

Introduction

The year is 1520. Kings Henry VIII of England and Francis I of France meet in Calais, at the famous Field of the Cloth of Gold [SLIDE 1]. As you can see, it came by its name honestly-- King Henry's tent, in his typically modest fashion, was actually *made of gold*. The multinational group enjoyed a week of jousting, jigs, drunken carousing and even a wrestling match between the monarchs themselves. They also outlawed war between Christian nations, and everyone lived happily ever after.

Well, not really: in fact, they reached no agreement, and, as at the Paris Peace Conference exactly 400 years later, this meeting was prelude to Europe's first wars of newly nascent nation-states, whose mix of patriotism and religion proved far more effective at general carnage than the feudal system had ever dreamed possible.

[SLIDE] The year is 1520, and meanwhile, in the lovely Belgian city of Louvain, a 27 year-old Valencian *converso* named Juan Luis Vives fell asleep at his writing desk. In one sense, the timing was less than ideal: Vives was a scholar at the radical *Collegium Trilingue*, the "Trilingual College," an off-the-books academic institute founded by Erasmus and his friends, where Latin, Greek, and Hebrew were all studied together along the latest humanistic lines. Now, the actual University of Louvain, very conservative in its approach, was reluctant to let these *enfants terribles* of the *Collegium* play any role in official education, but in 1520, after years of wrangling and petitions, the powers-that-be finally granted Vives the *venia legendi*, "the right to lecture." I'll let Vives take over from here, drawn from a letter to his friend, Henry Cranevelt [SLIDE]:

"For the sake of my own spirit I wished to deliver a public lecture here [i.e. at Louvain] on the *Dream of Scipio* and sought permission. As soon as the rector and certain other deputies heard 'Dream,' they burst into laughter. I think this was because when they heard a reference to dreaming, that beloved pastime in which they take such great delight, a rush of hilarity overcame them. They then directed me to take the matter before the faculty that had proper charge over the volume to be lectured upon. Yesterday, when the high and mighty Senate was in session, it referred to the Senators the new issue concerning the "Faculty of Dreams." That day was dragged out in opinions and quarrels, and many more will be eaten up over the question what the faculty is it to which dreams belong. The sort of happening that would send the victim out of his mind and give the bystander a good laugh, don't you think?"¹

It's unlikely that this story is 100% true—Louvain's administrators were no doubt familiar with Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*, prospective subject of Vives' course, since it was, as we shall see, one of the most famous ancient texts of the middle ages and early Renaissance. But the story can help Vives, and can help us, draw attention to the oddity of dreams, the sense that dreams don't fit perfectly into any one discipline or faculty, that they make a mess of everything they touch.

[SLIDE] Dreams did make a mess of Vives' lectures in 1520, and of the lecture-text printed in 1521 and revised in 1539. But this wasn't because dreams were its *subject*, but because they were its *form*: Vives' work on Cicero's *Dream* takes the form of a dream itself. Obviously, stylistic experimentation on this level, at this time, in these circumstances, was a *HUGE* gamble for the ambitious scholar: after fleeing Spain and its Inquisitions at the age of 16, Vives had studied in Paris, but had burnt all his French bridges through a scathing attack on what he called France's *Pseudodialectici*, their "Fake Scholars," [SLIDE] steeped in medieval casuistry, and divorced, Vives thought, from human, and classical, language and ideas. If he didn't make it

¹ Vives to Cranevelt, March 1520; Henry de Vocht, ed. *Litterae Virorum Eruditiorum ad Franciscum Craneveldium: 1522-1528*, cf. George 1989:xxxviii.

here, he might not make it anywhere, despite the friendship of Erasmus—who a few years later would actually abandon Vives—or the support of his wealthy patron—who would in fact die later that year.

Imagine what you would all have said I had come here to speak, and started off like this: I was preparing so hard for this talk on dreams, that I fell asleep from the exertion, and had a dream in which I saw the god of Sleep, and he told me all about the nature and history of dreams, and then introduced me, first, to all the degenerate scholars of today, and, then, to all of the greats of ancient history and literature--Homer, Virgil, Cato, Scipio--and finally showed me Cicero, who gave me a long explication of a dream that *he* had written, and which explains the nature of Rome, of the world, and of the cosmos, and which I will now give to you in full, and in Cicero's own voice, in Cicero's own language."

You'd be right, I think, to doubt my sanity, and of course, it is the suspicion of insanity that makes working with dreams so rewarding; it was exactly this that the not-so-foolish faculty of Louvain put their finger on: just where do dreams fit? In fact, it's precisely why I myself have turned to a new project on dreaming in Latin literature from Ennius, at the beginning, to Johannes Kepler, in the 17th century, for dreams they burst the boundaries of disciplines, but also of styles, genres, and political affiliations. They tend to burst their own boundaries as well, and it is dreams' M.C. Escher game-of-mirrors quality that turns us now to Vives, for Vives' *Dream and Waking on the Dream of Scipio* is not just a dream of Rome--that would be banal. Instead, Vives' work is a dream of what Vives takes to be Rome's own dream, an extended meditation on why someone like Vives, or someone like me, or you, should study Classical literature in a world of nation-states, firearms, and wars of religion. "The past," said Seneca, "is not our master, but our guide,"² and Vives agreed, and would put such principles to work in the years that followed, as he served as teacher and writer, as progressive counselor to cities—he proposed the first-ever universal welfare state for the city of Bruges—and as adviser of kings—he was, rather oddly, Queen Catherine of Aragon's lawyer during "The Affair of Jupiter and Juno," that is, King Henry VIII's *first* divorce.

But before he came to all of that, Vives turned, in the red-letter year of 1520, to two dream-books that were among antiquity's most famous works: Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*, written in the last generation of the Roman Republic, and Macrobius' commentary on Cicero's dream, written in the 400's CE by one of the so-called "last pagans of Rome." Why Vives turned to these dreams when he did, and what he made of them, will be today's theme.

Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*

The year is 51 BCE, and Marcus Tullius Cicero, self-made Roman knight whom a decade of tumultuous politics has seen as consul, then exile, and now as a political voice increasingly isolated in the Rome of Caesar and Pompey, sets out his vision of the nature, structure, and purpose, of Rome's traditional government. That vision was his *De Re Publica*, his work "Concerning the Republic," and it ended with the story of a Dream. Cicero once complained that his sometime political ally, the obstinate paleo-conservative Cato, acted as though he were living, not in the "sewers of Romulus"--i.e. real-life, modern-day Rome--but in the utopian dream-city of Plato's *Republic*. Plato's *Republic*, recall, was an extended thought-experiment hashed out in the pleasant groves of the leafy, extra-urban, Athenian Academy, towards the beginning of the 4th century BCE, with a goal of using politics as individual morality writ large.

² Ep. XXIII *non domini nostri sed duces*.