

The Strife of Love in a Dream in the Context of Christian Monasticism: An Example of *Lectio Divina* and a Secret Monastic Code

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Abstract

The present paper recognizes the pertinence of the monastic culture in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* or *Strife of Love in a Dream*, written by Francesco Colonna in 1499. Taking as a starting point the hypothesis that the author was a Venetian monk, the research demonstrates the omnipresent Christian context in a novel that traditionally has been considered “pagan” and identifies the religious profession of the author projected over the protagonist (Poliphilo). Monastic codes of secret knowledge, prayer and meditation are content in a literary masterpiece, that reveals inner battles of the soul like distractions of the mind. Topics about free will and morality, and the recovery of human dignity, based on the role of the senses involved in the cognitive process are some of the conclusions that stem from the study of this novel from a Christian perspective.

Keywords

Secret Knowledge, Spiritual Battle, Therapeutic Writing, Creative Remembrance

1. Introduction

The Strife of Love in a Dream (*Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* in its original title) is a famous illustrated novel of the Renaissance (1499) and maybe, the most misunderstood. On the surface, it is a simple love story where Poliphilo, the protagonist, walks in the company of nymphs who inhabit mysterious places. It is possible to observe different levels of meaning in those symbolic landscapes and fantastical architecture, which suggest a mystic experience. Through the centuries, different scholars have confronted the challenge of interpreting the enigma propounded by this beautiful book; if we presented a panoramic view of their at-

titude towards it, we could say that it has been a long way between contempt and rejection, until theories regarding the author's identity appeared, offering new and unexplored starting points for approaching the study novel's contents.

Two principal theories have arisen, recognizing two different men behind the name Francesco Colonna, author of the aforementioned novel: roman prince with literary gifts (Calvesi, 1965) or a *Venetian monk of dissolute character* (Pozzi & Ciapponi, 1964). However, both always remain within a neo-pagan cultural frame. On some occasions, when the theory of the Venetian monk as the author of this novel is preferred, it is *presented just as a controversial detail* that can explain the mystic tendency and erotic inclinations in the content and images of the book. It is important to consider that *The Strife of Love in a Dream* was written at a time of religious crisis, due to the relaxation of monastic customs in relation to the rules established by its founding fathers. As an example, some comments made by Erasmus of Rotterdam in *Enchomion moriae seu laus stultitiae* (printed in 1511) offer us a very critical image of the members of the mendicant orders in Europe.

[...] They consider it a sign of high piety to be so fasting from all kinds of studies that they don't even know how to read. In addition, they sing psalms, pronounced, but not understood, and thunder the temple with their voices of donkeys, they believe that they provide great delight to the ears of heavenly people [...] Although they certainly live far from the world, no one, without, however, he dares to annoy them, especially the mendicants, because by confessions, as they call them, they hold everyone's secrets. But it is not permissible for them to discover them, except when, after having drunk, they want to delight themselves with pleasant anecdotes, and yet they say things so that they are understood by conjecture, always keeping the names silent. But if someone irritated those drones, then he would take revenge in his sermons, designating the enemy by indirect allusions, so that no one would fail to understand them, except those who understand nothing. And he would not stop removing his skin as long as he did not throw a bone to cover his mouth (de Rotterdam, 1984).

Despite the irony by which certain aberrant customs are described in the life of some monks. Beyond the burlesque coloratura of the words, Erasmus's comments are evidence of those most recognizable aspects of monastic life at that time. Indeed, this article will focus on the importance attributed to the singing of the psalms, and the possession of a classified knowledge, shared by the exclusive members of this type of religious community: a secret code jealously guarded of the eyes of the common people, only known by the eye of faith.

Ariani and Gabriele have connected the classical erudition of the book with the immoral behavior of the monk-author as a determining and necessary factor for the creation of *The Strife of Love in a Dream* but have not gone further than that. A closer examination of related studies and articles demonstrates that, many of the scholars who have accepted the thesis of Francesco Colonna as a Venetian monk, have not considered the impact that a religious author would have for the novel in its deeper levels of meaning or interpretation. Even without

the certainty of whether the author of *The Strife of Love in a Dream* was a Roman prince or a sinner Venetian monk, the truth remains that, in both cases, the *Christian context is omnipresent*. However, there is no research emphasizing the importance of Christianity in the construction and function of the book. There are some studies that help us assert the pertinence of our proposal. Following the background given by these texts, this study does not keep the focus in a Classical or Humanistic frame as previous studies have done. Starting from the issue of authorship, this article seeks to establish the influence of early and medieval Christianity on the creation of this book, through the study of some monastic literary sources in relation to *The Strife of Love in a Dream*.

Once we embrace the thesis postulating that Francesco Colonna was a monk, it is possible to identify different aspects related to monastic spirituality, a religious context that, necessarily, would have inspired the construction of the book. However, we are not focusing on Francesco Colonna's life as an insubordinate monk with a talent for erotic literature. We follow the thesis of the monk but ask for the traces that the author's monastic life would have left in the composition and design of *The Strife of Love in a Dream*. In fact, if Colonna was a monk, and we take into consideration the general conclusions in Denis Turner's research in *Eros and Allegory. Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (1995), Colonna, through Poliphilo, the protagonist of his novel, would be celebrating his love towards God by way of erotic-spiritual writing:

[The monk] knows what he is doing, he intentionally denies to himself a genital outlet for his sexually and deliberately transfers his sexual energies upon a spiritual object [...] these men needed to talk about love [to God], so the human love was a model (Turner, 1995).

Poliphilo's desire is the desire Colonna himself is expressing towards God. Indeed, the passionate love that Poliphilo feels for the nymph Polia is a metaphor the fervent desire for God on the part of the monk-author, that is, Colonna. Liane Lefevre, in a chapter of "The Real Polyphile" in *Leon Battista Alberti's Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, provides us with the only visual proof of Colonna's monastic profession, because she suggests Leo Battista Alberti as the true identity behind Colonna's name. Without sharing her thoughts on this, we do agree with Lefevre regarding her point that Poliphilo is a fictional reflection of the author and, as such, shares his profession. Specifically, Lefevre remarks upon the aspect of the protagonist's clothes. This detail would be superfluous if we did not consider that men's fashion at that time was constituted by tights and short jackets, used without exception for all other male characters represented in the novel (Lefevre, 1997). According to the work of Lefevre, Poliphilo's toga is the usual clothes of an apostolic abbreviator of the roman curia (Figure 1). She compares the drawings of the book and the image of Poliphilo with the self-portrait of Alberti in the National Library of Rome and, in fact, Poliphilo does have the appearance of a servant of the Roman curia. The toga and its use have meaningful significance in relation to the monastic profession, as well as being the object of the protagonist's obsession. These antecedents reinforce the religious weight of such

clothing in Colonna's work. Some of the arguments offered by John Cassian in his *Institutions* (Casiano, 2012b) help us to understand the author's choosing of the toga as a garment to differentiate Poliphilo from other characters. Cassian was the monk responsible for transmitting Eastern Christian monasticism to the West during early medieval times—he established the rules regarding monks' attire, about which he commented to Saint Paul (1Tim 6: 8).

He says "*operimenta*", about what cover us; and not "dresses". That is, it is a garment that covers only the body, not a garment that promotes vanity. It is so simple that neither by the novelty of the color nor by the originality of the cut it is too esteemed by those who follow this kind of monastic life. By removing the embellishments adorned, on the other hand, the opposite situation that must be avoided is evident [...] an affected negligence. [...] Finally, keep away the worldly fashions [...] (Casiano, 2012b).

We can observe that the portrait of Alberti and the images of Poliphilo depict the idea of clothes that cover, that are not garments (*operimenta*). Furthermore, the negligence with the vestments explains, in part, the constant worry and shame that Poliphilo feels regarding the poor state of his toga throughout the whole novel. Certainly, those rags that put Poliphilo to shame are a projection of the sinful soul shared by the protagonist and author-monk.



Figure 1. Poliphilo's toga according to Lefevre (1997) Leon Battista's Alberti's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. At the center, Alberti's self-portrait clothes of an apostolic abbreviator of the roman curia. To the left, men's fashion with tights and short jackets. To the right, Poliphilo and his toga.

Additionally, we do not agree with Emanuela Kretzulesco-Quaranta when she claims that *The Strife of Love in a Dream* (1996) is not exactly a Christian book (Kretzulesco-Quaranta, 1996). On the contrary, we will demonstrate that inside this book it is possible to find some topics and biblical marks that belong to the Christian monastic tradition. The novel is in fact a Christian book as it is possible to identify themes and concerns that are distinctive to Christianity (fighting temptation, the doctrine of virtues and vices, the soul's salvation) as well as biblical marks belonging to the Christian context. N. Temple, in his article "The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphilli* as a Possible Model for Topographical Interpretations of Rome in the Early Sixteenth Century" (2012), emphasizes the existence of baptismal symbolism the book (with Poliphilo in front of the stream, see **Figure 2**), and also perceives a certain biblical style (Temple, 1998). We must also add to his observations that the mention of the dipsa snake and of the deer—both in chapter 2—constitute a set of biblical marks all originating from the *Book of Psalms*, a monk's biblical text par excellence. As established by William P. Brown in his book *Seeing the Psalms* (2002), the water source corresponds to the metaphor of God as fountain, a "fountain of living water" (Jer. 2: 13; 17: 13), which appears in the *Book of Psalms* 36 (35): 10, and of God as "stream" next to the deer, Ps. 42-43(41-42): 2. The deer is present too as a representation of the worshipping soul and prayer in Ps. 18 (17: 32-34). In contrast, the serpent (in its different aspects) is always the representation of wickedness or the trap on the path: the enemy of God and his good followers (see Ps. 91: 11-13; 58 (57): 5 and 140 (139): 4) (Brown, 2002). Furthermore, the mention of the holm oak in several chapters (1, 3, 5, 7, 17, 21, 29 and 38) of the novel of Colonna (2015) and the terebinth (chapter 21 and 27) (Colonna, 2015) reminds us of the importance given to botanic symbolism in the Sacred Scriptures. The same happens with Poliphilo's *raptus* towards the end of the tale (chapter 25) which, as a "spiritual flight", echoes Saint Paul about the "third heaven" (2 Cor. 12. 1-6). We can also add to our list of biblical marks that the conscientious descriptions of buildings, mechanisms, and objects (chapters 3-5; 9-10; 19, 22-24) a rhetorical matrix often used in monastic penitence and obey compunction.

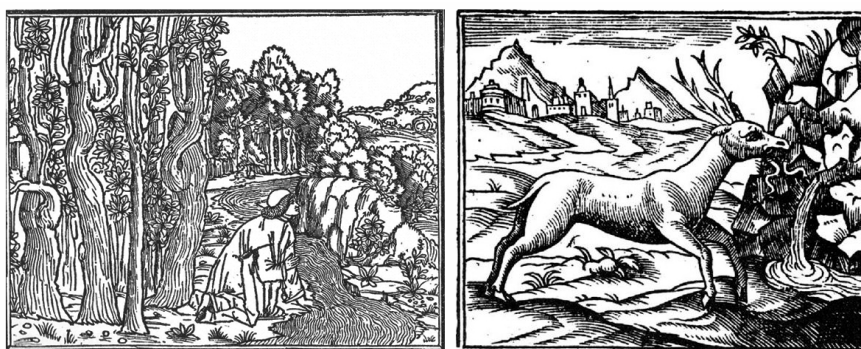


Figure 2. Poliphilo as a pious servant/deer comes to the fountain. To the left, Poliphilo genuflects in front of the stream. To the right, deer in an illustration of the *Physiologus* (Roma: XVI century), visiting the stream to purify itself from the serpent's venom.

[If] Compunction is an action of God in us, an act by which God awakens us, a shock, a blow, a “twinge” [...]. It is necessary, first and foremost, to become sensitive to that invisible action of God, an intervention so useful that it is not noticeable except through those new senses, those five “spiritual senses” [...]. [Thus’] We contemplate from afar the beauty of our Creator with a knowledge of love [God’s desire] [...] This adherence of the spirit is not the result of interpretation: it is a *taste*, a *flavor*, a wisdom and not a science (Leclercq, 2009).

Through the idea of “monastic culture”, Leclercq distinguishes between medieval monastic treatises and scholastic theology. With that, he proves the *continuity of Eastern patristic tradition and thought* (from the time of the Fathers from the desert during Paleo Christianity) *through medieval monasticism* (Western), even beyond the scholastic period. The survival and permanence of the precepts and codes developed between the second and fourth century, by writers such as Origen of Alexandria, Evagrius Ponticus, John Chrysostom, allows us to understand monastic mysticism as a sensorial experience of God, which in turn confirms Turner’s conclusions regarding erotic monastic language. These authors, coming from patristic sources, help us to interpret certain sensitive peculiarities present in the novel (such as the importance attributed to the senses and aesthetic sensitivity), which we envision as privileged access routes to divine love. The identification of this divine love with the loving inclination between Poliphilo and Polia, or the correspondence of this love as the path that every monk undertakes towards Almighty God, are affirmations that are based on a monastic tradition that sinks its roots in the legacy of the Desert Fathers.

The notion of “monastic culture”—according to Leclercq—assimilates the knowledge of God through reading or the *lectio divina*, whose register of the experience (*meditatio/contemplatio*) is captured in some creative writing named *compositio*. Through this process of text creation, the monk rescues everything undeserving of oblivion: his visions of God and celestial Jerusalem. We must note that medieval monasticism was an eschatological culture; memory was trained to project ideas regarding salvation and hope, images, and visions of the great beyond (Leclercq, 2009).

The only legitimate desire is to possess God here below and always: here in the realm of pain and thanks to him; later, in heaven [...] Precisely in order to reach God, it is necessary *to love death, to desire it, to love it*, which is not an obstacle to suffer and fear it for it; It is necessary to accept it, to feel in the hour when God sends it to us as a means of going to him (Leclercq, 2009).

This did not prevent the exercise of a “humanistic spirituality”, which knew how to Christianize all classic material that the cloisters were able to keep in their libraries. In this sense, the notion of “monastic culture” and its literary characteristics can be applied to the study of Colonna’s novel, without erasing or standing in opposition with studies where a humanistic and neopagan view prevails. Colonna’s work can be inscribed within the margins that define medieval monastic culture, because in *The Strife of Love in a Dream*, we can observe the

key role played by physical senses, which give an account of the knowledge of God through allegory, figures and poetic icons of biblical origin.

2. The *Lectio Divina* and the Prudence Principle

2.1. The Strife of Love in a Dream and the *Lectio Divina*

In her article “Not Before Either Known or Dreamt of: *The Hypnerotomachia Poliphili and the Craft of Wonder*” Raffaella Fabiani Giannetto (2015) proposes the study of this novel as a product of monastic rhetoric. She follows the main ideas developed in the publications of Mary Carruthers between the years 1998 and 2008, who contextualizes the tradition of the art of memory inside monasticism (Fabiani, 2015). Indeed, in the introduction to the anthology *The Medieval Craft of Memory* by Carruthers and Ziolkowsky (Carruthers & Ziolkowsky 2004), the creational function of the monastic meditation, a creative principle that consisted in the re-combination of mental pictures during the internal process of recollection, is emphasized. Starting from this, for Giannetto, *The Strife of Love in a Dream* is a demonstration of the power of *phantasia*, a *compositio* that represents one of the steps in the production of new mental images, which in turn facilitate the invention of new thoughts and ideas revolving around God during the meditation (within the parameters set by monastic tradition). In fact, *Lectio Divina* comprehends the cognitive-spiritual process that depends directly on the workings of memory. We agree with Giannetto’s conclusions; nevertheless, it is urgent to emphasize the value of the practice of *Lectio Divina* as surrounded by *meditatio* in Colonna’s work.

Lectio Divina is an ancient methodology used by the Fathers of Eastern monasticism. It is a *method of thinking and praying* in relation to Sacred Texts, and it is done not in an intellectual way, but as gradual approximation to God in different spiritual stages: *lectio*, *oratio/contemplatio*, and *meditatio*. Duncan Robertson in the “Preface” of his book *Lectio Divina. The Medieval Experience of Reading* (2011) explains that *Lectio Divina* is a type of enigmatic communication between the one praying and God. His comments suggest that *Lectio Divina* involves the current interpretation of the biblical passages, where the reader participates in the (re)production of the (new) text (Robertson, 2011). Just as we did with Giannetto, by applying Mary Carruthers’ research to the analysis of *The Strife of Love in a Dream*, we can say that if we solely observed ‘monastic meditation’ as it is present within the narrative, we would be underestimating the power that prayer has in the book by Colonna as a material product. “Monastic meditation” as a composition is manifested both at the narrative level as well as at the material level of the monk’s work.

Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini in his *The Joy of the Gospel. Meditations for Young People* (1994) asserts that the different stages of the *Lectio Divina* can be grouped in a triad (*lectio*; *meditatio*; *oratio/contemplatio*) (Martini, 1994), the same organization that Saint Guigo II the Carthusian systematized in his *Scala Claustralium*, where defined the *lectio divina* as a process with steps or stages. Indeed, Martini observes a *concordance between these stages of spirituality with*

the three subdivisions of prudence—memory, intellect, and foresight or will—determined before in Cicero’s *De inventione* II (1991). The Ciceronian explanation is located within the frame of the tripartite “appreciable things” (virtue, science, truth) that determine moral actions. Prudence belongs to the “genre of truth”, which the philosopher also called “honesty” (Cicerón, n.d.). After, with monasticism, the honesty was the Holy truth or the memory of God, widely developed by Saint Augustine in the book X of *Confessions* (Agustín, 2006), and his treatise *De Trinitate* (Agustín, 1956). In this sense-monastic prudence and memory, during early and medieval Christianity depend on the search for divine truth, which is “a moral obligation as well as scholarly necessity” (Carruthers, 2008), the condition of moral perfection and not an intellectual practice. The *habitus*:

All virtues and vices are habits, good or bad [...] *habitus* [...] makes possible, the virtues of prudence or moral judgement [...] Memory itself is neither perception nor conception, but condition, *habitus* (Greek *hexis*) or “affection” (*pathos*). This basic connection between the process of sensation which ends memory, and that of human emotional life is fundamental for understanding the crucial role memory was thought to have in the shaping of moral judgment and excellence of character (Carruthers, 2008).

2.2. The *Oratio* of Poliphilo and Its Biblical Sources

Oratio and *meditatio*, together, are aspects of monastic tradition present inside the novel, specifically as stages of *Lectio Divina* that are based on the *ruminatio* of the Psalter. Prayer and meditation both contribute to the rhetorical formalism of prayer and to its innovation. There is a brief passage in chapter 2 of *The Strife of Love in a Dream* which still has not been evaluated by scholars (Ariani & Gabriele, 2015): the prayer of Poliphilo where this tradition is evident. We quote the prayer of Poliphilo as found in the original version by Colonna:

O Diespiter máximo. optimo et omnipotente et opitulo, si dalli divini suffragii la humanitate per iuste prece merita sufragio et debi essere exaudita, al praesente, di qualunque fragile ofensa dolente. te supplice invoco, summo patre, degli superi medioximi et inferi aeterno rectore, che de questi mei mortali pericoli et praesente horrore me ad la tua immensa deitate piaqui liberare et finire questa mia dubiosa vita per altro migliore fine (Colonna, 2015).

The humble invocation of Poliphilo towards Father-God is part of a rhetorical formalism of prayer, relative to the monastic tradition. Based on the first epistle to Timothy 2, 1-4, Origen of Alexandria recognizes the different parts that constitute prayer in his treatise *Sobre la oración* 12.2 (Orígenes, 1999). Tertullian finds inspiration for his treatise *On the Prayer* in John 17, 1-26. The adjective “omnipotente” is a pagan legacy to Christian popular expressions. Poliphilo asks for divine kindness to alleviate his suffering but, although the prayer is over, we have reasons to suppose that the religious practice continues as meditation, in other words, it adopts a creative appearance. Indeed, chapter, as a whole, would be a concentrated expression of the core of the *lectio divina* (*oratio* and *medita-*

tio) and its most frequent enemy: curiosity. To summarize the chapter, after the contact established by the thirsty and tired Poliphilo with God, and the symbolic finding of the brook as a divine answer to his pleadings, the rest of the narrative obscures any religious manifestation to a large degree. The reason: the mind of the reader is aligned with the precarious concentration of Poliphilo—a sinner monk (1995)—when he listens to a Doric song that moves him away from the precious source of water. In this way, when Poliphilo fails to find the music’s origin, and he is aware again of his physical fragility, the reader interprets his final speech—at the end of the chapter—as the whining of a frustrated lover. Nevertheless, the description of the place where Poliphilo falls asleep again, the hunting metaphor, the self-comparison with a wounded deer, and his allusion to the story of the poisonous snake, configure a fragmented narrative that can be explained when some Christian marks are uncovered. In other words, his meditative act—which follows the prayer quoted above—is materialized as a re-elaboration of specific contents of the Psalter.

Monasticism considers *prayer as a tool against curiosity and distraction*, where the *oratio* is configured by the *Psalter*, which constitute a particular form of praying. Evagrius Ponticus (fourth century) is very specific in his treatise *The Prakticos* (1995) about establishing a clear difference between *two types of prayer*: the intellectual one, and the *prayer that sings the Psalms*. The second is a regular practice for the *beginner monk*, who still cannot get an intellectual degree of communication with God. So, if we accept that Poliphilo is a monk (as the author would be), and follow this early categorization of prayer and considering the small degree of perfection of the soul of Poliphilo—because he is a monk who has fallen in love—then, we can suppose that his prayer is impregnated by *ruminated psalms*. In this respect, Colombás in the chapter *Biblia y Oración* comments the following about the monks:

Their book of prayer par excellence was the Psalter. As is well known, the Psalms constituted the main and more characteristic part of the canonical offices, which no monk stopped reciting; [it was] their prayer, their “ruminantion [...]”. He also added categorically: A monk who did not pray the psalms in public and private, who did not know them by heart, who was not imbued with its feelings, was simply inconceivable (Colombás, 2004).

In addition, it is necessary to indicate that *ruminatio* is, superficially, the repetition of words from a Sacred Scripture, but in a more accurate fashion, it is the act of reading as digestion. The assimilation of biblical contents blurs the outlines of these texts but keeps enough of their context so that the intended reader recognizes the stories and sacred passages. Claire Barbetti, in *Ekphrastic Medieval Vision*, called these almost imperceptible details “cultural markers”, “objects” that are “laced with meanings, stories and traditions that form a narrative” (Barbetti, 2011). This legacy of *Psalter* inside the novel has been observed in some ways by Temple, in a brief passage of his article, where he asserts that some scenes from the novel (all from chapter 2) have been “described in almost Biblical terms” (Temple, 1998). Although he does not mention the prayer of Poliphilo

lo, he highlights that the following scene (where thirsty Poliphilo is crouched in front the brook) may suggest an Early Christian sacrament of baptism. His argument considers that the visual representations in the baptisteries have been inspired by *Psalm* 41 (42). It is surprising that Temple says nothing about the self-comparison of Poliphilo to a deer and its iconography, which specifically links the novel with verses one and two. In fact, the psalm declares: “My *soul cries* out for you, God, like a *hart* [male deer] crying out for *streams of water*; My soul is *thirsty for God*, the God that is alive. When can I come and see the face of God?” This early baptismal scene in *The Strife of Love in a Dream* is also depicted in the woodcut of the Aldine edition (**Figure 2**). The similarities of the physical and spiritual sufferings expressed in the prayer of Poliphilo with *Psalm* 41 are something more than a mere coincidence. The allusion of the deer is the result of a meditation of the *Psalm*, and its literary recreation by the author, monk (Colonna):

Mi riposavo giacendo sul fianco sinistro, gli spiriti indeboliti, respirando l'aria fresca con le labbra raggrinzite e più afanosamente del cervo che fugge stanco. lacerato ai fianchi dai morsi dei cani feroci, il petto trafitto dalla freccia. la testa possente dalle corna ramosse appoggiata sul debole dorso: ormai allo stremo, incapace di rimanere eretto si abbandona sfinito, piegandosi moribondo sulle agili ginocchia (Colonna, 2015).

Poliphilo lying down resembles the dying deer. Furthermore, the truth is that his affliction and martyrdom have monastic antecedents. Evagrius Ponticus depicts in his work *The Praktikos* that the disease of the passionate soul—of the negligent monk—is an internal battle against thoughts that trouble the heart. The practice of prudence is the battle that occurs during prayer. In another treatise, *De oratione*, Evagrius *urges to pray with compunction* (1995) with tears for the sins committed. But also, he warns that “[i]f your intellect wanders during prayer, you are not praying as a monk yet, [you] still belong to the world instead, occupying yourself in decorating the outer tent” (Ps. 44 (43)) (Póntico, 1995).

This idea seems adequate to Poliphilo's emotional profile. The Elizabethan version of the *Hypnerotomachia* (1592) shows a more evident religious intention than the original text, thus emphasizing the connection with Evagrius' thinking:

Wherefore more trembling then in moifture, being throwlye feared with the furious north winde, *I lifted vp my hart to God*, deferring as *Achemenides* being afraide of the horrible Cyclopt rather to be flame by the hands of *Aenueas* his enemies, rather then to fuffer fo odious a death. *And my deuoute prayer, fincerely vinited to a contrite heart, powring out a fountaine of teares* with a fteadfaft beliefe to be deliured. I found myfelfe in a fhorte fpace gotten at libertie, like a new day crept out of a darke and tempeftuous night (Colonna, 2009).

There is a contrast in how the strength of Poliphilo's feelings are portrayed: the idea of praying with tears and a contrite heart clearly describes a critical stage of the *Lectio Divina* inside the novel, while the original version and its successive translation into Italian exhibit the prayer directly through the voice

and words of Poliphilo. The translation into English complements the original version because it exposes or uncovers elements associated with monasticism. The contrite heart and tears are products of the wandering of the soul. Expressions such as “contrite heart”, “fountain of tears” were emotional manifestations, whose origin dates back to *Dialog* 34 that belongs a treatise of Gregory I: there distinguish different types of compunction (Magno, 2010). Consequently, the writing of expressions such as the “*incerteza di questa mia vita*” by Colonna, perfectly would mean the spiritual imbalance (or imprudence) of his protagonist and, at the same time, the manifestation of a monastic anxiety, constantly shared by the author and his literary creature.

2.3. *Lectio Divina*: Battle Path of Pilgrim (Poliphilo)

Lectio Divina (in a relationship with prudence) is a continuous path of approaching the divine, a way of walking towards God, which makes *the activity of the monk comparable to that of the pilgrim*. The monk shares with the pilgrim the ideas of path, route, travel, and way. Their places, however, are different: for the first one, it is inside the cloister, the second one walks over the world. The routes of the monk are determined by *lectio divina*, meanwhile the pilgrim has the name of the places from the Bible as sacred guide. In the same way, some authors have identified similar aspects: The *vaghezza* by Oettinger (Oettinger, 2011; Lefevre, 1997) notices in the novel a world of *extra-vagance* or the necessity of transiting beyond the delineated path. On the other hand, links this matter to the routes of memory and the use of diagrams:

The “measurements” are an act of contrition, routed through an architectural mnemonic schema, which serves as *its via*. [...] [Then, the description of] the Tabernacle diagram is conceived to be initiatory to the text holding the traditional *position* of an inventive, meditational *pictura*[mental image related *phantasia*] (Carruthers, 1998).

From the quote, we have managed to relate pilgrimage routes and monastic diagrams with the memory and, therefore, to all these elements with the virtue of prudence and the exercise of pray. The monastic practice of pilgrimage in *The Strife of Love in a Dream* involves a battle that every stained soul must resist if the pilgrim yearns for perfection or purity. These concepts resemble very closely those outlined, once again, in the theology of Evagrius Ponticus:

Rest is bound to wisdom and work to prudence; because one cannot acquire knowledge without a struggle, nor can one fight righteously without prudence. To the latter, in fact, has been entrusted the mission of opposing the wrath of the demons, imposing upon the powers of the soul to act according to its nature and prepare the way toward wisdom (Póntico, 1995).

Ponticus connects prudence or *phronesis* (moral thinking) with an arduous labor, a stage before wisdom. The fatigue of walking is a condition prior to the sickness of the soul (or heart), as is the case with Poliphilo a condition that, from our perspective, shares with Colonna, its creator. In fact, Nilus of Ancyra (fifth century) took this thinking in his treatise *Of Asceticism*, indicating that the pri-

mary goal of any spiritual father of novices was “to clear the view” and “to guide the learner monk to walk on the path of the golden mean (de Ancira, 1994)”. The monk—in contrast to Poliphilo—is a pilgrim with an additional quality, *nepsis*, which explains the condition of auto vigilance of the monks over their hearts and their sobriety, and which directly depends on the virtue of prudence. Nilus indicates how to keep away *evil thoughts* with an architectural analogy, recommending to protect the purity of heart by “setting up an iron wall around it” (Ex. 4: 3), because if this vigilance is neglected:

[Those who] neglect the vigilance over themselves, allowing the images of old fantasies to begin again to crawl with the spontaneity of certain sprouts. If they are given space and they are not stopped, they gradually invade our intelligence, introducing in ourselves the combat against the passions which, once they have been defeated, renew once more this form of life [...] So, for it to not occur [...] do not follow them, so that after having removed them from you, the soul does not fall into the habit of delighting in such fantasies, returning again to the old evil (de Ancira, 1994).

Nilus, while commenting what happens when prudence disappears, seems to be describing the character and adventures of Poliphilo throughout the entire story. This kind of *invisible war* must conclude with an *awake soul*, ponderous and sober, two concepts that finally explain what prudence is. Nilus alludes to *Ezekiel*, specifically to a passage that warns of siege to Jerusalem. In this way, the heart of a monk is a walled city constantly in danger, and a monk, a sentinel above a tower in a fort. However, Poliphilo falls asleep in chapter II, he is not awake, and what is more, *vestiges of the invisible battle in his heart can be found in many passages of the novel which depict architecture in ruins*: the foreground of the Pyramid (chapter 3) or the Cemetery of Lovers with the architecture of the Polyandron and the Epitaphs (chapter 19). When the protagonist arrives to the island of Cythera (chapter 19), the ruins have disappeared in the dreamscape, and prudence comes back to Poliphilo. As prudence is a goal of the *lectio divina*, so it is the horizon to which the protagonist of *The Strife of Love in a Dream* walks towards. From this Christian perspective, prudence is the sentinel (virtue) of the monk’s heart. It is necessary then, to establish bibliographical antecedents that present the presence of prudence inside this novel.

3. Monastic Prudence with the Appearance of *Festina Lente*

Comments about *Los Jardines de Ensueño* by Kretzulesco-Quaranta (1996) appear inside the chapter “L’autore del Polifilo,” as part of the critical edition by Ariani and Gabriele (Ariani & Gabriele, 2015). Kretzulesco-Quaranta interprets the whole of the novel as a path of improvement or “the visionary journey of Poliphilo” and suggests that his trip depicts the words of the *Gospel of John* “I am the way, truth, and life.” (John 14: 6-9). She uncovers a secret behind the iconography of the motto *Festina Lente* (Figure 3), translating it to “make haste slowly” (rush slowly) or “be patient”. She presents a unique interpretation of the anchor with the dolphin, giving us a Christian perspective of this emblem:

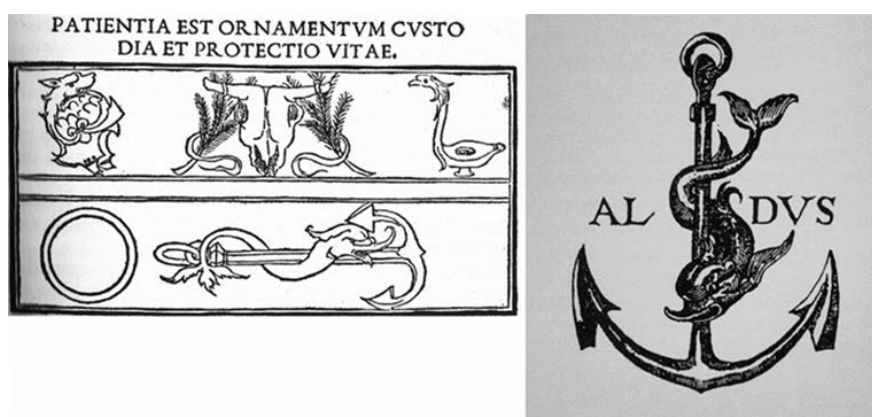


Figure 3. *Festina lente*. To the left, original emblem of the novel *The Strife of Love in a Dream*, as a hieroglyph in horizontal position. To the right, adaptation of the emblem by Aldus Manutius, as a typographic seal in vertical position.

[...] The anchor symbolizes the stability provided by reflection, while the dolphin symbolizes the speed with which intuition leads the spirit towards the understanding of mysteries. This ancient symbol [the dolphin], adopted by Christians, became the “fish” that represents Christ. The anchor acquired the sense of hope offered by redemption (Kretzulesco-Quaranta, 1996).

To our surprise, inside the research by Ariani and Gabriele there does not exist any observation about this unique understanding of this adage, a strange omission if we consider the broad interest they show towards it, and that they have even identified it as the creed of Francesco Colonna. Nonetheless, these authors do recognize prudence, and propose the motto to be an “*avvertimential-prudenza*” that works against the *curiosità* of Poliphilo and his foolish exercise of the senses. In the same vein, the “*medietas aristotelico-ciceroniano*” or “*mesotes aristotelico*” has also been reported in their study of the novel, as a rule that orders the action of the protagonist (Ariani & Gabriele, 2015). For Ariani and Gabriele, *Festina Lente* applies to amorous concerns, as an alliance between foresight and pleasure; for this, they carefully follow ideas from *Ethica Nicomachea* 6.1106b (Aristóteles, 1998), specially on “*medietas [aurea mediocritas] a modalità cognoscitiva degli arcane della generazione. perceptibili solo se l’equilibrio corpo-anima*” (Ariani & Gabriele, 2015). The “*aurea mediocritas*”, or golden mean in English is the relative middle or the middle point that avoids excess and defect a concern which was also developed inside the monastic context. Saint Augustine in his treatise *De Trinitate*, XII. XIV wrote about *medietas* as a “*right balance*” related to our need for science despite being an imperfect image of God’s wisdom. Following ciceronian thinking, Augustine determined that science could fulfill an edificatory function if the use of temporal things is moderated. He also talked about prudence (as well as justice, strength, and temperance) to keep away evil (Agustín, 1956). To summarize, we can establish that the adage *Festina Lente* works in the Christian context in connection with the virtue of prudence understood as a point of balance, with Aristotelian and Ciceronian roots, but also available from Christian sources. Now, we need to examine paral-

lel antecedents regarding the possibility of this motto being a type of signal intended “only for initiates”.

3.1. Prudence as Symbol of Christ

In his book *El Monacato Primitivo*, García M. Colombás reviews different appellatives for the Latin word *monachos*, or monk. During the beginnings of Christianity, one of those appellatives was the expression *adelphos frater*, or “brother of Christ” (Colombás, 2004). *A-delphos* in its Greek roots means brother as well. *Delphos* from Greek *delphys* is relative to “dolphin”, element conforms the emblem *festina lente*. In its Indo-European roots (*gwelbh*). It alludes to a *womb, matrix of the female* or offspring (Roberts & Pastor, 2017). This explains why they used the word “dolphin” to name the mammal which, living with fish in an underwater environment, is different from them by way of its birth. Although it is true that in Greek the term *ichthys* (fish, and not dolphin).

Housed within itself the acronym “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour” by which the first Christians identified themselves in the times of their persecution (Longman et al., 2015), we must understand that they were “fraternal” communities sharing a creed which made them all brothers, sons of a same matrix: the Church. Furthermore, they shared having been born from a woman’s womb with the son of God. With time, the figures and positive symbolic contents of the fish and dolphin were assimilated. In this way, the connection among the ancient Christian signal of *ichthus* with the dolphin is revealed. Additionally, the link between womb and dolphin is easy to explain through the Latin notion of *vesica piscis* (fish bladder), a symbol in which the fish is a *sacred container*. About the latter, it is interesting to remember the passage of the *Book of Tobit* 6: 2-9 in the Old Testament, when a fish captured by Tobias is a true receptacle of miracles, especially the liquid from its gallbladder that cleans the sick eyes of his father. In this sense, *adelphos*—from dolphin, meaning womb as a receptacle—represents a monk who aspires to improve the practice of virtue (prudence) in order to make his body an apt vessel for the soul; pure and free of pleasures (as a walled citadel, according to Nilus of Ancyra). Thus, we can conclude that *adelphos frater* shares symbolical contents with the iconography of *Festina Lente*.

Regarding these ideas, it is pertinent to consider the Christology developed by Origen of Alexandria because he clarifies the way the body was conceived and interpreted during the early times of monasticism. Origen was responsible for Christ being considered as an incarnated verb or the son of God inside a human body for the first time in history. Christ is a way to redemption (John 14: 6-9) that the rational being chooses freely. So, we can observe that *Christ offers redemption or healing in two symbolical shapes: as a path and as a container*. The latter healing is as the dolphin (as a womb), fish (*vesica piscis*) or chalice. In Origen’s, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom* (1999), we can find the topic of redemption linked to death, and especially, with the symbol of the container. The *redemptive death is a spiritual cure whose symbol is the calyx*.

[...] “How can I pay back to the Lord all the good that he does to me?” (Ps. 116: 2) And the answer to the question about what to give back to the Lord for all he has received from him is found in these words: “I will lift the salvation cup and invoke the name of Lord” (Ps. 116: 3). Martyrdom is commonly called the “calyx of salvation” as found in the Gospel. When those who wanted to sit to the right and left of Jesus in his kingdom sighed for such a great honor, the Lord said to them, “Can you drink the cup that I will drink (Orígenes, 1999)?”

The calyx is the symbol of martyrdom because “[a]ll martyrdom, for whatever reason consummated with death, is called calyx”, argues Origen. The opposite situation would be death in the sepulcher or tomb: “How terrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead people’s bones and every kind of impurity” (Matt. 23: 27). From these ideas is possible to affirm that the calyx is a Christian symbol opposite to the Polyandron in the novel. To the concupiscent bodies (the lovers) the Christian healing is denied. Calyx and tomb are both containers but, from a monastic point of view, they are very different. The calyx is both: Christ and the symbol of the imitation of Christ. It is what it means to be a monk (a follower who imitates Christ and his martyrdom). The calyx is the symbol of the redemptive death by martyrdom that appears in many pages of *The Strife of Love in a Dream*, aesthetically organizing the texts with the form of a cup. This strategy is known as *technopaegnia* (Figure 4). Eftymia Priki in *Crossing the Text/Image Boundary: The French Adaptations of Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (2012) identifies this technique, but she does not yet encourage linking this specific form with the meaning of the novel, and neither does she propose a theory about the possible causes and functions of the *technopaegnia* inside *The Strife of Love in a Dream* (Priki, 2012). In *El Caligrama. de Simmias a Apollinaire*, D’Ors (1976) comments that Aldus Manutius was the one to create this new type of cup or chalice-shaped calligram without any classic precedent, and that it first appeared in the *princeps* edition of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (D’Ors, 1976). Every symbolic aspect regarding the cup or chalice—relative to Christ’s death and martyrdom—feeds into the Christian contents already identified by Kretzulesco-Quaranta in *Festina Lente*. Thus, we can say that this emblem as used within *The Strife of Love in a Dream* contains a hidden message of sorts. It means that motto *Festina Lente* could work as a secret code, being reinforced through the image of the chalice in the diagrams appearing in the printed texts of Colonna’s book. In regards to conveying messages that had to be de-codified only by a group of chosen readers, we have antecedents in numerous passages of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite’s oeuvre (Areopagita, 2007), which reveal his *monastic zeal* and his anxiety to protect Christian teachings from profane ears. In *De Divinis Nominibus* I. 8, where Pseudo-Dionysius said: “Speaking of the profane, do not deal with them the divine things either by word or in any other way”; In *Coelestis Hierarchia* II. 2 you will find: “[...] It is very convenient for the treatises of the mysteries to cover them with ineffable and sacred

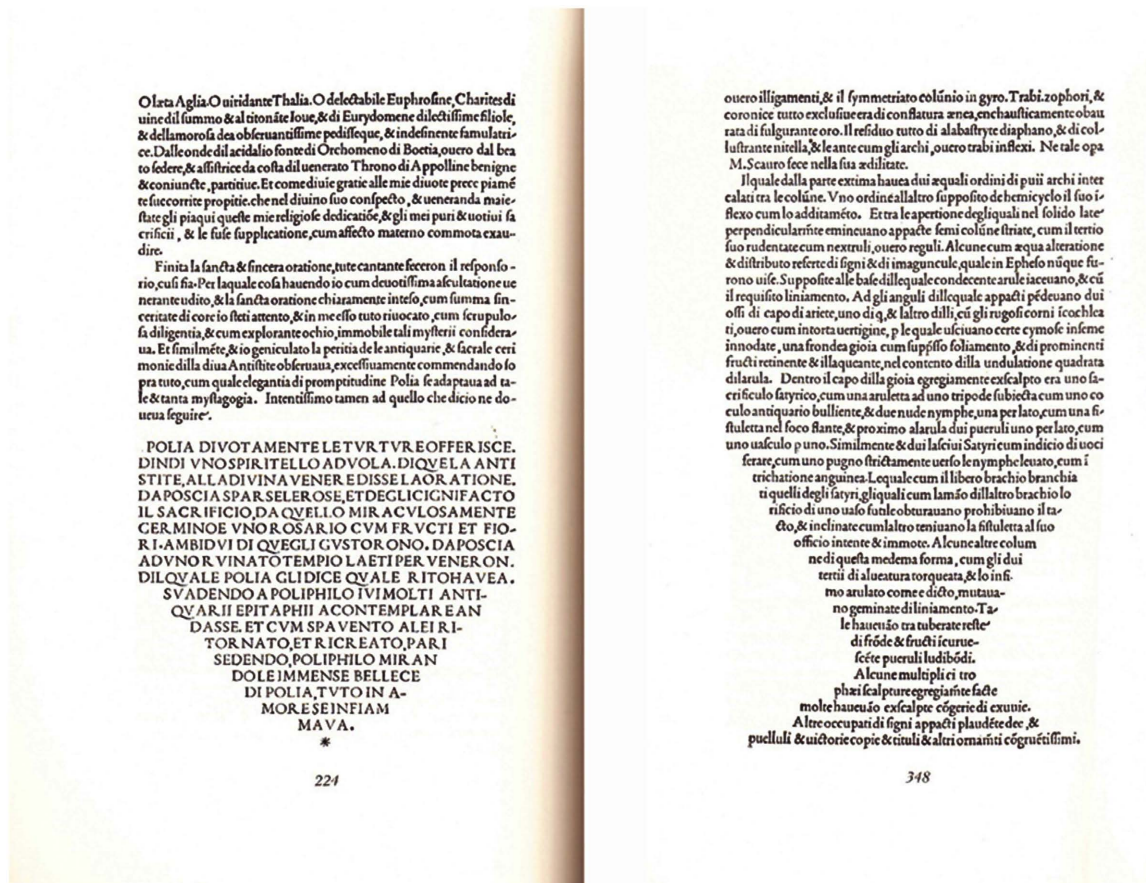


Figure 4. *Technopaegnia* inside *The Strife of Love in a Dream*. Diagrams of the texts in shape of a chalice or cup, symbol of martyrdom. Identifying code of monastic character.

enigmas and that the common people cannot access the sacred and secret truth [...], and “Keep the holy things in the recesses of your mind, preserving them as one against the multiplicity of the profane [...], *Coelestis Hierarchia* II. 5 (Areopagita, 2007). In the treatise *On Compunction* I. 6 John Chrysostom shares the same ideas with the Areopagite (Crisóstomo, 1997). The legacy of the thought of the Areopagite in the novel by Colonna has also been noted by Gabriele, although for a different reason. According to Gabriele in *De diuinis nominibus*: “il teólogo ripensa infatti l’idea neoplatonica della luce secondo una gerarchia del l’illuminazione, la cui crescente o decrescente effusion e corrisponde al progressivo innalzarsi o allontanarsi delle creature dal Creatore in una universale sinergia [...] (Ariani & Gabriele, 2015).”

Through the quotes presented, we can warn the pious zeal of the Areopagite illustrates a typical monastic attitude, which makes it possible to argue that the motto *Festina Lente* works as a clue that only the initiated Christian could understand. Indeed, Aldus Manutius used *Festina Lente* as a trademark for the first time, in vertical position in 1502. Curiously, it was with the edition *Poetae Christiani Veteres*. The antecedents of this emblem were the editions of *Hypnerotomachia*, and the *Adages* by Erasmus, who mention it. Helen Barolini, in her

Aldus and His Dream Book: An Illustrated Essay remarks upon some bibliographical details of his life. When he fell seriously ill, he promised to consecrate his life to God if he got healthy. Barolini argues that Aldus kept “a monkish and austere life for so long” and that the change in his lifestyle is surprising. Barolini explains that Aldus was led to marriage due to monetary concerns (Barolini, 1992). These religious antecedents support the idea of a signal for the initiated behind the idea and emblem of *Festina Lente*.

In conclusion, we can say that the calligram of the chalice or cup inside *The Strife of Love in a Dream* is an image of Colonna’s monastic prudence projected onto this novel and, at the same time, it functions as a clue left to the Christian reader, who knows the symbolic implications of *Festina Lente* in this writing. This clue is only for the initiated, who looks with the “eyes of faith”. Regarding the latter, it is important to add that the original expression is from the Latin *oculis fidei* by Saint Jerome, *Epistle* 108.10: “[...the] idea that the human eye can see beyond physical appearances to gain a fuller perception of biblical events or figures is important for understanding the spirituality of pilgrims” (Frank, 2000). Keeping these considerations in mind, we can identify blurred biblical sources in different passages of the novel.

Analyzing the symbolic Christian elements, and the philosophical antecedents inside *Festina Lente*. It can be said that the emblem shows how associative thought could work in the creation of hidden meanings within the novel. In this regard, Mary Carruthers argues that “[t]he associations proceed with mnemonic artistry”, making a “secret”—she adds—that the mind can discover through monastic praxis, which the author links only with the *meditatio*. The process of composition and interpretation involving the *meditatio* “[...] becomes a test of our communal identification because it is a proof of our educated memory” (Carruthers, 1998). We assume that *Festina Lente* (regarding the cross-anchor, Christ-dolphin, cup-redemption) functions as a “cultural marker” (as mentioned above) in a nod to the intended reader of the novel: a Christian, and specifically, a monk. That would be the reason why Colonna did not have the necessity of directly mentioning biblical references in his oeuvre; the biblical text can be discovered behind the blurred shapes just for the right reader: the prudent one.

3.2. *Festina*: Magical Word for the Practice of Prayer

The *Lectio Divina* includes the practice of continuous prayer. It sometimes occurs that *oratio* contains traces from the *Psalms*, a clear signal of the monastic prayer of the beginner. It is Evagrius Ponticus who determined that to sing psalms (*salmodiar* in Spanish) was the image of the multiform wisdom, the prayer of the impure monk (not the contemplative monk). In his treatise *De oratione* he distinguished two kinds of prayer: the practical, characterized by quantity (we can say he is referring to the practice of *ruminatio*), and opposite to contemplative prayer, intellectual and qualitative. The first one is the prayer done by beginner monks. The main function of singing psalms was healing the

soul and cleaning it from the passions. The final goal was to avoid the distractions of the monks' mind. This kind of prayer can be found in *The Strife of Love in a Dream*. The necessity of *continuous prayer* entails keeping the mind only in the "memory of God" during the *oratio* or keeping away distracting thoughts. John Cassian had been severely worried about this quotidian problem (call it distraction or spiritual lukewarmness) inside the cloisters. In some one of his conferences, he asks for advice from Abba Isaac. The answer from the desert monk was simple: to use a verbal formula "*Domine ad adiuuandum me festina*" [God hurry to help/save me]. This phrase was for him an "object[ive] of meditation" which must *always be before our eyes*. Note, as well, is the presence of the term *festina*. We can interpret this "object" as a picture of the walls protecting the citadel that will be besieged. This "meditation object" was useful when:

[...] Our soul, immersed in this ignorance and such a multitude of obstacles and difficulties, walks wandering and as in a continuous drunkenness. It runs without a compass, from object to object, without stopping at any. If a spiritual thought comes more by chance than by his research, he feels unable to hold it for long. The ideas happen one after the other as in an uninterrupted flow, accepting them all, without selecting them (Casiano, 2012a).

This quotation seems to be talking about Poliphilo, wandering since the beginning of the novel, and about his fragile spiritual condition, as well as the verbiage of every description of the objects parading before his eyes. Surprisingly for us, Abba Isaac also compares this stage of the distraction of the mind (called monastic curiosity) to dreaming.

Because sometimes it happens that, after having wandered for so long and lost in our prayer, we try to return to ourselves as from a deep sleep, awakening from our dream. We try to *renew then the memory of God*, which was already drowned in us. But the long effort this entails fatigues us, and before we have recovered our past thoughts, attention gasps, sinking us into dissipation and oblivion. Our spirit has not been able, retracting within itself, to conceive any supernatural idea (Casiano, 2012a).

The words of Abba Isaac are attractive, not only because of how *The Strife of Love* elapses during our protagonist's dream, or because it highlights the traditional link between dreaming and the forgetting of God in Christian thought. From our perspective, the interview of Cassian to Abba Isaac suggests the difference between two kinds of thought inside the Christian mind: that of the *supernatural of the sacred conception*, which occurs when the prayer is confronted successfully, and that of the *marvel of mundane creation* when concentration fails during prayer. In other words, a lost mind expresses itself through the powerful images of human *phantasia* (Aristóteles, 2003) because its thoughts have been defeated and thrown out of balance. The situation is clearly depicted in the novel with the procession of buildings, incredible objects, and divine characters that Poliphilo perceives and describes Colonna's *compositio*.

We can corroborate this with the detailed description of the pyramid (chapter

3), the gate (chapter 6), and the architectonical structures in the Eleuterilyde Kingdom (chapters 7-10) with temple of Venus Phyzoa (chapter 17), the Polyandron (chapter 18) and Cythera Island (gardens, amphitheater, Sepulchre of Adonis, chapters 12-14).

The Strife of Love in a Dream, with the absence of mind or vagueness incarnated in the author-protagonist, is a novelistic evidence of the *real existence of monastic anxiety regarding keeping away distractions (curiositas) from the mind*. We suspect that the regularity of this perturbation in the life of a monk could have inspired the creation of this book, although the context of Cassian's writings was exclusively religious in contrast to the culture surrounding Colonna. As a result of these preliminary conclusions, we can suppose that there is an essential moralizing function in the novel, depicted through Poliphilo's urgent necessity for returning to a stage of prudence or balance. We imagine that the religious author left to us the choice regarding which is the correct path of creation (the sacred one, or the profane with the richness of its images). From our perspective, *The Strife of Love in a Dream* seems to offer the experience of prudence for both ways (sacred and mundane things): as a virtue that favors an attitude based on the organization of the different (opposite) elements that constitute *the process of memory*.

3.3. *Lectio Divina*, Reading and Memory

Robertson (2011)'s research helps us to understand that the study of the *Lectio Divina* today must be the actualization of "the discussion of the process of reading rather than the result". His ideas, when applied to our novel, allow us to interpret the operation of memory as a pilgrimage on both paths; moving far away or closer to God (the above mentioned sacred or mundane paths). If we follow Robertson's reasoning, the *process of reading The Strife of Love in a Dream would imply a creative memory process* (or creative remembrance) that requires a slowed down reception (*lente*), where the sentences go beyond meaning and become doing. In other words, we need a slow response to the different elements that compose the novel, a quiet *inner experience* (through *oratio* and *meditatio*) of the senses in respect to the effect that the images and texts from the book have over our emotional condition as readers. After all, the slowed down reception requires the swift help from God (who is asked for hasty succor or *festina*), in which divine remembrance supplies the act of exegesis. This theoretical perspective can shed some light on the enigmas of the book, mainly because it cannot be studied as a narrative product in the traditional logical terms.

Following Robertson's ideas regarding *Lectio Divina*, *The Strife of Love in a Dream* must be analyzed as a dynamic object because it materializes a mental process demanding an introspective behavior from the reader. The descriptive passages of the novel (mainly the first chapter) slow down the reading and the narrative as well, a signal of the monk-author's interest in controlling the speed of the experience and the process of reading (into an average prudential degree

or *Festina Lente*). Slow introspection is required—by the monk behind the book—because of how the quick distractions of Poliphilo’s mind are not only shown but also transmitted to the reader. Only a monk-author could have been openly interested in proposing a combat inside ourselves and comparing it to a spiritual one. And the monk’s only weapon or tool against *curiositas* or distractions was prayer. The author-monk sets the richness of the images and *phantasias* deployed in the novel, but demands from us, at the same time, to concentrate on the different stages of the *process involved in the creation of those pictures* (swift, with the help of God), and not exactly in the images themselves. We believe that if a particular picture is pursued by Colonna, such would be the image or diagram that could depict the whole mechanism of memory.

4. To Be a Monk in a Sinner Way. The Route of Francesco Colonna and His Poliphilo

What is it to be a Monk? Formulating the question can help us to spotlight the interests of Colonna the Venetian monk, who wrote for a particular type of reader—a Christian—and eventually to discover some of his rhetorical strategies behind the Poliphilo’s pilgrimage.

Answering the question posed, a monk is someone who experiments a second baptism, and who receives the mark of a new conversion path to God through the imitation of Christ, biblical models, and also the martyrs:

Mimesis [...] occupies a place of great importance in the spirituality of the monk, who wants to imitate Christ through the imitation of the patriarchs, the apostles, the martyrs, the angels; but above all it is the imitation of monastic fathers in general [...] that will turn the novice into a true monk, the disciple into a teacher, and in this way, the chain of tradition will be prolonged (Colombás, 2004).

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, in his Ecclesiastical Hierarchy (Areopagita, 2007), affirms that to be a monk is to be an “initiated”, a “therapist” and a “painter” too. The last comparison leads us back to the spiritual idea of “masterpiece”, but now the responsibility of the training falls to the monk himself, and not his master:

[The monks are] artists who love Divine Beauty. They reproduce its image inside intelligence. The attentive focus and contemplation of this perfumed and secret beauty enables them to reproduce an exact copy of the model. Divine painters do not cease to adjust the power of their minds to the design of a supra-essential, perfuming, and intellectual Virtue [...] Imitators of God, as they are in truth [...] They are truly divine images of the infinite sweetness of God (Areopagita, 2007).

Secrecy, healing, and creation are concepts that define monastic spirituality, and they can be extrapolated to the enigmatic life of Francesco Colonna, as well as to the possible moralizing function of his book as a metafictional novelistic creation.

This is not all. Colombás answers our initial question when he writes that

“[t]he monk is just a Christian, and more precisely, a pious layman who adopts the most radical ways in the practice of his Christianity”. For a monk being “radical” is the option for the essential (pristine Christian origins: that is to say, being a martyr), or the original traditions. To be radical is to be—in its root—an extreme, to opt for ways of behavior with the goal of purification. Then, the theory of the Colonna monk is feasible, despite how the erotic enthusiasm in the narrative of *The Strife of Love* or some of the sexual details depicted in its woodcuts can look a bit extreme—even for a dissolute religious person—and discourage scholars from believing in such a theory. Furthermore, a monk with a raffish and earthy personality would offer nothing special to the literary world, except his biographical anecdotes. Instead, for the present study, the radical attitude of the author is a deliberate religious option where mundane expressions are an alternative path of perfection towards God.

Now, in relation to certain rhetorical strategies used by the Christian community (this includes the production of monastic texts), we have identified the leptology, the paradoxography (Frank, 2000), and the *exempla* (Rivers, 2010), typical rhetorical resources in the testimonies of pilgrims travelling to the Holy Land, the same ones used by Colonna to describe his journey through lands full of wonders. Indeed, authors such as Georgia Frank in *The Memory of the Eyes* and Kimberly Rivers with her *Preaching the Memory of Virtue and Vice, Memory, Images and Preaching in the Late Middle Ages*, distinguish this type of discursive strategies to common resources of Christian travelers who seek to recall biblical passages in the sacred lands, in order to atone their sins. But this was not the only route to meet God. We have found literary sources where is exposed that the sinner way is an advantage and speed way of spiritual conversion. This idea is in the treatise *On First Principles* by Orígenes (2002). The author expressed this surprising reasoning:

[...It m]ay seem to be a more advantageous procedure for the [celestial] soul to be under the dominion of the flesh than under the power of its volition, [...] If [the celestial soul] truly joined the flesh, then, satiated and full of those evils from the vices of the flesh that it suffers, and as if tired of the heavy burdens of luxury and lust, the soul could be converted with more ease and speed from the filth of material things to the desire of divine things, and to the pleasure of spiritual grace (Orígenes, 2002).

Origen clearly suggests an alternative path to God and perfection: the way of the sinner. However, is important stablish that this idea was also supported by Saint Antony in his First Letter (about the three ways of conversion), Póntico (1995) and Casiano (2012a, 2012b). This idea in the theoretical core of monasticism is radical and extreme, a strategy that Francesco Colonna could have borrowed from compilations or *florilegia*. According to Leclercq (2009), there exist documents containing medieval monastic indexes, as well as information pertaining to the titles provided by the diverse florilegia still available. Included within the indexed authors, there were some treatises translated to the Latin

used by the Greek Fathers (let us remember that Greek was almost non-existent in medieval Europe). Among them, we find controversial names—such as Origen or Tertullian—that despite their infamy did not stop being read and consulted. Other treatises present in these lists are by Ephrem the Syrian, John Chrysostom, Cassiodorus, Athanasius, Evagrius Ponticus y John Cassian. Just as Leclercq claims, it cannot be affirmed that medieval European monasteries had access to the whole of Greek theological production (Eastern Church), but they did possess all the material useful for the nourishment of their ascetic lives (Leclercq, 2009).

In book six of *On the Priesthood*, Saint John Chrysostom establishes the differences between priesthood and monasticism, helping us to better understand the complexity of the monk's spiritual battle. This text elucidates how this obstacle could have affected the mood of the author-monk (Francesco Colonna) and, consequently, painted the character of the novel's protagonist. Chrysostom illustrates the monk as someone who consciously fights to be a good Christian. However, he noticed that a major danger of the monastic profession was the possibility to hide all vices in the retirement of loneliness. He wrote:

“A monk should not be the object of the greatest and most excessive of wonders; for by remaining alone, no one troubles him, nor does he have the occasion to commit many great a sin”, nevertheless “[he] who has many vices, being able to hide them in the withdrawal of solitude, and to make them not be reduced to action [...] when offered publicity, will only be ridiculous [...]” (Crisóstomo, n.d).

These words seem to describe the dissolute profile of Francesco Colonna. The vices of the imperfect monk exposed in the book have unchained a controversy around Colonna's moral condition, when the possible therapeutic reason of his writing is ignored. It is necessary to openly confront the question about what pushed Colonna to write about the weakness of his flesh. We have the framework provided by Origen and Chrysostom, but also the thought of Saint Anthony, exposed in *Vita Antonii* by Saint Athanasius. He wrote:

Every day each of us should keep track for the acts of day and night [...] Let us constantly examine ourselves and strive to reach what we lack. Let us also have this concern to be sure not to sin: that each one takes note and writes down his acts and the impulses of his soul, as if he had to reveal them to others. And be sure that, because of the shame of these being known, we will stop sinning and having evil thoughts in our hearts. Who wants to be seen while he sins? Who after sin does not lie to hide? [...] May what we write be for us like the eyes of our companions in asceticism. So that blushing from writing the same we would from being seen. We have no more evil thoughts. Educating ourselves this way, we can enslave the body, and please the Lord, and tread the Enemy's sloth (Atanasio, 1995).

Thus, the exercise of writing about sinful thoughts is a moralizing instrument for Saint Anthony. Writing supposes a reader (and a pair of eyes: the spiritual

leader) different from the writer, and the exhibition of the interiority of the monk (the soul of the mind) is an action of cleansing. The act of writing exposes the invisible battle within the fighter monk, who longs to be a gifted painter who imitates some of the biblical models. Monastic writing is then a revelation of the self and its testimony: public, extreme, and violent sometimes. The shame produced—mixed up with courage—is a mechanism for reaching virtue and healing the soul of the monk. The monastic perspective we propose for *The Strife of Love* is likely because that same spirit animated and defined the singularities of Colonna's writing. At the same time, it sketches a possible function for *The Strife of Love in a Dream*, specifically for the first book, which would then be a register of the first stages undergone from sinfulness to perfection through the journey of an author-protagonist, who would in turn be a monk.

5. Final Thoughts

As has been proved, adopting a Christian, monastic, and medieval perspective contributes to the interpretative enrichment of Francesco Colonna's novel. The exercise of the *Lectio Divina* defines a memory process which, through prayer and meditation, constitutes a model that in turn defines Poliphilo's journey. Monastic prayer is a weapon in the inner battle against curiosity and the fantasies generated by a wandering mind like that of the protagonist. Thus, prayer is an instrument that allows internal edification, through self-vigilance and memory put in service of literary invention. This is only possible because the matrix of medieval monastic culture to which Francesco Colonna belonged made him able to visualize the experience of an inner process—cognitive and emotional—in his protagonist, whom he throws towards the search of spiritual balance. His merit consists in returning dignity to the body and to the role of the senses that intervene in the knowledge of God through the discipline of *Lectio Divina*.

Prayer and memory, invention and prudence are the messages locked in the motto *Festina Lente* hidden in Christian code for the reader of the *Strife of Love in a Dream*. The swift divine intervention in moments where there is a lack of mental focus, as well as the demand to savor the tortuous descriptive passages, replicate within the reader part of the protagonist's experiences and the author's spiritual concerns. And no matter how intense the soul's wavering in front of temptation may be, the promise of a celestial Jerusalem for the virtuous monk—or of the island of Cytera (just like in the novel)—exists for the reader who knows how to uncover the final code of *Festina Lente*: anchor the fleeting vessel of your soul in the permanence of the Christian faith.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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