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*Ricerche filosofiche e materiali storico-testuali*

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FAZIO AND HIS DEMONS.  
GIROLAMO CARDANO  
ON THE ART OF STORYTELLING  
AND THE SCIENCE OF WITNESSING  
GUIDO GIGLIONI

SUMMARY

Fazio Cardano, Girolamo Cardano's father, plays a key role in Girolamo's philosophical investigations. This article focuses on Girolamo's use of Fazio as an authoritative figure in matters of demonic apparitions and explores the boundaries – not always clearly defined – between storytelling and reliable witnessing in Cardano's accounts of family memories, reported speeches and preternatural phenomena.

1. THE FREEDOM OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY

WE owe to Cardano's zest for gossip and storytelling a true ghost story set in Pavia in the 1460s. In *De varietate rerum* (1557), he recounts how one night his father Fazio happened to have a close encounter with a demonic creature, a *folletto*. «My father used to tell this story very often», so Cardano begins his report; but then, with an unexpected narrative turn, he lets Fazio speak for himself. All of a sudden, Girolamo's «I» becomes Fazio's «I»:

I was brought up in the house of Giovanni Resta, a nobleman of Pavia, and during the time I lived there I taught his three sons Latin. I left the house when I began to practice as a physician and I became able to earn my own living.<sup>1</sup> While I was still involved with medicine, but already thinking of civil law to please my brother Paolo Cardano, an expert in canon law and a high-rank priest,<sup>2</sup> one of Resta's children, by now an adolescent, happened to fall mortally ill. I was called to assist him because of

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<sup>1</sup> As Cardano recalls in *De sapientia* (in *Opera*, I, p. 578a), Fazio's original career was in medicine and he only decided to become a jurist later on in life: «pater meus Facius Cardanus medicus primo, inde iurisconsultus factus est». See also *De vita propria*, in *Opera*, I, p. 1a.

<sup>2</sup> Paolo Cardano, Fazio's brother, was *decretorum doctor* and *rector* of the church of S. Paolo in Compito in Milan (see C. MARCORA, *Stefano Nardini, arcivescovo di Milano (1461-1484)*, «Memorie Storiche della Diocesi di Milano», III, 1956, pp. 257-488: 312). Judging from Fazio's story, Paolo seems to have played an important role in convincing his brother to change profession from medicine to law. I would like to thank Francesco Mores for explaining to me some of the technical expressions relating to Paolo Cardano's position in the Church of Milan.

both my medical expertise and my ties of friendship. At the time, Giovanni Resta was living in another place, which he rented, and not in the house where we stayed, which he owned. I was sleeping in the bedroom upstairs with the other brother, while the ill brother was downstairs (the third child, Isidoro, was away).<sup>1</sup> Both bedrooms were adjacent to a tower (an architectural feature that is common in Pavia). At dusk, when we went to bed, I heard thumping noises against the wall as if someone was beating the wall with one of those chains with which people are beaten up, fettered or restrained. I asked: «What's going on?». The boy told me: «Don't worry, it's just a domestic demon which they call a *folletto* [a sprite]. Usually he is harmless, but sometimes, like now, he can be annoying. I don't know what's wrong with him!». While the boy was falling asleep, I became fascinated with the events that were unfolding before me and for that reason I remained awake, full of anxiety. For half an hour, the *folletto* kept silent. Then I felt that someone's thumb was being placed on the top of my head. My impression was based on a sensation of cold, for in fact the *folletto* was not pressing his hand at all. I was on my guard, and the *folletto* placed his forefinger, then the middle finger, and then the other fingers, until his little finger almost reached my forehead. Judging from its size, it was the hand of a ten-year-old child, it feels as if it were made of cotton (*ex cotto*),<sup>2</sup> but so cold that it was quite a nuisance.<sup>3</sup>

That night, the excitement of witnessing a true wonder of nature initially overcame Fazio's fear of being injured by the *folletto*.

I was enjoying that moment very much, for I was given the opportunity to know such a marvel. Therefore, I kept listening with attention. Slowly the hand moved down straight to my face with the ring finger leading the way and coming down towards the nose. Its position indicated that it was the left hand. Finally the hand stole into my mouth, and two fingernails were already inside it, when I began to think that what was happening was not right. So I pushed the *folletto* away with my right hand to avoid its body coming inside my own. The *folletto* remained quiet while I kept watching over the whole thing, because I could not trust this spectre at all. I laid on my back for about half an hour and then the *folletto* was back, this time doing everything in a lighter way than before, but not so lightly – and he was acting very lightly – that he could prevent that extraordinary sensation of cold from being perceived by me. When he tried again, I pushed him away, for by now I was convinced that he was trying to enter my body. The astonishing fact was that, although my lips were tightly sealed, my

<sup>1</sup> Isidoro Resta, one of Giovanni's children, would become a key character in the dramatic story of Girolamo's birth. See G. CARDANO, *De vita propria*, in *Opera*, I, p. 3a: «Isidorus Resta Ticinensis patritius, me nudum balneo aceti calidi exceptum, tradidit nutrici». Isidoro was Girolamo's *padrino*, which is evidence of important ties existing between the Cardano and the Resta families. For a study on the early modern notion of godparenthood in Italy, see G. ALFANI, *Padri, padrini, patroni. La parentela spirituale nella storia*, Venice, Marsilio, 2007 (English translation by C. Calvert, *Fathers and Godfathers. Spiritual Kinship in Early-Modern Italy*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> In *Consilium pro dolore vago* (in *Contradicentium medicorum libri duo*, Paris, Jacques Macé, 1565, f. 310v), Cardano recommends to sleep on a bed made of cotton, not feathers («lectus sit ex cotto, non ex pluma»).

<sup>3</sup> CARDANO, *De varietate rerum*, in *Opera*, III, p. 335b.

teeth and my face were still able to feel the coldness of his fingers, for it was clear to me that that body was aerial.<sup>1</sup>

The story continues with Fazio getting up and being chased by the sprite across the house. Once Fazio ends his recollection of the misadventure in Resta's house, Girolamo resumes his function as the main narrator and concludes: «In view of all this, I am not surprised that my father would often say how certain he was that demons exist».<sup>2</sup> When Cardano published the horoscope of his father in his *De exemplis centum geniturarum* (1547), he duly noted Fazio's «knowledge of occult disciplines». According to Girolamo, his father had «such a great expertise in necromancy that he surpassed everyone in our time». Most of all, people knew that «he had a familiar spirit, something that, in a naive way, he himself would admit».<sup>3</sup> This is confirmed by Girolamo, who tells us how Fazio relied a great deal on the services of his personal demon. Only in cases of extreme gravity would he resort to the more orthodox help of saints. Girolamo tells the story of when, at the age of eight, ill with dysentery and fever, he was on the brink of death, and his father turned to St Jerome for help rather than to his familiar spirit, as was his want in cases like these. Revisiting the episode in his autobiography (written in 1575), Cardano writes that he «steadfastly refrained from investigating» this tainted relationship.<sup>4</sup> It is important to remember that the time when Cardano was recollecting these childhood memories was after the tragic experience of his imprisonment in 1570, very likely to have occurred because of his unwise meddling with divinatory topics and practices. It comes as no surprise, then, that he felt the need to specify how, unlike his father, he had not indulged in such activities as predicting the future and entertaining the company of demons. In fact, we know that not only did Cardano investigate demonic matters; he, too, had his own familiar spirit.<sup>5</sup>

As a very short prolegomenon to a future study on Fazio and his natural philosophy, this article may be seen as an essay in oral history, based on Fazio's speeches reported by Girolamo – a piece of oral history which is inevitably biased and compromised from the very beginning because Gi-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 335-336b.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 336b.

<sup>3</sup> G. CARDANO, *De exemplis centum geniturarum*, in *Opera*, v, p. 460b. On Fazio's necromantic expertise, see G. GIGLIONI, *Nature and Demons: Girolamo Cardano Interpreter of Pietro d'Abano*, in *Continuities and Disruptions between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. by C. Burnett, J. Meirinhos and J. Hamesse, Louvain-La-Neuve, Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales, 2008, pp. 89-112: 90-96.

<sup>4</sup> CARDANO, *De vita propria*, in *Opera*, I, p. 3a; *The Book of My Life*, tr. by Jean Stoner, New York, The New York Review Books, 2002, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, *De vita propria*, in *Opera*, I, p. 53a. On Cardano's years after the imprisonment, see I. MACLEAN, *Girolamo Cardano: The Last Years of a Polymath*, «Renaissance Studies» XXI, 2007, pp. 587-607.

rolamo is the only witness we have. As an attempt to explore Girolamo's attitude towards his father, this essay is compromised as well, since it is not always easy to assess where Girolamo's account of Fazio ends and Girolamo's own projections begin. Sometimes we get the impression that Fazio is Girolamo's alter ego, a mirror in which Girolamo may see a reflection of his own soul. At times, Fazio's alleged stories look like a narrative ploy that allows Girolamo to write and discuss matters with a level of freedom that otherwise would have looked suspicious.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. FAZIO AS SEEN BY GIROLAMO

Fazio makes his frequent appearances in Girolamo's work as a character surrounded by an aura of mystery and respect. The reader can still perceive the feeling of admiration mixed with terror that Fazio aroused in Girolamo when he was a child. Fazio is depicted as a frightening, angry, cruel, strange, gloomy, fickle, credulous, vain and naive man, concerned with social decorum and prestige, and yet behaving like an eccentric who, wearing garish outfits, brags around reckless views on necromancy; a scholar trained as an Aristotelian rationalist, who nevertheless claims to entertain conversations with demons; a sceptic endorsing a jaded and disillusioned view of life, who, however, does not refrain from turning to forms of popular devotions when in special need. Described by his son as a man of violent temperament, Fazio could nevertheless extract confessions from suspects without resorting to physical violence. «My father was one of the lawyers working for the state treasury (*advocatus fisci*)», recounted Girolamo in *De varietate rerum*; «he would force people to say the truth without having recourse to torture as others did using the most exquisite torments».<sup>2</sup> Girolamo often stresses the level of loneliness and gloom that accompanied Fazio's life. «I don't know the reason», he wrote in *De utilitate ex adversis capienda* (1561), «but my father died with no friends. I wish there weren't a greater calamity in poverty and other situations!».<sup>3</sup> In *De consolatione* (1542), Girolamo recorded the depth of Fazio's pessimism:

When he was still alive, I remember my father Fazio always saying that he wished he could die, for he always had his best time when he was deeply asleep and far away from all the affairs of this life. I gather he meant that this universal delight which we perceive through our senses produces more bitterness than sweetness and that, there-

<sup>1</sup> On the importance of the narrative aspects in Cardano's work, see N. G. SIRAI, *Girolamo Cardano and the Art of Medical Narrative*, «Journal of the History of Ideas», LII, 1991, pp. 581-602; EADEM, *The Clock and the Mirror: Girolamo Cardano and Renaissance Medicine*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 195-213.

<sup>2</sup> CARDANO, *De varietate rerum*, in *Opera*, III, p. 322b.

<sup>3</sup> G. CARDANO, *De utilitate ex adversis capienda*, in *Opera*, II, p. 145b.

fore, there is no better condition than being without them, provided that the intellect remains.<sup>1</sup>

Fazio had never been tender with his son Girolamo, but Girolamo, too, had never had any qualms about criticising his father's shortcomings.<sup>2</sup> One of his most severe judgments can be found in *De libris propriis* (1550): «My father left me with nothing else but sorrows and seeds of future calamities».<sup>3</sup> When Girolamo was still seven years old, Fazio began to employ him as a «page» in his daily routine of business and meetings.<sup>4</sup> He complains that before he was twenty years old, he did not have time to do anything else: «I was always at the service of my father (*in patris servitute perpetuo essem*) and, what is more, I didn't have any knowledge of the Latin language (*absque lingua Latina forem*)».<sup>5</sup> The daily harsh treatment he received from his father remained a deep trauma in Cardano's life. He was especially hurt by the thought that Fazio could be so insensitive towards his education and well-being. However, one might say that Fazio imposed such a strict discipline (close to actual slavery) because he wished his son to follow on his legal footsteps and become a lawyer:

My father actually wept in my presence when he learned that I had given over jurisprudence to follow the study of philosophy, and felt deeply grieved that I would not apply myself to his same interests. He considered jurisprudence a more ennobling discipline – repeatedly he quoted Aristotle on this point – and a profession better adapted to the acquisition of wealth and influence, and to the improvement of the family position. He realised that his office of lecturing in the law schools of the city, together with the honorarium of a hundred crowns which he had enjoyed for so many years, would not, as he had hoped, fall to me, but that another would have succeed him in his post.<sup>6</sup>

Fazio was certainly a learned and knowledgeable man. In *De propria vita*, in a chapter devoted to his teachers, Girolamo presents his father as the person who provided him with the essential rudiments of arithmetic, knowledge of arcane matters, Arabic astrology, mnemotechnics (not with great success, in this case) and Euclidean geometry, before he was able «to acquire and learn without any elementary schooling, and without a knowledge of the Latin tongue».<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere in the same work, Girolamo describes his father as a brilliant legal scholar with a basic knowledge of mathematics,

<sup>1</sup> G. CARDANO, *De consolatione*, in *Opera*, I, p. 600b.

<sup>2</sup> CARDANO, *De varietate rerum*, in *Opera*, III, p. 329b.

<sup>3</sup> G. CARDANO, *De libris propriis*. *The Editions of 1544, 1550, 1557, 1562, with Supplementary Material*, ed. by I. MacLean, Milan, Angeli, 2004, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> CARDANO, *De vita propria*, in *Opera*, I, p. 3b.

<sup>5</sup> CARDANO, *De libris propriis*, cit., p. 125

<sup>6</sup> CARDANO, *De vita propria*, in *Opera*, I, pp. 8b-9a; tr. by Stoner, pp. 38-39.

<sup>7</sup> Ivi, p. 26ab; tr. Stoner, p. 126.

who, nevertheless, lacked the focus and resolution necessary for intellectual pursuits of a broader philosophical scope: «he was in no wise given to original thinking, nor had he availed himself of the resources of the Greek language». He had «many-sided interests», and was «naturally gifted», but he also was characterised by a certain «inconstancy of purpose». <sup>1</sup> Girolamo saw in this «habit of relinquishing one aim in life for another» a «mighty obstacle to his success» and a main difference between himself and his father, who had never managed to write a book. <sup>2</sup> Such a character trait might have come from Fazio's bodily temperament. In the astrological treatise on exemplary genitures, Girolamo pointed out how Fazio had «a most humid brain» due to the influence of Saturn. <sup>3</sup>

From Fazio's horoscope, which Girolamo published in his collection of genitures, we learn that his father was born on 16 July 1445 and lived for 79 years. <sup>4</sup> Girolamo also recounted in dramatic tones the moment of his death, on 28 August 1524, in *De vita propria*. <sup>5</sup> The geniture, in Girolamo's opinion, presented «not a few remarkable traits». Fazio was characterised by «an immense love for studying» to the point that «he did nothing else» throughout his life. The stars, judging from Girolamo's astrological portrait, had been generous with his father. Saturn had given him «endurance», Apollo and the Belt of Orion «talent» (*ingenium*) («but a lazy one») and a «remarkable memory». And so it happened that Fazio became «a doctor in both canon and civil law, a physician and a mathematician». <sup>6</sup>

In his *Contradicentia medica*, written at different stages and published first in 1545, and then expanded in 1548 and 1663, Cardano informs us that his father had studied medicine under Giovanni Marliani, a pupil of Biagio Pelacani and a professor of natural philosophy, medicine and astrology at the University of Pavia from 1441 to 1483, the year of his death. <sup>7</sup> Marliani belonged to a Milanese patrician family known for having produced a series of distinguished physicians, jurists and counsellors. He was also personal physician to Galeazzo Maria Sforza and then to his son Gian Galeazzo. <sup>8</sup> Like his student Marliani, Biagio Pelacani had been professor of mathematics and philosophy at the University of Pavia (from 1377 to 1378, from 1389 to 1399 and from 1403 to 1407). His contributions ranged from mathematics to

<sup>1</sup> Ivi, p. 9a; tr. Stoner, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12a; tr. Stoner, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> CARDANO, *De exemplis centum geniturarum*, in *Opera*, v, p. 460b.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> CARDANO, *De vita propria*, in *Opera*, i, p. 3b.

<sup>6</sup> CARDANO, *De exemplis centum geniturarum*, in *Opera*, v, p. 460b.

<sup>7</sup> G. CARDANO, *Contradicentia medicorum*, in *Opera*, vi, p. 483a: «Pelacanus, qui fuit Ioannis Marliani praeceptor, qui fuit praeceptor patris mei in Medicina, quamquam postmodum evaserit Iurisconsultus». See also *De sapientia*, in *Opera*, i, p. 507b.

<sup>8</sup> M. CLAGETT, *Giovanni Marliani and Late Medieval Physics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1941, pp. 11-22.

physics (especially on Aristotle's rules of motion), but he also wrote commentaries on the biological works of Aristotle (*De generatione animalium* and *De anima*), besides writing on optics and astrology.<sup>1</sup> The work of John Peckham, especially his *Perspectiva communis*, had been studied and discussed in Pavia, and Fazio would later publish an edition in 1482-3.<sup>2</sup> Given his academic training and his familiarity with the characteristic blend of late scholastic Aristotelianism and new views on nature, Fazio can be seen as the missing link between Girolamo and such authors as Pietro d'Abano, on the one hand, and Pietro Pomponazzi, on the other.

### 3. HOW TO WITNESS APPARITIONS AND TO REPORT ABOUT DEMONS

Significantly, the book that was most subjected to inquisitorial censures, *De varietate rerum*, is also the work which contains both the most extensive account on demonic life and the longest excerpt relating to Fazio's life.<sup>3</sup> In the long chapter 93 (book 16), devoted to «demons and the dead», Cardano divides the various opinions about demons into three general groups, i.e. according to the Christians (for whom demons are immortal beings, evil and of a feeble nature), according to Fazio (who thought that they are mortal and powerful, some of them good, some evil, but very concerned with their death) and, finally, according to Platonists and Neoplatonists (for whom demons are immortal, partly good, partly evil, and powerful beings). With respect to Fazio's views, Girolamo bases his account on the fact that one demon in particular communicated (*narravit docuitque*) this opinion to his father.<sup>4</sup> As is often the case when dealing

<sup>1</sup> On Biagio Pelacani see: F. ALESSIO, *Un maestro dello studio Pavese del Trecento: Biagio Pelacani da Parma*, in *Discipline e maestri dell'ateneo pavese*, Milan, Mondadori, 1961, pp. 173-176; G. FEDERICI VESCOVINI, *Le questioni di Perspectiva di Biagio Pelacani da Parma*, «Rinascimento», XII, 1961, pp. 163-243; EADEM, *Biagio Pelacani a Padova e l'averroismo*, in *L'averroismo in Italia*, Rome, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1979, pp. 143-173; EADEM, *Studi sulla prospettiva medievale*, Turin, Giappichelli, 1965; EADEM, *Biagio Pelacani. Filosofia, astrologia e scienza agli inizi dell'età moderna*, in *Filosofia, scienza e astrologia nel Trecento europeo: Biagio Pelacani Parmense*, ed. by G. Federici Vescovini and F. Baroncelli, Padua 1992, pp. 39-52; A. HARRISON, *Blasius of Parma's Critique of Bradwardine's Tractatus de Proportionibus*, in *Scienza e filosofia all'Università di Padova nel Quattrocento*, ed. by A. Poppi, Padua, Edizioni Lint, 1983, pp. 19-69.

<sup>2</sup> A larger commentary on this work by Fazio with Girolamo's annotations never materialised. See CARDANO, *De vita propria*, in *Opera*, I, p. 9a.

<sup>3</sup> On the theological censures to *De varietate rerum*, see M. VALENTE, «Correzioni d'autore» e censure dell'opera di Cardano, in *Cardano e la tradizione dei saperi*, ed. by M. Baldi and G. Canziani, Milan, Angeli, 2003, pp. 437-456; U. BALDINI, *L'edizione dei documenti relativi a Cardano negli archivi del Sant'Ufficio: Risultati e problemi*, in *Cardano e la tradizione dei saperi*, cit., pp. 457-515.

<sup>4</sup> CARDANO, *De varietate rerum*, in *Opera*, III, p. 319a. On Fazio's as a source of stories for Girolamo, see Germana Ernst's translation of the chapter on witches from *De varietate rerum* in this volume, pp. 000.

with Fazio and his demons, storytelling remains for Girolamo the privileged line of inquiry:

For a long time, Fazio Cardano had an ethereal demon who was, as he used to say, familiar to him. This demon, as long as Fazio kept him bound, gave him truthful responses. Once he released him, however, he kept returning but gave him false answers. If I am not mistaken, he kept him bound for twenty-eight years and he left him free for about five. Whatever the matter, during all the time he remained bound, the demon appeared at ease, and at least he confirmed that demons exist, for he investigated everything diligently from them. He was not always alone, although for the most part he was. Sometimes he used to come with friends.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout his excursus on Fazio in *De vanitate rerum*, Girolamo did not question the veracity of his father's accounts or the veracity of his intention, but the levity of his arguments, concluding that his father was in fact too credulous. In order to avoid the same mistakes (i.e. precipitation in judgment and self-delusion) when dealing with demonic apparitions, Girolamo devised an ingenious set of criteria meant to test the reliability of demonic witnessing. He argued that the reality of demonic apparitions could be proved through rational arguments, direct perception of the senses and reliable witnessing.<sup>2</sup> Expanding on witnessing, Cardano insisted that a good testimony should be based on the interplay of technical expertise and moral character. He began by saying that all reliable witnesses are characterised by cautious judgment (*prudencia*) and moral integrity (*integritas*). Provided that in no circumstance can one extort the truth resorting to violence, he concluded that ideal witnesses have to be moderately unhappy and endowed with a sense of moral decency. He then qualified this statement by adding that witnesses cannot be completely unhappy or completely honest (for these kind of people «tend to turn to wishful thinking rather than follow their judgment»), they cannot be either happy or evil (for «they deny even that which is true»), they cannot be honest and unhappy (for «they indulge so much in wishful thinking that they imagine what they want rather than see or hear things»). Behind this taxonomy of possible witnesses, it is not too difficult to recognise Cardano's characteristic penchant for combinatorial thinking. The conclusion of the whole argument seems to question Fazio's reliability as a witness in demonic matters: if one is too honest, too happy, too evil or too unhappy, he or she will be unable to perceive the reality of things, for such a person will be either too idealistic, too involved

<sup>1</sup> CARDANO, *De varietate rerum*, in *Opera*, III, p. 320b.

<sup>2</sup> On the early modern debate over apparitions and their level of reality, see S. CLARK, *Vanities of the Eye. Vision in Early Modern European Culture*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007; E. BEVER, *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe. Culture, Cognition, and Everyday Life*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

in the world of the imagination, or too twisted; in any case, he or she will be in denial and, deliberately or not, will distort reality. Unlike Fazio (too unhappy and too intransigent from an ethical point of view), Girolamo is better equipped to distinguish between reality and self-deception because of his painful awareness of the gap separating reality from representation, a religious expectation of a better life after death and, above all, a long-term knowledge of human foible:

Therefore, this opportunity has been rightly given to me, for I am not so honest or unhappy that I want what I cannot have or imagine what is impossible, for I detest lies more than any other human being, nor am I so irreligious or happy in this life that, if it could happen, I wouldn't like to survive to it. Therefore, no one should tell me that I am too credulous, if I recount things that can hardly be believed, or that I do not favour the belief in the immortality of souls, if I don't try hard to bring forward things that go beyond my power of perception and more shining spectres, as most people do.<sup>1</sup>

In Girolamo's opinion, Fazio's testimony was not reliable because he was too honest and too unhappy, and therefore «he tended to imagine what he wanted rather than see or hear things». From this point of view, Girolamo's mother, Chiara Micheira, was more reliable as a witness, because, like her son, she was unhappy, but ethically less intransigent than his father. Most of all, she was not a self-aggrandising person:

I heard a similar story from my mother, a woman who was religious, but not superstitious at all. When she had a three-month-old baby from her previous husband – and the husband, Antonio de Alberis (this was his name), was in fact present – she heard someone walking about barefoot in the bedroom. So she wakes up her husband; he hears the same thing; they are surprised and frightened; they think it is a prodigy. The day after, the baby, otherwise healthy, is dead. This is what was told by that most truthful and not at all vain woman.<sup>2</sup>

In the end, one might say that Fazio – and the same could be said of Girolamo's mother, Chiara – was simply a wonderful raconteur of horror stories, who took a certain pleasure in frightening the already vivid imagination of his only child, or maybe he was a sort of late medieval ghost hunter, who apparently spent a large part of his life investigating the life and mores of demons and other aerial creatures using all the scientific means at his disposal (optics, astrology, medicine). Undoubtedly, Girolamo grew up in a family in which both parents seem to have indulged in telling stories of ghosts and demons, while complaining about the miserable state of human nature. This must have had a profound effect on his frame of mind. While it is clear that Fazio's figure often emerges as a character out of a ghost story

<sup>1</sup> CARDANO, *De varietate rerum*, in *Opera*, III, pp. 322b-323a.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 323a.

– at times as the narrator and at others as the author of reported speeches about demons and ghosts –, a deeper and long lasting legacy is passed on from father to son and manifests itself in Girolamo's attitude towards storytelling and the positive aspects of narrative inquiry. Above all, Fazio's stories on demons, ghosts and shades from the otherworld were successfully used by Girolamo to reinforce the idea of a link between the continuity of the self, the persistence of individual memories and the achievement of a final state of bliss.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I have examined Cardano's notions of the self, immortality of the soul and memory in *Autobiography as Self-Mastery. Writing, Madness, and Method in Girolamo Cardano*, «Bruniana & Campanelliana», vii, 2001, pp. 331-362; *The Eternal Return of the Same Intellectuals. A New Edition of Girolamo Cardano's De immortalitate animorum*, «Bruniana & Campanelliana», xiii, 2007, pp. 177-183; *Mens in Girolamo Cardano*, in *Per una storia del concetto di mente*, ed. by E. Canone, 2 vols, Florence, Olschki, 2005-2207, ii, pp. 83-122. For a fine analysis of Cardano's view concerning the link between the soul of the living and the dead, see in this volume the article by A. MAGGI, *The Dialogue between the Living and the Dead in Cardano's Thought*, pp. 473-480.

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