Conclusion

The focus of this study has been how intellectual arguments about the nature and significance of dreams were moulded by the social concerns of theologians and philosophers over the course of the mid to late seventeenth century. It examined how dreams were used as a conceptual category across a number of contexts, including medical literature and theological writings concerned with the soul, prophecy and metaphysics, the sermons and confessional literature of Protestant divines, and a range of 'occult' and mystical texts imported to England and produced at home after 1640. Taking a thematic approach, it began by tracking changing trends in the discussion of dreams as part of the soul's natural capacities; in how these capacities were thought to interact with the power of the divine to mediate divine knowledge; and how these ontological and epistemological structures informed the evangelical programme of ministers and theologians concerned with the moral life of their congregations. It finished with an examination of the different approaches taken by early modern thinkers to interpret and produce meaning from the visual and phenomenal contents of individual dreams, and how these were located in the psychological and metaphysical frameworks which defined their functional and moral values.

By looking at these different contexts in which beliefs about dreams were articulated, the study has engaged in the difficult process of trying to gauge processes of change across the period. The seventeenth century was a time of incredibly dynamic change on the intellectual scene, and the inherent complexities present a formidable challenge for the historian who wishes to characterise the nature of change without falling prey to misconceptions. The period is acknowledged to have seen a great paradigm-shift in attitudes to knowledge, but the exact nature of this shift, and the terms on which it occurred, have been subject to repeated and intensive revision over the last few decades. While historians have long refuted the idea that the rising status of experimental methodologies in this era signalled a rapid secularisation of knowledge and rejection of the supernatural, they still grapple with the challenge of correctly characterising the shifts that did occur in the religious sensibilities that informed philosophical activity, and as a corollary, attitudes toward the superstitious, the supernatural and the 'occult'.

The study draws out several themes of change in beliefs about dreams, and also identifies continuities across all four of the contexts it has investigated. The first is the joint role of vitalist concepts and a sensory discourse in framing debates about perceptions of the spiritual in nature. The link between the two was established firstly in cases where thinkers were seeking to strengthen traditional arguments about the place of humanity in nature. This has been

seen in discussions about the natural attributes of the soul, where spiritual vitalism was seen to bring humanity closer to the dignity of God and the angels than Aristotelian theory, which suggested that cognition ceased in the absence of material sense impressions. When we first encounter this argument in use by Le Loyer, he is seeking to establish that man has a foothold in the supernatural world, just as spirits do, through their ability to occupy physical substances. They are therefore able to meet across the divide between earth and heaven, and God has made man competent to encounter these beings. In the later seventeenth century, many theologians were placed in the uncomfortable position of having to fight a battle on two fronts against radical religious belief which built upon and pushed arguments about the integrity of man's inner spiritual senses to break away from the Church, and against materialists who they believed might deny the role of God in nature by associating miracles, divine dreams and revelations with human misconception and illusions.

Both learned Protestant theologians and lay thinkers engaged with the idea that the material and spiritual constituted two different realms of sensory experience, which might have the potential to blend with each other through the imaginative medium, or might be discontinuous, like two sides of a coin which could only be viewed one side at a time, an argument that went back to Sextus Empiricus.[1] Beale argued in this vein when he protested that prophetic passions could not be subjected to measurement by earthly instruments. Tryon used the dichotomy between material and spiritual planes both to explain the unbelief of contemporaries, and why dreams seemed unreal once one awaked. He drew on the occultism of Agrippa and the theosophy of Jacob Boehme, which blended the realms of the spiritual and material, and in which the contents of the imagination formed an alternative plane of experience through the medium of an 'astral' body. Both John Smith and Moïse Amyraut suggested that the fantasies of natural dreams could be easily contrasted with divine dreams because the natural kind would lack vital power, whereas divine dreams would make an immediate, powerful and lasting impression on the mind. This dialectical distinction between weak natural dreams, violent diabolic fantasies, and muscularly poignant divine visions was disturbed, however, by claims that enthusiastic fantasies were also compelling because of their great ontological force. This did not, however, displace the traditional argument that there was an experiential basis to discerning divine visions and dreams, which were still applied to justify their role in the Biblical narrative, and continued to appear in the epistemology and pneumatic theories of the Cambridge Platonists. With the death of Henry More in 1687, these questions came to rest with the next dominant thinker in English philosophy, John Locke. Locke judged that spiritual forces could not be subjected to any meaningful method of observation available to humanity, and rejected the connection between dreams and any nocturnal consciousness of the soul.

The second major theme was the ways in which these concepts of spiritual vitalism and discernment were reconciled with the view of humanity's moral weakness that dominated English religious culture at this time. This was

[1] Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 305—306.

expressed through pessimistic accounts of the devil's power over the individual and society, and the intensity of its disciplinary programme of sanctification and reform. This anxiety was in part responsible for an increased focus on the 'speculative' powers of imagination, where dreams symbolised the wilful wickedness of man's appetites, and in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, provide Satan with an entrance to corrupt the mind of Eve. It was the passageway, according to Thomas Edwards and Philip Goodwin, of the gangrene which seeped from the body into the soul, leading to depravity, madness, and violent disruption of the godly society through hidden sedition and open rebellion. Writings on dreams gave a physiological, cognitive and cultural basis to the state of corruption, and established even more closely the link between common human vanity and the slide toward heretical disorder. A natural atrophy was envisioned from the misplaced and profane fear of the superstitious, to the cauterized conscience of the reprobate, to the lechery and violence of false prophets and enthusiasts.

The medicalization of madness and enthusiasm by several theologians in the 1650s was not a secularisation of attitudes to religious dissent, but a ramping up of the rhetoric concerning the weakness of the flesh, even though More and Casaubon argued that some could be counted as naïve victims of society's own inability to distinguish forces of nature from divine miracles. It was the fear of this human weakness, and his consequent vulnerability to the manipulation of the devil, which drove attempts to reform the dark places of the human mind before and after the Restoration. From an early stage evangelicals concerned with the reform of souls turned toward meditational tools as a method of sacralising the mental space of the believer, some of them rejecting the image-making powers of the imagination, and others embracing it as long as it was focused on Scriptural figures and types. Anxieties about the devil's power over this mental space were heightened at night, when his power was ascendant and the soul was isolated, ensuring that devotional prayer in the morning and evening was an essential element of Christian household observance. There was also a struggle over the religious and mystical significance of dreams. While conscience literature and prayer manuals stigmatized dreams as sites of diabolical manipulation, individually believers wondered at the appearance of Christ in their dreams, predictions that appeared fortunate or providential, and the full implications of the belief that angels as well as demons had the power to influence the mind. Phillip Goodwin revealed himself a theological ally to this kind of dreamer. Unfortunately, his attempt to sacralise the mental space of dreams through an appeal to spiritual vitalism, and submitting their images to the devotional and meditational practices of the bedchamber, was not to be repeated or even remarked upon by those who followed him. Subsequent treatments by godly ministers of conscience continued to fixate on anxieties about the corrupting nature of the body and the comparative fragility of reason.

Finally, examining the practices of dream interpretation raises several important historiographical questions. It interrogated the rationale of 'dream-reading' techniques, seeking to move beyond claims that the seventeenth century merely relied upon the same sources and formulas as the medieval and renaissance Church. It suggested that interpretation should be divided between techniques that can be broadly aligned with the scholastic and later Protestant

religious doctrines of 'discernment', which relied upon the fundamental principles of Aristotelian and Neoplatonist thought for their theory of revelation, and the more exuberant aspects of ideographic and 'emblematical' thinking with their roots in more elaborate occult belief systems. These two world-views can nevertheless be seen as drawing together when they are invoked both by John Beale, an English hybrid humanist and Baconian who is sympathetic to the occult, and Moïse Amyraut, a French Arminian. In Amyraut, especially, emblematic visual theory combines attention to underlying occult forces, and to the manifest relations between superior and inferior forms which present themselves in visions of angels, demons and natural spectacles that resemble miracles. Finally, both strands of thought are underpinned by the role of vitalist supernatural forces in elevating the spiritual powers of the mind. In a familiar pattern, most Protestant theologians attribute these elevations of the mind to special instances of God's grace, while occult thinkers suggested that the ability to interpret signs in dreams could be trained by practising divinatory arts, reading the magical texts which recorded sympathies, correspondences and antipathies, and recording dreams to preserve their signs in the memory.

For experimental philosophers and religious reformers, a more respectable avenue for occult interests focused on the arts of memory, and the potential of hieroglyphs, emblems and other symbols to encode knowledge. This attempt to discover the most efficient way of memorising knowledge was implicitly linked to the search for a universal language and universal method of knowledge. It is here, I have suggested, that Beale's interests in mnemonics and dreams had the potential to converge, though he never expressed concretely how dreams might facilitate access to scriptural knowledge. The emblematic view of nature may have been in overall decline by the 1650s, but was still in evidence amongst those who engaged with occult thought during the radical revolution and beyond the Restoration. This continued interest existed alongside new interpretive methods which did not depend on the emblematical sensibility, but viewed Scripture as being composed of typological patterns and figures, which might hide providential truths, or even encode secret philosophical truths. Protestant rejection of allegory, the death of occultism, and the embracing of mechanical and experimental philosophy did not destroy the symbolic potential of visionary and scriptural texts, but merely reconfigured the basis for reading them. As Peter Harrison argues, Protestant intellectuals became obsessed with extracting accurate philosophical and historical information from the Bible.[2] If there are further questions to be asked about the later fortunes of dream interpretation, these must be posed in the context of More and Newton's works on the prophecies of Revelation, and suggest a valuable future avenue for research. An analysis of the techniques under use here would assess their relationship relative to the 'emblematic' instincts of earlier theologians, and whether any clear distinctions can be drawn between their approach and those like Joseph Mede who saw fit to draw upon ancient dream manuals like Achmet's *Oneirocriticon*.

[2] Harrison, *The Rise of Natural Science*, pp. 121—160.

Chapter four also raised questions about the relationship between interpretation and subjectivity, and the light it shines on arguments about the evolving nature of early modern interiority. Demonstrating how dream interpretation relied upon emblematic attitudes toward meaning allows us to tease out the multi-layered and subjective nature of dream-readings, whether practised by a theologian, a physician or an astrologer. The inner essence of any image or object which might appear in a dream was reflected in all of its associations and instantiations. Every reading or interpretation was a dialogue that involved perceiver and perceived in a unique instance of the interpretive act. Though the essence of the object was unchanging, the conditions under which it disclosed itself were always shifting. Armando Maggi characterises every corporeal manifestation of a spirit as a dialogue that existed between a supernatural intelligence and a human being.[3] In the same way, the dream diviner Artemidorus indicated that every instance of a dream symbol would be in some way unique to the dreamer, dependent upon his age, social status, etc.[4] There was hence a considerable degree of elasticity between the 'objective' types and archetypes furnished by dream-books, and the task of rational or spiritual discernment practiced by sophisticated dream interpreters. The physiognomic and humoural profiles assigned to dreams and diseased bodies in works by physicians and occult 'projectors' must be viewed in the same way. It helps us to understand the margin of skill that was assumed to be involved in dream interpretation, and moves us away from the notion that early moderns made uncritical use of the arbitrary authority of dream dictionaries and symbols. The astrologer Samuel Jeake believed that he had successfully applied Baconian standards of proof to his art.[5] Dream interpretation thus falls into one of the many experiential arts which could be assimilated to the 'experimental' mentality of the era, native not just to Baconian philosophers and occultists but those who sought religious assurance, or became religious 'seekers'.

A dream had its objective reality by virtue of its origins, but always subjective in its address from God to the individual. The sovereignty of the inner senses in seventeenth-century discourses of religious assurance, radical enthusiasm, or Cambridge Platonism, gave renewed authority to the imaginative experiences of the religious. For many Christian believers in the late seventeenth century, self-conscious interiority was promoted by the intense anxiety centred on the imagination, and the scrupulous regime of self-surveillance and disciplinary policing that was visited on the household and the bedchamber in this period. Richard Baxter was particularly lyrical about the mind's vulnerabilities: '*Awakened Reason serveth Faith*, *and is alwaies on thy side: But sleepy Reason in the gleams of prosperity*, *is ready to give place to flesh and fancy*, *and hath a thousand distracted, incoherent dreams.*'[6] His *Christian Directory* demonstrated awareness not just of how the imagination could be corrupted by dreams, but also the obdurate dangers of religious melancholy and its links to enthusiasm. He expressed not only the nature of these theological dangers, but how undermining they were to his own sense of self. The same tortured awareness

[3] Maggi, *In the Company of Demons*, pp. 25—103.
[4] Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, pp. 83—84
[5] Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*, pp. 75—82.
[6] Baxter, *The Life of Faith*, pp. 602—603.

is visible in the spiritual diaries of John Bunyan and George Fox, but in each case, form part of a spiritual journey in which knowledge of ones' spiritual infirmities eventually gave way to certainty in the presence of God's indwelling power.

In the case of radical visionaries, this allowed for an identification of the self with the divine, and an abolition of distinctions between self-perception and divine knowledge. In the writings of Abiezer Cope, Arise Evans, John Pordage and Thomas Tryon, dreams transcend individual subjectivities to bestow on them omniscient verities, on what Nigel Smith identifies as paradoxically subjective terms.[7] This inner transformation, as Paul Monod says, was self-certifying: its proof came in the unfolding of multiple levels of meaning to the understanding of the visionary.[8] Even theologians like Henry More, secure in the belief that they formed part of a learned theological community and a historical lineage of revealed and rational knowledge, allowed themselves to be convinced that they had privileged access to divine insight in dreams. These certainties may have been intellectually suspect and deeply unfashionable in the public culture by the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, they persisted with certain religious and occult thinkers, to later influence the development of attitudes toward the imagination. The popular attractions of spiritual 'enthusiasm' would become visible again in eighteenth-century Methodism. The occult celebration of imagination as a vitalistic force through which divine truths were born within the soul would influence later Romantic thought and foreshadow the central place given to the imagination by Kant as the site of human subjectivity and creativity.

[7] Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, pp.229—230.
[8] Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts,* p. 87.