a single actor in a series of profoundly different roles, and even to change the actor's assigned role in the course of developing a single painting. This actor is, of course, the frontally disposed, mysteriously smiling figure which by its expression, gesture and motion directs the beholder's gaze either up beyond the picture plane (as with the lost "*Angel of the Annunciation*") or back into the painting's deepest recesses (as with the *Pointing Lady* and such late paintings as the *St. John the Baptist* and the *Bacchus* in the Louvre, where the figure of Bacchus seems to have started out as a *St. John in the Desert*). This recurring figure evidently made his first appearance as the Angel in the Windsor Castle studio drawing of 1505.⁽⁴²⁾

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Meller, 1955, p.141, noted, without pursuing the point, that in the *Pointing Lady*, Leonardo approached Dante's first person narrative style, and that the drawing is "related to his later one-figure compositions in which the principal effect is achieved by the expressive smile and the pointing gesture."

⁽⁴¹⁾ P.C. Marani, *Leonardo: catalogo completo dei dipinti*, Florence, 1989, pp.145f. (catalogue entry 12A).

⁽⁴²⁾ See Marani, 1989, pp.115-20 (catalogue entries 124-125), for the Louvre paintings.

As has often been observed, in these late paintings expression, form and gesture seem to matter more to Leonardo than subject matter, and this has always made it exceedingly difficult to classify them iconographically with confidence. St. John the Baptist, notoriously, seems to metamorphose into Bacchus with little regard for iconographic consistency or the distinction between sacred and profane subject matter. This prompts one to ask: How can we feel confident that the painting of a “testo d’uno angelo” that Vasari describes, or the preliminary study for this subject at Windsor Castle, does in fact represent the *Angel of the Annunciation*? As Carlo Pedretti has observed, “this cannot be the conventional Angel Gabriel addressing the Virgin Mary.”⁽⁴³⁾ And the effort to make Leonardo’s lost painting “work” as a variation on the traditional *Annunciation*, with the beholder improbably cast in the role of the Virgin Annunciate, and then to make iconographic and stylistic sense of the paintings descended from it, has compelled even the very finest of Leonardo’s biographers to wander perilously into the wilderness of iconographic, psychological and theological speculation.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Martin Kemp has suggested that in these works Leonardo was pioneering a new narrative style, in which the subject of the painting “communicates directly with the beholder” within an embracing, effectively sculptural space. He writes: “L’aspetto più notevole che riguarda la concezione dell’*Angelo dell’Annunciazione* è da vedere nel fatto che l’Angelo comunica direttamente con lo spettatore. Il riguardante diviene così colui il quale riceve il messaggio dell’Angelo, come se noi avessimo preso il posto della Vergine in un ‘tableau vivant.’ La direttrice di questa correlazione fra una figura singola dipinta, in una situazione implicita di ‘historia’, e il riguardante è senza precedenti nella storia della pittura.”⁽⁴⁵⁾

Kemp suggests that this narrative style, while unprecedented in contemporary painting, has roots – as well as later echoes – in the sculpture of the period. But this style also invites comparison, as we have seen, with Dante’s first person narrative style. The Angel at Windsor Castle could, in fact, quite easily depict Dante’s Angel of Zeal in Purgatorio XIX, with the beholder being cast in the poet’s role – as in the later *Pointing Lady*, where “we see Matelda through Dante’s eyes.”⁽⁴⁶⁾ As we have seen, both Dante’s first person narrative style and the Angel’s powerfully direct mode of address invite this kind of pictorial treatment. Perhaps this Angel is the precursor of the *Pointing Lady* not only stylistically and in its first person narrative technique, but also iconographically.⁽⁴⁷⁾

⁽⁴³⁾ Pedretti, *Leonardo: a Study in Chronology and Style*, Berkeley, 1973, p.167.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ This series late works is discussed with an admirably candid sense of bewilderment by Clark, 1988, pp.246ff; see also M. Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man*, Cambridge, Mass., 1981, pp.336ff.; and most recently Vecce, 1998, pp.249ff. and Marani, 1989, p.118, both emphasizing the iconographic ambiguity of these late paintings.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ See Kemp, *Leonardo e lo spazio dello scultore*, Florence, 1988 (“Lecture Vinciane” XXVII).

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Meller, 1955, p.141.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Compare also Botticelli’s surviving drawing for Purgatorio XIX, in which the Angel of Zeal, turning to his right, points heavenward with his right hand, his left wing emerging fully into view. Allowing for Botticelli’s distinctive narrative style, this drawing is close enough to the Angel at

The angel's left wing in the Windsor study reminds us again of Dante's description of the Angel's "open wings that seemed like a swan's." The Windsor drawing differs in this key regard from some of the surviving copies of the so-called "*Angel of the Annunciation*," not all of which feature wings, and also from a recently discovered, much-discussed drawing, privately owned and usually attributed to Leonardo himself. Dated ca. 1513 and thus roughly contemporary with the *Pointing Lady*, this drawing is known as the *Angel in the Flesh*. Despite the absence of wings, this puzzling drawing is clearly descended from the "*Angel of the Annunciation*," and is thus related to the series of late paintings we are discussing. The *Angel in the Flesh*, however, is unique in one respect: this Angel, with its prominently erect penis, is anatomically and indeed stridently androgynous, rendering any iconographic relationship to the subject of the Annunciation unlikely. Perhaps this puzzling drawing, too, is inspired by Dante's encounter with the Angel in Purgatorio XIX, particularly as that episode was interpreted by Landino.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Windsor Castle to strengthen the case that the latter is in fact Dante's Angel of Zeal. Meller, 1955, p.140, has suggested that Leonardo might have known Botticelli's surviving Dante drawings, since he is known to have been in touch with Botticelli's patron, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, who commissioned these drawings, in the years immediately preceding the young Medici's death in 1503. See note 20 above for the suggestion that Botticelli's illustration of Purg. IX, in which the poet's metaphorical comparison of an Angel with an eagle is made explicit, might have reinforced Leonardo's association of his "childhood memory" with Dante.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ See C. Pedretti, *The Angel in the Flesh*, "Achademia Leonardi Vinci" IV, 1991, pp.34-51; A. Green, *Ange ou démon?* "Achademia Leonardi Vinci" VI, 1993, pp.212-15. Both Pedretti and Vecce, 1998, p.246, have reminded us that the features and figure of *Angel in the Flesh* are descended ultimately from studies of Leonardo's pupil, Salai. This might, from a psychobiographical perspective, help account for the drawing's strangest feature, the Angel's very prominent erection. However that may be, Cristoforo Landino's commentary on Purgatorio XIX might shed light on this drawing. Commenting on verse 37 specifically – the verse that begins with the phrase: "Sù mi levai" ("I rose up") – Landino, 2001, writes that here Dante "dimostra che la sensualità excitata dallo intellecto gli diventa obbediente, et può surgere ..."; see Landino, *Comento*, p.1340). Could Leonardo's *Angel in the Flesh*, with its visible erection, be a visual metaphor for this "rising up" (sublimation?) of human sexuality, "excited" by the intellect? Landino's further observation, in connection with verse 49 (*Mosse le penne poi e ventilonne*), seems to reinforce this reading. Landino writes that the Angel "ventillò la fronte assolvendo dell'accidia." J. Beck has suggested that Leonardo came to regard his own sexuality as an obstacle to his pursuit of knowledge and truth (see Beck, *I sogni di Leonardo*, and *The Dream of Leonardo*). The Angel's second direct address to Dante (in verse 50) reads: "*Qui lugent* affermando esser beati." This is, of course, an allusion to the beatitude, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Did Leonardo hope to be counted among those – in Dante's description – "ch'avran di consolar l'anime donne"? This might help account for Leonardo's interest in Landino's decidedly Neoplatonic commentary on Dante. For Landino's over-arching theme is precisely the soul's gradual passage from the *vita voluptuosa* to the *vita contemplativa* (Lentzen, 1979, *passim*). Surely this is one of the few themes of Renaissance Neoplatonism to which Leonardo might have responded on a personal and intellectual level.

Carlo Pedretti has suggested that Leonardo's *Bacchus* in the Louvre – which, as we know from a preliminary study formerly at the Museo del Sacro Monte in Varese, started out as a *St. John in the Desert* – was “painted to illustrate an artistic theory” related to light, shade and three dimensionality, and thus was intended to be “paradigmatic.”⁽⁴⁹⁾ More recently, he has suggested that the *Angel in the Flesh*, too, embodies and reflects Leonardo's theoretical commitments. Prompted by the intriguing presence on the verso of this sheet of a quotation from Pliny the Younger, he proposes that the drawing represents an attempt on Leonardo's part to emulate or surpass the Greek painter, Apelles, to whom Pliny attributes the ability to “paint the unpaintable,” specifically, atmospheric turbulence (lightning, thunder and thunderbolts).⁽⁵⁰⁾ I suggest that these works do indeed embody Leonardo's aspiration to “paint the unpaintable” and thereby to demonstrate, in the spirit of his *paragone*, that painting is truly the rival of poetry. But I suggest that Leonardo's aspiration took the shape of a rivalry with no less a poet than Dante. In his several late Angels, Leonardo has sought to give haunting physical form to Dante's defining encounter with the Angel of Zeal, as his *Pointing Lady* gives haunting physical form to the poet's encounter with Matelda in the Earthly Paradise. In these works, Leonardo portrayed “in the flesh” an angelic encounter that Dante could only describe in words. And in so doing, he pioneered a new style of narrative painting in the “first person,” a style that was formative for his other late paintings as well.

Coda

Leonardo's early fable of “The Cavern” captures powerfully the narrator's mixed feelings of “fear and desire” – *paura e desiderio* – as he peers into the mysterious “cavern”: “fear of the threatening dark cavern, desire to see whether there were any marvellous thing within it.” One could hardly ask for a better example of “ambivalence,” and it is not surprising that psychoanalysts and art historians alike have sensed the relevance of this fable to the study of Leonardo's sexuality. And so I want to conclude by returning to Freud and to Leonardo's “childhood memory.” Perhaps the “childhood memory” does, after all, carry more freight – in the form of “latent” meanings – than immediately meets the eye.

It seems significant that the only allusion to Leonardo's childhood, among the thousands of pages of his surviving manuscripts, was penned in the shadow of his

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Pedretti, 1973, p.169, writing about the nocturnal *St. John the Baptist* in the Louvre.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ For Pliny on Apelles, see *Naturalis Historia* 35:96: “Apellis ... pinxit et quae pingi non possunt, tonitrua, fulgetra fulguraque; Bronten, Astrapen et Ceraunobolian appellant” (“Apelles ... painted the unpaintable, lightning, thunder and thunderbolts; called Bronten, Astrapen et Ceraunobolian”). The final three Greek words are found in Leonardo's hand on the verso of the sheet containing the *Angel in the Flesh*. See Pedretti, 1991, as well as J.F. Moffitt, *The Evidentia of Curling Waters and Whirling Winds: Leonardo's ekphraseis of the Latin Weathermen*, “Achademia Leonardi Vinci” IV, 1991, pp.11-33. Pliny's reference to “thunderbolts” (*fulguraque*) recalls the eagle that, in Dante's dream in *Purg. IX*, “descended terrible as a thunderbolt” (*terribil come folgore discendesse*; verse 29).

father's death, and that in this unique *ricordo* Leonardo invokes the kite (*nibbio*). We know that the kite was popularly associated with envy. And of course Leonardo himself, in his so-called "bestiary" (ca. 1493-94), enlisted the kite as the very embodiment of Envy (*Invidia*) or, more precisely – and still more tellingly – as the incarnation specifically of *parental* envy of a flourishing child. He writes: "Del nibbio si legge che quando esso vede i sua figlioli nel nido esser di troppa grassezza, che per invidia egli becca loro le coste e tiengli senza mangiare."⁽⁵¹⁾ One need not be a psychoanalyst to entertain the idea that Leonardo's "childhood memory," with its unlikely description of a kite descending and striking the infant Leonardo, still in his cradle, several times, harbors the ambivalent feelings of an illegitimate child toward his recently deceased father. This reading seems all the more plausible when we recall the disenfranchised artist's unsuccessful litigation with his several legitimate half-brothers over the disposition of their father's estate.⁽⁵²⁾

And yet, as James Beck has reminded us, the kite might also have held quite different, if no less troubling, associations for Leonardo. Beck was the first to draw attention in our context to the fact that Leonardo owned a popular medieval treatise on dream interpretation, the so-called *Sogni di Daniello* (*Somnia danielis*), first printed in the vernacular in the 1480s. In this slim book, as Beck notes, Leonardo would have read this ominous passage: "Nebio vedere significato morte de' toi parenti" – "To see a kite signifies the death of your parents."⁽⁵³⁾ It is hard to imagine a more ironic – or, in fairness to Freud, more Oedipal – variation on the popular meaning of the kite as the incarnation of parental envy. We do not know precisely when Leonardo acquired this book, nor which edition he owned, nor indeed whether he ever read it, and least of all whether he read and registered this potentially disturbing sentence. But it is tempting to speculate that he did, and that these conflicting associations with the kite reinforced both the need and Leonardo's resolve to find an altogether different and more benign meaning in his close and protracted study of the kite and also, perhaps, in his conflicted attitude toward

⁽⁵¹⁾ MS. H, Institut de France, fol. 5r. See McCurdy, 1956, v.2, p.469, Richter, v.2, p.261. This text was first discussed in connection with Leonardo's "childhood memory" by Schapiro, ed. cit., p.165. Pedretti, 1977, v.2, p.261, dates this manuscript c.1493-94. The association of the kite with envy (*invidia*) was entirely conventional. It can be traced back by way of the popular *Il Fiore di Virtù* to Aesop's *Fables*, both of which Leonardo knew. And as J. Beck has noted, it survives in Gian Paolo Lomazzo, who tapped into abiding Milanese traditions concerning Leonardo. Lomazzo recounts a dream that features a conversation between the artist and Paolo Giovio, who wrote the first biographical sketch of Leonardo. In this dream, Giovio relates "come ora il nibbio invidioso, che gli propri figlioli, acciò che grassi di lui più non divengano, cerca sempre de pizzare." See Beck, *I sogni di Leonardo*, n.6 and *The Dream of Leonardo*, n.5, quoting from Lomazzo's *Gli sogni e ragionamenti*, in R.P. Ciardi's ed. of Lomazzo's *Scritti sulle arti* 2v., Florence, 1973-74, p.11.

⁽⁵²⁾ See Vecce, 1998, p.250.

⁽⁵³⁾ Beck, *I sogni di Leonardo*, quotation on p.10; *The Dream of Leonardo*, p.187, without the quotation. The book itself is number 82 in Leonardo's book list in the Madrid Codices, where it is referred to as "Sogni di Daniello"; see Marinoni, 1974, p.242, Vecce, 1992, p.260. Beck, *The Dream of Leonardo*, cites several vernacular editions, the first published in 1487 in Bologna, and including a Florentine edition ca.1495.

his late father. That alternative meaning ultimately assumed the shape of a dream narrative, set in his earliest childhood, forecasting his own future greatness, but modeled on the prophetic morning dreams of his fellow Florentine, Dante Alighieri.