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Dreams, Visions, and the Rhetoric of Authority

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

DREAMS, VISIONS, AND THE RHETORIC OF AUTHORITY

By

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ABSTRACT

DREAMS, VISIONS, AND THE RHETORIC OF AUTHORITY

Authors' uses of dreams and visions in literature inherently involve questions about the text's access to (or distance from) higher (or lower) authorities. Whether including a brief dream sequence within a larger narrative or framing a narrative within a dream, authors often depict the ultimate sources of their texts' dreams and visions as standing outside the rational mind of man. Unless intending them for ironic effect, authors typically present their literary dreams and visions as incorporeal, otherworldly, revelatory—transcending the thoughts of the day and providing (usually transformative) insight into not only the past and present, but, prevalently, the future.

These dream elements inherently link literary texts to a “non-literary” or non-fictional tradition: “authentic” prophetic and visionary texts. The literary mode imitates the authentic, which claims access to divine sources outside of the temporal (present and past) strictures of knowledge. The reader inevitably connects (whether consciously or unconsciously) the literary revelatory dream or vision to the generally more authoritative tradition of prophetic and visionary writing. This “borrowed” sense of authority elevates the overtly literary fiction, producing the impression of transcendent knowledge.

The present study is predicated upon two underlying arguments: 1) that dreams and visions in literature frequently function as authorizing devices and 2) that texts involving dreams and visions draw upon numerous conventional strategies for both affirming and complicating (especially in the ironic dream vision) the text's authority. My method for exploring this thesis involves four case studies in which I synthesize recent dream and vision scholarship, consider historical context and intertextual dialogue, and perform my own close reading of relevant

passages. While I address the diverse issues intrinsic to dream literature—especially their complex historical, philosophical, and spiritual contexts—I explore these connections and sub-arguments primarily in terms of authority and textual self-authorization.

While many scholars have noted the importance of authority in dream literature—Steven Kruger, J. J. Collins, A. C. Spearing, Kathryn Lynch, Jessica Barr, J. Stephen Russell, Michael St. John, among many others—the present study takes this broad concept of authority and applies it in a more specific and comprehensive manner than previous scholarship. I have chosen four key texts in the history of Western dream and vision literature that 1) are paradigmatic representations of their respective genres and 2) exercised a high degree of influence on that formal tradition.

Chapter 1 presents a taxonomy of dream and vision genres, emphasizing the role of authority in their distinctions. Chapter 2 focuses on the issue of cultural authority in the Book of Daniel (the dream sequence and the apocalyptic vision in the Jewish tradition). Chapter 3 discusses the importance of authority in Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (Neoplatonic dream theory and the classical dream vision). Chapter 4 analyzes authorizing devices in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Love* (the medieval mystic vision). Chapter 5 is a close reading of the ironic treatment of authority in Chaucer's *House of Fame* (the medieval ironic dream vision). These four works from four distinct traditions feature several conventional “authorizing devices” that characterize the dream and vision genres they represent. While some of these strategies remain particular to one genre and/or era, others clearly cross periods, cultures, and traditions.

INTRODUCTION

DREAMS, VISIONS, AND THE RHETORIC OF AUTHORITY

Dreams and Authority

Dreams have empowered human consciousness and action for thousands of years in recorded experience. In literature, the incorporation of dreams and visions has transcended cultures, eras, and genres. Until the last century, where psychoanalytic and physiological studies have sought to trace dreams and visions solely to psychological and cognitive sources—the inner workings of the unconscious and the self-regulating operations of the brain—most texts in the history of Western literature have portrayed dreams and visions as emanating from supernatural sources and serving a higher function. The vast majority of these fictional dreams and visions act as bridges to other realms, windows into a supernatural reality, offering the dreamers/visionaries (and their readers) access to knowledge beyond human or rational or worldly limits.

In his comprehensive study of the conception of dreams and dreaming in the Middle Ages, Steven F. Kruger succinctly summarizes this traditional conception of dreams:

For most of its long history, the dream has been treated not merely as an internally-motivated phenomenon (although as we shall see, such explanations of dreaming have their own ancient roots), but as an experience strongly linked to the realm of divinity: dreams were often thought to foretell the future because they allowed the human soul access to a transcendent, spiritual reality.¹

These supernatural experiences outside/beyond the mundane—whether in relation to the world of the readers or the diegetic world of the characters—enable authors to break away from the linear narrative, achieve important insight into characters' motivations, and leap into fantastic

¹ Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 2.

landscapes and situations. However, the most important benefit of incorporating dreams and visions in literature rises above narrative advantage: Dreams and visions heighten a text's sense of authority. The transcendent authority a culture associates with authentic dreams—popular, religious, philosophical, superstitious—transfers directly to its manifestations in fiction. For this reason, those fictional works that incorporate dreams and visions have a greater cultural import, a greater cultural authority that elevates the text to a higher plane of discourse.

Gilgamesh dreams of a meteor plummeting from the Heavenly Dome, the divine realm of An, marking the turning point of his reign from a tyrannical king to a mythic hero—who holds in his hand, if only for a moment, the key to eternity. Jacob dreams of a stairway stretching to the heavens; from the heights, the Lord speaks to Jacob of his divine plan for his chosen people and Jacob's pivotal role in their ascension. Joseph dreams of his brothers' bundles of grain bowing to his own, followed by a dream of the stars and moon submitting to him. These dreams prove to be the catalyst for his betrayal to the Egyptian slave trade—and subsequent rise to power.

Nebuchadnezzar dreams of an awful statue, a towering yet fragile colossus; only Daniel, through a vision of the Lord, can discern its divine portent. Scipio Aemilianus dreams of his revered grandfather, Scipio Africanus, who reveals to him the humbling hierarchy of the Neoplatonic universe. Julian is granted visions of God's overwhelming sufferings, love, and power. Joseph of Galilee dreams that an angel of the Lord tells him his wife will bear a son—and he will be the divine salvation of his people and the king of an everlasting kingdom. John dreams of the final days, when the leaders of the nations will meet the true authority of the heavens.

Dreams as markers of divine impartation of worldly authority. Dreams foretelling the rise of individuals to power, of nations to authoritative positions in history. Dreams denouncing

figures of authority—and dreams announcing the messiah. Dreams imparted to grant authority, deny authority, proclaim the restoration of true authority....

From the earliest within-the-story dream sequences of Mesopotamia to 21st century psycho-analytic filmic dream visions, the essential purpose of incorporating a dream or vision in a text often centers around authority—namely the author’s desire to imbue the text with a sense of greater authority. This “authorizing strategy” requires the impression of the text’s/author’s access to the transcendent, authoritative knowledge associated with authentic divinely imparted dreams and visions.

The major early literary threads at work in the fabric of Western Civilization, though diverse and often divergent in conventional elements, similarly value and employ dreams in their narratives. While most of these traditions find similar narrative opportunities in dream elements—such as plausible breaks from the constraints of linear plots, imaginative jaunts into more fantastic settings and modes, and convenient means of revealing, in a dramatic and imagistic form, the motives and psychological struggles of the characters—dreams have maintained a “higher” significance in the narrative legacy of the Western traditions. Dreams are, first and foremost, authorizing devices.²

Whether a brief dream sequence within a larger narrative, a narrative framed by a dream, or an apocalyptic vision, authors’ incorporations of dreams and visions in literature inherently involve questions about the text’s access to (or distance from) higher (or lower) authorities.³

² Many dream scholars make similar arguments, especially Russell, Spearing, Kruger, and Collins (in regard to apocalyptic visions).

³ See the second chapter of this study for a comprehensive categorization of the diverse dream and vision genres. For other similar classifications, see Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*; J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984); Stephen J. Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1988); A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision and Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter*. Stuttgart, 1981; Michael D. Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry*.

From the earliest literature to the Early Middle Ages, in both the polytheistic and monotheistic Western traditions, dreams in literature have almost invariably been ascribed to supernatural sources.⁴ Whether heavenly or infernal, the ultimate sources of literary dreams are often depicted as standing outside the bodily or worldly or rational mind of man. Unless intended for ironic effect, as in many of Chaucer's satiric projects, dreams are portrayed as incorporeal, otherworldly, revelatory—transcending the thoughts of the day and providing (usually transformative) insight not only into the past and present, but, most prevalently, the future.

The emphasis on future-oriented dreams is almost ubiquitous, spanning diverse periods and traditions.⁵ From a purely literary perspective, intra-narrative visions of the future—dreams that predict events that will be fulfilled within the story itself, like the dream of Nebuchadnezzar's madness in Daniel⁶—produce a pleasure similar to that offered by narrative flash-forwards popular in modern storytelling, through which the audience or reader might enjoy the twists and turns that seem, often impossibly, to lead to the predicted (or “pre-visioned”) outcome. As in the Oedipal intra-narrative prophecies, the audience delights in the ironic circumstances, attempted circumventions, and ultimate circularity of the plot.⁷ The implied “argument” of an intra-narrative dream prediction is an ordered, divinely orchestrated universe where all events build to predetermined outcomes, thus confirming the ultimate temporal authority of God/the gods.

Norman, OK: 1987; Hans Robert Jauss, “Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature.” In his *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis, 1982) Pp. 76-109.

⁴ Kruger addresses the issue of authority several times throughout *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*; see especially Ch. 1-3.

⁵ As Kruger points out, even Freud discusses dreams in terms of their relationship to the (psychologically predetermined) future (3).

⁶ See the chapter on Daniel below.

⁷ C. S. Lewis discusses the readerly pleasures of the fulfillment of within-the-narrative predictions in his essay “On Fiction.”

Though this sense of inevitability is one of the great joys of intra-narrative prophetic dream sequences, it is not the only, or even dominant, reason for the popularity of prophetic literary dream elements. The most notable effect of employing dream sequences or framing devices is the link these elements provide to a “non-literary” or non-fictional tradition: “authentic” prophetic and visionary texts and utterances. While the labels “authentic” and “non-literary” are imprecise,⁸ the degree of seriousness with which the culture takes this tradition is the most consistent point of distinction: the authentic prognostications, prophecies, and visions of the shaman/oracle/soothsayer/visionary generally carry a greater weight within the culture than more clearly artificial, narrative-focused, “literary” dreams and visions.⁹ Questions of the authority of “authentic” texts are further complicated of course as one moves from one culture, religion, or period to another. Regardless, the general distinction remains between those works that purport to be true visions/dreams and those that promote themselves as overtly literary.

Despite the gap between these two broad categories of texts, the “authentic” traditions serve as important cultural referents to their more overtly artificial, literary cousins. The access to divine sources required to step outside of the temporal (present and past) strictures of knowledge in the authentic mode carries over to some degree in the literary. The audience or reader inevitably connects (whether consciously or unconsciously) the literary predictive dream to the generally more authoritative tradition of the prophetic and visionary writing. This

⁸ Jessica Barr provides an insightful discussion of both the inadequacy and usefulness of the distinctions of “authentic” and “literary” visionary and dream writing in her introduction to *Willing to Know God* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2010), especially pp. 35. See the chapter on dream and vision genres below.

⁹ Several studies discussed below address the social role of the mystic vision, revelation, or apocalypse in the Western tradition. See Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Katharina M. Wilson, *Medieval Women Writers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984); J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* and “Jewish Apocalyptic against Its Hellenistic Near Eastern Environment.” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (1975), 220:27-36; and Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*.

“borrowed” sense of authority elevates the overtly literary fiction, lifting it, even if only subtly, heavenward.

While many scholars have noted the importance of authority in dream literature—Kruger, Collins, Spearing, Barr, Lynch, Russell, among many others¹⁰—the present study takes this broad concept of authority and applies it in a more specific and comprehensive manner than previous scholarship to several key texts in the history of Western dream literature, namely the Book of Daniel, Macrobius’ *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations of Love*, and Chaucer’s *House of Fame*. These texts are not only highly influential in their respective traditions, they serve as paradigms of diverse dream and vision genre(s): the dream sequence (Daniel); the apocalypse (Daniel); Neoplatonic dream theory and the classical dream vision (Macrobius’ *Commentary*); the divine vision (Julian’s *Revelations*); and the ironic dream vision (Chaucer’s *House of Fame*). These diverse works and traditions feature several conventional “authorizing devices” that characterize the dream and vision genres they represent. As I will attempt to highlight throughout, while some of these strategies remain particular to one genre and/or era, others clearly cross periods, cultures, and traditions.

Emphasis and Scope

This study arose from my readings in medieval dream visions, where the authority, or lack thereof, of the dream is often highlighted in a particularly emphatic manner. Dream visions, or framed dream narratives, reach their peak in both popularity and formal maturity in Western

¹⁰ The principal texts to which I am referring are: Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*; J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*; A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*; Jessica Barr, *Willing to Know God*; Kathryn L. Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form*; Stephen J. Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form*.

civilization in the High and Late Middle Ages.¹¹ The literary, scholarly, and popular religious interest in dreams and dreaming intersect in this period in a unique way in Western history. Popular visionaries, such as Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Marguerite d'Oingt (c. 1240-1310), Gertrude of Helfta (c. 1256-1301), Margery Kempe (c. 1373-1438), and Julian of Norwich (c. 1342-1416)—whose *Revelations of Love* is the central focus of one of the following chapters—strengthened the cultural valence of dreams and contributed new conventional standards. By the thirteenth century, scholastic circles had appropriated and adapted Neoplatonic and Patristic dream theories into their own theoretical models.¹² In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, widely read authors such as de Lorris and de Meun, Dante¹³, Langland, and Chaucer helped solidify the dream vision as a far-reaching and much imitated form, second only to the romance in the Late Middle Ages.

In works like the *Romance of the Rose*, *Piers Plowman* and *House of Fame*, the reliability of the dreamer, the purpose and accuracy of the dream account, and the truth of the arguments and revelations within are often deliberately called into question. The handling of authority in these texts raised a general question for me: How do other dream and vision traditions handle authority? What techniques or devices do they employ in either solidifying or undermining the sense of authority in their texts? And to what degree are medieval authors engaging with, answering, mimicking, or mocking these techniques and devices?

¹¹ Using Dinzelbacher's study (*Visions and Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter*, pp. 13-28), Lynch highlights some illuminating statistics: "According to a recent conservative count, over 225 visions were written from the sixth century through the fifteenth, if one does not distinguish between literary and nonliterary visions. The concentration is even higher for the years after 1100, when about 70 percent of all visions and 90 percent of the literary ones were probably composed" (Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision*, p. 1).

¹² The most systematic analysis of this heritage is Kruger's *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*.

¹³ Including Dante among the imitators and innovators of the dream vision is not as cut and dried as the others listed here, but, as will be discussed below, his *Commedia*, while not employing a traditional dream frame, nonetheless takes up many of the conventions and themes of dream visions—and, as is the mode of Dante, ingeniously expands upon and complicates them. Other scholars have also included the *Commedia* among the genre; in *The High Medieval Dream Vision*, Lynch labels it a "philosophical vision" (her name for a subgenre of dream vision) along with those of Alain de Lille, Jean de Meun, and Gower.

The emphasis and scope of the following study flow from the ultimate goal of better understanding authorizing strategies in Late Medieval English dream visions, particularly those of Chaucer (whose *House of Fame* is the focus of the final chapter). Working backward from that end, I first narrowed the various eras, genres, and works to investigate only works that 1) are paradigmatic representations of their respective genres and 2) exercised a high degree of influence on that formal tradition. From this more narrowed field, I have selected four texts to serve as case studies, each modeling influential or common “authorizing strategies” of their genre, culture and era.

This study does not attempt to trace a direct, linear genealogy of authority to Late Medieval English dream literature. Such a project is impossible, requiring an oversimplification of the diverse traditions at work and forcing a reductive reading of the ways influence and ingenuity in literature operate. Instead, the following is an examination of and meditation upon diverse authorizing strategies in four key dream and vision texts in the Western tradition. I explore the imitations, parallels, adaptations, and reformations of these strategies, especially as they manifest themselves during the height of the popularity of the rhetorical dream visions in the Late Middle Ages. At the same time, I will resist pursuing a reductive or myopic approach to these diverse texts and traditions.

The present study is predicated upon two underlying arguments: 1) that dreams and visions in literature are usually employed as authorizing devices, and 2) that the texts involving dreams and visions draw upon numerous conventional strategies for both affirming and complicating (especially in the ironic dream vision, a genre I will discuss in more depth below) the text’s authority. My method for exploring this thesis involves four case studies in which I synthesize recent dream and vision scholarship, consider historical context and intertextual

dialogue, and perform my own close reading of relevant passages. While at times I address the diverse issues intrinsic to dream literature—especially their complex historical, philosophical, and spiritual contexts—I attempt to explore these connections and sub-arguments primarily in terms of authority and textual self-authorization.

Chapter Overview

I begin with a taxonomy of the various genres, subgenres, and modes of dream and vision literature in the Western tradition. This categorization inherently engages questions of authority, most notably concerning divine impartation and the authority of tradition. My first move is to make the distinction addressed above between “authentic” and “literary” dreams and visions. I argue that the “authentic” texts of prophets and visionaries are the cultural referents from which their “literary” correlatives derive a greater part of their authority. Drawing upon the work of Kruger, McGinn, and Collins, I distinguish between two major varieties of “authentic” or “non-literary” dreams and visions: corrective prophecy and mystical visions. I proceed to discuss subdivisions, or modes, of mystical visions: the revelation of divine “first principles”; visions of Hell, Purgatory, and/or Heaven; prophecies of future events, apocalypse, and anti- or infernal revelations. As I explain, these two traditions, though sometimes overlapping (as in Ezekiel), contain subtly different motivations and methods; however, both modes are presented as authoritative, divinely-imparted revelations of truth. I divide the “literary” modes into two major categories: dream sequences and dream visions. Building from Kruger, Spearing, Russell, and Barr, I discuss three key subdivisions of dream visions: didactic instruction (the correlative of corrective prophecy), pseudo-revelation (the correlative of mystical visions), and ironic or invalid dream visions (akin to the anti-revelation). While these three subgenres contain their own

particular emphases, they all engage with the issue of authority implicitly through their deliberate echoes of their “authentic” counterparts.¹⁴

The first text I examine has proved pivotal in establishing several authorizing strategies in two usually distinct dream and vision modes: the dream sequence and the apocalyptic vision. By the Late Middle Ages, the Book of Daniel was arguably the most influential dream text in the Western tradition¹⁵—and one that successfully demonstrated the role both the dream sequence and the apocalypse might play in struggles for cultural authority or legitimization.¹⁶ I begin the discussion with a review of recent scholarship concerning the complexity of the text’s literary and cultural heritage. Contemporary studies of Daniel, as exemplified in the work of J. J. Collins, place the compilation/composition of the text in a particularly tumultuous cultural moment: the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes IV and the Maccabean revolts (2nd century BC). The text’s use of dreams to assert Jewish cultural legitimacy—essential in its historical moment—begins in the dream sequences of the first half of the text, where the author/compiler establishes the intellectual credentials of Daniel (paralleling the elitist credentials espoused in the Neoplatonic dream theory of Macrobius), his supremacy over his competitors, the proper subject matter of legitimate dreams, the necessary humility of a receiver or interpreter of a divine vision, and the ultimate authority of Yahweh. In the second half, which employs the genre of the apocalyptic vision, the text features several authorizing devices that become popular in subsequent

¹⁴ See the table of genres in Appendix A.

¹⁵ J.J. Collins’ comprehensive explication of Daniel provides a detailed discussion of the various interpretations of Daniel from its earliest Jewish references, relationship to the Qumran, and on. J.J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 72-122. As Collins notes in his introduction, Daniel’s influence can be seen as early as a half century later in the books of the Maccabees (72). For more discussions of Daniel’s widespread influence, see J.J. Collins, “Current Issues in the Study of Daniel”; Lester L. Grabbe, “A Dan(iel) for all Seasons: for whom was Daniel Important?”; and Klauss Koch, *Europa, Rom und der Kaiser vor dem Hintergrund von zwei Jahr-tausenden Rezeption des Buches Daniel* (Hamburg: Joachim Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, 1997).

¹⁶ The apocalypse’s role in the struggle for cultural legitimacy and communal consolation is the central premise of Collins’ *The Apocalyptic Imagination* and “Jewish Apocalyptic against its Hellenistic Near Eastern Environment.”

apocalypses. The visions' most significant feature is a masterful mixture of precision and vagueness, simultaneously grounding the vision in history (with specific dates, cultural references, and timeframes) and presenting its narrative in "apocalyptic symbolism" and cryptic revelation.¹⁷ Daniel not only helps to popularize two dream/vision modes, serving as a textual paradigm for both the dream sequence and apocalypse, but it provides a model for those exposed to the text of how to successfully employ the two genres to powerful socio-political effect.

From the famous Hebrew dream and vision text, I turn to the standard bearer for Neoplatonic dream theory, Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*. This massively influential work—particularly in scholarly circles of the High and Late Middle Ages¹⁸—is not only crucial in understanding dream theory for medieval thinkers, but also for its arguments on the centrality of authority in dream literature. Macrobius approaches Cicero's dream vision in a characteristically Neoplatonic encyclopedist's manner, stressing his authoritative sources throughout.¹⁹ His emphatic sourcing has a cumulative effect, building a sense of consensus (although by imperfect paraphrase and, even, contradiction). This is the authority-emphasizing mode of the Neoplatonist polymaths, a mode that directly influenced medieval scholars and authors. After defending the legitimacy of using fiction in philosophical discourse, he narrows his discussions to the potential philosophical legitimacy of dream visions.²⁰ His privileging of the

¹⁷ Collins, McGinn and David S. Russell likewise highlight the concept of apocalyptic symbolism; for more on the importance of this element in apocalyptic visions, see both the genres and Daniel chapters below.

¹⁸ Perhaps none were so overtly influenced as Chaucer, whose dream visions will be the focus of a later chapter in the current study. For an important early study of the *Commentary's* influence on Chaucer, see Anderson, E.P. "Some Notes on Chaucer's Treatment of the Somnium Scipionis," *Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, XXXIII (1902), xcvi-xcix. For a broader discussion of the development of Chaucer's worldview, see Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*. New York, 1926 and J.L. Lowes, *Geoffrey Chaucer and the Development of his Genius* (Boston & NY, 1934).

¹⁹ For comprehensive discussions of sourcing in Neoplatonic texts, see Thomas Whittaker, *The Neo-Platonists* (2nd ed. Cambridge, England, 1918).

²⁰ As I point out below, Macrobius' defense of fiction likely follows his predecessors, Porphyry and Proclus. See Stahl 84; Thomas Whittaker, *Macrobius; or Philosophy, Science and Letters in the Year 400*. (Cambridge, England,

dream vision as an ideal philosophical expression stems from his passion for authority and championing the indirect expression of higher philosophical truths. Macrobius argues that the power of dream fiction ultimately rests upon that dream's ability to meet legitimizing credentials: the vision must be revealed to a properly credentialed figure, by an authoritative oracular guide, concern appropriately weighty subject matter, and convey its higher truths through a philosophically appropriate indirect mode. The second half of the chapter focuses on Macrobius' influential five categories of dreams: the *somnium*, *visio*, *oraculum*, *insomnium*, and *visum*.²¹ As Macrobius argues, these five categories are grouped into two major types based upon their authority or lack thereof. His paradigmatic application of those categories to the *Dream of Scipio* completes his argument for the authority of the dream vision genre in philosophical discourse.

Chapter Four examines authoritative devices in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Love*, a divine vision representative of the female mystics of the High and Late Middle Ages. The authorizing strategy employed by Julian of Norwich involves several prominent religious and philosophical discourses of the period, all of which center on authority: questions of epistemology (i.e., the relationship of the *intellectus* and *ratio*); individual volition; the role of piety in gaining access to divine truths; and the necessity of orthodoxy to a divine vision's canonicity. Drawing upon recent scholarship, especially that of Kathryn Lynch, Jessica Barr, and

1923): 58; and Karl Mras, "Macrobius' Kommentar zu Ciceros Somnium," *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, Jahrg. 1933): 236-37.

²¹ Artemidorus' categories were also a major influence in the Western dream tradition; the relationship between the dream theory of Artemidorus and Macrobius is still in debate. See Kruger 20 and Stahl, I, iii, 87-8, footnote 1. For an important study of Artemidorus, see Claes Blum's *Studies in the Dream-Book of Artemidorus* (Uppsala, 1936).

Barbara Newman,²² I examine the complex claims to authority through the emphasis of the passive/receptive *intellectus* through the rhetoric of humility and the “unlettered” (or the de-emphasis of educational credentials²³). Julian, however, does not only feature the *intellectus* in her visions: she also highlights active cognition, *ratio*, in the revision process of the text. Two closely related authorizing devices employed by Julian are her demonstrations of the alignment of her will with God’s and her devout piety. Finally, Julian’s visions answer perhaps the most crucial test for legitimacy: orthodoxy, the ultimate, argument for the authority of her revelations.

In the final chapter of this study, I focus on the ironic turn the dream vision takes in the High and Late Middle Ages, especially as epitomized in Chaucer’s *House of Fame*. As Kruger argues, intellectuals of that period were increasingly pulled in two directions: between theology and philosophy, revelation and reason.²⁴ Caught between these two poles, Chaucer and many of his fourteenth century contemporaries produced works which purposefully withhold a sense of definitive authority, emphasizing instead ambiguity and ambivalence. This mode runs counter to the definitive revelations of the mystic’s divine visions. The ironic dream vision proved the perfect, ambiguous form for the day: these “enigmatic” visions foreground uncertainty, potential misinformation and misinterpretation. Chaucer’s greatest contribution to the dream vision is his promotion of this ironic, comedic potential. His *House of Fame* experiments with the genre’s conventional limits and themes, continually undermining its own authority, and helping to steer the genre in a satiric and ironic direction. Chaucer primarily accomplishes his ironic goals

²² Namely Lynch’s *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* and *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form*; Barr’s *Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages*; and Newman’s *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages*, “Divine Power Made Perfect in Weakness: St. Hildegard on the Frail Sex,” and “What Did it Mean to Say ‘I Saw’? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture.”

²³ As discussed below, this anti-elitism, learned in part from the Hebrew tradition, runs counter to the Neoplatonic model presented in the preceding chapter.

²⁴ Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 130.

through his heavy use of allusion, which often intermixes clashing and contradictory sources. Characteristically, Chaucer merges high-minded scholarly sources with the popular material of the day. Throughout *House of Fame*, Chaucer teases out the authoritative claims of his diverse sources, creating a subversive vacillation between deference and dismissal of the authorities upon which the text draws. The text's contradictory obsession with and dismissal of authority characterizes both its allusions and narrative digressions, culminating in perhaps the ideal finale for the intentionally abortive tale. The poem ends just before the arrival of the "man of gret auctorite" (2158)—the perfect(ly frustrating) anti-climax of an ironic dream vision.

The intent of the present study is to trace, in a more focused and systematic manner than previous scholarship, the rhetoric of authority through important representative texts from diverse dream and vision genres of the Western tradition. These paradigmatic texts, all holding prominent positions in their respective traditions—the dream sequence, apocalypse, classical dream vision, Neoplatonic dream theory, divine/mystic vision, and ironic dream vision—provide important examples of key "authorizing devices and strategies" employed in their respective dream and vision genres.

CHAPTER 1

THE AUTHORITY OF FORM: DREAM AND VISION GENRES

Authenticity and Artifice

“Dreams and visions” in literature appear in diverse genres, sub-genres, and modes. Learning from other scholars’ models—particularly Kruger, Barr, Spearing, Russell, Lynch, McGinn, and Collins²⁵—I have found it worthwhile to be specific in my categorization of the major forms of dream and vision literature, employing at times my own subgenres and modal descriptions of the diverse manifestations of both “authentic” (nonfictional) and “literary” dream literature. The intention is not to be prescriptive, but to help further construct an interpretative and evaluative framework from which to better understand the “horizons of expectations,” the conventional assumptions and cultural import and meaning of the texts.²⁶ Lynch makes this argument well in *The High Medieval Dream Vision*:

genres are not instruments for prescribing meaning before the fact or classifying it afterward, but for interpreting and producing meaning in the moment, for a specific work and a specific historical time.²⁷

²⁵ Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; Jessica Barr, *Willing to Know God* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2010); A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Stephen J. Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1988); Kathryn L. Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988); Bernard McGinn, “Introduction.” *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 1-36; J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) and “Jewish Apocalyptic against Its Hellenistic Near Eastern Environment.” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (1975), 220:27-36.

²⁶ Jauss, Hans Robert. “Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature.” In his *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis, 1982) Pp. 76-109. (Lynch uses Jauss heavily in *High Medieval Dream Vision*.)

²⁷ Lynch, *High Medieval Dream Vision*, p. 5-6. In the introduction to her study, Lynch provides a thoughtful and balanced defense of categorization, perhaps best captured in the following passage: “A genre, rather, seems to be made up of a repertoire of features that evolve slowly over time. Drawing upon this repertoire, individual writers can create meaning by varying and modifying generic norms. Thus, any adequate theory of genre must find a middle ground between what Hans Robert Jauss calls ‘the Scylla of nominalist skepticism . . . and the Charybdis of

My intention in the present study is to approach the texts with a certain reverence for specificity—to the text’s specific designs and methods, the specific historic moment, and the specific conventions of the form—as a balance to the overarching comparative purposes of this study. The following subgenres and types are to be applied with this qualification, read as descriptive rather than prescriptive.

My first major division is a standard one in dream and vision formal analysis: distinguishing the “authentic” (“non-literary”) and “literary” texts. As is implied in the first category, the theme of authority is already inherent in this overarching distinction: the first classification implies claims to authoritative, higher knowledge. The second, as I will argue below, inherently borrows from the perceived authority of the authentic correlatives, offering artificial parallels or emanations of the first, as well as its own particular “authorizing devices,” often stressing scholarly and literary authorities and the collective authority of literary tradition.

While dividing the “authentic” from the “literary” might be a common dichotomy, it is nonetheless problematic. In her introduction to *Willing to Know God*, Jessica Barr provides an illuminating discussion of the underlying problems in distinguishing between these two traditionally differentiated modes of visionary and dream texts. Drawing upon Lynn Staley and Barbara Newman, both scholars who have also recently addressed this issue, Barr points out that “the porosity of the boundaries between presumably authentic and presumably fictional vision texts” is more complex than earlier scholarship often recognizes.²⁸ In many cases their

regression into timeless typologies.’ Or as Alastair Fowler points out in an excellent recent study of the problem, adjustments are continually required ‘to mediate between the flux of history and the canons of art.’ According to Jauss and Fowler, then, genres are not instruments for prescribing meaning before the fact or classifying it afterward ,but for interpreting and producing meaning in the moment, for a specific work and a specific historical time” (Lynch, *High Medieval Dream Vision*; citing Jauss, *Theory of Genres*, p. 78 & 80 and Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 22 & 24).

²⁸ Barr, *Willing to Know God*, p. 4.

boundaries overlap and altogether disappear, as many works are ambiguous in their intention, historicity, and/or formal applications. As Barr argues:

Vision texts of both kinds make claims to theological as well as experiential authenticity while also employing literary and even fictionalizing conventions.²⁹

Every utterance and text is ultimately a constructed thing, inherently “rhetorical” or, in the most general of applications, “literary.” For instance, the “authentic” revelations of the mystics cannot be simply confined to the study of historians; as studies of the last few decades have demonstrated, they often employ their own “literary” conventions:

It takes little imagination to realize that visionaries could reorder their experiences for the sake of their telling, highlight or downplay certain episodes, and alter details in the reconstruction of what they perceive in their visions; furthermore, vision texts and hagiographies themselves have been shown to be carefully constructed narratives whose authors make highly strategic decisions in order to sustain the impression of their subjects’ sanctity.³⁰

Certainly “in-between” texts—like Mechthild of Magdeburg’s overtly constructed visionary writing, Dante’s theologically rich, pseudo-prophetic, yet self-consciously “literary” epic, and Christine de Pisan’s fictional yet visionary-like *Book of the City of Ladies*—cross over, frustrate, and complicate the boundaries between the fictional and nonfictional categories of dreams and visions.

²⁹ Barr, *Willing to Know God*, p. 4.

³⁰ Barr, 3; Cf. Staley, *Margery Kempe’s Dissenting Fictions*, 3, and Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 19-26.

However, as Barr, Lynch, and others have concluded, while these overarching distinctions are by necessity oversimplifications, they are nonetheless useful in analyses.³¹ That being said, the majority of texts fall rather easily into these two traditional classifications; for this reason, I use these distinctions as a convenient and helpful means of more precisely defining and sub-categorizing dream literature. (See Appendix A for an outline of the following taxonomy.)

Authentic Dreams and Visions

Generally speaking, the texts of authentic visionaries and prophets are the cultural referents from which their literary cousins derive a greater part of their authority. The visionary messages and dream interpretations of the prophets and holy texts are ever whispering between the verses of their overtly fictional correlatives, lending them import and consequence. In the following study, I distinguish between two major varieties of authentic or “non-literary” dreams and visions: corrective prophecy and divine/mystical visions. The reductive conflation of prophecy (i.e., societally corrective messages) with visions of future events, especially apocalypses, requires a more explicit description of and distinction between the two (sometimes overlapping) traditions. Both the motivations and methods of these two dominant categories diverge enough to require clearer differentiation.

Corrective prophecy is a didactic mode, teaching its hearers mostly through cause and effect, *ratio*-based arguments.³² As corrective prophecy often involves dreamed or visionary messages, it can fall under the umbrella category of dream and vision literature. Corrective

³¹ For example, the following statement by Barr: “And yet, it seems like a mistake—or at least an overstatement—to claim that there are *no* generic distinctions between Julian’s *Showings* and *Piers Plowman*. Although the categories of authenticity and literariness do not work consistently as ways of distinguishing these texts, they can be useful; [...] Superficially, we do seem to have, if not two different genres, at least two ends of a spectrum of experiential basis” (Barr, *Willing to Know God*, p. 4-6).

³² See the discussions of Aquinas’ theories on *ratio* and *intellectus* in the chapter on Julian of Norwich below.

prophecy appears in three dominant modes: lamentation, remonstrance, and exhortation.³³ While some prophecies emphasize one over the others, often they employ the full range of these three corrective approaches, most notably in the major Hebrew prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. Though certainly not always the case, this general pattern is often followed, even cyclically, in one prophecy: lamentation of the current spiritual state of the culture; cause and effect explanation for and remonstrance against this lamentable state; and societal exhortation to return to faithful orthodoxy. This is certainly not an exhaustive description of the diverse modes of corrective prophecy; however, most of the passages of such prophecy, especially in the Hebrew tradition, fall under one of these three sub-varieties.

Mystical visions, while sometimes interwoven with corrective prophecy, are often separate modes with purposes distinct from that tradition and relying more upon revealed or *intellectus*-based knowledge than active reasoning.³⁴ Consider the second half of Daniel (chapters 7-12), which present mystical visions of future events, including the vision of the four beasts, representing four future earthly kingdoms, and his visions of the Son of Man and the final apocalyptic battles between the Kings of the South and North. The purpose of these visions is not corrective; no specific societal sins are lamented or admonished, and no clear corrective solutions are provided that the prophet might exhort his culture to enact. The vision is an apocalypse rather than a “corrective prophecy,” existing as a testament to the divine

³³ This is my own sub-categorization derived from my readings of canonical Hebrew prophecy. For a particularly thorough application of the diverse modes of Jewish prophecy, see Walther Zimmerli. *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, Eds. Frank Moore Cross, Claus Baltzer, and Leonard Jay Greenspoon. Trans. Ronald E. Clements. Hermeneia. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) and *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, Eds. Paul D. Hanson and Leonard Jay Greenspoon. Trans. James D. Martin. Hermeneia. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

³⁴ See the discussion of *ratio* and *intellectus* in the chapter on Julian of Norwich below.

foreknowledge imparted by God and as a consolation (as Collins argues³⁵), rather than a moral or social admonishment.³⁶ These mystical or divine visions might be subdivided into two types: revelatory and anti-revelatory. Gregory makes this distinction, determined ultimately by the spiritual origin of the vision; a true, revelatory vision comes ultimately from God, while an anti-revelatory vision is imparted by a demonic source.³⁷

Divine visions appear in a few modes: revelations of divine “first principles” (e.g., the revelation of God’s love to Julian of Norwich, see below), visions of Hell, Purgatory, and/or Heaven (e.g., the apocalypses of Peter, Paul & the Virgin), visions of future secular/worldly events (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the colossus, some passages of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah) and, finally, the immensely popular apocalypse (e.g., the final six chapters of Daniel and the Revelation of John). Anti-revelations are infernally-derived inversions of these true divine visions (as discussed in Tertullian and Gregory³⁸).

As will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on Daniel below, the apocalypse is a complex form that requires precise definition. The most widely accepted was created by the scholars (headed by J. J. Collins) involved in the Society of Biblical Literature Genres Project, *Semeia* 14 (1979). They defined the apocalypse as

a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality

³⁵ In *The Apocalyptic Imagination: an Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*, J. J. Collins in part examines the ways the apocalypse, like the Daniel, Enoch, and Sibylline Oracle texts, was employed by Jewish authors to push back against the cultural pressures imposed by the Hellenistic (under Antiochus Epiphanes IV) and Roman (during the Jewish revolts) forces of their respective eras. This “push back” involved the use of apocalypse to console, revive, and/or strengthen the faith of the oppressed.

³⁶ I will expound on the authorizing purposes of the Daniel below.

³⁷ See Kruger’s discussion in *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Ch. 3 “The Patristic Dream.”

³⁸ See Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, pp. 50-53, 125-26).

which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.³⁹

Since that definition's widespread acceptance, many scholars have attempted to list specific formal elements of the genre. Bernard McGinn provides a useful summary of many of D. S. Russell's essential characteristic of Jewish apocalyptic (many of which are likewise posited in Collins' *The Apocalyptic Imagination*):

1. A "systematic and deterministic" conception of history as a "unitary process"
2. An emphasis on the conflict between good and evil (especially as portrayed through angelic beings)
3. The dual "sense of the imminence" of the final days of this age and the "transcendental character" of the one to come
4. The anticipation of a messianic kingdom, and in some cases a coming Messiah
5. And the expectation of life after death, along with a time of judgment⁴⁰

A majority of Old Testament Hebrew authentic dream and visionary writing emphasizes the corrective prophecy; however, the popularity of the canonical Hebrew mystical visions—especially the apocalypse of Daniel (as validated explicitly by Christ himself in Matthew 24:15)—heavily influence the dominant approach of the Early Christians: apocalyptic and

³⁹ J. J. Collins, ed. *Apocalypse: the Morphology of a Genre* (Semeia14; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979). For one of the most widely-referenced systematic analyses of apocalypse, see J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*.

⁴⁰ Bernard McGinn, "Introduction," *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 2-14; citing David S. Russell *The Message and Method of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 BC-AD 100* (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1964).

mystical visions.⁴¹ The popularity of this Early Christian apocalypse and divine vision continues with rather consistent popular currency throughout the Middle Ages, often crossing over into more “literary” modes (especially that of the dream vision), while corrective prophecy is increasingly relegated to the teachings, pronouncements, and policies of the Church.

Literary Dreams and Visions

Dream Sequences

Arguably the most prevalent dream mode in Western literature is the within-the-narrative dream sequence, where the storyteller includes a dream account as a part of the diegesis, allowing the reader into the mind of one of the characters, pertaining to events that have already occurred or will occur in the story. Our earliest example serves as the paradigm for this mode: Within the diegetic world of *Gilgamesh*, the mythic king has a dream that not only provides insight into his thoughts, but serves to tighten the narrative structure of the poem by allowing for a narrative flash-forward and eventual fulfillment of those forecast events. The Old Testament is filled with such intra-narrative dream sequences: various key societal figures have troubling dreams that require interpretation. Joseph and Daniel not only prove to be capable interpreters, but dream their own dreams as well; their dreams and their ability to interpret signaling or giving rise to their eventual cultural prominence. The New Testament follows suit, especially in the Gospel of Matthew, wherein Christ’s coming ministry is revealed to both the Jew and Gentile alike. It is difficult to find a period in the Western tradition that does not similarly feature the diegetical

⁴¹ The influence of the Hebrew apocalypse on early Christianity is the underlying argument of Collins’ *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*.

dream sequence in an equally prominent way—and to similar effect: both providing dramatic glimpses into the thoughts of the characters and allowing for a tightening of narrative threads.⁴²

Dream Visions

The dream vision is the literary cousin of the divine vision, drawing much of its sense of supernatural authority from its “authentic” relative.⁴³ The dream vision originates in the Classical period and reaches its popular apotheosis in the High and Late Middle Ages. From the beginning of the twelfth century to the end of the sixteenth, ninety percent of the dream visions of the medieval period were produced.⁴⁴ The dream vision is markedly “literary,” overtly constructed, employing the dream framework and other ubiquitous conventions for, as J. Stephen Russell puts it, “self-consciously fictional” purposes.⁴⁵ This artificiality is strengthened by the author’s often emphatic connection of the text to the larger dream vision tradition.

In his influential formal analysis of the medieval dream vision, Russell establishes a few key formal components present in most dream visions:

At the simplest level, a dream vision is the first person account of a dream; the dream report is usually preceded by a prologue introducing the dreamer as a character and often

⁴² Examples of slippage between the two categories (authentic and literary) can be seen clearly in the examples I provide, as, depending one’s perspective, the historical nature of the tales might include these dream sequences in the “authentic” category.

⁴³ For an older study on the deliberate connections with authentic dream and visionary experiences in the poetry of Chaucer and his contemporaries, see Constance B. Heatt, *The Realism of Dream Visions: The Poetic Exploitation of the Dream-Experience in Chaucer and His Contemporaries* (Paris, 1967).

⁴⁴ See Lynch’s *High Medieval Dream Vision*, p. 1; based on Dinzelsbacher’s *Visions and Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter*, pp. 13-28.

⁴⁵ Russell uses this phrase to describe Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis* in his *English Dream Vision* (p. 8). For a study on the broader category of “framed fiction,” see Judith M. Davidoff, *Beginning Well: Framing Fictions in Late Middle English Poetry* (London & Toronto, 1988).

followed by an epilogue describing the dreamer's reawakening and recording the dream report in verse.⁴⁶

Dream visions generally contain these four essential elements: 1. the dreamer-narrator-character;⁴⁷ 2. a prologue opening frame that generally provides a vague sense of the dreamer's (often distressed) waking state; 3. the "dream report" or dream narrative itself, which comes in diverse forms; and 4. the epilogue, which will sometimes specify the waking response of the dreamer. Russell points out that the most heavily conventionalized formal element is the prologue.⁴⁸ The diversity of the forms of the actual dream narrative frustrates any all-inclusive description, but they can include wise guide figures, allegorical human and non-human characters, philosophical debates, and celestial tours.⁴⁹ The epilogues of dream visions are often brief, but sometimes will offer a sense of enlightenment and future direction for the dreamer; regardless of the specifics, this portion of the work provides closure that is often not offered in the dream report itself.

The most influential works in the Western tradition that fit this description of the dream vision are Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (1st century BC), de Lorris and de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* (c. 1230-80), *Pearl* (late 14th century), Langland's *Piers Plowman* (B Text c. 1378-80), and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchesse* (c. 1368), *House of Fame* (c. 1378-81), *Parlement of Foules* (c. 1380) and the *Legend of Good Women* (c. 1386). Among these rhetorical dream visions, many scholars include Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (c. 524) and Dante's *Commedia* (1314-21), both of which, though missing traditional dream-framing elements, nonetheless,

⁴⁶ Russell, *English Dream Vision*, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Russell, *English Dream Vision*, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Russell, *English Dream Vision*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ For a study on the allegorical elements of medieval dream and vision fiction, see Paul Piehler, *Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory* (London, 1971).

follow and elaborate upon key conventions and themes of the dream report/narrative element of the mode.

As several scholars have argued, the dream vision presented medieval readers a highly self-reflexive and emphatically artificial form—perhaps more so than any other genre in that period. Kruger points to this intrinsic self-reflexivity and constructedness—the text’s ability to “examine its own status as poetry”⁵⁰—several times in *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*:

The dream fiction, by representing in the dream an imaginative entity like fiction itself, often becomes self-reflexive. Dream vision is especially liable to become metafiction, thematizing issues of representation and interpretation.⁵¹

Spearing elaborates upon this premise in *Medieval Dream Poetry*, arguing ultimately that the dream vision helps to take fiction as whole to a new level of self-realization as a work of art:

essentially a dream-poem, from the fourteenth century on, is a poem which has more fully realized its own existence as a poem. Compared with other poems, it makes us more conscious that it has a beginning and end (marked by the falling asleep and awakening of the narrator); that it has a narrator, whose experience constitutes the subject-matter of the poem; that its status is that of an imaginative fiction (whether this is conceived as a matter of inspiration or of mere fantasy, or somewhere between the two); in short that it is not a work of nature but a work of art.⁵²

This palpable artificiality is often redoubled by the author’s deliberate integration of the work into the dream vision tradition, a rhetorical move that Russell finds essential to the genre, arguing that to be considered a dream vision, a poem must “*both* contain certain motifs *and* be

⁵⁰ Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 135.

⁵¹ Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 134.

⁵² Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, pp. 4-5.

the product of the poet's intention to follow a tradition or imitate a generic model."⁵³ While Russell's convention/tradition-based criterion is specifically relevant to medieval dream visions (and thus perhaps might not be applied accurately to the genre's primary works, like *Somnium Scipionis* or even *De Consolatione*), it points to a deliberate, conscious integration into the ancient tradition of the framed dream narrative. Spearing likewise comments on this emphasis on tradition:

It appears, then, that medieval writers of dream-poems were conscious of writing in an ancient tradition, going back to Scriptural and Classical sources, to which they felt a need to establish the relationship in their own poetic visions.⁵⁴

Paul Piehler addresses this conscious connection with the dream vision tradition as well, arguing that the poets "regard themselves as part of a cumulative tradition, in which each allegorist recapitulates, refines and develops the thought and imagery of his predecessors."⁵⁵ This emphasis on a larger tradition is an important authoritative strategy, especially for those dream vision poets of the Late Middle Ages.⁵⁶

Three major *modes* of dream vision are popular: didactic, pseudo-revelatory, and ironic/invalid.⁵⁷ These diverse modes are often employed in the same work, creating an interpretative "tension."⁵⁸ These literary dream visions, while deliberately drawing attention to their artificiality, strategically borrow from some of the key conventions of their authentic

⁵³ Russell, *English Dream Vision*, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Piehler, *Visionary Landscape*, p. 20. (Lynch also cites this quote in *High Medieval Dream Vision*, p. 4.)

⁵⁶ Lynch addresses this issue at length in *High Medieval Dream Vision*: "For later poets, looking backward and forward at the same time, the visionary subgenre generated by Boethius and extended by Alain de Lille, Jean de Meun, John Gower, and other would have such a meaning. These poems would embody the authority and conservatism for which later poets yearned as much as they did for change" (p. 15).

⁵⁷ For more on the ironic dream vision, see the chapter on Chaucer's *House of Fame* below.

⁵⁸ Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 129.

counterparts as well as the cumulative authority of the dream vision tradition itself to produce a complex duality of interpretation: at once foregrounding the constructed nature of the work while simultaneously drawing upon the genre's borrowed and inherent authority.

The instructive modes of corrective prophecy find their approximate correlatives in didactic dream visions, wherein the author uses the dream vision conventions as a means of teaching about more *ratio*-based "worldly," romantic or philosophical truths.⁵⁹ Both the courtly love vision, or just "love vision" (as epitomized in *The Romance of the Rose*, the most influential High Medieval dream vision), and philosophical vision (e.g., Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, the primary Late Antique source for this subgenre, and de Lille's *Complaint of Nature*) follow this didactic mode.⁶⁰

Some passages of these works (or the works in their entirety) imitate most closely mystical, revelatory visions, likewise stressing revealed knowledge (and thus emphasizing the use of the *intellectus*), and often featuring visions of hell, purgatory, heaven, and/or future events.⁶¹ I include both revelation and anti-revelation in this category: heavenly, imparted by God or a member of his angelic host, and intended to lead the dreamer to spiritual enlightenment; and demonic, imparted by an infernal source and, thus, intended to lead the (as featured in

⁵⁹ I am indebted to Barr for many of my treatment of *ratio* and *intellectus*. See the chapter on the Medieval Divine Visions for more discussion of these terms and Barr's application of them, especially to mystical visions.

⁶⁰ In *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions*, Lynch recognizes a similar subcategory of medieval dream visions, calling them "philosophical visions," a subgenre she traces in an earlier study from the High Middle Ages and that she argues "sought to affirm the continuity between the realms of nature and of grace" (26). Chapter 2 of her study is the most direct in her description of the subgenre. Lynch introduced her definition of the philosophical vision in her earlier work, *The High Medieval Dream Vision*, where she discusses a synonym for the subgenre, the Boethian vision, arguing against the label because of its misleading sense of direct contact and lineage from *De Consolatione* (pp. 1-19). Barr also recognizes this philosophical, instructive variety of dream vision, labeling it "educative" (Barr, *Willing to Know God*, pp. 23-28).

⁶¹ Kruger labels this dream vision sub-genre as, simply, "divine," as opposed to the "mundane" dream (what I call "ironic/invalid dream"), as discussed below. In this dual sub-genre division, the "didactic" dream would likely fall under the first category.

Gregory the Great's *Dialogs* and the poetic life of St. Guthlac).⁶² Both (pseudo-) revelation and anti-revelation fall under this category as each claim otherworldly sources, one heavenly, the other infernal. Most popular though are the heavenly visions, offering a literary version of the mystic vision. Such imitations of mystical revelation play prominent roles in Cicero's *The Dream of Scipio* (see discussion of Macrobius below), Dante's *Comedy*, and *Pearl*.

The potential for a multiplicity of modes in dream visions is underscored here: works like the *Comedy* clearly employing both didactic and pseudo-visionary modes; often the more extensive and complex the work, the more likely several of these modes will be employed. The pseudo-revelatory mode in the dream vision was particularly popular in the High Middle Ages; the subsequent generations of poets would more prominently explore the comedic and ironic potential of the form.

The ironic/invalid mode, which comes to dominate dream visions in the fourteenth century, emphasizes comedy and satire; the artificiality of the text generally underscored even more overtly than the other forms. These dream visions hint toward or openly claim corporeal or worldly sources; thus, admitting their lack of authority. These false/mundane visions correspond roughly to Macrobius' *insomnia*, "mundane nightmares," or *visa*, "hallucinations."⁶³ Chaucer and Langland solidified this form, opening up the ironic potential of dream literature for subsequent generations. Lynch discusses this subgenre as a "self-reflexive" or "tertiary phase" of medieval vision poetry (the first phase marked by unconscious participation in an imperfectly realized genre, as might be argued for *De Consolatione*; the second by conscious imitation of and

⁶² Kruger discusses infernal, "anti-revelations" at length in several sections of *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*; one particularly helpful section, mentioning demonic dreams of the *Dialogues* and *Guthlac A*, as well as *Strabo's Visio Wettini*, is the sixth chapter, "Dreams and fiction" (pp. 123-49).

⁶³ Kruger often uses the term "mundane" to describe these ultimately worldly, false, or deceptive dream accounts. See especially his initial discussion of Macrobius and Calcidius and Chapter 6: "Dreams and Fiction" (*Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, pp. 21-32 and pp. 123-49).

elaboration upon the genre, including the creation of subgenres, as might be ascribed to many of the High Medieval texts)⁶⁴:

More thoroughly and in radically new ways, these later poets stretch the form and turn it in on itself to express a view of the world and art significantly different from that of their predecessors.⁶⁵

The quintessential example of the invalid dream vision is Chaucer's *House of Fame*, which both affirms and mocks its authoritative traditional roots: the poet at once deliberately calls attention to the ancient roots of the genre, only to redirect the genre through its ironic disruptions and reversals. Much of this ironic redirection stems from the poem's pronounced invalidity—its humorous de-authorizing strategies. Langland achieves a similar de-authorizing effect in *Piers Plowman*, increasingly interrupting the revelatory process and foregrounding the ineptitude of the dreamer as receiver and transmitter of higher truth.⁶⁶ These deliberately invalid visions often deconstruct many of the authorizing strategies employed by authentic and literary dreams alike, reversing the visionary program; rather than providing a transcendent journey from corporeal to celestial, reason to revelation (in Aquinas' terms, *ratio* to *intellectus*), sin to grace, by continually drawing the reader back to earth, most often via the dreamer's imperfection.

⁶⁴ Building on Fowler's arguments in *Kinds of Literature*, Lynch explains: "Primary literary kinds, Fowler argues, though not necessarily primitive, come at the beginning of a form's evolution, when a writer is not conscious of the system of conventions within which he is working, or at least not conscious of them as a system. Boethius might be seen as primary in respect to the Middle Ages, though of course he comes at the end of another highly sophisticated tradition. Secondary kinds—Alain de Lille's *De planctu naturae*, the *Roman de la rose*, Gower's *Confessio Amantis*—are more deliberate, distanced, conscious of using conventions as such, capable of generating new subgenres like the love vision. Finally, a tertiary kind "takes up a kind already secondary, and applies it in a new way," perhaps allegorizing, interiorizing or making burlesque of it, as Kiser and Delany have shown Chaucer's dream visions to do" (*High Medieval Dream Vision*, p. 13).

⁶⁵ Lynch, *High Medieval Dream Vision*, p. 4.

⁶⁶ Barr addresses this strategy in depth in her chapters on *Piers Plowman* and Chaucer's dream poetry in *Willing to Know God*.

The dream vision is a particularly diverse form, a range of its various modes often employed within a single work. Kruger comments on these complex combinations:

The “courtly love” vision, even when only revealing the dreamer’s erotic entanglements, frequently calls to mind (for instance, through the language of a “religion of love”) transcendent realities. Inversely, there is often a pull downward in revelatory visions. When, in the *Visio Wettini*, Wetti briefly resists his angel’s command to make public what he has seen, we are diverted from the wonders of the other world and reminded of the human being’s weakness, his distance from an ideal action (pp. 63-64; lines 656-79). Similarly, in the Middle English *Pearl*, the dreamer’s naïve, uncomprehending questions prevent the poem from ever fully transcending earthly perspectives. Movement toward an understanding of the religious mysteries rarely proceeds unimpeded in medieval dream poetry; the fictional dreamer is, after all, human and fallible.⁶⁷

As Kruger here describes, the overlapping of modes, especially the ironic potential of invalid aspects of the dream account and/or the dreamer’s interpretation of it, make for the complication of clear-cut subgenre designations for many dream vision texts. However, most do subscribe to a dominant mode, drawing upon the particular conventions in order to situate the poem in the evaluative and interpretive tradition of a specific dream vision sub-genre.

Macrobius’ Five Categories and Kruger’s Three-Fold Taxonomy

While I address the contributions of Macrobius in more depth in my discussion of Neoplatonic dream theory, it should prove useful to contextualize (and synchronize) briefly here his five dream categories in relation to these two overarching divisions of dreams and visions, authentic and literary, and to discuss Kruger’s three-fold summary descriptions.

Only three of Macrobius’ five categories are possible types of the first division, authentic dreams and visions. The *oraculum* (direct revelation by an authoritative guide), *visio* (a

⁶⁷ Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 129.

revelation of future worldly events), and *somnium* (a dream containing various truths indirectly or enigmatically revealed). The divine origins of these three categories allow for true mystical revelation. Macrobius' two "mundane" or untruthful dream categories are not legitimate types for the authentic revelation.

All five of Macrobius' dream types are potential material for literary dream visions. The final two categories, the *visum* (a false, spectral illusion or fantasy) and *insomnium* (a false, corporeal or mundanely derived dream), while not relevant in authentic dream texts, are often used in rhetorical dream literature, especially ironic or invalid dream visions. I will examine Chaucer's direct reference to the *insomnium* in more detail below, but the convention of using potentially false sources for a literary dream are ancient indeed, tracing back to the earliest sources, including *Gilgamesh*, the *Iliad*, and the selfishly motivated dream interpretations of false prophets recorded in Hebrew scriptures; these invalid dreams finding clear expression as well in Macrobius' model, Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*.

Having expounded his five dream types, Macrobius demonstrates that a single dream vision might draw from a combination of the modes. His explication of Cicero's *Somnium* works as an illustration of the hybridity of the genre. While most dream visions employ a particular dominant mode, part of the literary appeal of the dream vision genre is the rhetorically complex interpretative "tension" arising from the dream vision's potential to combine aspects of the transcendent (didactic and revelatory) and the mundane (ironic/invalid). Kruger expresses this sentiment concisely in his chapter on "Dreams and fiction":

We cannot, in practice, completely separate divine and mundane visions from each other: the threat of failed vision often lies beneath the surface of the revelatory dream poem, as the suggestion of revelation often inheres in works of the "lower" tradition. The tension

between the transcendent and the mundane, central to medieval dream theory, creeps into even the most fully divine or earthly dream visions.⁶⁸

Because of the impossibility of perfectly ascribing unqualified divisions and distinctions to the various subgenres and modes of the dream vision, Kruger often uses a more general taxonomy: the higher, middle and lower dream. By the “higher vision” Kruger means those dreams that are intended to be interpreted as divinely-inspired, rightly recorded and interpreted, authoritative dreams (Macrobius’ *oraculum* and *visio* generally fall comfortably under this category). The “lower vision” is the opposite: stemming from a corporeal or worldly or demonic source and/or inaccurately conveyed and comprehended by the dreamer; in other words, the unauthoritative dream (Macrobius’ *visum* and *insomnium* would meet this description). Finally, the “middle vision,” or the ambiguous dream, is the category that falls somewhere between the two (loosely Macrobius’ *somnium*). It is this “middle” form that he most focuses upon in his scrupulously-researched *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (especially chapters 2 and 6). While I will usually employ more precise terminology, at times these three general descriptors do work their way into some of the following discussions.

⁶⁸ Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 129.

CHAPTER 2

AUTHORIZING STRATEGIES IN THE DREAMS AND VISIONS OF DANIEL

Introduction

The Book of Daniel establishes several ways in which dreams and visions can be used to powerful effect in the battle for cultural legitimation, employing diverse authorizing strategies, many of which serve as models for subsequent dream and vision texts. Daniel further solidifies and popularizes two literary forms: the dream sequence and the apocalypse. The text is an important study to the broader understanding of the issue of authority in dream and vision literature as Daniel eventually serves as a textual paradigm in how to wield the two forms in a socio-politically powerful manner.

I will begin with a brief overview of the cultural relevance of Daniel, followed by a historical contextualization of the book and an overview of the competing literary modes at work. This foundation laid, I will then perform a close reading of the text, focusing on the key authorizing strategies Daniel employs in the socio-political struggles of its day, including: the power of pseudonymity; the demonstration of Daniel's elite credentials; the delegitimization of his social/religious rivals; the establishment of appropriate dream and vision recipients, interpreters, and content; the pious authority of humility; the exaltation of the written word; the effective use of "apocalyptic symbolism,"⁶⁹ balanced by concrete historical reference; and the dreamer's self-authorizing response.

⁶⁹ "Apocalyptic symbolism" is a concept J. J. Collins addresses at length in *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

The Cultural Authority of the Book of Daniel

Of all the canonical works of the Old Testament featuring dreams and visions, the most influential—especially throughout the Middle Ages—is the brief but remarkably complex Daniel.⁷⁰ It is a cultural historian's labyrinth as the convergence and overlap of cultural forces, twisting corridors of narrative influences, and intersection of genres have proven to be an intriguing scholarly mission for those inclined to speculative cultural musings.

Its cultural heritage likely involves four or five competing cultures. It is an amalgam of the Hebrew culture of the Torah and more ancient Hebrew prophecies⁷¹, as well as other traditions coursing through the Hellenistic realms: the Babylonian, Akkadian, Neo- Assyrian, and Persian.⁷² This complex genealogy of course involves multiple languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek; with some sections of the story likely drawn from Akkadian and other Semitic sources. The canonical text of Daniel encompasses the transition from Ancient Hebrew to Aramaic (as confirmed in the Qumran texts⁷³), with translations, emendations, additions and

⁷⁰ J. J. Collins' comprehensive explication of Daniel provides a detailed discussion of the various interpretations of Daniel from its earliest Jewish references, relationship to the Qumran, and on. J.J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) pp. 72-122. As Collins notes in his introduction, Daniel's influence can be seen as early as a half century later in the books of the Maccabees (72). For more discussions of Daniel's widespread influence, see J.J. Collins, "Current Issues in the Study of Daniel," *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, pp. 1-15; Lester L. Grabbe, "A Dan(iel) for all Seasons: for whom was Daniel Important?," *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, pp. 229-46; and Klaus Koch, *Europa, Rom und der Kaiser vor dem Hintergrund von zwei Jahr-tausenden Rezeption des Buches Daniel* (Hamburg: Joachim Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, 1997).

⁷¹ Perhaps Daniel's most direct tie to the major prophets is Ezekiel 14:14, 20 and 28:3. See Michael A. Knibb, "The Book of Daniel in its Context," pp. 16-35.

⁷² See J.J. Collins, "Stirring up the Great Sea. The Religio-Historical Background of Daniel 7," in idem, *Seers, Sibyls, and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) pp. 139-55; Karel Van Der Toorn. "Scholars at the Oriental Court: the Figure of Daniel Against its Mesopotamian Background," *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, pp. 37-54.

⁷³ J.J. Collins, "Current Issues in the Study of Daniel," pp. 2-3, citing P.W. Flint, "The Daniel Tradition at Qumran," in C.A. Evans and P.W. Flint, (eds.), *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) pp. 42-43.

spinoffs after the text is translated to Greek.⁷⁴ But that is not the end of the labyrinthine linguistic heritage, as recent research suggests the Greek additions were based on other Semitic sources.⁷⁵

The formal lineage of the book is equally as intricate, involving diverse genres: the embattled, righteous sage (most famously the story of Joseph⁷⁶ but also stemming from the Assyrian and Babylonian sage traditions⁷⁷); the marginalized Hebrew prophet (Elijah perhaps drawing the closest parallels⁷⁸); the wisdom of the oneiromancer⁷⁹; the Babylonian “vindicated courtier” tradition⁸⁰; the martyr tale⁸¹; and, of course, the apocalypse (addressed in Part II of this chapter) which is traceable back to Mesopotamia.⁸²

⁷⁴ J.J. Collins, “Current Issues in the Study of Daniel,” p. 3.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 3; J.J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, pp. 6-7; E. Ulrich “Double Literary Editions of Biblical Narratives and Reflections on Determining the Form to be Translated,” in idem, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible* (SDSRL; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) pp. 43-44.

⁷⁶ Genesis 39-41.

⁷⁷ See Karel van der Toorn. “Scholars at the Oriental Court: the Figure of Daniel Against its Mesopotamian Background,” p. 40.

⁷⁸ Elijah is a cross-cultural figure himself, appearing in diverse works from diverse cultures, including the canonical Old Testament, the Talmud, Mishnah, New Testament, and Qu’ran. Another and more direct tie to the Hebrew prophetic tradition is found in three verses in Ezekiel, most importantly 28:3: “Behold thou art wiser than Daniel: no secret is hid from thee”; 14:14 And if these three men, Noe, Daniel, and Job, shall be in it: they shall deliver their own souls by their justice, saith the Lord of hosts”; and 14:20: “And Noe, and Daniel, and Job be in the midst thereof: as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter: but they shall only deliver their own souls by their justice” (Douay-Rheims). See below for more on Ezekiel and Daniel.

⁷⁹ In which an oneiromancer, or dream interpreter, is able to solve the riddle of a dream and thus impart a divine message. See below. Also, see R.C. Thompson, *Assyrian Medical Texts* (London: Humphrey Milford and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923). Referenced in Karel van der Toorn. “Scholars at the Oriental Court: the Figure of Daniel Against its Mesopotamian Background,” p. 41.

⁸⁰ Wherein a courtier falls from grace—whether through the machinations of a rival or unfortunate circumstances—but is able through his prudent actions to return to his social position, or even attain a greater one. See discussion below. Also, see Karel van der Toorn. “Scholars at the Oriental Court: the Figure of Daniel Against its Mesopotamian Background,” pp. 42-53.

⁸¹ See Paul, Shalom M. “The Mesopotamian Background of Daniel 1-6,” *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, pp. 55-68.

⁸² See Karel van der Toorn, “Scholars at the Oriental Court: the Figure of Daniel Against its Mesopotamian Background,” p. 38; W.G. Lambert, *The Background of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: Athlone Press, 1978); and H.S. Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and of the Son of Man* (WMANT 61; Neukirchen-Vluyn; Neukirchener Verlag, 1988).

Another dimension of Daniel's complexity is, simply, the issue of time. Reading Daniel is an exercise in time travel. First are the text's at least two major sections, which represent at least two distinct eras. J.J. Collins summarizes the most popular theory succinctly:

It is generally agreed that the tale in Daniel 1-6 are older than the visions in chapters 7-12, and are traditional tales that may have evolved over centuries.⁸³

As Collins references, the first of these sections (chapters 1-6) likely developed over centuries themselves. The second half (chapters 7-12), however, also provide readers a virtual "time jump," as they current theories conceive of them as a hybrid of pseudo- and genuine prophecies of past, current, and future events. Thus, "time" complicates Daniel on dual levels: composition and content.

The Daniel Tradition

The most widely accepted general theory about the composition of the Book of Daniel is promoted consistently by J.J. Collins. As he explains, since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a majority of scholars approach Daniel as a pseudepigraphic work that melds an older "legendary" tradition with a newer apocalyptic text(s). The "broad consensus" perceives the compiler(s)/author(s) to have derived the stories in the first six chapters from an older legendary tradition of Daniel—and perhaps (an)other similar figure(s)—and merged them with the new apocalyptic visions of chapters 7-12, composed in the Maccabean era.⁸⁴

⁸³ J.J. Collins, "Current Issues in the Study of Daniel," p. 5.

⁸⁴ "A broad consensus on several key issues has existed since [the late 19th and early 20th centuries]. It is agreed that Daniel is pseudepigraphic: the stories in chapters 1-6 are legendary in character, and the visions in chapters 7-12 were composed by persons unknown in the Maccabean era." J.J. Collins, "Current Issues in the Study of Daniel," p. 2. Collins takes his argument further, asserting that the book "must be read, then, as a witness to the religiosity of that time, not as a prophecy of western political history of the eschatological future" (2). However, I would

Michael A. Knibb provides a precise summary and geographical triangulation of this “consensus” theory, arguing that the canonical Daniel

represents the crystallization in a particular location and at a quite precise point in time—Jerusalem or its immediate surroundings shortly before the rededication of the temple in 165 BCE—of the traditions concerning Daniel and his companions that were then in circulation.⁸⁵

Knibb points out that the stories of the first half of the book (chapters 2-6 in his view) can be traced to a different geographical location, the eastern diaspora, and were likely born in either the early Hellenistic or Persian periods.⁸⁶ He also adds that Dan 12:11-12 offers evidence that the text was revised shortly after its compilation/composition.⁸⁷

Though, as Collins argues, there seems to be a “broad consensus” on this theoretical textual history, there is a mystery at the heart of the text: Why Daniel? Why, out of all the great heroes of the faith available to him/them, would the compiler(s)/author(s) choose Daniel as the protagonist? Other than potential prototypical examples,⁸⁸ no traditions of Daniel exist outside the canonical text. Why his sudden rise to fame?⁸⁹

One answer might be found in another influential, visionary work of the Old Testament, Ezekiel, which directly refers to a wise man who ranks with the likes of Noah and Job:

argue that proscriptive statements like have a limited view of the multidimensional, multi-interpretational nature of religious texts.

⁸⁵ Michael A. Knibb, “The Book of Daniel in its Context,” *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, p. 16.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ The Ugaritic epic of Aqhat contains a sage named Daniel that might be a prototype of the Hebrew Daniel. See John Day, “The Daniel of Ugarit and Ezekiel and the Hero of the Book of Daniel,” *Vetus Testamentum* 30.2 (April 1980:174–184).

⁸⁹ Or as Knibb states, “The fact that Daniel appears as the hero of the stories on which this collection is built remains something of an enigma in that there are no traditions outside of the Book of Daniel which provide a clue as to why he might have been made the hero of them” (16).

And if these three men, Noe, Daniel, and Job, shall be in it: they shall deliver their own souls by their justice, saith the Lord of hosts. (Ezek 14:14, D-R)

And Noe, and Daniel, and Job be in the midst thereof: as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter: but they shall only deliver their own souls by their justice. (Ezek 14:20, D-R)

Behold thou art wiser than Daniel: no secret is hid from thee. (Ezek 28:3, D-R)

As is evidenced in these verses, a strong Daniel tradition existed by the time of the writing of Ezekiel; indeed, his star had already risen to the heights of two of the most revered of all Hebrew heroes. Many scholars, like Lester L. Grabbe, argue that the persona of Daniel seems to be based on a historical figure, likely an “ancient sage noted for wisdom,”⁹⁰ whose notoriety in the Jewish tradition had gained momentum by the writing of Ezekiel.

The larger point, of course, is that the textual history of Daniel is an amalgam of cultural milieus, literary traditions, and historical periods. Though the book was compiled/composed during the Maccabean revolt, the legendary stories are, in Collins’ terms, “almost certainly a century older than the visions”—but perhaps far older than that.⁹¹ Thus, the history of the text undergoes at very least two leaps in time. It springs from the more ancient, within-the-narrative dream tales (chs. 1-6)—themselves likely spanning centuries—to the presumably contemporary Maccabean visions (chs. 7-12), which in turn present themselves as encompassing multiple eras. It is a text whose composition and content pay witness to a vast span of centuries.

⁹⁰ Lester L. Grabbe, “A Dan(iel) for all Seasons: for whom was Daniel Important?,” *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, p. 230.

⁹¹ J.J. Collins, “Current Issues in the Study of Daniel,” p. 2.

Historical and Literary Appropriations

The compiler/author of Daniel uses all the tools at his/their disposal to fashion a book of particular cultural weight. The appropriation of both history and other cultures' traditions imbues the text with a sort of cumulative authority. Each literary tradition offered readers an additional (potentially) authoritative resonance, collectively producing a multicultural/multi-traditional argument for the text's legitimacy. This diverse literary lineage is an important for a text composed in the complex cultural climate of 2nd century BCE Mesopotamia.

Several recent Daniel scholars have done the hard work of tracing particular moments of the text to particular historical moments and traditions. Karel van der Toorn generally agrees with the widely held perspective of the text's hybrid legendary-visionary background as endorsed by Collins and Knibb. In his article "Scholars at the Oriental Court," Karel van der Toorn argues that though the "legendary" nature of the early chapters is clear enough, some aspects of the tales are likely part-historical, and without question other cultural traditions have been assimilated into the text.

A demonstration of this is the widely accepted theory about the fourth chapter of Daniel. Van der Toorn agrees with this theory, arguing that the madness of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 is derived from the Mesopotamian tradition of king Nabonidus, as seems to be confirmed in the Qumran *Prayer of Nabonidus* (4QPrNab) and the *Persian Verse Account of Nabonidus*.⁹² The confusion of Nabonidus and Nebuchadnezzar results in a fusion of the two distinct traditions.

Such specific tracings of the lineage of particular historical moments in the tale demonstrate the manner in which Daniel effectively accumulates greater historical weight through the appropriation of authoritative historical and cultural traditions. Other scholars, like

⁹² Karel van der Toorn, "Scholars at the Oriental Court: the Figure of Daniel Against its Mesopotamian Background," pp. 37-38.

Shalom M. Paul agree with van der Toorn that the Mesopotamian influences on the text are formative, but use different methods to arrive at that conclusion. Paul focuses on the “linguistic, philological, and typological Mesopotamian imprints.”⁹³

Intersecting Modes and Genres

Daniel’s intricate generic lineage is another trending topic for critics that likewise involves issues of authority. Its hybridity works, like the cultural crosscurrents, to infuse the text with a sense of relevance in multiple modes and categories. The most obvious adapted genre is the dream-sequence-based tale, which can be employed in just about any larger literary mode. The first half of the text revolves around within-the-narrative dream sequences, not only as central plot elements, but to establish the diegetic authority of Daniel.

The dream sequences of Daniel are embedded in other generic modes. Overarching the entire text is the influence of wisdom literature. As Grabbe points out, Daniel is a product of “wisdom” circles, regularly using “wisdom vocabulary” but concerned mainly with the transmission of prophetic knowledge, particularly in the form of the apocalyptic (defined in more detail below).⁹⁴ This apocalyptic mode is most clear in the second half of the text, but is also important in the dream interpretations of the first six chapters.

Also evident in the legendary narrative of the first half of the text are elements of the righteous sage tradition, as embodied in Genesis’s Joseph episodes⁹⁵ as well as similar Assyrian

⁹³ Paul employs a philological methodology: focusing mainly on the linguistic parallels of the texts, for example the influence of Akkadian phraseology on certain Aramaic terms for “to speak (improperly)” (against God). Shalom M. Paul, “The Mesopotamian Background of Daniel 1-6,” *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, p. 55.

⁹⁴ Grabbe touches on the role of wisdom literature in Daniel. See Lester L. Grabbe, “A Dan(iel) for all Seasons: for whom was Daniel Important?” p. 230.

⁹⁵ Genesis 39-41.

and Babylonian traditions.⁹⁶ Another clear Hebrew genre parallel is the politically-entangled prophet, like Elijah and Elisha, who must contend with the political authorities to correct the course of the state. (Though Daniel is employed by the state, his relationship with the political leadership swings into conflict.)

Similar to this embattled prophet tradition is the martyr tale, which not only seems to precede the text, but gains cultural momentum in part because of the popularity of Daniel.⁹⁷ As Shalom M. Paul and other scholars have pointed out, the fiery furnace episode—not only the unjust sentencing of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to enter, but their righteous submission and miraculous salvation—becomes a paradigm for the genre.⁹⁸

A Babylonian genre that has garnered more attention recently is the “vindicated courtier” tradition.⁹⁹ This genre followed the trajectory of a courtier’s public and political standing, usually tracking an unfair fall from the court’s grace to a final vindication and return to former or even improved social status. R.C. Thompson discusses another thematically linked genre, the wisdom tales of the oneiromancer, or dream-interpreter.¹⁰⁰ An intriguing recent study by John H. Walton finds plot parallels between Daniel and yet another genre, the Ancient Near-East chaos-combat myths (using the Anzu myth as his model).¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ See Karel van der Toorn. “Scholars at the Oriental Court: the Figure of Daniel Against its Mesopotamian Background,” p. 40.

⁹⁷ See Paul, Shalom M. “The Mesopotamian Background of Daniel 1-6,” pp. 55-68 and Jan Willem Van Henten, “Daniel 3 and 6 in Early Christian Literature,” *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, pp. 149-69.

⁹⁸ “The literary genre of the martyr tale is exemplified in chapter 3 by the miraculous rescue of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace...” Shalom M. Paul, “The Mesopotamian Background of Daniel 1-6,” p. 55.

⁹⁹ Karel van der Toorn. “Scholars at the Oriental Court: the Figure of Daniel Against its Mesopotamian Background,” pp. 42-53.

¹⁰⁰ See R.C. Thompson, *Assyrian Medical Texts* (London: Humphrey Milford and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923). Referenced in Karel van der Toorn. “Scholars at the Oriental Court: the Figure of Daniel Against its Mesopotamian Background,” p. 41.

¹⁰¹ Parallels with chaos-combat myths feature prominently in chapter 7 of Daniel: namely the rise of the mythic beast(s) (often particularly from the sea, as in 7:3); the beasts’ threats of usurpation and destruction; and the ultimate restoration of order through their overthrow (by a deity or deities). For more on chaos-combat myth

But of all these genres of which Daniel seems to be a composite, the most important influence on the second half of the text is the apocalypse. Ultimately traceable back to Mesopotamia,¹⁰² this sub-genre of visionary writing constitutes the bulk of chapters 7-12, which ultimately prove to be the model for the form in the centuries to follow, heavily influencing the Revelation of John and early Christianity as a whole.¹⁰³ The apocalypse is a particular form of the divine or mystical vision.¹⁰⁴ The preeminent scholar in the field, J. J. Collins, and his colleagues defined the apocalypse as a subgenre of “revelatory literature” that included a “narrative framework” (usually book-ended by a sleeping/waking frame, and involving a plot-like sequence of events), and involving a usually symbolically expressed “transcendent reality” that presents both a temporal/eschatological and spiritual/otherworldly salvation.¹⁰⁵ (I will address several particular formal elements in the discussion of the visions of Daniel below.)

Like the complex cultural heritage of the text, the hybridity of its genre lineage is itself an authorizing device, providing a cross-braced foundation of culturally authoritative literary traditions.

parallels, especially the Anzu myth, see John H. Walton, “The Anzu Myth as Relevant Background for Daniel,” *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, pp. 69-89.

¹⁰² See Karel van der Toorn, “Scholars at the Oriental Court: the Figure of Daniel Against its Mesopotamian Background,” pp. 38; W.G. Lambert, *The Background of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: Athlone Press, 1978); and H.S. Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and of the Son of Man* (WMANT 61; Neukirchen-Vluyn; Neukirchener Verlag, 1988).

¹⁰³ Jesus explicitly validates the apocalypse himself (Matthew 24:15). For more on the influence of Hebrew apocalypse on early Christianity, see Collins’ *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*.

¹⁰⁴ For more on the divine/mystical vision, see the discussion of dream and vision genres above.

¹⁰⁵ J. J. Collins, ed. *Apocalypse: the Morphology of a Genre* (Semeia 14; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979). For one of the most widely-referenced systematic analyses of apocalypse, see J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*.

The Struggle for Cultural Authority

I contend that the driving purpose of the Book of Daniel is to establish the authority of the Hebrew God and, by so doing, the superiority of the Jewish culture over those that seek to subsume it. The method the author(s) use(s) in this struggle for cultural authority is to employ two literary modes: the dream sequence and the prophetic vision.

Collins and Flint's *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception* collects several illuminating essays on the cultural collisions taking place during the theoretical composition of the canonical Hebrew Bible Daniel.¹⁰⁶ Grabbe's piece in that collection, "A Dan(iel) for all Seasons," offers a helpful discussion of the likely social milieu of the compilation of the text, providing context for the cultural struggles at the book's core.¹⁰⁷ As Grabbe points out, ultimately there are "no magical keys" to Daniel: careful analysis is continually "driven back" to the text because of historical and corpus limitations.¹⁰⁸ The text itself, however, provides numerous clues to its authorship and cultural purposes. The current consensus is that the stories of the first half were pre-Maccabean,¹⁰⁹ but compiled and combined with new/original visions during the period between the Maccabean-era forced cessation of the daily *tamid* sacrifice and its reinstatement (168-165 BCE). Some key textual evidence of this historical location is that while the visions seem to be aware of the rise of Antiochus IV Epiphanes,¹¹⁰ they demonstrate no knowledge of the retaking of the Temple.¹¹¹ Many scholars, including Grabbe, see the prophecy

¹⁰⁶ J. J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (eds.), *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1 (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 2001).

¹⁰⁷ Lester L. Grabbe, "A Dan(iel) for all Seasons: for whom was Daniel Important?" *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, pp. 229-46.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 229

¹⁰⁹ One popular proof of the pre-Maccabean dating for the "legendary" tales cited by Grabbe and others is Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the statue, which demonstrates awareness of Alexander but not Antiochus' reign or any other specific 2nd century developments (Grabbe 230).

¹¹⁰ Dan 7:19-27

¹¹¹ Lester L. Grabbe, "A Dan(iel) for all Seasons: for whom was Daniel Important?" p. 230.

of the “abomination of desolation” (Dan 8:13-14; 11:31-45; 12:11) as a genuine prediction rather than an *ex eventu* pseudo-prophecy, thus demonstrating the author’s sincere concern with forecasting future events.¹¹²

Debates about what individual collated/crafted the text has more recently given way to theories on the specific cultural group that might have produced the text. No consensus on the group has been reached; leading theories range from an exclusive Jewish priestly cult to a prophetic wisdom circle to a pro-Maccabean scribal class to roaming Jewish court scribes.¹¹³ Rainer Albertz poses the as-of-yet unanswered questions about the authorship of the text succinctly:

Did the Daniel apocalypticists stand in the prophetic, priestly or the wisdom tradition?
Did they belong to “pious conventicle” next to the lower class, as the Hasidim were situated by O. Ploger and M. Hengel? Or did they belong to the well-educated upper class? Moreover, were they a part of the Jerusalem establishment? Or did they represent a group of immigrants from the diaspora?¹¹⁴

Clearly the question of authorship is still up for debate. However, the text itself provides a few key descriptors of the author(s) that are self-evident: the author(s) was/were scholarly,

¹¹² Ibid, p. 230. The three and a half years the pagan idol occupied the temple corresponds approximately with Dan 7:27. For a discussions of *ex eventu* prophecies in apocalyptic visions, see Bernard McGinn, “Introduction,” *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) and Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*.

¹¹³ Collins and Flint’s collection of articles on the text’s social setting in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol 1, provides helpful discussions on some of the leading theories: Rainer Albertz, “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” pp. 171-204; Stefan Beyerle, “The Book of Daniel and Its Social Setting,” pp. 205-28; Phillip R. Davies, “The Scribal School of Daniel,” pp. 247-265; Lester L. Grabbe, “A Dan(iel) for all Seasons: for whom was Daniel Important?” pp. 229-46; and Daniel L Smith-Christopher, “Prayers and Dreams: Power and Diaspora Identities in the Social Setting of the Daniel Tales,” pp. 266-90.

¹¹⁴ Albertz, Rainer. “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, p. 173.

rhetorically astute, and emphatically concerned with the current and future state of the Jewish people in history.

Dating the text to the Maccabean revolt opens up several interpretative possibilities. Perhaps the most dominant is the text's role in the contemporary Jewish struggle for cultural legitimacy. The compiler(s)' interest in traditional Daniel tales contains a culturally relevant thread for those in the midst of the power struggle of the Maccabean era. The parallels between the two situations would be obvious to contemporary readers: disenfranchised Jews under the leadership of a hostile government. Not only would the older tales' championing of Yahweh's ultimate authority serve as a theological "proof," an apologetic for the Hebrew God, but His privileging of the subjugated Israelites might embolden contemporary Jews in their current struggles.

The contemporary visions of the second half of the text would serve as at least two purposes in the power struggle: to provide contemporary readers with 1. proofs of the text's prophetic legitimacy and 2. a spiritual interpretation/contextualization of current events. Additionally, the genuine prophecies of the final chapters would give contemporary Jewish readers a sense of cultural direction and comfort.

The Dream Sequences of Daniel (Chapters 1-6)

The Intellectual Elite

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher captures the cultural mission of the first six chapters of Daniel:

At their core, the Daniel tales [chapters 1-6] represent Jews who are "renegotiating" their cultural and religious identities in circumstances of cross-cultural contact that also

presumes a significant perception of threat and unequal distribution of power and authority.¹¹⁵

The dream sequences of these tales serve to directly engage this argument for cultural authority. The first order of business: establishing the credentials of the lead character. This first authorizing device is likewise prominent in the Greek and Roman dream traditions: privileging the cultural elite. As is emphasized in numerous ways in Neoplatonic dream theory, authoritative dreams must both come from and be interpreted by elite, authoritative figures.¹¹⁶ While the Hebrew tradition as a whole sends mixed signals on this issue¹¹⁷, in many ways, Daniel falls in line with this elitist tradition; as Philip R. Davies points out, recent scholarship has “increasingly recognized that the values of the book of Daniel are clearly those of the scribal elite,” concerned with intellectual capacity, literary tradition and mantic wisdom.¹¹⁸

The text immediately establishes Daniel as a member of an elite group. Though a political prisoner under the despotic control of Nebuchadnezzar, the storyteller makes clear that Daniel and company were chosen in part because of their genetic, intellectual, and educational superiority:

And the king spoke to Asphenez the master of the eunuchs, that he should bring in some of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed and of the princes, Children in whom there was no blemish, well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, acute in knowledge, and

¹¹⁵ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “Prayers and Dreams: Power and Diaspora Identities in the Social Setting of the Daniel Tales,” *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, p. 266.

¹¹⁶ See discussion of Macrobius and Neoplatonic dream theory above.

¹¹⁷ Many Hebrew dream and vision texts—most notably the dream sequences of Joseph (Gen 37-50) and Daniel, but also many of the prophecies, especially Isaiah and Ezekiel—exhibit a tension between the dreamer’s/visionary’s abilities or credentials to be an authoritative interpreter and his dependence upon God for divinely revealed interpretation. As I will discuss below, the Book of Daniel highlights this tension early on (especially chs. 1 and 2).

¹¹⁸ Philip R. Davies, “The Scribal School of Daniel,” *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, p. 250.

instructed in science, and such as might stand in the king's palace, that he might teach them the learning, and the tongue of the Chaldeans. (Dan 1:3-5, D-R)

While this elite upbringing in part falls in line with some of the more ancient Hebrew prophet figures—like Samuel, official members of the priest class—many of the Old Testament prophets are not explicitly described in terms of privileged upbringing, nor is their intellectual capacity foregrounded. Assertion of their intellectual authority is largely left to the rhetorical power of the prophetic pronouncement themselves.

The text highlights the four's aptitude for scholarly understanding (Dan 1:17a), but singles out Daniel for the particular gift of dream/vision interpretation:

And to these children God gave knowledge, and understanding in every book, and wisdom: but to Daniel the understanding also of all visions and dreams. (Dan 1:17, D-R)

The text underscores that the Israelite's educational training only increases under the Nebuchadnezzar's program; their mastery of Babylonian literary and philosophical teachings clearly plays a key role in their rise within the court (Dan 1:19-20). This emphasis on educational credentials will be important in the second half of the book, where the *maskilim* (or “wise”) men are portrayed as those intended to teach the people the visions.¹¹⁹

Delegitimizing the Competition

The compiler/author's second move in establishing Daniel's authority as a diviner comes to fruition in the sequence of Nebuchadnezzar's first dream. After establishing the intellectual and scholarly credentials of the imported Israelites, the writer draws stark contrasts between them

¹¹⁹ See below. For more on the term *maskilim* in Daniel, see Stefan Beyerle, “The Book of Daniel and its Social Setting,” pp. 205-28; Rainer Albertz, “The Social Setting of the Aramaic and Hebrew Book of Daniel,” and J. J. Collins, “Daniel and His Social World” and *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*.

and their Babylonian counterparts. Already having established in the exposition that the Hebrews were “ten times better” than the diviners and philosophers of the court (Dan 1:19-20), the text dramatizes this disparity in the second chapter through the impotence of the Babylonian wise men in the face of true divination. Daniel’s divinely imparted interpretation is the central authorizing device of the first half of the book, drawing a clear distinction between superficial wisdom and spiritual understanding and supernatural access to divine knowledge.

The author shrewdly puts the supernatural benchmark in the mouths of the Babylonian wise men:

Then the Chaldeans answered before the king, and said: There is no man upon earth, that can accomplish thy word, O king, neither doth any king, though great and mighty, ask such a thing of any diviner, or wise man, or Chaldean. For the thing that thou askest, O king, is difficult; nor can any one be found that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose conversation is not with men. (Dan 2:10-11, D-R)

Narratively, this effectively provides the miraculous interpretation proper dramatic buildup; politically, this claim provides a clear separation between two culture’s divinities. Daniel’s access to divine revelation is not just a personal legitimization, it is a supernatural endorsement of an entire culture. Daniel successfully appropriates the Babylonian/gentile practice of dream interpretation, demonstrating the supremacy the Jewish God and, in turn, the Jewish culture. The pattern of divinely imparted insight into transcendent truths is repeated in the text’s other divine interpretation sequences: the dream of the tree (Ch. 4) and the vision of the disembodied hand (Ch. 5).

Dreaming of Authority

The first half of Daniel encourages an at least partly elitist interpretation not only through the intellectual and scholarly credentials of the diviner, but, like the Greek and Roman traditions, through the authoritative position of the dreamer. The two dreams and one vision of the first six chapters are worthy of interpretation not solely because of the expertise of the interpreter, but because of the authoritative position of he who received them. As is the case in Macrobius' analysis of the *Dream of Scipio*, all the major players involved must meet a standard of societal legitimacy: the dreamer, the dream interpreter (and, in the case of Macrobius), the dream scholar who must eventually clarify the process.¹²⁰

But of course this list of legitimizing factors would be incomplete without the most importance piece: the verifiable truth of the dream. The first half of Daniel accomplishes this final verification easily enough: some of what is prophesied plays out within the narrative itself. This is especially true of the second dream, where the reader gets to experience the fruition (excuse the irony) of the revelation: Nebuchadnezzar dreams of divine pronouncement by a "holy one" (4:13, D-R) from heaven to chop down a massive tree and banish "him" to graze with the animals for seven years (4:13-17); Daniel subsequently interprets the tree as the Nebuchadnezzar's reign and "him" as the king himself (4:19-27); the sequence is completed with the dream's precise enactment, as recounted by the king (4:33-37). As in *Oedipus Rex*, the reader experiences the pleasure of implausible events unfolding narratively, divine omniscience demonstrated *within* the text.

While the text provides its own intratextual verification of the second dream, the first requires a reader's familiarity with extratextual knowledge, as it addresses several historical periods. This first dream anticipates the prophetic visions of chapters 7-12 in its broader

¹²⁰ See the chapter on Macrobius and Neoplatonic dream theory above.

prophetic scope as well as its more indirect/symbolic mode. The dream's focus is telling: The dream is concerned with cultural power, the rise and fall of nations. In this way, the authority theme is further compounded. Not only must the dream come from an authoritative figure and be interpreted by a legitimate source, it must concern matters of authority, whether worldly or spiritual, or both.

The first dream culminates with a vision of a final, everlasting kingdom. This vision is in part a climactic assertion of cultural power, as it features the ultimate rise of the kingdom of the Hebrew God. This transcendent/everlasting kingdom (2:44-45)—a version of the New Temple established in Hebrew prophecies (especially Ezekiel 40-48 and Zechariah 3) and elaborated upon as the New Jerusalem in Revelation (21)—asserts the cultural authority of the Israelites once and for all. This same move will be reiterated in the final visions of the book; the repetition of the climactic rise of the everlasting kingdom serves as an intratextual confirmation of the prophecy's truth.

Authorizing Humility and Humiliation

The elitist theme of chapter one is countered in Daniel by a critical authorizing device used in many religious visionary texts: divine deferment, or, more simply, humility.

Like most introductory sections included in the prophetic pronouncements of both the major and minor Hebrew prophets—and like the self-diminishing disclaimers of the female visionaries of the Middle Ages—the Daniel text provides a deferential frame for revelation and interpretation. In this way, the author(s) of Daniel provide a foil to the elitist theme of the opening chapter by explicitly giving God the credit for all divinatory understanding; in a sense, having it both ways by legitimizing Daniel for both his elite knowledge and capabilities while

simultaneously dismissing any innate talents or learning in his interpretation of dreams and visions.

The text insistently presents Daniel's reception and comprehension of Nebuchadnezzar's first dream as miraculous. The "mystery" of the king's dream is out of any human, active attempts at apprehension; mysteries must be "revealed" by the God of heaven:

Then was the mystery revealed to Daniel by a vision in the night: and Daniel blessed the God of heaven, (Dan 2:19, D-R)

Not only does the narrator preface the dream and its explication with an assertion of its revealed nature, but Daniel himself affirms this through his hymn of praise:

And speaking he said: Blessed be the name of the Lord from eternity and for evermore: for wisdom and fortitude are his.

And he changeth times and ages: taketh away kingdoms and establisheth them, giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that have understanding.

He revealeth deep and hidden things, and knoweth what is in darkness: and light is with him.

To thee, O God of our fathers, I give thanks, and I praise thee: because thou hast given me wisdom and strength: and now thou hast shewn me what we desired of thee, for thou hast made known to us, the king's discourse. (Dan2: 20-23, D-R)

This poetic genuflection is a masterful assertion of God's temporal and spiritual authority—especially as it involves the middle state between them, dreams.¹²¹ The poem's language is specifically tailored to dream interpretation: all understanding is in His control, dispensed by

¹²¹ Kruger addresses the idea of the "middleness" of dreams and dream state in *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* in ch. 2, "The Doubleness and Middleness of Dreams."

Him; all revelation of the “deep and hidden things” veiled in “darkness”; in other words, the interpretation of dreams and visions. This submissive posture is dramatized in the pseudo-martyrdoms of the Israelite courtiers. All four must face death to prove the authenticity of their deference to God’s higher knowledge.

The fourth chapter of Daniel adds another wrinkle to the humility theme. Within the narrative, humility plays another important role other than Daniel’s deferential declaration: the king’s humiliation and subsequent endorsement of the Hebrew God. The interesting parallels between the king’s fall from status with that of the Israelite courtiers underscores the importance of humility in the impartation of divine knowledge. The king must in essence meet the Israelites in the furnace of public disgrace to ascertain heavenly truths. In this way, the king’s humiliation not only serves as an intratextual proof of the validity of Daniel’s interpretation, but provides a dramatic example of the Hebrew visionary prerequisite of deference in order to be granted access to higher knowledge.

The Power of the Written Word

Like Ezekiel and Isaiah, the Book of Daniel underscores the power of the spoken and written word, and, in so doing, underscores its own oracular worth. The vision of the hand writing on the wall is witnessed by, again, a king—this time the son of Nebuchadnezzar, Baltasar. That the vision leaves words that others can see makes this incident technically a cross between a mystical vision and a physical miracle. The collective experience of the miracle diegetically lends the sequence more credence.

The author uses the wise men’s calling of Daniel for an interpretation as an opportunity to reconfirm the true source of his divinations:

There is a man in thy kingdom that hath the spirit of the holy gods in him: and in the days of thy father knowledge and wisdom were found in him: for king Nabuchodonosor thy father appointed him prince of the wise men, enchanters, Chaldeans, and soothsayers, thy father, I say, O king: Because a greater spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, and interpretation of dreams, and shewing of secrets, and resolving of difficult things, were found in him, that is, in Daniel: whom the king named Baltarsar. Now therefore let Daniel be called for, and he will tell the interpretation. (Dan 5:11-12, D-R)

But there is something else accomplished in this otherworldly sequence: like its predecessors Ezekiel and Isaiah (and its descendent Revelation), Daniel grants the written word supernatural power within the narrative itself. We learn that there can be an (other)world of meaning in three simple words.

When Daniel provides the interpretation of the words written by the ghostly hand, the elaboration implies a bold argument for the power of the spoken and written word. In three words, the fate of multiple nations might be revealed. This heightened sense of the potential depth and power of the spoken or written word works an authorizing device for the text itself, opening up the interpretative potential of the prophetic pronouncements.

The more indirect mode of the final visions particularly profit from this passage as the story makes clear that the abstract nature of the words were confounding to even the most astute of the court. The often deliberately ambiguous prophecies of the last half of Daniel carry a similar level of abstraction as the writing on the wall—the same sense of mysterious/mystical higher meaning, and, thus, potentially transcendent power.

The Apocalyptic Visions of Daniel (Chapters 7-12)

The Socio-Political Power of Apocalypse

The second half of Daniel provides a number of shifts: in voice, in historical focus, and in literary mode. Daniel's cultural prominence satisfactorily established in the "legendary tales" or narrative section, he now qualifies as an authoritative enough figure to receive visions of consequence historically and culturally. Rather than to a king (to be subsequently *interpreted* by Daniel), the visions are now imparted directly to Daniel. In this way, the visions of Daniel depend upon an important authorizing device: pseudonymity, which imbues a text with the borrowed authority of the pseudonymous referent. The content of the dreams shift as well, focusing on more immediate historical events. As McGinn states, Daniel "purports to be written in the sixth century but was actually composed in the second" and contains "recognizable details of recent history under the guise of prophecy" (or *ex eventu* prophecy).¹²² And, finally, the within-the-narrative/diegetic dream sequences of the first six chapters give way in the final six to a different dream mode, a subset of the divine vision: the apocalypse.

The series of divinely imparted mystical visions of Daniel 7-12 contain all of the formal requirements of the apocalypse: the narrative framework, at times presented with brief waking accounts (Dan 7:1, 8:1, 9:1-21, 10:1-5), involving largely symbolically/allegorically expressed temporal and spiritual events.¹²³ As Collins explains, this symbolism contains moral, social and cosmic implications. Daniel also contains elements described by McGinn and D. S. Russell¹²⁴:

¹²²Bernard McGinn, "Introduction," *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) p. 7.

¹²³ This is a compression of the definition provided in J. J. Collins, ed. *Apocalypse: the Morphology of a Genre* (*Semeia* 14; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979). For one of the most widely-referenced systematic analyses of apocalypse, see J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity*.

¹²⁴ Many of these are likewise posited in J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*.

1. A “systematic and deterministic” conception of history as a “unitary process”
2. An emphasis on the conflict between good and evil (especially as portrayed through angelic beings)
3. The dual “sense of the imminence” of the final days of this age and the “transcendental character” of the one to come
4. The anticipation of a messianic/heavenly kingdom¹²⁵
5. And the expectation of life after death, along with a time of judgment¹²⁶

A great deal of the power of the visions of Daniel is this “systematic” and “unifying” program: providing its (embattled) readers with a sense of deterministic design, a divinely choreographed historical drama, that ultimately lead the reader to a transcendent climax.

Some scholars have approached apocalyptic visions as products of persecution.¹²⁷ While persecution is not a necessary matrix for all apocalyptic literature, the tumultuous socio-political milieu of the Maccabean-era seems to beg that premise. The apocalyptic visions of the second half of Daniel (ch. 7-12) might be read as a response to specific socio-political events, namely the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The assertion underlying the entirety of the text of Daniel is the cultural authority of the Jews—a message needed in a period that posed very real political and personal threats to that culture. This argument is central to Collins’

¹²⁵ Unlike its Christian descendent, Revelation, which expounds at length on the subject, Daniel only hints at such a kingdom: “I beheld therefore in the vision of the night, and lo, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and he came even to the Ancient of days: and they presented him before him. And he gave him power, and glory, and a kingdom: and all peoples, tribes and tongues shall serve him: his power is an everlasting power that shall not be taken away: and his kingdom that shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:13-14).

¹²⁶ Bernard McGinn, “Introduction,” *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*, pp. 2-14; citing David S. Russell *The Message and Method of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 BC-AD 100* (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1964).

¹²⁷ For some arguments for and against this perspective, see S.L. Crook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Philip R. Davies, “The Scribal School of Daniel,” *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, pp. 247-65; H.H. Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires of Daniel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1935 [repr. 1959]); idem, “The Unity of the Book of Daniel,” in *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (2nd ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 1965) 249-80.

seminal work: he argues that the “apocalyptic imagination” creates a world based in largely symbolic terms whose primary purpose is to uphold a culture’s values “in the face of social and political powerlessness” even cultural destruction.¹²⁸ The apocalyptic visions of Daniel push back against the cultural pressures imposed by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. To effectively “push back,” though, Daniel must not only draw on the textual authority established in the “tales” section of the book, but must continue this authorizing strategy in its apocalyptic mode.

The apocalyptic visions of Daniel help establish or popularize a number of authorizing devices that will greatly influence the Christian apocalyptic tradition. The text’s uncanny combination of broad-scope, adaptable apocalyptic allegory with moments of precise historical (and numerical) reference (via *ex eventu* prophecies, providing historically verifiable “extratextual proofs” of the text’s authority) proved a model for successful visionary writing that is able to balance precision and ambiguity in a way that carries a sense of both historical immediacy and universality. The result is a visionary text with equal parts historical and spiritual authority. The visions use another important device to accumulate a sense of textual authority: the emphasis of the revelation’s impact on the dreamer—both within the dream and upon waking—as intra- (and pseudo-extra)textual proof of the vision’s legitimacy.

Universality v. Historical Moment: Apocalyptic Symbolism and *Ex Eventu* Prophecy

The opening line of Daniel’s first vision is important in a number of ways. First, it demonstrates the author(s)’ familiarity with the established Hebrew prophetic tradition of grounding the prophecy in history by establishing a concrete historical moment:

¹²⁸ J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, p. 215. Collins refers to this at times as the “apocalyptic cure” to social ills. Collins also applies this argument not only to Daniel, but to Enoch and the Sibylline Oracle texts as well. He goes on to argue that these Jewish apocalypses, especially Daniel, served as the “matrix” for several essential New Testament beliefs, especially perspectives on the coming Messiah/Son of Man and the final judgment.

In the first year of Baltasar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream: and the vision of his head was upon his bed: and writing the dream, he comprehended it in few words: and relating the sum of it in short, he said: (Dan 7:1, D-R)

We are also told explicitly that this is “dream,” a “vision of his head” (and later, “vision of the night”) as translated in the Douay-Rheims. We also learn that he himself wrote it down (and in so doing, comprehended it “in a few words”). The emphasis on the succinctness of the retelling brings to mind the succinctness of the writing on the wall, the mysterious depth and breadth possible through divinely revealed words.

The apocalyptic power of the first vision of Daniel is its remarkable balance between ambiguity and specificity. Learning from its prophetic forerunners (like Isaiah and Ezekiel), the flexible/adaptable potential of the (in this case largely animal) metaphors, along with key descriptive and numerical details, is fused with a particular historical context, producing a mixture of epic, otherworldly conflict and immediate historical moment. This powerful combination has allowed the text to be popular not only with its Maccabean-era audiences,¹²⁹ but with audiences from subsequent periods and diverse cultures.¹³⁰

The epic scope of the visions is partly achieved by their metaphorical nature, which heavily employs animal metaphors. Two verses will suffice to demonstrate this:

After this I would diligently learn concerning the fourth beast. which was very different from all, and exceeding terrible: his teeth and claws were of iron: he devoured and broke in pieces, and the rest he stamped upon with his feet: And concerning the ten horns that he had on his head: and concerning the other that came up, before which three horns fell:

¹²⁹ See Lester L. Grabbe, “A Dan(iel) for all Seasons,” *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, p. 244.

¹³⁰ For proof of the latter, one need look no further than John’s Revelation, which draws directly from this particular chapter, essentially expanding on it descriptively, and cementing Daniel’s legacy in the Christian tradition.

and of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth speaking great things, and was greater than the rest. (Dan 7:19-20, D-R)

In part because of the popularity of Daniel, the use of animals would become a staple of many prophetic traditions, especially the early Christian traditions via Revelation. The use of animals to represent nations is certainly not an invention of Daniel; however, it seems to have gained some popularity during the Maccabean period, as evidenced in the Animal Apocalypse (1 *Enoch* 85-90), a contemporary of the Book of Daniel.¹³¹ Daniel becomes arguably the most important work in the popularization of the form for future Hebrew and Christian dream and vision traditions.

This passage features another powerful authorizing device employed by many apocalyptic authors: the *ex eventu* prophecy. This device Daniel uses masterfully. The historical precision of these prophecies works as a balance or counter to the visions' "universal" allegorical mode. The *ex eventu* prophecies serve at least two purposes in Daniel's struggle for cultural power: to act as historically verifiable proofs of the text's prophetic legitimacy and to provide contemporary readers a spiritual interpretation of current events. The ten horns, the three that fall, and the horn with eyes correspond with a specific sequence in Hellenistic history contemporary readers would recognize immediately.¹³² This practice intensifies in the later visions as the events approach the historical moment of the text's composition. These ubiquitous *ex eventu* predictions (the most notable of which are those pertaining to the "little horn" of the fourth beast, Antiochus IV) act as historically verifiable "proofs" of authenticity, adding to the text's cumulative sense of extratextual authority.

¹³¹ For further historical and literary contextualization, see J.J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, pp. 38-60 and his discussion of Enoch in *The Apocalyptic Imagination*.

¹³² For an illuminating analysis of Daniel's visions, both *ex eventu* and genuine, in their contemporary context, see Reighard G. Kratz, "The Visions of Daniel," *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, Vol. 1, pp. 91-113.

The Rhetoric of Numbers

In Daniel's second vision, we see the balance of the broad/abstract and the precise/concrete applied in yet another rhetorical device the text helped popularize in the Western apocalyptic tradition: mystic numerology. This rhetoric of numbers, providing precise numerical predictions, appears in several key moments in the text, underscoring their significance, and lending the prophecy a sense of precision and certitude.

Beginning with the reference to the 2,300 sacrifices over the course of which God's Sanctuary will be restored (8:14, 26), the author applies precise figures to stress significant moments of the visions: the famous seventy sevens and sixty-two sevens prophesied by the oracle figure, Gabriel, in the third vision (9:24-27), and the culminating specifics—1,290 and 1,335 days—of the Temple's desecration in the final, fourth vision (12:11-12). In its contemporary historical moment, those numbers corresponding to a specific series of events, especially the halting of the daily sacrifice during the reign of Antiochus IV. However, a few centuries later, in Revelation, these specific numbers were interpreted apart from reference to Antiochus IV and canonized in the Christian apocalyptic sequence.¹³³

Learning from the earlier prophets, the author(s) of the visions of Daniel understood the sense of authoritative weight precision lends to the prophetic mode. The text's masterful combination of broadly applicable epic allegory with moments of pinpoint accuracy makes for a powerful and dynamic read. Already having been used to some degree by the earlier Hebrew prophets, Daniel helped to solidify and popularize the practice even more in the Jewish tradition.

¹³³ See the 42 months (approx. 1260 days) of Jerusalem's desecration and the 1,260 days the Two Witnesses will prophecy (Rev 11:1-3). Other famous instances of such precise numerical references in Revelation include the 144,000 (12,000 per tribe) that will be "sealed," the "666" of the Beast, and the repetition of "seven" throughout the text.

As mentioned, John of Patmos would employ the same techniques in Revelation, thus establishing the dynamic practice permanently in the Christian tradition.

Fear and Trembling: The Dreamer's Authorizing Response

The Book of Daniel builds upon prior Hebrew models by emphasizing the dreamer's/prophet's response to his visions. This is particularly on display in Daniel's second vision, where the dreamer reacts powerfully to the oracular figure (Gabriel) within the dream and subsequently is deeply disturbed upon waking.

A voice (presumably the Lord's) calls upon Gabriel to explain the preceding vision to Daniel. Daniel's response follows the formula presented in other Hebrew oracular or angelic interactions:

And he came and stood near where I stood: and when he was come, I fell on my face trembling, and he said to me: Understand, O son of man, for in the time of the end the vision shall be fulfilled. (Dan 8:17, D-R)

The requisite fear and trembling is intra-textual proof of the oracle's divinely sanctioned role; most angelic visitations in the canonical Hebrew and Christian texts employ a similar sequence: the appearance of the divinely empowered figure; the human's terror; the consolation offered by the angelic being; and, finally, the delivery of the divine message. In this way, the text simultaneously adds to the sense of weight of the vision and taps into the authority of the angelic visitation trope.

This authorizing sense of visionary weight carries beyond the dream. Upon waking, Daniel is powerfully moved by what he has seen:

And I Daniel languished, and was sick for some days: and when I was risen up, I did the king's business, and I was astonished at the vision, and there was none that could interpret it. (Dan 8:27, D-R)

In a simple but powerful way, Daniel's recounting of the real-world impact of the dream on his state of mind (and physical health) acts as an additional testimony to the vision's validity. This type of waking authentication is something that will be used frequently in succeeding dream/visionary traditions (e.g., Julian of Norwich and Langland).

The pre-dream introduction to Daniel's third vision demonstrates the importance of *intertextual* reference to the book's self-legitimation:

The first year of [Darius'] reign, I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, concerning which the word of the Lord came to Jeremias the prophet, that seventy years should be accomplished of the desolation of Jerusalem. And I set my face to the Lord my God, to pray and make supplication with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes. (Dan 9:2-3, D-R)

Daniel's meditation on the seventy years of desolation predicted in Jeremiah provides another instance of intertextual reinforcement, but it also demonstrates the piety of Daniel in a similar way to the legendary narratives of the first half of the book. This type of lead in, which features the dreamer meditating beforehand on what will be the content of his/her dream, is likewise used in diverse dream traditions, from Cicero to Julian of Norwich to Chaucer. This type of waking episode preceding the dream/vision either legitimizes or delegitimizes the dream depending on the nature of the dreamer's preoccupation: whether the dreamer's waking life is focused on spiritual or worldly matters.¹³⁴ Daniel, as we might expect at this point, is concerned with

¹³⁴ Chaucer's particular treatment of the pre-dream state of the dreamer works to undermine the validity of the dream. See the Chaucer chapter below.

spiritual matters and has turned, rightly, to scripture for elucidation, in this way providing pre-validation of the coming vision.

A Cryptic Climax: Daniel's Final Assertion of Authority

The concluding five verses of the Book of Daniel contain a final highly influential authorizing device. This device becomes a staple of the Christian apocalyptic tradition: the cryptic climax.

And he said: Go, Daniel, because the words are shut up, and sealed until the appointed time. Many shall be chosen, and made white, and shall be tried as fire: and the wicked shall deal wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand, but the learned shall understand. And from the time when the continual sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination unto desolation shall be set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred ninety days, Blessed is he that waiteth and cometh unto a thousand three hundred thirty-five days. But go thou thy ways until the time appointed: and thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot unto the end of the days.

(Dan 12:9-13)

Just at the climax of Daniel's final vision's worldly and otherworldly conflict, the heavens close—the “words are shut up” until the “appointed time.” The reader's (by way of the visionary's) portal to universal insight is closed—and the vision's/visionary's final assertion of authority is made emphatically. He alone has access to these mysteries, and God alone is the one who determines when and to whom they are imparted.

The text ultimately sets a limit to the revelation of divinely ordained events. Similarly to the abstract nature of much of the text, the conclusion is deliberately obscured. Literarily, this finale is a masterpiece of discretion: the balance of the specific (the 1290 and 1335 days) and the ambiguous (“the abomination of desolation” and the mysterious “sealed” aspects of the revelation), the revealed and concealed, provides a tantalizing mixture of concrete and obscure

expression. This deliberately obfuscated knowledge highlights the dominant position of the universal intellect, as imparted to the visionary, over the reader's temporal knowledge.

The phrasing in the text is ultimately humble: the dreamer himself is denied parts of or at least explanation of parts of the revelation.¹³⁵ Despite this deferential stance, the end result is the text's clear assertion of an authoritative hierarchy of knowledge: the reader, the visionary, the Divine. The cryptic closing leaves the reader with the impression that the text has buried mysteries beneath it—and the author has knowledge that transcends that which the reader is allowed to obtain.

Conclusion: Daniel's Hierarchy of Authority

The Book of Daniel maintains a prominent position in the Western literary dream and vision tradition. The text features two literary dream and vision forms—the dream sequence and the apocalypse—which it uses masterfully in its overarching argument for the legitimacy of the Jewish culture. The text demonstrates several strategies by which dreams and visions can be employed for cultural/socio-political legitimation that will be imitated in diverse dream and vision genres, especially in the Middle Ages.¹³⁶

In the legendary tales of the first six chapters, the author/compiler strategically appropriates the cultural cache of Daniel through pseudonymity—and further augments this cultural authority by emphasizing Daniel's intellectual credentials. Similar to many of the major Hebrew prophets, the author/compiler highlights Daniel's authority through the delegitimization of his socio-political rivals, exposing their ineptitude and misplaced faith. The dream sequences

¹³⁵ Another possible interpretation of these verses is to read the "sealing" as an explanation for why the ostensibly 6th century BCE prophecies of Daniel are not "revealed" until the 2nd century.

¹³⁶ See the chapters on Julian of Norwich and Chaucer below for discussion of the medieval adaptations of several of the strategies Daniel employs.

of the tales feature appropriately authoritative dream and vision recipients, interpreters, and content (similar to the elitist Neoplatonist theories as argued in Macrobius¹³⁷). Several key passages in the text, however, provide a counter to many of its elitist implications by stressing Yahweh as the ultimate source of true dream interpretation. As the visionary writings of the medieval mystics will likewise argue,¹³⁸ Daniel presents a crucial prerequisite to the access of transcendent knowledge: the recipient's humility (and sometimes humiliation).

The apocalyptic visions of the second half of the text are paradigms of the Western apocalypse. They effectively balance “apocalyptic symbolism”¹³⁹—a device that grants the text a level of abstraction that proves remarkably adaptable (as seen in the Revelation of John)—and concrete historical allusion. These visions also feature moments where the visionary/dreamer demonstrates the real-world power of his visions through personal, waking-world response—a strategy that medieval mystics, like Julian of Norwich, will incorporate to powerful effect.

The Book of Daniel presents a clear hierarchy of authority. The text's emphasis on both the credentials of the dreamer/visionary (intellectual, socio-political, and spiritual) and divine discretion in revealed knowledge (as embodied in the rhetoric of sealed prophecy in the final vision's cryptic climax) presents a consistent hierarchy of knowledge. The ultimate authority, Yahweh, allows the dreamer/visionary to serve as the authorized mediator to reveal (in part) transcendent knowledge to the reader. This hierarchy of authority is perhaps the most influential legacy of the Book of Daniel.

¹³⁷ See the chapter below on Macrobius and Neoplatonic dream theory.

¹³⁸ See the chapter on Julian of Norwich and the medieval divine vision below.

¹³⁹ “Apocalyptic symbolism” is a concept J. J. Collins addresses at length in *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

CHAPTER 3

MACROBIUS: ESTABLISHING THE AUTHORITATIVE PHILOSOPHICAL FORM

Introduction

Establishing the Authoritative Philosophical Form

Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* proves to be a highly influential work for the men of letters of the High and Late Middle Ages.¹⁴⁰ Macrobius' characteristic Neoplatonist emphasis on authority in his discussion of Cicero's dream vision helps to establish authority as a central issue in the form. Following the pattern of other Neoplatonic encyclopedists, throughout the commentary, Macrobius stresses his (authoritative) sources.¹⁴¹ Macrobius' first move is to defend the legitimacy of using fiction in philosophical treatises.¹⁴² His next move takes the defense of fiction in a more specific direction, narrowing his discussion to the philosophical authority of the dream vision proper.

With his Neoplatonic encyclopedist's passion for authority and the privileging of indirect expression of higher philosophical truths, Macrobius holds up the dream vision as *the* authoritative fictional mode for philosophical discourse. Macrobius argues that the power of dream fiction ultimately rests upon that dream's ability to construct within itself an authoritative support structure (including revelation to properly authoritative figures concerning legitimate

¹⁴⁰ Perhaps none were so overtly influenced as Chaucer, whose dream visions will be the focus of a later chapter in the current study. For an important early study of the *Commentary's* influence on Chaucer, see Anderson, E.P. "Some Notes on Chaucer's Treatment of the Somnium Scipionis," *Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, XXXIII (1902), xcvi-xcix. For a broader discussion of the development of Chaucer's worldview, see Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*. New York, 1926 and J.L. Lowes, *Geoffrey Chaucer and the Development of his Genius* (Boston & NY, 1934).

¹⁴¹ For comprehensive discussions of sourcing in Neoplatonic texts, see Thomas Whittaker, *The Neo-Platonists* (2nd ed. Cambridge, England, 1918).

¹⁴² Macrobius here is likely following his predecessors, Porphyry and Proclus. See Stahl 84; Thomas Whittaker, *Macrobius; or Philosophy, Science and Letters in the Year 400*. (Cambridge, England, 1923): 58; and Karl Mraz, "Macrobius' Kommentar zu Ciceros Somnium," *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, Jahrg. 1933): 236-37.

subject matter) and to convey its truths through the tastefully and appropriately indirect rhetorical mode. His most important contribution to succeeding intellectual circles is his famous five categories of dreams:¹⁴³

1. The enigmatic dream (Latin *somnium* / Greek *oneiros*)
2. The prophetic vision (Latin *visio* / Greek *horama*)
3. The oracular dream (Latin *oraculum* / Greek *chrematismos*)
4. The nightmare (Latin *insomnium* / Greek *enypnion*)
5. The apparition (Latin *visum* / Greek *phantasma*)

These five categories of dreams—three legitimate and two illegitimate—as well as his paradigmatic application of those categories to the *Dream of Scipio*, helped establish authority as the central issue in the Western dream vision tradition.¹⁴⁴

The Arbiters of Authority

The scholarly giants of Late Antiquity were consumed with the question of authority. Calcidius, Martianus Capella, Boethius, Cassiodorus, and Isidore of Seville emphasized the authority of their sources in both direct and indirect means throughout their encyclopedic projects. The accumulation of authoritative sources in the scholarly projects of Late Antiquity, presented in a

¹⁴³ See Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, especially chapters 4 & 5.

¹⁴⁴ Artemidorus' categories were also a major influence in the Western dream tradition; the relationship between the dream theory of Artemidorus and Macrobius is still in debate. See Kruger 20 and Stahl, I, iii, 87-8, footnote 1. For an important study of Artemidorus, see Claes Blum's *Studies in the Dream-Book of Artemidorus* (Uppsala, 1936).

cohesive and (in most cases) logically-organized manner, is the *first cause* of their lasting influence in the Middle Ages. What is more, for the current study, their general success in their attempts to “epitomize and present in readily accessible form the classical liberal arts and more attractive teachings of classical philosophy” set the standard for the Middle Ages (Stahl 9). In works such as the *Commentary on Timaeus*, *Consolation of Philosophy* and *De Nuptis*, the appeal of a one-stop/single-source reference to the ideology and ideas of Classical Antiquity not only provided Medieval scholars with access, though imperfect, to the great ideas of that pivotal period, but it also provided a model for the approach to scholarly and literary works. The Scholastics and their literary counterparts are largely imitating this encyclopedic projects, learning from them the method and power of wielding authority.

As a great number of scholars have documented, the Late Antique encyclopedists were far from perfect annotators and compilers. A heavy reliance on the “authorities” in Late Antiquity in reality was more often than not a reliance upon derivatives, resulting in imprecise paraphrase and explication. Often removed by several sources, the Late Antique classicist projects presented some information that was more hearsay than summation. For authors such as Iamblichus and Macrobius, Plato’s *Phaedo* is more Porphyry than Plato; Aristotle is become merely threadbare Neoplatonist clichés loosely stitched together. In his introduction to his English translation of Macrobius’ *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, William Harris Stahl captures this issue of Late Antiquity’s scholarly distance and imperfect representation:

Apart from the disinclination or inability of both writers and readers to comprehend the more recondite matters of Greek philosophy and the more specialized developments of Greek science, the main reason that these works are poor representatives of classical thought is that the authors follow the traditional practice of a long line of compilers and commentators who had long since lost contact with the classical originals. (Stahl 9)

Regardless of the sometimes “poor representatives” of the golden age(s) of philosophy, these Late Antique compilations yet remain some of the most influential books in Western civilization. The essence of their lasting power simply put is authority, derivative at times though it may be.

Macrobius’ encyclopedic projects fall perfectly in line with those of his Late Antique peers. Scholars attribute three at least partially preserved works to Macrobius: the complete *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, the largely intact *Saturnalia*, and *On the Differences and Similarities of the Greek and Latin Verb* (which exists as a medieval abridgement). The *Saturnalia*, a “miscellany of pagan lore and antiquarianism,”¹⁴⁵ is of interest mainly to classicists. The *Commentary* on the other hand is largely the focus of Medievalists because of its massive influence on Medieval intellectuals, especially the Scholastics, as it is a compendium of the Neoplatonic worldview.

Macrobius’ *Commentary* is marked by an emphatic reliance upon the authorities of Greek and Roman philosophy. He makes his “sourcing” approach clear from the beginning; the first line of his *Commentary* raises the rhetoric of his discussion by dropping the names of two of the heavy hitters of philosophy.

In our reading of Plato’s *Republic* and Cicero’s *Republic*... (I.i: 81)

A reference to Cicero is of course appropriate in the beginning of a commentary on his work, but Macrobius here is using this as an opportunity to demonstrate the method of the work: his commentary is more a compilation/compendium of leading authorities than an individual intellect’s musings. This is the scholarly mode in which he was groomed; and, ultimately, he will remain faithful to its creed. Macrobius immediately launches into a comparison-contrast of Cicero’s and Plato’s *narrationes fabulosae*, where he jumps at the chance to reference Plato’s

¹⁴⁵ Stahl’s introduction to his translation of the *Commentary*, page 3.

Phaedo and *Gorgias*: “For example in the *Phaedo* [...] Likewise in the *Georgias* ” (82). The result: by the end of this succinct introduction, Macrobius has established overtly at least four canonical sources.¹⁴⁶

Macrobius’ extensive use of Porphyry (whom he only directly references twice in the text¹⁴⁷) and occasional borrowings from Plotinus are both explicit, often referenced directly—though at times vaguely or inaccurately—in the text, and documented meticulously in various comprehensive studies of the text (among them, Henry, Cumont, Mras, Courcelle, and Stahl). Besides Cicero’s *Republic*, existing, lost, and even hypothetical texts of Porphyry (perhaps most importantly *De regressu*, the *Commentary on the Phaedo*, and the lost *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*), Plotinus (while much of his “Plotinus” is probably actually by way of Porphyry, many leading scholars agree at least on the direct use of Plotinus’ *Enneads*; Macrobius also directly references his *On the Virtues*, which might be credible), Virgil’s *Georgics*, and, likely, Nicomachus’ *Theologoumena arithmeticae* (or a derivative), Macrobius at times draws from less prominent thinkers, as well as non-philosophical sources (for instance Ennius in the *Saturnalia*).¹⁴⁸

It is worth noting up front that Macrobius, like most good Neoplatonists, found Plato and Cicero to be infallible sources of truth. Though he would have to reconcile some inconsistencies in their worldviews in later chapters (e.g., see his discussion of the spheres of Mercury and Venus in I, xix,¹⁴⁹), he is nonetheless able to maintain throughout the text a reverential and “revelational” perspective of their works. However, Macrobius almost certainly did not read

¹⁴⁶ As a convenient example of the “authority accumulation effect,” Proclus uses the same sources in his own analysis (Stahl, footnote 82).

¹⁴⁷ That Macrobius gives so little credit to his true source of many of his chapters should be no surprise to those who are familiar with Late Antique and Medieval encyclopedists. Stahl references this trend in his “Introduction” VII, p. 36.

¹⁴⁸ See Stahl’s explanation of the range of opinions on the sources of Macrobius’ *Commentary* (23-39).

¹⁴⁹ See Stahl for a more detailed discussion (13, 17).

Plato or Aristotle himself. His “Plato” is Plato-via-Plotinus-viaPorphyry. That he is often reading them “from a distance,” through the filter of the scholarship before him, namely Porphyry and Proclus, seems not to detract from this worshipful posture. For Macrobius, every word of Cicero is a revelation waiting for the right Neoplatonist paradigm through which to unlock its mysteries.

(An ironic note: With so much made of sourcing by the fathers of Neoplatonists, one of the great ironies of the movement is that its masters, like Macrobius, are customarily untrue to their sources. Macrobius paraphrases, inserts, interweaves, and, on occasion, effectively overwrites the canonical authoritative voices of his field. Ironically, he is following the great flaw of the material world in his Neoplatonic model of the universe: the further the emanation from the true source, the more imperfect that emanation becomes. Macrobius’ derivative mode allows for greater slippage, something a Neoplatonist would seem to be more sensitive to; however, this derivative method, born out of necessity, is the *modus operandi* of these antique scholars.)

The cumulative effect of Macrobius’ seemingly perpetual sourcing is a sense of collective authority, consensus. Authority is the beginning and the end. Authority over novelty. Authority over originality. Authority over (at times) coherency and consistency. This is the mode of the Late Antique polymaths, a mode passed down to the Medievals—and perhaps nowhere better learned than from Macrobius’ *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*.

Defending the Dream Vision

In Defense of (Dream) Fiction (Ch. I and II)

Macrobius' emphasis on authority is compounded in the first topic: the question of authoritative literary forms. Like Porphyry and Proclus,¹⁵⁰ Macrobius feels the need to defend the use of fiction in philosophical treatises, maintaining that it is indeed a legitimate mode for philosophical elaboration.

Allegedly prompted by Colotes and "the entire sect of Epicureans" (I.ii: 83), Macrobius devotes a chapter to expounding on the differences between legitimate and illegitimate fiction for philosophical projects. His defense on one level is straightforward: if Plato and Cicero argue that the foundation for the ideal republic must be a love for justice (I. I: p. 81), then it follows that their treatises must work to promote such a love:

[Plato] realized that in order to implant a fondness for justice in an individual nothing was quite so effective as the assurance that one's enjoyments did not terminate with death. (I. ii: 83)

In other words, as befits a Neoplatonist's worldview, a true devotion to justice will not exist without a belief in the immortality of the soul. Plato and Cicero must then choose the most effective means of defending that premise. Their respective solutions are essential to the analysis that Macrobius is about to perform, Plato's providing the infallible sanctioning of Cicero's approach, the subject of the treatise.

Plato's solution is the famous Myth of Er. In the closing section of his *Republic*, Plato relays an account told by a man, Er, who had "apparently" experienced death but was revitalized

¹⁵⁰ See Stahl 84; Thomas Whittaker, *Macrobius; or Philosophy, Science and Letters in the Year 400*. (Cambridge, England, 1923) 58; and Karl Mras, "Macrobius' Kommentar zu Ciceros Somnium," *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, Jahrg. 1933): 236-37.

twelve days later to be able to describe his observations of the afterlife. Highlighting Plato's intentions for the "myth" and the efficacy of his method, Macrobius designates this fantastic account a necessary "fiction" or "fable" that ingeniously provides Plato his opportunity to discuss the otherwise unknowable mysteries of the immortal soul (I.ii: 81-82).

Following Porphyry, Macrobius uses this opportunity in his second chapter to distinguish between the appropriate and inappropriate use of fiction in philosophical discussions. Directly citing Colotes as the prominent objecting voice, Macrobius presents the objection that fiction has no place in those dedicated to ascertaining truth, that Plato is "defiling the very portals of truth" by his fallacious fable of Er (I.ii: 84). As this "censure" applies both to Er and Cicero's dream account, Macrobius "must resist this adversary and refute his pointless argument" (I.ii: 83). Macrobius' classical refutation in Chapter 2 establishes the analytical method he will employ throughout the *Commentary*: categorization.

Macrobius begins by arguing that philosophy distinguishes between the useless and useful fictions. The first category, fantastic and moral fables, intended merely to "gratify the ear" or "encourage the reader to good works," while perhaps good for "children's nurseries" should be rejected by legitimate philosophers (I.ii: 84). The second category is those *narrationes fabulosae* ("fabulous narratives") that consist of entirely fictitious settings and plots:

Either the presentation of the plot involves matters that are base and unworthy of divinities and are monstrosities of some sort (as, for example, gods caught in adultery, Saturn cutting off the privy parts of his father Caelus and himself thrown in to chains by his son and successor), a type which philosophers prefer to disregard altogether; (I.ii: 85)

This low and distorted form of *narratio fabulosa* Macrobius distinguishes from the truthful, allegorical form, which he argues contains "a decent and dignified concept of holy truths with

respectable events and characters, is presented beneath a modest veil of allegory” (I.ii: 85).¹⁵¹ It is to this truthful category of the fabulous narrative that the Myth of Er subscribes, and it is only this type of fiction that is “approved by the philosopher who is prudent in handling sacred matters” (I.ii: 85).

In Macrobius’ estimation, Cicero proves to be “equally judicious and clever” in following Plato’s lead in the use of a particularly effective version of the truthful fabulous narrative: a dream vision (I.ii: 82).

...after giving the palm to justice in all matters concerning the welfare of the state, he *revealed*, at the very end of his work, the sacred abodes of immortal souls and the secrets of the heavens and pointed out the place to which the souls of those who had served the republic prudently, justly, courageously, and temperately must proceed, or rather must return. (I.ii: 82, emphasis mine)

Besides providing in this passage a concise summary of the virtues and the Neoplatonic conception of the soul’s ultimate trajectory, Macrobius also appropriately establishes his perspective on Cicero’s dream account. It is a *revelatio*, a mystical and—as he will imply throughout his analysis—infallible disclosure of otherworldly truths, unknowable if not by divine insight.

Macrobius is doing something quite complex here. In these introductory chapters he is establishing Cicero’s account of Scipio’s dream as both a *narratio fabulosa*, unequivocally a fiction—created for a rhetorical and pedagogical purpose, in both imitation and correction of

¹⁵¹ As Kruger argues, Macrobius’ theory on allegorical fiction are “is echoed repeatedly in the Middle Ages.” A few examples of such echoes can be found in Petrarca’s “Coronation Oration” and Boccaccio’s *Genealogy of the Gods*. (Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 (214, footnote 39).

Plato's model—and, simultaneously, a mystical (and ultimately infallible) impartation of transcendent truths.

In the final third of the second chapter, Macrobius takes his categorization of appropriate *narratio fabulosa* to greater intellectual heights. He fine tunes his distinctions of what is and is not appropriate: conscientious philosophers may adequately employ such stories only when speaking about either the Soul (spirits “having dominion in the lower and upper air”) or else when talking about the gods in general (I, ii, 85). However, when the discussion “aspires to treat of the Highest and Supreme of all gods”—that is, those entities that dwell in the higher spheres, the super-lunar realms—fiction fails (I, ii, 85).

Macrobius here is of course talking about what the Neoplatonists call the Good or the First Cause, but he is also talking about the supreme Mind or Intellect that emanates from the Good. A tactful philosopher, he argues, will avoid using fictions, no matter how true the *narratio fabulosa*, in treating such transcendent, numinous subjects:

But when the discussion aspires to treat of the Highest and Supreme of all gods, called by the Greeks the Good (*tagathon*) and the First Cause (*proton aition*), or to treat of Mind or Intellect, which the Greeks call *nous*, born from and originating in the Supreme God and embracing the original concept of things, which are called Ideas (*ideai*), when, I repeat, philosophers speak about these, the Supreme God and Mind, they shun the use of fabulous narratives. (I, ii, 85-86)

Apart from providing a clear and succinct summary of the Neoplatonist worldview (of the Plotinus school at least), Macrobius here is laying the foundation for a profound argument: the limits of fiction in the expression of first principles and supreme truths. In short, fiction is not fit for engaging the sacred subjects of the Intellect and the Good/First Cause. Narratives have a ceiling, here precisely delimited: it must stay within the prescribed boundary of the corporeal

sublunary realm. In other words, the Soul is its boundary; any higher sphere, any closer to the Good, it should be “shunned.” The best a philosopher might do in treating these loftier truths are analogies (most famously Plato’s analogy of the sun). The *Narratio fabulosa* proves too crude a mode for such transcendent topics.

When [philosophers] wish to assign attributes to these divinities that not only pass the bounds of speech but those of human comprehension as well, they resort to similes and analogies (I, ii, 86)

While they are thusly limited, Macrobius next stresses that at key moments these fabulous narratives are not merely permissible, in some circumstances they can be essential to philosophical discourse. His defense of this assertion is important to examine for the present discussion. Macrobius argues that the (sublunary) mysteries of Nature, which are clearly within the purview of philosophers, fall, unlike the Good and its celestial emanation Mind, within the “bounds of speech” and “human comprehension.” However, though the greater mysteries of Nature are both communicable and comprehensible, a straightforward disclosure of her secrets is ultimately “distasteful” (I, ii, 86).

...a frank, open exposition of herself is distasteful to Nature, who, just as she has withheld an understanding of herself from the uncouth senses of men by enveloping herself in variegated garments, has also desired to have her secretes handled by more prudent individuals through fabulous narratives. (I, ii, 86)

Fiction, is in fact the only appropriate means of communicating the intimate secrets of Nature, or in other terms, sublunary reality. The implications of this statement are vast. First, Macrobius is establishing a hierarchy of expression, with direct exposition at the bottom and similes and analogies at the top. In the middle, though falling short of supreme truths, is a form

of expression which bridges the gap of common knowledge and truly transcendent knowledge: fiction, narratives. Plato's "Myth of Er" and Cicero's "Dream of Scipio."

To elucidate his point further, Macrobius uses the illustration of Numenius' dream of the Eleusinian mysteries. He tells us that the philosopher Numenius gave a direct interpretation of the Eleusinian rituals and was consequently chastised in a dream by the goddesses of the cult:

The Eleusianian goddesses themselves, dressed in the garments of courtesans, appeared to him standing before an open brothel, and when in his astonishment he asked the reason for this shocking conduct, they angrily replied that he had driven them from their sanctuary of modesty and had prostituted them to every passer-by. (I, ii, 87)

Macrobius argues that the gods prefer the appropriately distanced and indirect method of mythology over the blunt modes of analysis and interpretation.

Not only does this brief account provide a nice "warm-up" dream analysis, it also creates a direct link between the philosopher and the dreamer, and, consequently, highlights a parallel in Neoplatonic circles and what has been, and will continue to be, a common trope in dreams and dream interpretation. This dream trope is that of the dreamer who gains access to transcendent truths, but is prohibited from revealing aspects of those truths.

This prohibition of the dreamer's full disclosure produces the same effect as Macrobius' proposition. Those worthy/intelligent/holy enough to journey beyond the worldly sphere—be it by spiritual revelation or intellectual reflection, or both—are often limited in their means of communicating aspects of their spiritual/intellectual discoveries. This is true in the Hebrew and early Christian traditions—whose prophetic/visionary writings usually include specific instructions from God or His messengers to seal up portions of their mystical revelations (as

featured prominently in Daniel, and Revelation)—and, as Macrobius here reinforces, the Neoplatonic tradition.

The second implication of Macrobius' argument arises from the phrases "uncouth men" (those who can only comprehend and employ plain speech) and "prudent individuals" (those capable of comprehending and employing more oblique literary devices). What becomes increasingly evident here is a profound elitism, one at the heart of Plotinian Neoplatonism:

only eminent men of superior intelligence gain a revelation of her truths; the others must satisfy their desires for worship with a ritual drama, which prevents her secrets from becoming common (I, ii, 87).

Thus, what a philosopher must never do is to allow the great mysteries of Nature to become "common" knowledge; he must cloak, obscure, obfuscate the higher truths, "dressing" them in "variegated garments" of fiction. The "prudent" philosopher must reject the "distasteful" act of "direct exposition." In this way part of the philosopher's program is to maintain a distance through rhetorical device between the less erudite of his culture and the more esoteric or enigmatic aspects of his philosophy. The degree of difficulty of the truth should be paralleled by the difficulty of expression and interpretation, a paradigm that will help to keep higher wisdom in the hands of the intellectual elite. (In this way, the elitism of Neoplatonism is more firmly established as a criterion than in the Hebrew and Christian tradition. Macrobius does not send mixed message, like the Book of Daniel, concerning intellectual and educational prerequisites for those attempting to interpret or receive higher truths.)

Formal Authority: The Dream Vision as the Perfect Philosophical Form

With his encyclopedist's avidity for authority and the mystically-inclined philosopher's distaste for direct exposition, Macrobius' *Commentary* finds perhaps the perfect form upon which to focus. The power of dream fiction ultimately rests upon that dream's ability to construct within itself an authoritative support structure and to convey its truths through the tastefully and appropriately indirect rhetorical mode.

First and foremost, an effective dream account's center and stabilizing force must *seem to be* or *imitate* the divine authority of prophetic visions. This is as true for Neoplatonists as it is for the Israelites or the early Christians or the ancient Mesopotamians. Dream literature only lives and breathes if it gives the *impression of heaven* behind its inspiration.

Second, in Macrobius' hierarchy of expression, an appropriately philosophical dream will disclose its secrets through the "modest" veil of fiction. A majority of the subject matter of Cicero's dream account clearly falls under the parameters set forth in Chapter 2: It treats of entities and concepts that are beyond "common" knowledge, namely, the ascendancy of man's soul from the tangles of the body and the "mortal and transitory" sublunary world (IV, 73).

While the ascendancy of the soul is certainly the focus of the dream—which, as Macrobius argues, is the ideal subject of the *narratio fabulosa*—the account of Scipio's dream on one level seems to violate Macrobius' delimitations of the fictional mode in philosophical treatises. Scipio is, after all, guided beyond the earth's mortal sphere and travels into the eternal realms of the higher celestial spheres. This might seem like a case of fiction overstepping its discursive purview; however, Macrobius could still defend the boundaries he outlines as the focus of the discussion remains consistently on the soul, never touching directly on the Good or the Mind. Cicero presents the description of the celestial realms for a specific purpose: to highlight the diminutive nature of man's worldly existence, influence and authority. Thus, in

Macrobius' logic, even when treating of the transcendent realms, Cicero maintains a "modest" focus for his fiction: the Soul and the mortal sphere, appropriately resisting the disclosure of the "supreme truths" of the Principle Cause and the Intellect.

While he does not state it directly, Macrobius' lengthy exposition of Cicero's dream vision argues for the supremacy of this particular subtype of fabulous narrative. His famous chapter classifying the five types of dreams has the cumulative effect of highlighting the complexities and subtleties of dream fiction and its literary and spiritual interpretation. Plato's Myth of Er is, in Macrobius' estimation, a purely fictional account used necessarily and tactfully by the grandfather of the Neoplatonists. It is thus a straightforward fabulous narrative that appropriately highlights the transitory nature of the mortal life in a modest and indirect manner. However, the Myth of Er does not have the added complexity and accompanying authority of a philosophically serious dream vision like Cicero's account. The interpretative apparatus surrounding "The Dream of Scipio" proves to be more rich, intricate, and philosophically engaging than a straightforward narrative, even when told by the master of philosophy. Though Macrobius does not state this directly, from the opening chapter (where he demonstrates Cicero's judicious choice of the dream as an answer to Plato's critics) to the final chapter (which highlights Cicero's masterful fusion of the three fields of philosophy¹⁵²), Macrobius effectively establishes and demonstrates the dream narrative as the perfect, authoritative form with which to disclose the secrets of the Soul.

¹⁵² II, xvii, 246.

Defining the Dream Vision

A Question of Authority: Macrobius' Five Categories of Dreams

Macrobius' five categories of dreams greatly shape the way dreams and authority are understood throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁵³ His Neoplatonic worldview, fused with the dream theory of Artemidorus (or a common source of the two), helps to establish or at least reaffirm the emphasis of authoritative sources of dreams.¹⁵⁴

Predictably, Macrobius begins his widely influential categorization of dreams by first establishing the authority of its sources:

We must first describe the many varieties of dreams recorded by the ancients, who have classified and defined the various types that have appeared to men in their sleep, wherever they might be. (I, iii, 87)

He tells the reader that he has drawn the following categories from “the ancients,” a rather vague method of sourcing his material. As is true for many sections of the *Commentary*, scholars cannot point with certainty to the direct source(s) of these dream categories; however, it is clear that Macrobius' discussion closely parallels the widely read second century dream divination book, *Oneirocritica* by Artemidorus of Daldis (also called Artemidorus Daldianus and Artemidorus Ephesius). In fact, some passages of Macrobius' dream chapter read like loose Latin translations of Artemidorus' Greek text. As there are some divergences between the two texts, the most likely relationship is either that Macrobius is drawing from a second or third-hand derivative of the *Oneirocritica*, both authors are drawing from an older original source, or

¹⁵³ See Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, especially chapters 4 & 5. For an important study of Artemidorus, see Claes Blum's *Studies in the Dream-Book of Artemidorus* (Uppsala, 1936).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 20 and Stahl I, iii, 87-8, footnote 1.

Macrobius is modifying the Artemidorus himself.¹⁵⁵ Macrobius' withholding of the details of his sourcing might be interpreted as a reluctance to specify a less authoritative derivative source, confusion about the ultimate source of the information, or, simply, a lack of concern for tracing the specifics of its derivation.

Regardless of the reasons, his vague reference to the "ancients" still adequately maintains the cumulative effect of his larger authorizing-via-sourcing strategy. The vagueness of the reference gives a general impression of consensus about the categories he is about to explicate for the reader. In this way Macrobius both maintains his authorizing strategies and avoids having to clarify the (more than likely) indirect means by which he's come by these categories, which might have detracted from their legitimacy.

Macrobius argues for five categories of dreams, three of which are worthy of interpretation due to their "prophetic significance" (I, iii., 88). Two of the categories he describes as unworthy of interpretation, as they provide no insight into future events. It is worth pausing for a moment here and looking at the logical progression of Macrobius' argument thus far. The shift from the discussion about useful *narrationes fabulosae* in the preceding two chapters to useful *dreams* involves the introduction of a new prerequisite. While a dream account might fall under the umbrella of fabulous narratives, the standard for a "worthy" dream in philosophical discourse seems to require another element: prophetic potential.

This emphasis on supernatural knowledge provided by dreams is surprising on one level. Is prediction of future events the purpose of philosophical discourse? While one might argue that natural philosophy often does involve questions about predicting natural patterns, like Thales' prediction of the eclipse, Macrobius' assumption that the authority of dreams depends on a supernatural foreknowledge of events is a curiously specific and limited viewpoint for all three

¹⁵⁵ Stahl, I, iii, 87-8, footnote 1.

branches of philosophy. Why must future events be involved? Why can a dream not simply allow the dreamer access to higher spiritual truths? Must they demonstrate to the dreamer verifiable prescience to be philosophically worthy dreams? The answer is likely in Macrobius' source(s); the editorial reality of such encyclopedic projects is occasional oversimplification, dissonance, and inconsistencies in the disparate sections of the text. Macrobius' focus on the divinatory nature of dreams continues throughout his discussion, though he is able to offer other reasons for a vision's philosophical worth.

Macrobius famously subdivides dreams into five types, all of which inherently involve questions of authority:

1. The enigmatic dream (Latin *somnium* / Greek *oneiros*)
2. The prophetic vision (Latin *visio* / Greek *horama*)
3. The oracular dream (Latin *oraculum* / Greek *chrematismos*)
4. The nightmare (Latin *insomnium* / Greek *enypnion*)
5. The apparition (Latin *visum* / Greek *phantasma*)

In the following I will use both the English and Latin terms to describe these dream forms; the English for clarity and, at times, the Latin for succinctness as well as the frequency of their use in both scholarly and literary texts.

The first three (enigmatic dreams, prophetic visions, and oracular dreams) are the philosophically authoritative dreams, as, Macrobius argues, they offer supernatural insight into future events; the final two categories (nightmares and apparitions) are the philosophically irrelevant dreams.

As Macrobius unpacks these terms he makes clear that while future predictions are a required test for a dream's value, the reason behind the phenomena is the key: the source of the dream. The validity of a dream ultimately derives from its source. The first three are divinely imparted; the final two are merely corporeal, originating in the mortal and worldly. In other words the philosophically valuable dreams depend upon divine authority. Those dreams that are born of the material world are unable to provide authoritative knowledge. In a close parallel of his previous differentiation between "distastefully" direct expression of common knowledge and the indirect mode of philosophical fiction, Macrobius makes clear that corporeal dreams are only able to express the lower, worldly truths, while the divinely imparted dreams are able to convey the higher truths of the spirit and the spiritual realm. The limits of a dream's interpretative value is thus inextricably connected to the authority of its origin.

Illegitimate Origins: *Insomnium* and *Visum*

Macrobius begins his famous categorization with those dreams that lack philosophical authority, the two types of corporeal dreams: the nightmare (*insomnium*) and the apparition (*visum*). The nightmare originates from three possible causes: mental distress, physical distress, or anxiety about the future. The bodily/worldly origin of the nightmare nullifies its prophetic and, thus, philosophical significance. The insights offered by nightmares are limited to insights of the mortal body and the types of "vexations" the dreamer experiences "in the day" (I, iii, 88). The bodily derived dreams might be caused by overindulgent eating or hunger; according to Macrobius' parameters, clearly not the interest of serious philosophical discussion.

The "mental variety" of *insomnium* is simply a continuation of the thoughts of the dreamer's waking life. Macrobius provides two quick examples: the man who is pining for a

lover and the man who fears the threats of an enemy. In this way, the psychological “vexations” of the day are merely following the man into sleep. Macrobius emphasizes that these dreams arise from negative psychological states:

Since these dreams and other dreams like them arise from some condition or circumstance that *irritates* a man during the day and consequently *disturbs* him when he falls asleep, they flee when he awakes and vanish into thin air. (I, iii, 89, emphasis mine)

The implication is that the sleep state is philosophically fertile only *if* the dreamer is able to transcend waking mental distress.

The final type of *insomnium* is that caused by “anxiety about the future.” The distinction between this category and the “mental” type is the hypothetical nature of the latter. The dreamer is not troubled by those psychological distresses of the day, but by worry about possible things to come. He provides the example of a man who dreams of either gaining or losing a political position, a possible future outcome arising from worry about things to come.

Paralleling his logic about the inadequate waking origins of nightmares, Macrobius “proves” that *insomnium* (which he explains means “in sleep”) are illegitimate for philosophical or prophetic purposes because they are “noteworthy” only while in the dream state, afterwards having “no importance or meaning” (I, iii, 89).

As a final confirmation of his dismissal of the nightmare’s authority, Macrobius calls upon the authority of Virgil, specifically the famous verse about false dreams from Aeneid vi. 896 (as well as iv.3-5 and 9). While his explanation is ultimately unconvincing, giving more the impression of a retrofitting of Virgil than a straightforward interpretation, the method of the passage is standard Neoplatonic encyclopedic sourcing: to cover over any weakness or inconsistency of the previous argument with a preeminent authoritative voice.

It is worth pausing here to point out an inconsistency in Macrobius' argumentation. Though he dismisses the *insomnium* for philosophical purposes, he does not seem to make the connection between this bodily derived category and the very dream vision he is in the process of explicating. The irony of this incongruity is only heightened by his examples, two of which directly correspond with Scipio's dream, which explicitly originates in part from a discussion with King Masinissa about 1. Scipio the Elder (his eventual dream guide) and 2. the political state of both the King's realm and Scipio the Younger's commonwealth. In this way, the dream of Scipio is arguably in part an *insomnium*, deriving from 1. mental cogitations of the day and 2. "anxiety about the future." To be fair to Macrobius, the conversation with Masinissa does not seem to be a particularly *stressful* or *anxious*, arising from the lower cogitations of the physical mind; however, the fact that the waking life has influenced the dream is undeniable.¹⁵⁶

The second philosophically inconsequential category is the apparition (*visum*). Macrobius underscores the degree to which this corporeal dream type is unworthy of philosophical discourse by the brevity of his description of it. Again, the ultimate source of the apparition is the body; in fact, the waking physical/mortal mind is even more at play in this category than the nightmare, as the dreamer never attains the full sleeping state when experiencing apparitions. The dreamer only attains "the first cloud of sleep," caught "between wakefulness and slumber" and "imagines he sees specters rushing at him or wandering vaguely about, differing from natural creatures in size and shape, and hosts of diverse things, either delightful or disturbing" (I, iii, 89). Macrobius argues that hallucinatory experiences such as these are the cause of "popular belief[s]" such as the incubus, again playing on the lower "common knowledge" vs. esoteric truths theme that is essential to the chapter's premises. The underlying arguments of this brief

¹⁵⁶ As we will explore in a subsequent chapter, Chaucer gets a lot of mileage out of the potential nightmare-inducing waking episode similar to that offered in Cicero's dream vision.

passage—preoccupations of the waking mind as unworthy origins of dreams and the overly “common” experience of apparitions—reaffirm the dichotomy Macrobius draws in the chapter as a whole: the worldly and common are invalid sources of philosophical truth. Authority must be derived from the higher realms.

The Three Authoritative Dreams: *Oraculum*, *Visio*, and *Somnium*

Macrobius devotes the second half of the discussion to the three authoritative dream categories: the oracular dream (*oraculum*), the prophetic vision (*visio*), and the enigmatic dream (*somnium*). Like most of Macrobius’ discussions, the order in which he presents these categories is no accident. The three dream forms are progressively more indirect; in this way, Macrobius’ hierarchy of philosophical expression is maintained. The move from oracle to enigmatic dream, along with the greater time he devotes to the last category, reasserts the philosophical superiority of the indirect and abstruse (i.e., effectively esoteric) fictional mode. All three modes, however, are undeniably authoritative, imparted to the reader from the higher realms, rather than lower regions of the mortal body and mind.

Of the three, the first category Macrobius presents most explicitly depends upon authority, coming necessarily in the form of a recognizable authoritative figure:

We call a dream oracular in which a parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god clearly reveals what will or will not transpire, and what action to take or avoid. (I, iii, 90)

The prerequisite that the oracle (i.e., the dream guide) is clearly in an authoritative position in relation to the dreamer redoubles the importance of source in Macrobius’ dream taxonomy. The

author makes clear that an oracular guide cannot be a common, ordinary figure. At very least, a revered parent or elder is required (as is the case in Scipio's dream); piousness and veneration—usually in the form of a holy or divine persona—is the standard. Thus, like the Hebrew oracular tradition, which requires either an angelic being—often Michael or Gabriel, or an overt stand-in for Yahweh¹⁵⁷—the Neoplatonic tradition requires a figure that holds a higher position than the dreamer. The elevated status of the dream guide is the first condition of a true oracular dream; that figure's status allowing him or her the role of mediator between the lower realm of the dreamer and the higher source(s) of the revelation or prophecy.

Remaining true to his original premise, the second necessary aspect of an oracular dream is its ability to reveal future events and/or prescribe the future actions of the dreamer. In this way Macrobius underscores the worldly relevance of authoritative dream visions, which always impart knowledge that has a direct impact on the waking life—and, as such, are both potentially transformative for the dreamer and verifiable to the reader. Either some significant action(s) of the dreamer will change as a result of the oracular dream, or the predictions of the prophecy will prove true, or both. (Again, this offers an interesting parallel with the Hebrew tradition, as featured both in the dream episodes and in the visions of Daniel, where a true dream/vision has a powerful effect on the dreamer or interpreter.¹⁵⁸)

After this pithy description of the oracular dream, Macrobius provides a brief account of the “prophetic vision” (*visio*). The distinction between this form and the oracular dream is the dreams' methods of revealing the truth: the oracular dream depends upon a dream guide, who generally tells the reader of future events of necessary actions; the prophetic vision, on the other hand, is an actual vision/revelation of future events. Like the oracular dream, those future truths

¹⁵⁷ See Hebrew prophecy discussion above.

¹⁵⁸ See the discussion of Daniel above.

experienced in the prophetic vision must eventually prove to be true for the vision to be authentic. Again, the corporeal world acts as confirmation of the dream's authority.

Macrobius provides two quick illustrations of the prophetic vision, the dreamed of return of a friend and the request to accept money for safekeeping, which soon thereafter indeed take place. In the first example, Macrobius makes sure to highlight a key distinction between the “distresses” of the day that might trigger a prophetically and philosophically useless *insomnium* and the divine source(s) of a *visio*. The dream of the returning friend, he insists, is not prompted by waking thoughts: the dreamer dreams of a friend whom he/she has not thought about in the waking world, thus, nullifying the possibility of its physical/psychological source.

The third and final category of prophetic and philosophically authoritative dream holds a special position in the discussion, not only ending the classification in a way that produces a moderate crescendo, but requiring its own five sub-varieties. This more effusive treatment of the third authoritative category reaffirms its privileged philosophical position in Macrobius' taxonomy. Macrobius demonstrates its philosophical value in the amount of time he devotes to its explanation.

By an enigmatic dream we mean one that conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the true meaning of the information being offered, and requires an interpretation for its understanding. (I, iii, 90)

Macrobius' emphasis on uncertainty—“strange shapes” and “ambiguity”—hints at his reasoning for holding this dream category until the end of the discussion. As opposed to the more directly conveyed oracle or the more easily validated vision of a future event, the *somnium* is a far more slippery form of philosophical/prophetic vision, requiring further subdivision. According to the logic of Macrobius' arguments in the previous chapters, this increased degree of indirection

endows this final dream category with a heightened philosophical merit, requiring a higher level of intellectual work to decipher.

The five varieties include the personal, alien, social, public, and universal enigmatic dream. The first two categories are simply a distinction between the first person (personal) and third person (alien) point of view of the dream; the social involves both the dreamer and (an)other person(s). Public and universal enigmatic dreams concern larger issues. The public features the community or state; the universal the “sun, moon, planets, sky, or regions of the earth” (I, iii, 90). The multiplicity of the enigmatic dream proves its authoritative value in Macrobius’ taxonomy. As if to make this more clear to the reader, Macrobius devotes a majority of his application of the three authoritative/reliable dream categories to the five varieties of the enigmatic dream.

Aggregate Authority: The Dream Categories Applied

Macrobius’ next move in this influential chapter on dreams is to apply the three valid varieties to Scipio’s dream. Not only does this final section serve as a model application of his taxonomy in a literary/philosophical explication, in displaying the multifaceted nature of Scipio’s dream, Macrobius effectively intensifies his case for the dream as a supreme philosophical form. His multi-categorical explication produces a sense of aggregate philosophical authority, proving his larger point demonstrably: dream visions are the perfect fictional mode for philosophy as they are able to operate on several philosophically legitimate channels at once.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ The parallels with the Book of Daniel are striking; Daniel likewise employs all three legitimate visionary modes: the oracular, prophetic, and enigmatic. (See above.)

Macrobius' application demonstrates the dream vision's potential to cross categorical boundaries. He argues that the dream of Scipio contains elements of all three authoritative varieties and the five sub-types of the final category:

The dream which Scipio reports that he saw embraces the three reliable types mentioned above, and also has to do with all five varieties of the enigmatic dream. (I, iii, 90)

Not only does Scipio's dream employ the oracular mode (through Aemilius Paulus and Scipio the Elder), it contains a prophetic vision of future events (featuring the afterlife and Scipio's future condition) as well as the indirect revelations of the enigmatic dream, requiring "skillful interpretation." (I, ii, 91) To drive the point home, Macrobius quickly demonstrates the dream's full range of enigmatic revelations, exercising all five sub-varieties: the personal, alien, social, public, and universal (I, ii, 91).

Thus, not only is a dream narrative able to express higher-realm truths through one of the three valid dream categories, they have the potential to attain even higher philosophical heights through the combination of those varieties. Macrobius' application demonstrates that the mode of revelation of a dream is multiple, able to employ any combination of oracular, visionary, or enigmatic expression. Considered in the context of the arguments of Chapters 1 and 2 for the transcendence of indirect expression in philosophical treatises, the implication here is clear: the multiplicity of the dream vision's modes makes it a supremely authoritative philosophical form. In this way, Scipio's dream is not only authoritative because it is recorded by the infallible hand of Cicero, it deserves the careful scrutiny of the philosopher because it communicates through the entire range of modes of authoritative dreams.

Conclusion: Authoritative Dreamers and the Omnipresent Veil

Macrobius ends his condensed treatise by doubly reaffirming the importance of authority in dream theory. First, he defends the authority of the dreamer, in this case Scipio, as a valid recipient and transmitter of a philosophically worthy dream:

It is incorrect to maintain that Scipio was not the proper person to have a dream that was both public and universal inasmuch as he had not yet attained the highest office but, as he himself admitted was still ranked “not much higher than a private soldier.” (I, iii, 91)

Again, the elitism of Macrobius’ particular brand of Neoplatonism reasserts itself, as it does in the preceding chapters. Not only must a dream derive from the properly authoritative sources, the dream must also be received by the appropriate vessel. As support of this position, Macrobius characteristically calls upon an infallible authority, Homer. The corroborating passage is from the *Illiad*, when Nestor asserts “that in matters of general welfare they had to confide in the dream of a king, whereas they would repudiate the dream of anyone else” (I, iii, 91). This confirmation of his Neoplatonic elitism in the authority of authorities requires no further defense in Macrobius’ estimation.

As a fitting book end to the chapter, Macrobius circles back to Virgil, this time expounding on his famous description of the gates of ivory and horn. As is his custom throughout *Commentary*, in the midst of his analysis Macrobius calls upon one of his primary intermediary authorities, Porphyry. The particular passage he quotes provides another angle on his argument about indirect revelation, reasserting the obscured nature of truth but adding that the dream state allows for access to more clear philosophical understanding, a point he had at this state intimated but not stated directly:

“All truth is concealed. Nevertheless, the soul, when it is partially disengaged from bodily functions during sleep, at times gazes and at times peers intently at the truth, but does not apprehend it; and when it gazes it does not see with clear and direct vision, but rather with a dark obstructing veil interposed.” (I, iii, 92; Porphyry’s *Commentaries*)

The notion that all truth is “concealed”—and thus requires an appropriately “discrete” disclosure—is certainly nothing new to these opening chapters; but the second argument of this passage leads Macrobius to a slightly more nuanced argument: the dream state as a partial disengagement from the body, allowing for the two possibilities presented by Virgil’s allegory of the two gates. The false, philosophically worthless, unauthoritative dreams of the gate of ivory, and the true/philosophically valid/authoritative dreams of the gate of horn. The difference is a difference of origin. To better harmonize this allegory with Macrobius’ central premises of the chapter, the gate of ivory would represent a worldly or bodily source, the gate of horn heavenly or divine. The point Macrobius stresses here is that, regardless of the validity of the source, dreams always offer at best a “clouded” or “veiled” visions of the truth. The rhetorically intricate and suitably discrete modes of the dream thus, by nature, are able to effectively express the more transcendent truths of philosophy.

CHAPTER 4
JULIAN OF NORWICH:
THE AUTHORIZING DISCOURSES OF THE MEDIEVAL VISIONARY

Introduction: Authenticity and Medieval Visionaries

Authority is perhaps nowhere so crucial as it is in the visionary writing of the medieval mystics. The often marginal social position of many of the female mystics, coupled with the atmosphere of Church canonicity and control, places a particularly heavy demand upon these works for claims to the authority of both the Source and mediator of these mystical dreams and visions. The need for these female visionaries—like Marguerite D’Oingt, Gertrude of Helfta, Margery Kempe, and Julian of Norwich—to affirm and reaffirm the authority of their revelations turns upon several theological and philosophical discourses taking place during the era. Foremost among these discourses are questions of epistemology, volition, piety, and orthodoxy. All of these discourses begin and end in the overarching question of authority.¹⁶⁰

Despite the work of the scholastics, there was of course no last word in the High and Late Middle Ages on the complex questions involved in epistemological inquiries. The debates of the day largely involved the “powers of the mind,” the *ratio* and the *intellectus*. The first was considered an active power, the logical, deductive reasoning abilities of the mind. The second is discussed by Aquinas and others in terms of passivity, the receptive capacity of the mind, that

¹⁶⁰ Several scholars explore the relationship between the philosophical and theological movements of High and Late Medieval English dream and visionary literature. In particular, see Barr’s *Willing to Know God* (to which I am indebted for much of the discussion below concerning medieval perspectives on the *ratio*, *intellectus*); Lynch’s *The High Medieval Dream Vision* and *Chaucer’s Philosophical Visions*; Delany’s *Chaucer’s House of Fame*; Boucher’s “Nominalism: The Difference for Chaucer and Boccaccio.” *Eldrege’s “Chaucer’s Hous of Fame and the Via Moderna”*; and Peck’s “Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions.”

part that either intuitively understands or comes to understand the mysteries of God.¹⁶¹ Or, in a paraphrase of Aquinas, the *ratio* is the mind “moving” to understand, while the *intellectus* “rests” in understanding.¹⁶² Stated this way, the (widely assumed) supremacy of the second power, *intellectus*, seems self-evident: true knowledge is only truly attained by the *intellectus*; though the logical faculties of the mind are “active” (in modern terms, usually considered superior to the alternative), ultimately the *ratio* is merely the mind “in process,” reaching out toward true knowledge, stepping deductively from one intellectually grasped truth to another, but yet to fully apprehend it.

The visionary’s claim to authoritative knowledge is invariably a claim to a direct exposure to and at least partial comprehension of mystical truth. Thus, for a revelation to be authoritative, it must engage the *intellectus*. In this way, the legitimacy of the revelation depends in part upon the passivity of the visionary’s mind. As the privileged *intellectus* operates through “intuitive cognition,” the logical agency of the visionary, is often deemphasized, even denied in many cases.¹⁶³ The rhetoric of impartation, reception, and openness permeates the writings of the mystics—a key distinction from dream vision poems. As I will attempt to demonstrate through a close reading of the revelations of Julian of Norwich, this rhetoric is a potent authorizing device that characterizes most visionary writing.

Another debate among medieval scholars concerns the relationship of the two-fold cognitive powers to the individual will. Like the debates about the *ratio* and *intellectus*, those involving the role of the will contained arguments from diverse angles, some arguing for the “primacy” of logic and revelation, while others argued that a right will was a prerequisite for

¹⁶¹ Michael St. John uses the terms “agent” and “receptive” in his discussions of the active and passive aspects of the dreamer’s experience in his *Chaucer’s Dream Visions*, p. 9.

¹⁶² Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, p. 79:8.

¹⁶³ Lynch uses the phrase “intuitive cognition” to describe the workings of the *intellectus* (*Chaucer’s Philosophical Visions*, p. 27).

knowledge, and thus superior to the powers of the intellect.¹⁶⁴ Aquinas established the “intellectualist” position, arguing that the mental faculties superseded the will, ultimately shaping and directing the individual’s volition. The Franciscans in general trended toward a voluntarist position, emphasizing the role of the will in one’s cognitive life; the most forceful proponents of the will were Duns Scotus and William of Ockham.¹⁶⁵ Regardless of the conflicting conclusions, the differing parties both agreed: the will matters in the process, and whether it is the catalyst or consequence, the alignment of the will of the visionary is a necessary part of the revelatory process. An important authorizing strategy for visionaries is to demonstrate this alignment of the will, often expressed in terms of a desire to understand some aspect of God. This (self) portrait of the right-willed narrator/visionary can occur before and/or after the vision, often following a similar pattern: the visionary desires to understand some aspect of God further, receives a vision that provides this desired knowledge, and, because of the insight(s) imparted by the vision, is left desiring to know God all the more. As I attempt to demonstrate below, Julian of Norwich is a paradigmatic example of this volitional bookending.

Necessarily linked with the authenticating rhetoric of righteous volition is the visionary’s piety. As is reinforced across centuries—from Genesis to Daniel to the Church Fathers¹⁶⁶—a divine vision can only be comprehended fully by a pious recipient. This is the devout Christian (via the Hebrew) version of the Neoplatonists’ social elitism, but righteousness has replaced

¹⁶⁴ See Barr for her summary of this debate (pp. 21-22).

¹⁶⁵ For more, see Anthony Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy, A New History of Western Philosophy*, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005); J. B. Korolec, “Free Will and Free Choice,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100-1600*, ed. Norman Kretzman, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 636-37; and Gordon Leff, *The Dissolution of the Medieval Outlook: An Essay on Intellectual and Spiritual Change in the Fourteenth Century*. (New York: New York University Press, 1976) p. 28.

¹⁶⁶ See the discussion of the Book of Daniel above.

intellectual or political laurels.¹⁶⁷ In this Medieval Christian economy, sin is the disqualifier, leading to misreading, distortion, obscurity; he or she who is mired in sin before can hardly be expected to be allowed such direct intellectual and spiritual communication with God. Perhaps the most demonstrable authenticating standard is the state of the recipient *after* receiving the vision: a true vision necessarily brings about spiritual transformation in the visionary. As modeled in the final visions of Daniel, one of the proofs of the vision's authenticity is the visionary's post-vision response: No clear signs of transformation, no possibility of a divinely imparted and comprehended vision.

The visionary's pious prerequisite often requires an "idealized visionary subject," marked by not only righteous desires for greater spiritual knowledge, but also humility.¹⁶⁸ This humility can take several forms, but, in the case of medieval mystics, the most common is the visionary's denial of adequate education and social position. These texts strive to present the perfect, devout conduit, one who demonstrates the fruits of the spirit of Galatians 5:22-23.¹⁶⁹ As will be addressed below, this rhetoric of piety and humility is at work through several approaches in Julian's *Revelations*.

Perhaps the most vital litmus test for Catholic medieval audiences of a vision's authority is the orthodoxy of the truths it articulates. As Church doctrine is ever evolving and often labyrinthine, this ultimate "test" is by no means straightforward. Certainly by the High and Late Middle Ages, many doctrines are clearly defined and long-established, but some more obscure, esoteric questions (like that of the relationship of the will to spiritual knowledge) were still up for

¹⁶⁷ See the discussion of Neoplatonic elitism above.

¹⁶⁸ Barr, p. 5.

¹⁶⁹ "But the fruit of the Spirit is, charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity" (Gal 5:22-23, Douay-Rheims).

contentious doctrinal debate.¹⁷⁰ Though she pushes the boundaries of orthodoxy at some points in her visions, ultimately Julian's fundamental orthodoxy offers a powerful argument for the legitimacy of her revelations.

The Rhetoric of the Unlettyrde

Julian of Norwich (c. 1342-1416) was a contemporary of Chaucer, Langland, and Margery Kempe (who famously sought Julian out for spiritual guidance in 1412 or 1413).¹⁷¹ Eventually taking on the position of anchoress in Norwich, Julian's public career seems to have begun with the original publication of the sixteen visions she experienced during a three-day near-death illness. The revision and amplification of her original "Short Text" (ST) two decades later in the "Long Text" (LT), often titled *Showings* or *Revelations of Love* (*Revelations* for short below), solidified her visions and theological analysis as some of the most influential in English visionary literature. Though (perhaps?) mentored by a church father in the Long Text expansion twenty years after her initial vision, as recorded in the Short Text, the Church seems to have neither censored nor fully endorsed her during her lifetime. The sanctity of her life¹⁷² and the soundness of her overarching doctrine¹⁷³ helped lend credibility to her revelations. Her intensely

¹⁷⁰ For more discussion of the changes in the High and Late Medieval perspectives on these doctrines, see J. B. Korolec, "Free Will and Free Choice," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100-1600*, ed. Norman Kretzman, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 636-37; and Gordon Leff, *The Dissolution of the Medieval Outlook: An Essay on Intellectual and Spiritual Change in the Fourteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1976) p. 28.

¹⁷¹ For a broader discussion of the role of anchoress, particularly as it relates to Julian, see Grace M. Jantzen's "The Life of an anchoress," *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000) pp. 28-49.

¹⁷² See Clifton Wolters, "Introduction," *Julian of Norwich. Revelations of Divine Love*. Trans. Clifton Walters (London & NY: 1966) pp. 11-46; Denise N. Baker, "Introduction," *The Showing of Julian of Norwich*. Ed. Denise N. Baker (NY & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005); and Grace M. Jantzen, "The Life of an anchoress." *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, new edition (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000) pp. 28-49.

¹⁷³ Though the specifics of a few of her theological claims certainly push the envelope of orthodoxy, like her references to "Jesus as mother" and the three heavens. See Caroline Walker Bynum, "Jesus as Mother and Abbot

personal and logically complex work, especially in its expanded longer form, ultimately earned her a prominent place among the mystics of the Middle Ages.

Julian apparently did not write the work(s) alone, insisting in the opening chapters that this is the work of an uneducated woman:

This revelation was made to a simple creature unlettyrde leving in deadly flesh the yer of our Lord a thousaunde and thre hundered and lxxiii, the xiii daie of May... (LT 2: para 1, p. 4-5¹⁷⁴)

These were shown to a simple and uneducated creature on the eighth of May 1373.
(LT 2: para 1., p. 63, Wolters¹⁷⁵)

Humility of this sort is a convention of mystics' writings, eschewing claims of educational and intellectual advantage, and embracing a seemingly passive posture. Julian's text includes a postscript signature acting as a confirmation of this assertion: "Postscript by the scribe who wrote this book for Julian" (Postscript, Wolters). This trope of the scribe appears in several other key medieval texts, usually with a similarly humble effect.¹⁷⁶

Julian's insistence that she is a "simple creature unlettyrde" works as a refrain throughout the text. The refrain strips away the possibility of rhetorical distance, disingenuousness, or artifice. This disarming strategy works to focus the reader on the power of her visions and subsequent interpretations and reinterpretations. This conventional visionary tactic frames the

as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing," Chapter IV. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982) pp. 110-169.

¹⁷⁴ The version of the text for the original passages provided in this chapter is that provided in the Norton Critical Edition. See Julian of Norwich, *The Showing of Julian of Norwich*, Ed. Denise N. Baker (NY & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005).

¹⁷⁵ The modern English translations provided throughout this chapter are courtesy of Clifton Walters Penguin Classics edition, an equally accessible and faithful translation. Julian of Norwich. *Revelations of Divine Love*. Trans. Clifton Walters. London & NY: Penguin Classics, 1966.

¹⁷⁶ Lynn Staley Johnson, "The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe." *Speculum* 66 (1991): 820-33.

text in a seemingly passive/receptive mode, allowing the intimacy and immediacy of the text to overwhelm the literary experience.

This seemingly passive posture is of course not the whole truth. As many critics have recently pointed out, the work of medieval female mystics has largely been omitted from literary studies, separated from the “literary” or rhetorical visions and neatly assigned instead to religious studies. The “literariness” of such visionary writings as Julian’s *Revelations* has often been minimized in comparison with literary magnates such as Dante, Chaucer, or the Pearl Poet. This trend is changing in the last few decades, however, with the scholarship of those such as Katharina Wilson, Barbara Newman, Kathryn Lynch, Peter Dronke, Laurie Finke, and Jessica Barr.¹⁷⁷

That visionary literature *is* Literature is a sentiment that is gaining momentum; yet the vision’s literariness does not mean there are no distinctions between it and canonical dream visions. As Barr and others argue, several distinctions between “authentic” or “divine” visions and “literary” dream visions are important for critical readers to recognize: the difference between a pious/reliable narrator persona of the visionary versus the imperfect/unreliable dream vision narrator; the historical grounding of most visionary and prophetic writing versus the markedly vague and/or fictive dream vision frames; and the passivity of the visionary narrator within the contents of the dream or vision, versus the (often blundering) active dream vision narrator. In such pious, historical, and passive persona attributes, the medieval mystics are direct literary descendants of the Hebrew prophetic and apocalyptic traditions. (On the other hand, the

¹⁷⁷ See Wilson’s *Medieval Women Writers*; Newman’s “Divine Power Made Perfect in Weakness: St. Hildegard on the Frail Sex,” *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages*, and “What Did it Mean to Say ‘I Saw’? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture”; Lynch’s *Chaucer’s Philosophical Visions* and *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form*; Dronke’s *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua († 203) to Marguerite († 1310)*; Finke’s *Women’s Writing in England: Medieval England*; and Barr’s *Willing to Know God*.

heritage of the dream vision writers, like de Meun and Chaucer, is more directly linked to the Neoplatonic tradition, as modeled in the *Dream of Scipio*. I will examine a few of these distinctions in relation to my theme in this chapter as well as the next.)

The essential difference between authentic divine visions and literary dream visions emanates from the differences in perspectives on the authority of the visions as conveyed through several strategies. The “first move” of the medieval mystic is perhaps the most overt of these strategies: immediacy and intimacy. Visionaries claim to be writing from firsthand experience, attempting to plainly and earnestly set forth their revelations in a convincing and direct manner. Like the narrators of dream visions, they are the ones who have experienced the vision personally; but unlike many dream vision narrators, they present themselves as trustworthy, humble, and pious.

While it may be argued that all firsthand narratives necessarily involve a constructed self, the persona of the visionary is not deliberately distanced from the historical person, as he/she is in High and Late Medieval dream visions. Like the Hebrew prophets, Christian visionaries often seek to ground their writings in history—often their own personal history. Julian clearly uses this approach throughout the texts, but most obviously in the introduction. As is modeled so often by the biblical prophets, her work starts with a specific date, 8 May 1373. She also provides a few passages where she clarifies the timeline for the Long Text revisions.¹⁷⁸ These passages provide the reader an important, real-life proof not only of her pious devotion to the truths of the visions, but of her *ratio* (active/reasoning) at work on what had been grasped by her *intellectus* (passive/receptive) intellectual powers. Her personal history is emphasized immediately, namely

¹⁷⁸ One example she includes in the final chapter of the LT: “From the time that these things were first revealed I had often wanted to know what was our Lord’s meaning. It was more than fifteen years after that I was answered in my spirit’s understanding” (LT 86: para. 2, p. 211).

in her discussions of her three pious desires (LT 2) and the initial stages of her near-death experience (LT 3).

Aligning the Will

Julian's Three Desires

Julian records her three desires at the beginning of the text, stating that she

[...] desired before thre gyftes by the grace of God. The first was mynd of the passion. The second was bodily sicknes. The thurde was to have of Godes gyfte thre woundys.
(LT 2: para 1, p. 5)

[...] had asked three gifts from God: (i) to understand his passion; (ii) to suffer physically while still a young woman of thirty; and (iii) to have as God's gift three wounds.
(LT 2: para. 1, p 63, Wolters)

These three desires are worth unpacking, as they set the stage for the volitional disposition of the visionary as well, set forth indirectly her intentions for the reader's experience of her message, and, in her desires' ultimate fulfillment, serve as proofs of the alignment of her will and the Divine Will.

Understanding the passion of Christ for Julian requires something deeper than a rational appreciation. It calls instead for an intensely emotional, even visceral "co-suffering":

For the first me thought I had sumdeele feelyng in the passion of Christ, but yet I desyred to have more by the grace of God. Me thought I woulde have ben that tyme with Magdaleyne and with other that were Christus lovers that I might have seen bodilie the passion that our Lord suffered for me, that I might have suffered with him as other did that loved him. (LT 2: para. 2, p. 5)

With regard to the first I thought I had already had some experience of the passion of Christ, but by his grace I wanted still more. I wanted to be actually there with Mary Magdalene and the others who loved him, and with my own eyes to see and know more of the physical suffering of our Saviour.... (LT 2: para 2, p. 63, Wolters)

This desire to *suffer* with him, to *see* his pains *bodily* (“with her own eyes”), to feel what Mary Magdalene felt, goes beyond theological insight. Though she will fortify the Long Text with profound theological assertions, the first wish or goal is miraculous experience, an integral part of “visionary knowing.”¹⁷⁹

Julian’s second wish takes this desire for visceral knowledge a step further, longing not only for a miraculous commiseration, but an actual physical affliction:

I would that the sicknes were so hard as to the death that I might in that sicknes have undertaken all my rightes of the holie church, my selfe weenyng that I should have died [...] I desired to have all maner of paynes, bodily and ghostly, that I should have if I should have died, all the dredys and temptations of fiendes, and all maner of other paynes, save that out passing of the sowle. (LT 2: para. 3, p. 5)

I quite sincerely wanted to be ill to the point of dying, so that I might receive the last rites of Holy Church, in the belief—shared by my friends—that I was in fact dying. [...] In this illness I wanted to undergo all those spiritual and physical sufferings I should have were I really dying, and to know, moreover, the terror and assaults of the demons—everything except death itself! (LT 2: para. 3, p. 63, Wolters)

In the tradition of the ascetic mystic, Julian believed this physical suffering would lead to spiritual catharsis, imparting to her a more profound corporeal sympathy with the sufferings of Christ, and through this sympathy the ability to live “more worthily of him” (ch. 2 para . 3, p. 63). Julian’s specific mentioning of the “assaults of the demons” highlights another aspect of this

¹⁷⁹ I borrow this term from Jessica Barr’s *Willing to Know God*.

second desire: to have a bodily, emotional, and spiritual bout with the infernal realm—an internalized journey to the gates of hell, if you will. She will add to this theme in the next chapter in her description of losing consciousness: “Apart from the cross everything else seemed horrible as if it were occupied by fiends” (LT 3: para. 6, p 65). Here Julian conflates the visionary convention of passing through an infernal realm (paralleling Christ’s harrowing of hell) before entering the beatific mysteries of God (paralleling his ascension) with her ascetic, corporeal longing.

Her third desire—which she says of the three was the one which was “with me continually” (LT 2: p. 64, Wolters)—exemplifies two modes that consistently dominate her visions: the allegorical/metaphorical and analytical. Her desire for “three wounds” is not a literal longing for the stigmata; instead, it is a metaphorical use of the term:

[...] I conceived a mightie desire to receive thre woundes in my life, that is to say, the wound of verie contricion, the wound of kynd compassion, and the wound of willful longing to God. (LT 2: para. 5, p. 6)

[...] I developed a strong desire to receive three wounds, namely, the wound of true contrition, the wound of genuine compassion, and the wound of sincere longing for God. (LT 2: para. 5, p. 64, Wolters)

Julian will continue this analytical method of breaking revelations and insights into distinct, enumerated parts throughout her writings. Likewise, her visions will follow the prophetic tradition of allegorization and heavy use of the “language of seeming,” aggregating increased authority with the allegorical and metaphorical resonances of that tradition.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Newman addresses the rhetoric of “seeing” in “What Did it Mean to Say ‘I Saw’? The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture.”

This opening discussion of the three desires is central to Julian's authorizing strategy. Not only do we have an "uneducated" (and, thus, "unmediated") firsthand account of the impartation of God's divine mysteries, we have visions bestowed upon a person whose will is aligned with the divine will. It is not enough to have a rhetorically clean/unmediated recipient of the vision; that recipient's will also must not hinder the direct and honest reception and recounting of the heavenly message. Aquinas insisted that both the intellect (including the passive/receptive *intellectus* and the active/deliberative *ratio*) and the will were necessary in the reception/acquisition of knowledge.¹⁸¹ While the receptive aspect of the intellect, the *intellectus*, was primary and thus superior to the will, nonetheless, the will was necessary for the faithful application of the secondary aspect of the intellect, the *ratio*, on the imparted knowledge.

Not only are these three longings important in establishing the pious disposition of her will, these desires might be read in terms of Julian's intentions for the audience of her revelations. The intent of Julian's "showings," and subsequent reinterpretation of them, is to share the profundity of her experiences with her readers: to help them understand concretely Christ's passion; to allow them to experience vicariously her near-death experience, allow them to step into the liminal space of the visionary; and, finally, to understand the sanctifying nature of the physical wounds of Christ. Her disarming humility, her disavowal of an educational background and *seeming* lack of rhetorical objectives, helps to accomplish these goals by portraying her visions as divine impartations rather than imaginative constructs. Ultimately, the fulfillment of her desires by the conclusion of her visionary record and reinterpretation works to further buttress her claims to an authentic divine revelation.

¹⁸¹ Barr makes clear, Aquinas's perspective is not the only one, nor is it necessarily broadly accepted by his peers. See *Willing to Know God*, Ch. 1:II, "Knowing in the Middle Ages: *Ratio* and *Intellectus*," pp. 19-23.

Julian's Sanctity

Julian's personal journey to the edge of mortality works as a powerful tool in establishing her undeniable sanctity. The Catholic tradition of martyrdom portrayed facing death as the greatest test of one's faithfulness. Julian's spiritual/psychological step into the liminal space between mortality and eternity offers the visionary a chance to give her sanctity a trial by fire. She, of course, passes emphatically. Her death-bed declaration of faith is a model of piety:

And yet in this I felt a great louthsomnes to die, but for nothing that was in earth that me lyketh to leve for, ne for no payne that I was afraid of, for I trusted in God of his mercie.

(LT 3: para. 1, p. 6)

Since I was still young I thought it a great pity to die—not that there was anything on earth I wanted to live for, or on the other hand any pain that I was afraid of, for I trusted God and his mercy.

(LT 3: para. 2, p. 64, Wolters)

Julian demonstrates her internalization of John's enjoinder to reject the world for the heavenly kingdom (1 John 2:15). She likewise demonstrates the fearlessness extolled in Old Testament works (especially Daniel) and affirmed throughout the New Testament (perhaps most famously in 2 Tim 1:17 and 1 John 4:18). Though admitting her reluctance to die at a young age and describing in personal and immediate terms what should be a terrifying moment, her anticipation of heaven and her bravery in the face of death prove triumphant.

Her description of this bout with mortality continues, further augmenting her visionary sanctity:

But it was for I would have leved to have loveved God better and longer tyme that I might by the grace of that levying have the more knowing and lovyng of God in the blisse of heaven.

(LT 3: para. 1, p. 6)

But were I to live I might come to love God more and better, and so ultimately to know
and love him more in the bliss of heaven. (LT 3: para. 2, p. 64, Wolters)

Here Julian sets forth the larger purpose of her near-death experience and subsequent visions and revisions. The rationale for her “return” to the world highlights the sanctity of her will: her desire is only “to love God more and better,” utterly aligned with Christ’s first clause of the Great Commandment. To make sure that this alignment of her will is not missed, she closes this passage with the most overt of her volitional claims:

And I understode in my reason and by the feelyng of my paynes that I should die, and I
ascentyd fully with all the will of myn hart to be at God’s will. (LT 3: para. 2, p. 6)

Reason and suffering alike told me I was going to die, so I surrendered my will
wholeheartedly to the will of God. (LT 3: para. 2, p. 65, Wolters)

Aligning the Intellect

Intellectus and Ratio

In Chapter 9 of the Long Text, Julian provides a helpful explanation of three modes of revelatory reception:

All this was shewde by thre partes, that is to sey, by bodily sight, and by worde formyde
in my understandyng, and by goostely sight. (LT 9: para. 4, p. 16)

All this was shown me in three ways, in actual vision, in imaginative understanding, and
in spiritual sight. (LT 9: para. 4, p. 76, Wolters)

Like the Hebrew and Christian visionaries before her, Julian assures the reader that the vision was first and foremost *received*, unequivocally passive. As she states, the visions she describes

were “shown” to her, imparted rather than created. While this rhetoric of passivity is certainly orthodox visionary speak, her three modes of divine transmission add a new dimension to the tradition, providing a late medieval update of the manner through which God communicates with man. I will discuss these modes in a slightly altered order.

First, she claims to have seen “all this” in “actual vision”; in other words, she experiences these revelations, at least in part, with her physical/worldly senses. As opposed to a dreamed vision (as specified, for example, in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel, Macrobius, and Chaucer’s dream texts), like many medieval visionaries, Julian specifies that at least parts of her vision were experienced through the five senses. As mentioned above, the Hebrew prophets often do not specify the manner of their visions, stating at times simply “I saw” (a standard phrase in Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah). These references might be interpreted as physical sight, both the Greek and Latin translations of the Hebrew making no distinction here.

Other times, however, both the Hebrew prophets and the early Christian visionaries contextualize their “seeing” in the state of being “in the spirit” (e.g., Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Revelation). This “spiritual sight” clearly parallels Julian’s third mode. There is no equivocation in Julian’s writings; spiritual sight is undoubtedly a higher level of sight. As she argues in Ch. 46:

But oure passing lyvyng that we have here in oure sensuylte knowyth nott what oure selfe is but in our feyth. And whan we know and see verily and clerely what oure selfe is, than shalle we verely and clerly see and know oure Lorde God in fulhed of joye. (LT: 46, para 1., p. 63)

Our fleeting life here, with its physical senses, does not know what our real self is, but in that Day we will see it truly and clearly, and know our Lord in fullness of joy. (LT:46, para. 1, p. 132, Wolters)

Echoing Paul's famous analogy from 1 Corinthians 13:12,¹⁸² "as through a glass darkly," Julian stresses the limits of the physical, "our sensuallite," and privileges a future transcendent spiritual experience and perception. Perhaps her most poignant discussion of the limits of the physical self and the superiority of the spirit comes in Chapter 19, when she differentiates the "outward" (physical) and "inward" (spiritual) selves:

The outward party is our deadly flessch, which is now in payne and now in woo and shalle be in this lyfe, where of I felte moch in thys tyme. And that party was that I repentyd. The inward party is a high and a blessedfulle lyfe, which is alle in peece and in love, and this is more pryvely felte. (LT 19: para. 4, p. 31)

The outward side is our mortal physical nature, which will continue to suffer and grieve all the time it lives—as I knew only too well! It was this part of me that regretted it all. The inward side is exalted and joyful and vital, all peaceful and loving. And deep down I was experiencing this. (LT 19: para. 2, p. 93, Wolters)

Having established the two natures, outward/physical and inward/spiritual, and their two natural states, suffering and blessed, respectively, she affirms that she—through her own volition—made the pious choice:

And this party is in which myghtly, wisely, and wylfully I chose Jhesu to my hevyn. And in this I saw truly that the inward party is master and sovereyne to the outward... (LT 19: para. 4, p. 31)

It was this part of me that so strongly, sensibly, and deliberately chose Jesus for my heaven. (LT 19: para. 2, p. 93, Wolters)

¹⁸² "We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face. Now I know I part; but then I shall know even as I am known" (1 Cor 13:12, Douay-Rheims).

This passage is noteworthy for a several reasons. First, it is emphatically self-reflective/reflexive, constantly spiraling back to the first person singular, persistently (re)applying the universal truths of the revealed knowledge to her own experience. Again, we see the anti-rhetorical mode of the visionary, stripping away rhetorical distance or artifice through the stress of humility and personal history. Secondly, Julian makes clear here that at least part of her spiritual journey was volitional, that is, she “chose Jhesu” in her spiritual/inward self. But most importantly, this passage presents a clear hierarchy that might apply to two of her visionary modes of reception: spiritual or “inward” sight definitively eclipses physical, “outward” experience. Julian continually employs phrases such as “inward” or “ghostly syght” or “gostly understandyng” to remind the reader of the dominant method of the reception of divine truths (LT 7 & 86).

The Divinely Sanctioned/Sanctifying Editing Process

Like *Piers Plowman*, Julian’s *Revelations* is a visionary work the literary and religious authority of which is partly derived from the editorial process of reinterpretation and revision. The recursive process of amendment and elaboration in both *Revelations* and *Piers*, rather than detracting from any notion of a divinely perfected original draft, actually acquires an increased level of authority through the “sanctifying” process of revision.

The final chapter of the Long Text presents a tantalizingly equivocal statement that is rife with both epistemological and moral implications:

This boke is begonne by Goddys gyfte and his grace, but it is nott yet performyd as to my sight. For charyte pray we alle to gedyr with Goddes wurkyng, thankyng, trustyng, enjoyeng, for this wyllle oure good Lord be prayde by the understandyng that I toke in alle his owen menyng and in the swete words where he say fulle merely, *I am grownd of thy besechyng*. (LT 86: para. 1, p. 124)

This book was begun by the gift and grace of God. I do not think it is done yet. We all need to pray God for charity. God is working in us, helping us to thank and trust and enjoy him. Thus does our good Lord will that we should pray. That is what I understood his meaning to be throughout, and in particular when he uttered those sweet cheerin words, “I am the foundation of your praying.” (LT 86: para. 1, p. 211, Wolters)

The crux of this passage is the third person singular pronoun: “it is nott yett performyd.” What exactly is not “yet performyd”? Does the “it” refer to the book or “Goddys gyfte and his grace”? The exposition that follows provides the answer, a *both/and* conclusion.

Julian expands on the concept of God as the foundation of our prayer life, that one’s understanding of prayer and contemplation that is truly centered upon God’s grace will eventually lead to profound spiritual and *intellectus* understanding of what she claims is the ultimate theme of her showings: love.

And xv yere after and mor I was answeyrd in gostly understandyng, seyeng thus, “What, woldest thou wytt thy Lordest menyng in this thyng? Wytt it wele, love was his menyng. Who shewyth it? Love. Wherefore shewyth he it the? For love. Holde the therin, thou shalt wytt more in the same. But thou schalt nevyr witt therin other withoutyn ende.” (LT 86: para. 2, p. 124)

It was more than fifteen years after that I was answered in my spirit’s understanding. “You would know our Lord’s meaning in this thing? Know it well. Love was his meaning. Who showed it you? Love. What did he show you? Love. Why did he show it? For love. Hold on to this and you will know and understand love more and more. But you will not know or learn anything else—ever!” (LT 86, p. 211-12, Wolters)

This one word summation of her revelations is a powerful rhetorical move. Four times she repeats the word as the answer to four questions posed to her “gostly understandyng”: “love” is the final interpretation of her visions; “love” is the content, imparted by “love” Himself, for one

reason, “love.” This condensation of the meaning of the entirety of her revelations reinforces her first rhetorical move, stripping away the pretense of “lettyrde” subtleties and adding proof of the pious humility of the visionary. This rhetorically powerful climax strengthens the text’s claims for authority in another way, by emphatically reconfirming the biblical orthodoxy of the text, unifying the consequence and climax of her visions in a poetic elaboration of 1 John 4:8:

He that loveth not, knoweth not God: for God is charity. (1 John 4:8, D-R)

Conclusion: Authorizing Discourses

The authorizing devices employed by Julian of Norwich involve several key philosophical and religious discourses of the day: questions of epistemology, namely the roles of the *intellectus* and *ratio*; individual volition in a universe governed by an omnipotent God; the relationship of piety and access to transcendent truths; and the boundaries of orthodoxy. All of these discourses hinge on the issue of authority.

The medieval mystic’s claim to authoritative truth requires a claim of direct revelation to the passive, receptive *intellectus*, or as Lynch’s term, “intuitive cognition.”¹⁸³ As demonstrated, the proof of such passive reception often involves a display of humility, most notably in the de-emphasis or denial of the visionary’s educational and intellectual credentials. Learned in part from the prophets and apostles of the Old and New Testaments, and intensified by the socially marginal nature of the female visionary, this “rhetoric of the *unlettyred*” proves to be an effective, disarming rhetorical tool in the hands of Julian and her fellow mystics. This self-effacing, passive posturing is also a key distinction between the medieval visionaries and their contemporaries, the dream vision poets, and thus a means of distancing one genre from the other.

¹⁸³ Lynch, *Chaucer’s Philosophical Visions* (27).

But the *intellectus* is not the only mental faculty featured in Julian's visions: she also highlights the active cognitive faculties, the *ratio*, in the revision process that resulted in the Long Text, a process that also has volitional implications.

Julian and her peers understood that a vision could have no authority without demonstrations of the alignment of the visionary's will with God's. Julian provides her first proof early on in her "three desires," and is carried beyond the completion of the Short Text through its revision process. Necessarily linked with the authenticating rhetoric of righteous volition is that of the visionary's piety. In a Catholic revision of Neoplatonist elitist/worldly credentials (as modeled in Macrobius), the ability to receive and interpret authentic/divine dreams depended upon certain moral/spiritual standards: the piousness of both the will and life of the dreamer/visionary.¹⁸⁴ Julian's Long Text clearly bookends the revelations with proofs of her earlier pious passions and the spiritual transformation that occurred *after* receiving the vision. In this righteous frame, she presents herself as an idealized visionary subject, characterized by a righteous desire for greater spiritual knowledge—and one who is ultimately granted its attainment.¹⁸⁵

Finally, Julian's visions satisfy perhaps the greatest test for authenticity: orthodoxy. Julian's overarching orthodoxy, driven home in the closing passages of the Long Text, provides the final, powerful argument for the authority of her revelations.

¹⁸⁴ The Neoplatonist standard involved intellectual and/or social credentials. See discussion above.

¹⁸⁵ Barr, p. 5.

CHAPTER 5

FRACTURED AUTHORITY: CHAUCER'S IRONIC DREAM VISION

Introduction: Fractured Authority in the Fourteenth Century

In the fourteenth century, the pillars of several long-standing intellectual and political presuppositions fractured, leaving Western conceptions of intellectual and political authority leaning precariously.¹⁸⁶ The previous century was largely the age of reconciliation. Philosophers such as Bonaventure and Aquinas produced largely stable syntheses of orthodox theology and Aristotle's syllogistic modes, fostering a relatively harmonious relationship between the revealed theology of the church and the new/old philosophical inquiries of the universities.¹⁸⁷ Aiding this reconciliatory atmosphere, the age's political powers, the "two swords" of the Church's spiritual authority and the king's temporal autonomy, managed not to cross too often or violently (at least on a broad scale) in the thirteenth century. However, this intellectual and political synchronization experienced several rifts in the 1300s. The disintegration of the two truces—between theology and philosophy on one hand, and the church and state on the other—would begin in earnest in the fourteenth century with the rise of Nominalism¹⁸⁸ and the increasing

¹⁸⁶ In the following discussion of the major shifts in the relationship between religion and philosophy and religion and politics in the fourteenth century, I am indebted primarily to three comprehensive studies: Frederick C. Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1972), Robert Pasnau, ed. with Christina Van Dyke, assoc. ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vols 1 and 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Anthony Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy, A New History of Western Philosophy*, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005);

¹⁸⁷ See Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, Ch. 10 "Thirteenth Century: Universities and Translations," pp. 150-59, and Ch. 11 "St. Bonaventure," pp. 160-75. For a comparison of differing theories of Bonaventure and Aquinas on the intellect and the will, see Tobias Hoffman, "Intellectualism and Voluntarism," *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 1, pp. 414-27. For more on the Aristotelian influence in the period, see Rega Wood, "The Subject of the Aristotelian Science of Metaphysics," *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 2, pp. 609-21.

¹⁸⁸ For a thorough analysis of the rise of Nominalism, see Joël Biard, "Nominalism in the Later Middle Ages," *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 2, pp. 661-73. Also see Gordon Leff, *The Dissolution of the Medieval Outlook: An Essay on Intellectual and Spiritual Change in the Fourteenth Century* (New York: New York University

clashes between the papacy and imperial powers.¹⁸⁹ The result was the destabilization of cultural perceptions of authority.

By 1229, both the Dominicans and Franciscans had established a chair of theology in the university of Paris.¹⁹⁰ Though the secular clergy resisted it adamantly, the intermingling of themselves and the various orders had begun; soon, the majority of the philosophers in the university would be members of one of the orders.¹⁹¹ Though the university officials censored Aristotle's metaphysics and natural philosophy, the application of his logical premises and methods soon overwhelmed much of the Neoplatonism of the Early Middle Ages.¹⁹² The initial stages of this transition from Plato (particularly Augustinianism¹⁹³) to Aristotle (or, at times, Averroism¹⁹⁴) produced complex hybrids. One of the most influential Franciscan minds, St. Bonaventure, maintained the traditional division between theology and philosophy: the first starting with revealed knowledge and applying reason to explain and expound upon it; the second starting with nature, or experiential reality, and employing reason to trace back to the

Press, 1976); Gyula Kilma, "Nominalist Semantics," *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 1, pp. 159-72; and Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, Ch. 14 "The Fourteenth Century [1]: William of Ockham," pp. 230-56, and Ch. 15 "The Fourteenth Century [2]," pp. 257-76.

¹⁸⁹ Politically, the most consequential was the power struggle between Phillip IV and Boniface VIII and the resulting "Babylonian Captivity," the Avignon Papacy, which spanned a majority of the century (1309-76). For more on the changing relationship of the church and state, especially as in context of authority, see Anthony Black, "Religious Authority and the State," *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 2. pp. 539-50.

¹⁹⁰ Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, p. 152.

¹⁹¹ Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 150-53. For general discussion of the development of the medieval university, see Steven P. Marrone, "The Rise of the Universities," *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 1, pp. 50-62.

¹⁹² For a discussion of the major shifts in the faculty, especially in the University of Paris, see Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, Ch. 10 "Thirteenth Century: Universities and Translations," pp. 150-59, and Ch. 13 "Aristotelianism and the Faculty of Arts at Paris," pp. 199-212.

¹⁹³ For a description of the development and theories of Augustinianism, see Gareth B. Matthews, "Augustinianism," *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 1, pp. 86-98.

¹⁹⁴ Those who followed Averroes' interpretations of Aristotle. See Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 200-202.

divine cause.¹⁹⁵ The bridge between theology and philosophy for Bonaventure, and many of his fellow philosophers, was metaphysics. Bonaventure's theory of exemplarism (via Augustine) presented nature as a manifestation of God, thus, inextricably binding the natural and spiritual worlds.¹⁹⁶ Aquinas, of course, took this synthesis even further, offering the most successful marriage of the two seats of intellectual authority. His catholic orthodoxy and his subtle application of much of Aristotelian logic affirmed both the teachings and traditions of the church fathers while simultaneously sanctioning the intellectual apparatus of the university doctors.¹⁹⁷ The result of the theories of Bonaventure, Aquinas, and most of the other highly influential thirteenth century philosophical minds was a relatively stable coexistence of theology and philosophy, the latter acting primarily as a complementary verifier of or rationalization of the first.¹⁹⁸

Politically, the balance of power between popes and kings in the thirteenth century certainly experienced trying moments, but the political theories of the preeminent philosophers, particularly Aquinas, outlined a manageable cooperation between the church and state.¹⁹⁹ By the High Middle Ages, the pessimism of *The City of God* had dissipated, and—largely thanks to the writings of Aquinas—had been supplanted by the largely optimistic political perspectives of Aristotle.²⁰⁰ Like the church, the state was a natural institute to man. Augustine's brilliant

¹⁹⁵ For a detailed discussion of Bonaventure's major tenets, see Copleston, Ch. 11, "St. Bonaventure," pp. 160-175. For comparison with between some of those positions and those of Aristotle, see Hoffman, "Intellectualism and Voluntarism," *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 1, pp. 414-27.

¹⁹⁶ Copleston employs the term "exemplarism" a number of times: pp. 36, 167-8, and 210. For more on Augustine's view of creation, see Gareth Matthews, "Augustinianism," *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 1, especially pp. 90-91.

¹⁹⁷ For a general discussion of Aquinas' major theological positions, see Copleston, Ch. 12 "Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas," pp. 176-98. For Aquinas' position on role of theology, see *Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 1 & 2, pp. 61, , 89, 614, 690, 696, & 722.

¹⁹⁸ For more, see Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, 69-106. ADD SOURCES.

¹⁹⁹ Cary j. Nederman discusses Aquinas' political theory in relation to the individual and community in his article, "Individual Autonomy," *Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 2, pp. 555, 568, & 569.

²⁰⁰ Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, Ch. 12 "Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas," pp. 176-98.

Babylonian vision, stemming as it did from an originally pagan-forged empire, grew dimmer over the centuries, as Christian kingdom after Christian kingdom waxed and waned.²⁰¹ For Aquinas and his contemporaries, the specter of a pagan empire had long disappeared; remaining was a century-tested, dynamic, and apparently sustainable system of spheres of influence and a balance of power. The church had its spiritual authority; the state, its temporal. Aquinas' championing of a constitutional monarchy provided some degree of ground-up authority for secular leaders, and was predicated on the Aristotelian notion that a legitimate political structure exists for the common good.²⁰² His orthodox view of the pope as the Vicar of Christ and the spiritual descendent of Peter did not directly undermine the secular jurisdiction of kings. However, like most of his fellow philosophers, Aquinas did posit an *indirect* influence of the church over the state (following what Chesterton refers to as Aquinas' principle of "subordinate sovereignties or autonomies"²⁰³). This indirect hierarchy, with the clear delineation of spheres of power, worked so long as the two seats of authority practiced restraint.²⁰⁴

In the fourteenth century, the alliance between the quasi-complements—theology and philosophy and church and state—experienced crises. For the latter, increasingly excessive papal intervention on one hand and defiant rejections of papal authority on the other forced many political philosophers to take a side. William of Ockham famously came to the defense of Ludwig of Bavaria against the Pope John XXII.²⁰⁵ Dante and Marsilius of Padua, having both witnessed the chaos of Italian political power struggles, reflected this imbalance of the spheres in

²⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 156-59.

²⁰² Ibid, 191-192; also, see Nederman's "Individual Autonomy," *Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 2, pp. 555, 568, & 569.

²⁰³ This brings to mind a quote by Chesterton: "If St. Thomas stands for one thing more than another, it is what may be called subordinate sovereignties or autonomies" (Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 36).

²⁰⁴ For more on Aquinas' political and ethical perspectives, see Anthony Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy, A New History of Western Philosophy*, vol. II, pp. 263-272.

²⁰⁵ Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 237. For a general discussion of William of Ockham, see *ibid*, pp. 230-56 and Anthony Kenny, *Medieval Philosophy, A New History of Western Philosophy*, Vol 2, pp. 89-96, 143-49.

their writing; Dante's excoriation of spiritual and temporal authorities alike—especially in the *Inferno*—calls into question the capacity for a happy marriage of the two spheres.²⁰⁶ Marsilius takes Ockham's more tempered theories and subsumes the role of the church within the ultimate power of the state. By the time of the Great Schism, the intellectual truce between the “two swords” of temporal and spiritual power had largely shattered, creating a crisis of institutional authority.

Though thirteenth-century perspectives on the relationship between Theology and the various branches of Philosophy were at times contentious, Aquinas and other influential scholastics championed a mutually beneficial interweaving of the two fields' realms of knowledge and authority. Aquinas still recognized the two fields' distinctions: distinguishing them by their methods and by the limitations of philosophy to ascertain the revealed doctrinal mysteries of theology. These distinctions, however, did not make them incompatible. Aquinas carefully and deliberately employed many of Aristotle's applications of metaphysical concepts—essence and existence, substance and accident, matter and form²⁰⁷—all the while reconciling these Aristotelian terms and modes with orthodox doctrines by keeping a clear hierarchy of understanding: philosophy was the means by which theology might be engaged and explained by the active intellect.²⁰⁸ Ultimately, though, theology trumped philosophy. Unlike the Averroists, Aristotle rejected philosophy's ability to challenge scripture and tradition; thus, he denounced Averroes' theory of the unitary divine intellect, or impersonal immortal intellect, in light of

²⁰⁶ Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 306-13.

²⁰⁷ For more on these debates, see John F. Wippel, “Essence and Existence,” *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 2, pp. 622-34; Robert Pasnau, “Form and Matter,” *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 2, pp. 635-46; Alessandro D. Conti, “Realism,” *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 2, pp. 647-60; and William E. Mann, “Faith and Reason,” *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 2, pp. 707-19.

²⁰⁸ Or as Chesterton puts it, Aquinas “insisted that the senses were the windows of the soul and that the reason had a divine right to feed upon facts, and that it was the business of the Faith to digest the strong meat of the toughest and most practical of pagan philosophies” (Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 31).

scriptural illumination.²⁰⁹ While a philosopher might attempt to affirm revealed truths, the limitations of his methods and the range of the discipline's reach prevent it from adequately contradicting revelation. Therefore, in a parallel to the dominant political philosophy of the day, the most influential philosophical school of the thirteenth century was able to maintain a stable, mutually beneficial, interwoven relationship between theology and philosophy.

The *via moderna* of William of Ockham proved to be intellectually divisive, ultimately undermining the continuity and authority of the Scholastics. In a similar vein to Duns Scotus, but with more deliberateness and conviction, Ockham rejected many of the “demonstrable” philosophical proofs of metaphysical premises (most famously, God’s divine omnipotence) and focused much of his analysis on the terminology of syllogistic reasoning.²¹⁰ By essentially removing the middleman of metaphysics and highlighting Aristotelian logic and intuitive cognition, Ockham and the so-called Ockhamists, or Nominalists, of the fourteenth century emphasized the divide between Theology and Philosophy.²¹¹ Divine mysteries were inaccessible to philosophy, whose limitations were far greater than those admitted by Scholasticism. The Nominalist reliance upon experience (intuitive cognition) and their privileging of individuation over universality limited philosophy’s reach. For Ockham and his school, philosophy’s realm is mostly confined to experientially grounded terms and categories, syllogistic premises and conclusions, and, therefore, unable to bridge the epistemological chasm between itself and

²⁰⁹ Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 182-83 (for larger discussion of Aquinas, pp. 178-98). For more on Aquinas’ perspectives on the relationship between faith and reason, see William E. Mann, “Faith and Reason,” *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 2, pp. 713-16.

²¹⁰ An example of Duns Scotus’ terminological inquiries is his discussions of human versus divine wisdom and contingent versus necessary, or infinite, being (Copleston, *Medieval Philosophy*, pp. 110-12).

²¹¹ For discussions of the Ockhamist/Nominalist movements, see: Joël Biard. “Nominalism in the Later Middle Ages.” *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 2, pp. 661-73; Gyula Klima, “Nominalist Semantics.” *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 1, pp. 159-72; Alessandro D. Conti, “Realism.” *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, Vol 2, especially pp. 651-54; and Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy*, Ch. 15 “The Fourteenth Century [1]: William of Ockham,” pp. 230-56.

theological truths. While the intention of many Nominalists/Terminists/Ockhamists was the purification of Theology—freeing it from the pagan entanglements of philosophy—the consequence of their collective emphasis on the disconnect between the fields, especially the inability of man’s reason to confirm divine truths, disrupted the compounding sense of authority achieved by the syntheses of the Scholastics.

These disruptions of political and intellectual authority in the fourteenth century profoundly impacted several authors of dream literature; the century’s “fractured” confidence of authority resulted in increasingly skeptical dream literature, particularly in the form of the ironic dream vision.

The Ironic Dream Vision

Ambiguity and the Ironic Dream Vision

Ambivalence has invariably been a part of the literary dream tradition, from the “primary” texts—Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis*, Pseudo-Ovid’s *Amores III*, Daniel, and John’s Apocalypse—to the most conscientiously derivative and conventional “tertiary” modes.²¹² Uncertainty about the source(s) of the dream, the degree of literalness and indirection of the dream’s “revelation,” and the narrator’s spiritual and/or cognitive capacity to discern the truth, have inherently begged the ultimate question of the authority of the literary dream to convey the truth. The “mature” dream vision of the Late Middle Ages particularly plays on this sense of ambiguity, exploiting the complex interpretational potential of the underlying/undermining questions. It is no coincidence that its maturation of form and rise in popularity coincides with the upheavals in the

²¹² For more on primary, secondary and tertiary works, see Fowler’s *Kinds of Literature* and Lynch’s *High Medieval Dream Vision*, p. 13.

theological and philosophical circles and the tumultuous spiritual-political power struggles of the fourteenth century.

The dream visions of the High Middle Ages are largely characterized by synthesis and reconciliation. In *The High Medieval Dream Vision*, Lynch comments on the synthesizing disposition of the age, arguing that dream visions of that period are often philosophically and theologically conservative and “continuous,” adhering to the Scholastic worldview and method.²¹³ Emanating from the philosophical and theological (and I would add, political) debates of the day, which “continually had to accommodate new evidence into the paradigm,” the poets of the period usually took up the conservative Scholastic cause: to integrate and harmonize.²¹⁴ The most influential dream visions of the thirteenth century, the *Romance of the Rose* and the *Commedia*, both employ encyclopedic methods in order to create a sense of unification and reconciliation. The *Commedia*, in particular, is generally labeled a Scholastic epic, even portrayed as the poetic parallel to the *Summa Theologia*: the poem’s reconciliation of the pagan and the Christian, its meticulous organization, interpretive unity, and sense of narrative inevitability a poetic analogy to Aquinas’ colossal work. As the fourteenth century approached, philosophy’s increasing sense of inadequacy, the strain of the Scholastic unifying system, seems to have inspired dream poets, like Dante and de Meun, to attempt to bridge the divide between reason and revelation. A similar hope that poetry might be more successful than philosophical prose in reconciling divinity and humanity seems to have inspired many dream poets of the period. Their attempts to compensate for philosophy’s failure to adequately unify the theological with the rational, to do what

²¹³ Lynch *High Medieval Dream Vision*, p. 12. (In this same passage, Lynch also points out that this is the second phase of Leff’s model.)

²¹⁴ Lynch, *High Medieval Dream Vision*, 15.

philosophy could not,²¹⁵ through “the special strengths of metaphor and myth”²¹⁶ resulted in some of the most impressive dream works in the Western tradition. This sense of the dream vision’s reconciliatory potential, however, would not last.

While this sense of ambiguity about the authority of a dream vision has haunted the form from its early stages, as is evidenced in such texts as Strabo’s *Visio Wettini*, the Late Middle Ages witnesses a notably higher percentage of texts that particularly emphasize authoritative uncertainty through ironic and invalidating strategies.²¹⁷ This increase in the popularity of the ironic dream vision can be attributed at least in part to the rift between theology and philosophy opened up by Ockham and the Nominalists that undercut the confidence of many scholars and poets in the authority of the medieval church and Scholastic views of the relationship between nature and God. Two prominent answers to this crisis of authority immersed in intellectual circles: mysticism and reason. Kruger succinctly summarizes the era’s twofold response:

In the later Middle Ages, new philosophical and theological movements tended to push God and the human being ever further apart, emphasizing the gap between divine action and human understanding. This situation elicited various responses: on the one hand, a mysticism that sought superrational unity with God; on the other, a science that concentrated its attention more and more fully on the mundane realm accessible to human

²¹⁵ I am paraphrasing Theodore Silverstein here via Lynch. (Lynch, *High Medieval Dream Vision*, 15; Silverstein, “Fabulous Cosmogony,” p. 116).

²¹⁶ Poets were very sensitive to these accommodations [of “new evidence” to the philosophical and theological paradigm] and so poetry did come to subvert and criticize, offering, for example, what Winthrop Wetherbee has called a critique of philosophy’s ‘failure adequately to reconcile physics with metaphysics, divine immanence with divine transcendence.’ But, and this is a very important point, we must also keep our eye on the way that poets sought to rise above that failure, to neutralize or contain its threats, especially in an art whose very premises, I will show, rested on that reconciliation. As Theodore Silverstein has observed, ‘What philosophy could not do poetry might.’ The special ability he referred to was not, as recent scholars have construed it, poetry’s freedom to *explore* philosophical conflicts, but its capacity to *resolve* them by exploiting the special strengths of metaphor and myth.” (Lynch, *High Medieval Dream Vision*, 15, citing Wetherbee, Introduction to Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, p. 55 and Silverstein, “Fabulous Cosmogony,” p. 116.)

²¹⁷ See Kruger’s analysis of Strabo’s *Visio Wettini*, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 126-29. As Kruger argues, “Already in the ninth century, these two paths were available to the writer of dream poetry: the divine and mundane dreams of theoretical discussion could both be put to literary use” (*Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 128)

reason. The late-medieval popularity of the middle vision [Kruger's term for the "enigmatic" or ambivalent dream] can be read as one additional reaction to the perception of a growing distance between humanity and divinity.²¹⁸

As Kruger argues, the growing divide between theology and philosophy, divinity and humanity, revelation and reason, pulled intellectuals in two directions. The result for thinkers such as Chaucer was in some ways predictable. Pulled by these polarities, many of the fourteenth century authors produced works which deliberately withheld a sense of definitive authority; instead, they emphasized ambivalence and epistemological ambiguity. The dream vision proved the perfect form for the day. Its inherent epistemological nature and the ambiguous and subversive potential of the form, made it a tempting genre for late medieval authors. These "middle" visions—those deliberately foregrounding uncertainty, potential misinformation or misinterpretation—are a complex, particularly self-reflexive subgenre of the dream vision that helps to push the ironic and comedic potential of the form.

Chaucer's Formative Form

The dream vision for Chaucer was not merely a fledgling writer's fascination and means of early apprenticeship-via-translation. The conventions and themes he learned from authoring *Book of the Duchesse* (1368) and translating *Romance of the Rose* (1368) inspired him the rest of his career and influenced most of his major works. Over a decade later he was still directly working within the generic parameters, but with a different emphasis. His *Hous of Fame* (1379-80) and *Parlement of Foules* (1380) solidified him as the Late Medieval master and redefiner of the dream vision genre, and it is in those works that he was able to fully realize the ironic

²¹⁸ Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 130. See the genre chapter above for a contextualization of Kruger's three-fold taxonomy of the higher, middle and lower dream (or the divinely-inspired, authoritative dream, the ambiguous dream, and the corporeal and inauthentic dream, respectively).

potential of the form. His translation of *Consolation of Philosophy* (1381-6) and final overtly dream-vision-inspired work, *The Legend of Good Women* (c. 1385-6), is not the final waking from the dream vision genre for Chaucer, however. Compartmentalizing the genre as merely an adolescent phase in Chaucer's literary maturation with direct impact on only six of his works is a mistake. The dream vision would continue to inspire him even through the final period of his career and in works not directly associated with the genre; he would carry the narrative and rhetorical lessons learned from dream literature into his most mature and widely read works, *Troilus and Criseyde* (1382-7) and *The Canterbury Tales* (begun 1387-92).²¹⁹

While the *Legend's* indebtedness to those conventions is obvious enough, the influence of the dream vision on *Troilus and Criseyde* is less apparent. The story is of course not a dream vision; rather, it is a "romance tragedy"²²⁰ that includes some key dream elements, most importantly a within-the-narrative dream sequence and a conclusion that mirrors the "celestial tour" episode that characterizes many dream visions. The turning point of the first book of the story comes in the form of a dream sequence, through which Troilus decides that he will indeed become a devotee of Love (calling to mind Chaucer's work on the *Romaunt*). However, the most important dream vision element is the final ten or so stanzas that follow Troilus' soul into the heavenly realms. Chaucer clearly drew upon his studies in the dream vision for Troilus' flight into the celestial realm, a motif Chaucer uses in several works, and one of course hearkening

²¹⁹Lynch is one of the scholars who likewise emphasizes continuity between Chaucer's earlier works and those of the mid-1380s and on: "[The Nun's Priest's Tale's] form suggests that, even toward the end of his career, when he had stopped using the explicit structure of the dream vision, he remained fascinated by dreams and the sorts of problems they could raise about truth, allegory, and literary form and language, as well as alert to the opportunity for humor the form offered." (Lynch, *Chaucer's Philosophical Visions*, 2). Lynch goes on to focus on the philosophical and thematic continuities of these texts.

²²⁰ Clough, Andrea. "Medieval Tragedy and the Genre of *Troilus and Criseyde*." *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s. 11 (1982):211-27.

back to Boethius, Augustine, and Cicero. Thematically, Chaucer likewise draws from popular dream vision themes, especially “worldly vanyte.”²²¹

The direct reference to dreams and dream interpretation in *The Canterbury Tales*, particularly in the Nun’s Priest’s Tale, has been well-documented, so I will not belabor the point here, but it is important to note that the idea of a framed narrative was learned by Chaucer from his dream vision work. In this sense, the principle structure of his greatest achievement was an adaptation of the dream genre.

Most importantly for the present discussion is perhaps the most dominant of Chaucer’s dream vision themes: the tantalizing clash of competing authorities. Chaucer was custom-made for the theme (or vice versa): his awareness of many of the current rifts between Theology and Philosophy (as discussed by Boucher, Delaney, Eldrege, Lynch, and Peck, to name a few²²²), as well as his firsthand experience in the whirlwind of contemporary political and turf wars, allowed him special insight into the period’s crises of authority. Simultaneously, his intellectual and creative affection for the dream vision form, leading to/invigorated by his apprenticeships-via-translation of *Romance of the Rose* and *Consolation of Philosophy*, provided him expertise in the ideal venue for engaging the theme of authoritative ambiguity.

²²¹ Robinson, V.264:1837.

²²²For more expansive discussions of the philosophical and theological movements in relation to Chaucer’s work, see Boucher’s “Nominalism: The Difference for Chaucer and Boccaccio”; Delany’s *Chaucer’s House of Fame*; Eldrege’s “Chaucer’s *Hous of Fame* and the *Via Moderna*”; Lynch’s *The High Medieval Dream Vision and Chaucer’s Philosophical Visions*; and Peck’s “Chaucer and the Nominalist Questions.”

The House of Fame

The Proem: Deference and Dismissal

Critics have long recognized Chaucer's literary power as stemming in part from his masterful manipulation of the ironic potential of his genres. Bloom describes Chaucer's particular brand of literature as inherently illusionistic and ironic:

Fiction, for Chaucer, is not a medium for representing or expressing ultimate truth; it is wonderfully suited for portraying affection and everything else that has commerce with illusions. Perhaps Chaucer would be surprised at our common agreement that he is primarily an ironist [...]²²³

This ironic view of literary potential Bloom distinguishes most dramatically from the prophetic potential embodied in Dante: "Chaucerian irony is a reaction against the arrogance of the prophetic stance that Dante took as his own."²²⁴ (It is significant that Bloom pits Chaucer against a visionary writer, deliberately connecting Chaucer more with the dream vision mode than any other.) As opposed to the Divine Visions of many of the High Medieval dreamers, like many of his contemporaries Chaucer was the champion of ironic expression, a mode appropriate to the instability of the times. That his first major forays into the literary realm largely involved dream visions should be no surprise.

Chaucer's greatest contribution to the dream vision is his emphasis and expansion of the ironic and comic potential of the genre. In his characteristically skeptical and inquisitive manner, Chaucer experiments with the satiric potential of the form, most notably in the *House of Fame* and the *Parliament of Fowls*, exploring the genre's conventional limitations and intrinsic thematic possibilities, all the while working to improve his craft as a popular writer. The result of

²²³ Bloom, *The Western Canon*, "Chaucer," 105.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

his explorations and experimentations is both the development of the form in a rhetorical and satiric direction as well as the popularization of the dream vision as primarily an ironic and comic genre. The irony of his dream visions is largely derived from their deliberate undermining of their own authority.

Chaucer's authoritative ambiguity begins and ends in his heavy allusionistic tendencies—allusions that juxtapose diverse and often contradictory sources. Part of Chaucer's widespread appeal is his uncanny ability to stride the learned and popular source material of the day—his adaption and assimilation of high-minded philosophical sources like Boethius, Macrobius, and Aquinas, popular French lays, and bawdy tavern stories. This combination of scholarly and popular, obscure and accessible elite and common, is already on display in his early dream vision work, but particularly in the *House of Fame*. Throughout the text Chaucer teases out the authoritative claims of his intellectual and creative sources, following a pattern of affected deference to the authorities that ultimately results in their effective dismissal.

He begins the text with a loose paraphrase of the third chapter of Macrobius'

Commentary on the Dream of Scipio:

God turne us every drem to goode!
For hyt is wonder, be the roode,
To my wyt, what causeth swevenes
Eyther on morwes or on evenes;
And why th'effect folweth of somme, 5
And of somme hit shal never come;
Why that is an avisoun
And this a revelacioun,
Why this a drem, why that a sweven,
And noght to every man lyche even; 10
Why this a fantome, why these oracles,

I not; but whoso of these miracles
 The causes knoweth bet then I,
 Devyne he; for I certainly
 Ne kan hem noght,

(*Hous of Fame*, 1-15a, Robinson)

Here Chaucer provides a rapid-fire, purposefully impressionistic taxonomy of dream types seemingly straight from the pages of Macrobius. Opening the *Hous of Fame* with this curious discourse simultaneously features and dismisses his philosophical source through incoherence and reversal. Though he seems to provide an approximation of Macrobius' five overarching categories, he deliberately confuses the matter by providing six rather than five types: "avisioun," "revelacioun," "dreem," "sweven," "fantom," and "oracles." The addition of a sixth type and his imprecise and unexplained use of the terms "dreem" and "sweven" frustrate the one-to-one alignment with Macrobius' five categories. While "fantom" and "oracles" seem straightforward enough (clearly cognates for Macrobius' *visum/phantasma* and *oraculum*, respectively), the remaining four terms are less certain. Is the "avision" or the "revelacioun" Macrobius' *visio*? Does "dreem" align with the *somnium* or the *insomnium*?

1. "avisioun" & "revelacioun" (?)	prophetic vision (<i>visio</i>)
2. "dreem" or "sweven" (?)	enigmatic dream (<i>somnium</i>)
3. "fantom"	apparition (<i>visum</i> , Greek <i>phantasma</i>)
4. "oracles"	oracular dream (<i>oraculum</i>)
5. "dreem" or "sweven" (?)	nightmare (<i>insomnium</i>)

While this lack of clarity and terminological slippage might be explained in part by the reiterative approaches of a work of poetry—as opposed to the precision necessary in a

philosophical treatise—or by his expectation of his learned readers to decipher his shorthand references to Macrobius, Chaucer’s dismissive closure to the discussion seems to argue for another reading: the ultimate incapability of the categories in an ironic and subversive dream vision. His double plea for God to “turn us every dreem to gode” dismisses a strict scholarly classification, emphasizing instead the spiritual and moral contents of the poem. The end result of his loose sketch of Macrobius’ dream types winds up ultimately dismissive, simultaneously flaunting his familiarity with the Neoplatonic dream categories while undermining them with a more popular/accessible Christian evaluative stance.²²⁵

Chaucer’s characteristic admixture of the bookish and the common proves an enchanting formula, teasing the reader with passages of esoteric, often highly structured knowledge weaved into tales that provide relief from systematizing discourses through his more free, emotionally and spiritually oriented “common touch” narrative style. The opening passage of the *Hous of Fame* is a fair example of his common touch at work in the midst of scholarly paraphrase. But it is also a telling passage in terms of Chaucer’s larger approach to dream literature. He asks here a series of questions all revolving around the issue of authority and causation. Why are some dreams philosophically or morally or spiritually worthy? And just as importantly, who is to determine what category a dream falls under? Thus, questions about the authority of both the dream itself and the hypothetical interpreter of the dream underlie this famous passage. With all the questions, few answers are offered; in fact, the one solid answer the dreamer can provide is that *he* is certainly not a valid authority to determine the worth of a dream:

²²⁵ It is this type of deliberately discordant and disruptive methods that leads some recent critics, such as Robert M. Jordan, to read the poem through a postmodern lens (Jordan, Robert M. “Lost in the Funhouse of Fame: Chaucer and Postmodernism” *Chaucer Review* 18.2 (1983): 100-115).

[...] but whoso of these miracles
The causes knoweth bet then I,
Devyne he; for I certainly
Ne kan hem noght, (Robinson, 12b-15a)

Again, the dreamer/narrator foregrounds these highly philosophical and scholarly questions in the poem, raising them for us to ponder for a brief moment, only to dismiss them summarily. The dreamer is unable to judge his own experiences, in this way distancing himself from the narrow numbers of the dons and doctors and aligning himself with a broader audience. The narrator is no person of authority; he merely is recounting in his self-effacingly unlearned manner what may or may not be of worth. As the poem progresses, its comic and ironic turns will progressively feature the entertainment/literary mode, undermining its authenticity all the more. However, though Chaucer denies the dream vision's narratorial authority, he is yet able to affirm his authorial expertise by affirming Macrobius' and others' elitist perspectives on who may both receive and interpret a philosophically worthy dream. As he states forty lines later:

Wel worthe, of this thyng, grete clerkys,
That trete of this and other werkes; (Robinson, 53-54)

Interpretive authority resides with the scholars, the learned defenders of orthodox interpretations. In this deference, Chaucer achieves a complex effect: he is able to maintain an accessible narrative persona, free to tell an entertaining tale, all the while framing the narrative in an elitist paradigm.

Chaucer's dismissal of his own work's narratorial authority from the beginning opens up its potential as a form to attain higher levels of comic and satiric effect. While not all of Chaucer's dream visions will be so explicitly self-de-authorizing (most notably his first poem,

The Book of the Duchesse), his overarching program in his dream texts as a whole is to problematize and undermine the authorizing devices of visionary and dream literature, pushing the dream vision form into an increasingly satiric genre, one custom-made for its particular moment in history.

Though the narrator denies his philosophical credentials, he establishes a contemplative mood in the early stages of the poem by touching upon a series of theoretical problems central to contemporary philosophical and theological debates concerning the ability of dreams to convey divine truth. He questions the “gaps of time,” the sequential leaps, that dreams feature (18). He returns again to Macrobius and the age-old question of the mundane or physical causes of dreams, questioning whether they might be caused personal temperament (22), mental fatigue (24), self-denial (25), sickness (25), adverse circumstances or disruption of routine (26-30), including obsession “studye” (29), melancholy (30), holy “devocion” or “contemplacion” (33-35), and lovesickness (37-40). The final two are of particular interest in this list of mundane causes of dreams: “devocion” (holy meditation) because of its pseudo-divine nature; while the “contemplacion” of the dreamer are “holy,” following Macrobius’ logic, this is nonetheless a case of an earthly or daily concern driving the dream; thus it is mundane, regardless of the divine direction of the thoughts. The final worldly source mentioned, the lovers who “hopen over-muche or dreden” (38), is clearly Chaucer’s nod to his first original dream vision, *The Book of the Duchesse*, whose insomniac dreamer reads a book of old “romaunce” (47-48)—book XI of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, though he also cleverly alludes to the *Romance of the Rose*—before he falls into his dream, which, of course, is about a grieving lover. Combined with the “obsession with books” mentioned in line 29, Chaucer is retrospectively highlighting the mundane

derivation of that dream vision (as well as this one), reinforcing the sense of the constructed nature of his particular brand of dream texts.

This brilliantly crafted, rapid-fire list of some of the most famous corporeal causes proposed for dreams is a compendium of implied authoritative voices from the past, including first and foremost Macrobius, but ranging back to late Antique (Augustine) and even Cicero himself. Again, Chaucer relies on his ironic formula: impressionistic or dismissive allusion to the elitist authorities.

The narrator turns from the mundane to the divine sources in line 43:

Or yf the soule, of propre kynde,
Be so parfit, as men fynde,
That yt forwot that ys to come, 45
And that hyt warneth alle and some
Of everych of her aventures
Be avisions, or be figures,
But that oure flessh ne hath no myght
To understonde hyt aryght, 50
For hyt is warned to derkly; --
But why the cause is, nocht wot I. (Robinson, 43-52)

Again, beginning, as the entire discourse does, in Macrobius, but moving into more contemporary discussions as well, Chaucer references shorthand several of the key arguments that have been circling around since the early Neoplatonists: the ability of the “parfit” soul, less encumbered when the “flesh” sleeps, to commune with the divine, specifically concerning what “ys to come.” This expansion on his earlier reference to prophecy (l. 8 and 9) coming as it does after the list of the various hypothetical mundane sources, adds rhetorical weight to the prophetic potential of dream accounts, a tantalizing ellipses at the end of the discussion. If the soul truly

does awake to a greater degree in the sleeping hours, it is possible that any dream account might contain some glimpse into heaven's secrets—even the current work of a dream theory novice...

Following the formula, the narrator immediately throws up his hands in affected humility: "But why the cause is, noght wot I" (52). He will leave that discernment to the "grete clerkys,/ That trete of this and other werkes" (53-54). Only the intellectual leaders can say in the end; the common man in his waking hours must resign himself to ambiguity, no matter how "parfit" his soul. The narrator's lack of specificity about who these enlightened scholars are is not solely a Chaucerian tendency, medieval footnoting is usually frustratingly imprecise, but the effect of the impressionistic allusion is consistent with Chaucer's particular aims for the dream vision genre: ironic authoritative ambiguity at every turn.

Chaucer's next (de)authorizing strategy is to draw upon the ancient tradition from the Hebrew prophets—and taken up most recently by many of the medieval visionaries—of providing a specific date for the dream, "tenthe day now of Decembre" (62). Rather than corresponding with a particular historical referent, this date is more likely thematic: in the contemporary calendar, December 10 was the winter solstice and thus the longest night and, therefore, having the most potential for lengthy and/or significant dreams.²²⁶ The date also falls under Sagittarius, the sign of the House of Fame.²²⁷ (It might be worth pointing out here the "middleness" of the image of the centaur, half-man half-beast—a fitting sign for the "middleness" of dreams.²²⁸) Regardless of the reason for the precise date, the rhetorical strategy used by the prophets before him remains active for Chaucer; the date provides the illusion of history, a concrete bridge from this world to the spiritual.

²²⁶ I get this argument from David M. Bevington's "The Obtuse Narrator in Chaucer's *House of Fame*," via Brian Stone, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Love Visions*, 237.

²²⁷ Stone, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Love Visions*, 237.

²²⁸ I am of course referencing Kruger's "middleness" premise in his *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*.

The First Invocation: Confusing the Heathen and the Heavenly

Each of the three books of *The House of Fame* begins with an invocation. While the second and third are loose imitations of Dante, the inspiration of the first is less clear (Robinson suggests Froissart's *Tresor Amoureux*). Chaucer makes a rhetorically complicated move in the first invocation. He dedicates it to the "god of sleep," Morpheus (technically the god of dreams; his father, Hypnos, was labeled by Hesiod and other early mythological works as the god of sleep), a self-reference to his tale of Alcyone and Ceyx—and the comic plea bargain with Morpheus that follows—in the *Book of the Duchess*. In that earlier work, he fleshes out the realm of "the god of slumber," firmly linking the state of sleep with death and vice versa: the cave of the god lies in a

[...] gloomy vale
where never yet gre tree or grain
or grass, and all growth was in vain—
No man, no beast, no living thing, (Robinson 156-59) REPLACE

The moribund realm of the god of sleep (and dreams) is a place where the dead actually reside, as is underscored by Morpheus' authority to temporarily resurrect Ceyx. While such a linking of sleep with death is hardly original—Hesiod and Homer established the tradition for the Greeks, while several New Testament texts affirmed "dreaming" as an orthodox metaphor for death from the beginning of Christianity—Chaucer complicates the association between sleep and death in the *Book of Duchess* through the narrator's insistence that his fictional encounter with the God of Sleep was diegetically a matter of life or death:

For this much dare I say to you,
I should be dead and buried too

Through utter lack of sleep and rest
Had I not read and been impressed
By the tale I told you. (Robinson 221-25)

The point here is that sleep, of course, really is a life or death prospect. Not only is it an orthodox theological metaphor or analogy for death, it is the only means to stave off death in severe cases of insomnia. Thus, the paradoxical equation: sleep is death/sleep is life. By paraphrasing and revising this invocation, Chaucer grafts on another level of interpretation to the first invocation in the *House of Fame*.

The text's more formal invocation to Morpheus adds a degree of classical orthodoxy to the poem. Chaucer provides a clear beginning and end to the invocation, giving it a more traditionally defined purpose in the poem (as opposed to the rather loose and haphazard nature of the informal invocation in the *Book of the Duchess*). The utterly pagan nature of the invocation likewise obeys the laws of the literary authorities, all the while widening the gap between the text and those of the authentic divine visions of the mystics, whose invocations are orthodox in the opposite direction. Instead of praying to the Christian God or trinity or Christ, as is one of the key authenticating practices of the mystics of his age, Chaucer heightens the sense of the constructedness of the poem: this is an artificial thing, following the ancient pagan rules of an ancient pagan tradition. His choice of Morpheus and emphasis of the gods' infernal position drives the wedge between revelation and artifice even further:

But at my gynnyng, trusteth wel,
I wol make invocacion,
With special devocion,
Unto the god of slep anon,
That duelleth in a cave of stoon 70
Upon a strem that cometh fro Lete,

That is a flood of helle unswete,
Besyde a folk men clepeth Cymerie, --
There slepeth ay this god unmerie
With his slepy thousand sones, (Robinson 66-75)

Here then we have a Christian praying to a god of “helle”: at once a claim of literary authority and disclaimer of divine authority.

As Chaucer is inclined to do, he of course immediately and deliberately complicates/confuses matters by following this pagan scene description with a prayer, not to the hell-bound God of Sleep, but to “he, that mover is of al/ That is and was, and ever shal” (81-82), the Neoplatonic-Christian description of God. His primary request mirrors that of the poem’s opening, but with a twist: that God would turn the dreams of all those who understand his dream aright to “Ioye” (83). The caveat modifies the original refrain; “God turne us every drem to goode” is now dependent on the reader’s ability to interpret the dream correctly. This pronouncement of a blessing to those who understand the message is another (playful) authorizing device, claiming (or at least requesting) real-world consequence for the poem. He follows this tongue-in-cheek beatitude with an equally absurd curse: that those who misread or “misdeme” (97) its meaning would experience nightmares involving “every harm that any man/ Hath had, sith that the world began” (99-100). This whimsical imitation of the pronouncements of blessings and curses that often follow divine visions (most famously in Revelation 22:18-19) mock-appropriates the tradition’s authoritative claims; all the while the interpolation of the passage in an invocation to a pagan god “of helle” effectively undermines this borrowed credibility.

The First Dream Account: Borrowed Legitimacy and Literary Digression

Chaucer's next mock-authorizing strategy is to again imitate one of the key conventions of the mystics: the affirmation of the piety of the visionary's/dreamer's will. However, befitting his overarching subversive program, this claim is anything but straightforward. After reiterating the convenient concrete date (December 10th), the dreamer not so subtly provides a claim to his own devotion:

Of Decembre the tenthe day,
Whan hit was nyght, to slepe I lay
Ryght ther as I was wont to done,
And fil on slepe wonder sone,
As he that wery was forgo 115
On pilgrimage myles two
To the corseynt Leonard,
To make lythe of that was hard. (Robinson 111-18)

The dreamer sleeps *as if* he had just undertaken a pious pilgrimage to the holy tomb of St. Leonard (a few miles from Chaucer's home and likely an inside joke²²⁹). This unsubtle simile approximates the "alignment of the will" so important to authentic visionary writers.²³⁰ The dreamer is *like* one who goes on pilgrimage; and thus only *like* one through whom God might impart divine truth. Chaucer thus remains perfect in his delightfully ambiguous authoritative claims/denials.

To the reader's surprise, the dreamer's visionary journey begins not in the House of Fame, but rather in the Temple of Venus. Remaining consistent with his Classical invocation, Chaucer begins his mock-vision in the heart of paganism. (However, as he does in the first

²²⁹ Stone, *Geoffrey Chaucer: Love Visions*, 237.

²³⁰ See the previous chapter on the medieval visionaries.

prayer to the God of Sleep, Chaucer will ultimately confuse the lines of the heathen and the heavenly in Books II and III.) Like the Hebrew prophets, the narrator employs the rhetoric of specificity, grounding the poem in descriptive minutiae: the glass walls, statues of gold, jeweled designs, the portrait of Venus crowned in a garland of white and red (120-39) all imitate, in an overtly literary mode, the specificity of authentic visions. His ironic project, though, undermines the connection from the start, the context of the visionary descriptions frustrating any sense of divine import. Rather than any illusion of a pious vision, Chaucer here emphasizes the worldly in two ways: by featuring worldly/romantic love and by autobiographical reference. Beginning as he does in the Temple of Venus, his audience is in part being taken on a tour of his early literary career, especially his translation of the *Romance of the Rose* and his first major work, the *Book of the Duchess*, both of which treat of the matter of Venus. (Chaucer will make this connection more overt in Book II, see below.) The associations Chaucer emphasizes through this opening sequence in the unholy grounds of the goddess of love is a complex mixture of pagan tradition, secular diversions, and autobiographical self-reference: in short, the antithesis of Christian piety.

Chaucer elaborates upon his approach in *Book of the Duchess*, where he recites at length the story of Ceyx and Alcione from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, by allowing the early part of his dream account to follow at length a classical tangent, the retelling of the major events of the *Aeneid* (and the account of Dido in Ovid's *Epistolae Heriodum*). The authenticating strategy of this lengthy passage is twofold: First, through paraphrase it borrows or takes part in the authority of not just the Greco-Roman sages, but the master poets, the revered (even pseudo-mystical) Virgil and Ovid. Chaucer will double down on this effect by finishing the tale with rapid-fire allusions to several other literarily orthodox stories, including Jason and Medea, Theseus, the Minotaur, and Ariadne (397-426), and the *Divine Comedy* (449), all of which lend the vision

authoritative capital. The other authorizing strategy at work is accomplished simply through the mode: this sort of encyclopedic synopsis falls in line with the intellectual and literary trends of the High and Late Middle Ages—the type of synthesis most successfully accomplished by Dante and de Meun, but continuing to be attempted by many of Chaucer’s contemporaries. In this way, Chaucer draws legitimacy from both literary allusion and literary convention.

Chaucer forces the interpolation of the full story of Troy and Aeneas, and he knows it: his primary theme of fame largely goes unmentioned by the narrator for the first two hundred lines of the retelling. While fame certainly has its relevance to the epic, the fall of Troy fits more comfortably into Boethius’ debates on fortune, and Dido’s demise is more a matter for the *Romance of the Rose* than the current discourse on fame. The rationale for this lengthy digression is implied in the early part of Book II; the focus of Book I being largely Chaucer’s revisitation and subsequent disavowal of the focus of his early literary career (see below). However, Chaucer does attempt to strengthen the continuity of the poem. First, he does some simple things, like emphasize the roll of Venus in the epic and reference Aeolus (203), who will make an appearance in Book III of the poem. He also at one point works the theme of fame into the story itself. Near the middle of the retelling, the narrator finally attempts to weave his theme of fame into the epic through Dido’s suicidal lament. After giving fame as one of Aeneas’ possible reasons for deceiving her (305-6), she launches into a bitter apostrophe:

O, wel-away that I was born!	345
For thorgh yow is my name lorn,	
And alle myn actes red and songe	
Over al thys lond, on every tonge.	
O wikke Fame! for ther nys	
Nothing so swift, lo, as she is!	350

O, soth ys, every thing ys wyst,
 Though hit be kevered with the myst.
 Eke, though I myghte duren ever,
 That I have don, rekever I never,
 That I ne shal be seyde, allas, 355
 Yshamed be thourgh Eneas, (Robinson 345-56)

Though the thematic connection could easily have been more thoroughly integrated into the earlier episodes of the story, Chaucer here finds a brief but important means of looking ahead to his Boethian allegorical analog: “the fickleness of Fame” (the obvious parallel between the dream visions that will add another legitimizing element to the story). He will elaborate upon this theme when we arrive in the House of Fame, but this planting of the seed of it helps mitigate the sense of digression in the Book I.

The narrator wraps up the story of Aeneas, and Book I of the vision, by making impressionistic references to his journey to Italy, his descent to Hell (an excuse for alluding to Dante and Claudian, two of Chaucer’s favorite citations), and battle with Turnus. By the end of the first book, the reader is left with the sense that the inclusion of the full story of Aeneas had more to do with borrowed legitimacy and encyclopedic convention than thematic unity.

Book II: Hybridity, Autobiographical Parody, and “Lewed” Language

The brief proem of Book II masterfully continues the theme of confusion and equivocation begun in the first proem. The dreamer promises an “avisyon” (the prophetic vision or *visio* of the Macrobius section), but then immediately highlights the categorical indeterminacy of the account by also using “drem” (the enigmatic dream or *insomnium* of Macrobius?) to describe the episode (513, 517). Chaucer then draws upon the tradition (most famously employed by Dante) of

claiming the uniqueness of the dream; however, like the account's category, Chaucer cleverly couches this claim in equivocal terms:

So sely an avisyon,
That Isaye, ne Scipion,
Ne kyng Nabugodonosor, 515
Pharoo, Turnus, ne Elcanor,
Ne mette such a drem as this! (Robinson, 513-17)

The subversive/ironic potential of the line is obvious enough: Surely the authoritative sources of the dream/vision tradition—Isaiah, Cicero, Genesis, Virgil—never recorded such a “sely” (honest/innocent or silly/insignificant?) dream as this.

The final lines of the proem contain a condensed invocation, a rather formulaic prayer to the gods “that on Parnaso duelle” (521), specifically “Thought” (523) until the final assertion, which reads as almost a taunting or testing of the gods:

Of my brayn, now shal men se 525
Yf any vertu in the be,
To tellen al my drem aryght.
Now kythe thyn engyn and myght! (Robinson, 525-28)

In the context of a deliberately self-emphasizing (and self-effacing) poem, the dreamer shrugs off the responsibility of telling his tale “aryght,” leaving that to Thought (i.e., in the context of the competing traditions in the poem, his Classical referents). The dreamer attempts to divert the performance anxiety of a highly personal poem by hiding behind literary tropes. It is up to the allegorical representation of memory (i.e., the Classical literary tradition) to transmit the dream, a sarcastic parody of the self-devaluating visionary invocation.

The dream account of Book II introduces the House of Fame, an ironic antithesis of the orthodox Hebrew and Christian teleological vision of the perfected holy temple. This comic inversion of the Judeo-Christian prophetic model is introduced to the dreamer not by a transcendent angelic or saintly being, but rather by a mocking, anthropomorphic eagle, a tactfully chosen and artfully constructed figure.

Chaucer's choice of an animal as a central figure in the vision is an antecedent of the two other dream-related beast tales, the *Parliament of Fowls* and the "Nun's Priest's Tale"; this exploration of the comic potential of animal figures thus continued throughout his career. But this particular bestial form is not only playful, it also conveniently connects the episode to the symbol's two most prominent referents: the Roman imperial eagle (associated with Jupiter) and the Judeo-Christian eagle metaphor.²³¹ The hybridity of the symbol is an apt choice for the two competing orthodoxies in the poem, the Classical literary and the Judeo-Christian visionary traditions.

The Eagle describes himself as a messenger of Jove, a bestial correlation to the angelic messengers of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Chaucer strengthens this obvious association through the dreamer's initial response. The appearance of the Eagle terrifies the dreamer, evoking in him the same response as the angelic figures do in the Hebrew prophets. Chaucer intensifies the terror by having the Eagle swoop down, faster than a lightning bolt (534-7), and seize the dreamer in its terrible talons. Like the swooning of Dante in *Inferno* (most famously in Canto V), the dreamer is so horrified that he faints (a delightful conundrum of consciousness).

Like the oracular angels of the Hebrew tradition, the first words of this bestial messenger must be ones of consolation to the terrified visionary:

²³¹ The most famous OT reference is Isaiah 40:31; the most popular use of the eagle in Christian iconography is the Eagle of St. John.

In mannes vois, and seyde, "Awak!

And be not agast so, for shame!"

(Robinson, 556-57)

The Eagle's voice initially modulates, as the dreamer explains, taking on a voice familiar to him in waking life (560-62), an innovation that adds a degree of psychological/personal depth to the moment. The Eagle strengthens this consoling personalization by speaking at first in Christian idiom, calling on "Seynte Marye!" (573) and referring to "God" (576) in the singular. But his truly personal purpose becomes most clear in his lengthy explanation of his particular assignment. Like Boethius' *Philosophia* and Dante's *Beatrice*, the Eagle explains that he has been sent by Jove to correct the dreamer's great error; and like the guide's literary models, he wastes no opportunity for derision.

The Eagle reintroduces the rhetorical strategy of grounding the dream in history, namely Chaucer's biography. Like many of Chaucer's key works, the dreamer is a comical substitute for himself, who has "served so ententyfly" (616) Cupid and Venus by setting his "wit" (of which the Eagle mockingly underscores, the Dreamer does not have much, 621) to "make bookys, songes, dytees, / In ryme, or elles in cadence" (623-24). This sort of mocking biographical sketch of his literary endeavors is a trademark of Chaucer, a comic version of a self-promotional tradition tracing back all the way to Ovid and Virgil. Chaucer here has fun with the tradition, appropriately couching it in his particular ironic mode. The result is, again, a strengthening of his poem's authority in terms of the orthodox literary tradition and historical immediacy, all undermined by a playful derision of his own literary achievements.

The Eagle's accusation that the dreamer/Chaucer "lyvest thus as an heremyte" (659) might be read not simply as a personal criticism, but a critique of the life of a scholar/writer in

general. In this sense, the Eagle preaches a mild anti-intellectual elitism, adding to Chaucer's subtly subversive allusions to the elitist authorities begun in the first proem.

In his lengthy discourse, the Eagle lays out the greater purpose of the House of Fame for the dreamer (and reader) and its connection with the Temple of Venus, thus serving as a bridge rhetorically between the poem's two competing themes, Love and Fame (675-99). The House of Fame is filled with famous devotees to Love who have suffered, like Dido, the Fortune-like whims of Fame. Thus, this is to be both a personal and literary revelation: a call to alter the dreamer's/Chaucer's hermitic, scholarly lifestyle, and to widen his literary scope thematically. Viewed within the context of a meditation on fame, this light jab at the hermitic intellectual lifestyle also suggests a destructive motivation for these intellectual pursuits. Chaucer will build on this almost immediately in his appropriation of philosophical descriptions of the order of the universe.

Chaucer's brilliant summation of the Aristotelian/Ptolemaic conception of mass and the natural order of matter (729-764) and his repeated allusions to some of the preeminent names of cosmology and astronomy (including Scipio, Plato, Boethius, Marcian, and Anticlaudian/Alanus de Insulis, and Boethius²³²) further legitimizes the text through direct association with additional authoritative sources; it also provides Chaucer with a rationale for his imaginative description of the pseudo-scientific properties of the middle realm of Fame. The familiar premise of the "kyndelyche stede" (829), or natural position, of all matter lends his airy construction some semblance of concrete footing, as does—or so he tells us—his lucid, emphatically *unscholarly* explanation:

²³² 915, 931, 972, 985, and 986, respectively.

"Telle me this now feythfully,	
Have y not preved thus symply,	
Withoute any subtilite	855
Of speche, or gret prolixite	
Of termes of philosophie,	
Of figures of poetrie,	
Or colours of rethorike?	
Pardee, hit oughte the to lyke!	860
For hard langage and hard matere	
Ys encombrous for to here	
Attones; wost thou not wel this?"	
And y answered and seyde, "Yis."	(Robinson, 853-64)

Again, we see Chaucer's signature pattern: allusion and dismissal, appropriation and denial. For over a hundred lines he borrows from the "realm" of the elite, grafting the authority of their discourse into his own work; however, he simultaneously aligns himself with the common man through both his language and sensibilities. The Eagle makes sure to underscore this point, taking pride in his lack of "subtilite of speche," his rejection of the "termes of philosophie," and (ironic) refusal to resort to "figures of poetrie." In short, he can talk "[I]ewedly to a lewed man" (866). This "straight talk" rhetoric is certainly not an innovation we can ascribe to Chaucer, but it is a frequent move he employs in his greater ironic (de)authorizing strategy.

The final passages of Book II refocus the attention on the dreamer, who is struggling with fears of seeing more than his mortal body or mind can handle. While the Eagle's anti-elite/anti-scholarly rhetoric is featured heavily in this section, the dreamer remains of two minds: he is reluctant to leave the safe world of his books, his philosophy and poetry. To add to the cumulative irony of the section, "termes of philosophie," which the Eagle just deliberately rejected, come directly to the dreamer's mind:

And thoo thoughte y upon Boece,
 That writ, "A thought may flee so hye,
 Wyth fetheres of Philosophye,
 To passen everych element; 975
 And whan he hath so fer ywent,
 Than may be seen, behynde hys bak,
 Cloude," -- and al that y of spak. (Robinson, 972-78)

This paraphrase is perfectly timed and perfectly ironic. The dreamer's quotation of Boethius here accentuates both the continued importance of book-learning (particularly philosophy) to the dreamer—the cause of his hermitic tendencies, as highlighted in the beginning of Book II—and the potential transcendence of intellectual activity. In other words, this quote, coming as it does at the end of Book II, subverts two of its key arguments, creating Chaucer's trademark ambiguity. The hermitic/contemplative life can be both personally destructive and profoundly productive; the wisdom contained in the books the dreamer has wasted his life pouring over can also be links to a higher reality. Chaucerian Irony doing its irresistible work.

Book III: Illusion and Allusion

Chaucer's primary contribution to the dream vision genre in the third book, particularly as it pertains to the issue of authority, lies in the frustrating, abortive/accidental(?) ending. Before I discuss that, however, I will touch on a few other key elements at work in the book that engage this theme: its superbly realized physical locations, tour de force of literary allusion, and explicit visionary lineage.

Chaucer demonstrates his descriptive powers again in Book III, indeed to the most impressive extent in the poem. The concrete realization of his imaginative journey, especially in

his ability to capture the sense of physical sense-experience of the two houses, adds, like the autobiographical elements, a corporeal dimension to what could otherwise be an airy journey. The weight of his own body as he scales the heights (1118-21), the dazzling shimmer of the crystalline foundation (1124-30), the almost scientific description of the sun's effects on the names inscribed in ice (1136-64), the intricacies of the house's adornments (1188-1200). His "tangible" approach to description begun in the Temple of Venus thus continues—but with even more innovation and inspiration—in the descriptions of the Houses of Fame and Rumor. This is the descriptive tradition of the Hebrew prophets via Chaucerian sensibilities: ever elaborating on illusionistic potential.

Both illusion and allusion are at work to masterful degree in this book. In two lengthy passages, Chaucer provides a catalog of famous literary characters (1201-1281) and personas (1419-1519). Like his lengthy paraphrase of Virgil and Ovid in the first book, these epic catalogs follow the age-old strategy of borrowed authority. The integration of the great figures and authors of the literature imports legitimacy to the work, wrapping literary tradition into the work and the work into tradition. However, the author's encyclopedic knowledge and ability to encapsulate and assimilate diverse texts and traditions is perhaps the truly "authoritative" aspect of the lists; the author's bookishness (mocked in the opening of the poem) are nowhere more on display than in these encyclopedic passages—something clearly intended to impress the reader with a sense of literary and scholarly cross-connectivity. The amount of space dedicated to these literary allusions is evidence enough of the consequence Chaucer assumed in such a strategy.

Two particular allusions are worth examining for a moment: the Revelation of John (1381-85) and Boethius (1547-48). The first he interweaves with his description of the countless eyes covering Lady Fame:

For as feele eyen hadde she
As fetheres upon foules be,
Or weren on the bestes four
That Goddis trone gunne honoure,
As John writ in th'Apocalips. (Robinson, 1381-85)

Though only a quick nod to Revelation, this allusion is important in that it *explicitly* links the current literary/“inauthentic” dream vision with the progenitor of all Christian divine visions. Chaucer’s continued reference to Boethius serves as the philosophical parallel of visionary allusions. While describing Fame’s whimsical dispensations of her blessings to the various suppliants, Chaucer makes the obvious comparison with Boethius’ Lady Fortune explicit: “Ryght as her suster, dame Fortune” (1548). All references to Boethius are in sense self-referential, as he famously translated the text, but more important is the connection to the larger tradition behind it. These two allusions, interwoven fluidly into his description of Lady Fame are case studies in Chaucer’s hybrid approach to the ironic dream genre. While a majority of Chaucer’s allusions in *House of Fame* are literary, like his frequent nods to Boethius, occasional direct connection to the divine/religious/authentic visionary tradition is essential in maintaining the genre’s hybridity, a playful intermingling of two divergent authoritative traditions.

The Conclusion(?): Indeterminate “Auctorite”

Much has been made of the non-ending of the final book of the *House of Fame*. In the Retraction, Chaucer calls the dream vision his “lytel laste bok.” Is that a description of its current incomplete state or its originally intended length? If the abortive ending is unintentional: Was it an occasional poem, and its immediate “occasion” disrupted? Or did Chaucer simply lose interest in the book and move on to another project? If the ending is intended: Is the fractured ending an

intentional teaser, frustrating the reader's expectations of an authoritative voice to cut through the discordant confusion of the House of Rumor? Is this the final ironic twist of the poem, a rhetorically brilliant non-ending to a non-vision? In the Retraction, Chaucer lists his "book... of fame" (1087) among his "translacions and enditynges of / Worldly vanitees" (1086) did he imagine the other works listed there as working in some sort of unison?²³³ If so, is the *House of Fame* thematically "completed" in another work, like the *Legend of Good Women*?

The pacing of the poem as a whole is uneven, which makes judging the completion of the poem through structural rhythm difficult. However, I believe Caxton's instincts are revealing: he felt the need to complete the poem because the poem is certainly incomplete. As unorthodox as Chaucer can be, this degree of deliberate unorthodoxy is hard to imagine. That Chaucer ultimately accepts the "lytel laste bok" as an imperfect, yet creditable enough exploration of the dream vision genre makes sense in light of his active professional and writerly life. Perhaps a less involved professional and writer would have been more inclined toward polish, but not Chaucer. His work is often characterized by hastiness and experimentation rather than scrupulous perfection; indeed, it is part of his stylistic charm.

For the many who consider the poem incomplete, the speculation about the man who "semed for to be / A man of gret auctorite" (2157-58) abounds. While the mention of "authority" is tantalizing for this particular discussion, any attempts at being more specific with his identification is too speculative to be helpful. However, it is valid enough to point out that authority was certainly on Chaucer's mind—and that here in this abortive end of this quintessential model of the Chaucerian ironic dream vision, he chooses to leave the reader pondering the indeterminacy of "auctorite"....

²³³ Interestingly, while Chaucer includes three of his other dream visions—*Book of the Duchess*, *Parliament of Fowls*, and the *Legend of Good Women*—he does not include his translation of *Consolation of Philosophy*.

CONCLUSION

THE RHETORIC OF AUTHORITY

Harold Bloom, the High Priest of the Cult of Shakespeare,²³⁴ argues that the great works of literature carve out their historical place through the “rhetoric of immortality”:

The deepest anxieties of literature are literary; indeed, in my view, they define the literary and become all but identical with it. A poem, novel, or play acquires all of humanity’s disorders, including the fear of mortality, which in the art of literature is transmuted into the quest to be canonical, to join communal or societal memory. Even Shakespeare, in the strongest of his sonnets, hovers near this obsessive desire or drive. The rhetoric of immortality is also a psychology of survival and a cosmology.²³⁵ (Introduction “An Elegy for the Canon,” 18)

Bloom’s famous literary psychoanalytics here reaches its apotheosis. The lasting power of a literary work—its potential either to be remembered or forgotten—is the “wingéd chariot” ever at the back of a writer’s mind. For Bloom, the “rhetoric of immortality” is the sublime language of literature: the great struggle to overcome the vacuum of forgotten texts. In fact, Bloom takes this all-encompassing rhetorical strategy one step further, enfolding the reader in the process. He argues that the primary power of literature is to help readers understand the “the proper use of one’s own solitude, that solitude whose final form is one’s confrontation with one’s own mortality.”²³⁶ Bloom uses the mysterious phrase “the authority of death”²³⁷ to describe something

²³⁴ I am of course being playful here, but my description of Bloom is far less hyperbolic than his assertions about Shakespeare; take for instance, “Shakespeare is the Western canon” (“Shakespeare, Center of the Canon,” *The Western Canon*, p. 71).

²³⁵ Bloom, “An Elegy for the Canon,” *The Western Canon*, p. 18.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²³⁷ “Whatever the answer, I would like to point out that the authority of death, whether literary or existential, is not primarily a social authority. The Canon, far from being the servant of the dominant social class, is the minister of death” (*ibid.*, p. 30).

akin to “the authority of the confrontation with our own mortality,” those works that best provide insight into the essential problem of humanity. The reader is not only experiencing on the page the inevitable struggle of the writer to acquire the authority of textual immortality, but the reader finds himself implicated in the argument. Reading, Bloom argues, is—in the writer and the reader, full circle—about human mortality.

In this study I have considered these premises from a different angle—one at first more general, but ultimately more specific. I agree that the “wingéd” anxiety at the back of the writer’s mind *is* a question of *authority*. However, a desperate striving to write a work worth remembering—that has the authority of “immortality”—in the exponentially expanding libraries of history is not always the fundamental drive of even the great authors. I believe, though, that *authority*, in a more flexible application of the word, is that driving force. While mortality and immortality, both literary (for the author) and existential (for the reader and author alike), are essential concerns in many or most of those works that have maintained a readership, I believe it is more universally true to say that the anxiety *of authority* has been the universal drive of both authors and their readers. For authors the anxiety of authority drives them to imitate, paraphrase, elaborate, quote, misquote, allude, negate, qualify, cite, dismiss, revivify, and rewrite. The question of *authority*, the desperate need to ascertain and assert it, is the question of literature. Inherent in this line of reasoning, the recognition and apprehension of the *rhetoric of authority* is essential to understanding many key moments and elements in a literary work.

Whether it is a brief dream sequence within a larger narrative (Daniel, ch. 1-6), a narrative framed by a dream (the dream visions of Cicero and Chaucer), divine/mystic vision (Julian’s *Revelations*), or an apocalyptic vision (Daniel, ch. 7-12), authors’ uses of dreams and visions in literature inherently involve questions about the author’s/text’s access to (or in

Chaucer's case, distance from) a higher authority.²³⁸ From the earliest epic poem, *Gilgamesh*, and epic history, *Genesis*, to the visionary writings of the Late Middle Ages, dreams in Western literature have usually been ascribed to supernatural, transcendent sources. Unless used ironically (as in Chaucer), authors almost invariably present dreams and visions as otherworldly, incorporeal, ultra-rational, transcending the limited range of knowledge of man—and, thus, transcending the ordinary authoritative limits of the author.²³⁹

Because of these transcendent associations, dreams and visions in literature inherently imbue a text with a greater authoritative weight. While dream elements provide some purely literary/narrative conveniences (e.g., creative opportunities to visit fantastic settings, temporary breaks from linear plots, and a means of revealing characters' motives and preoccupations) dreams have generally maintained a higher import in Western narratives.²⁴⁰ In short, dreams and visions in literature are often employed as authorizing devices. Incorporating dream sequences and dream framing devices in a literary work inherently associates it to some degree with the “non-literary” or “authentic” traditions, like prophecy, mystic visions, and apocalypses.²⁴¹ The

²³⁸ See the second chapter of this study for a categorization of dream and vision genres. For other similar classifications, see Kruger, Steven F. *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984); Stephen J. Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form*; A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*; Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision and Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter*; Michael D. Cherniss, *Boethian Apocalypse: Studies in Middle English Vision Poetry*; Hans Robert Jauss, “Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature.” In his *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis, 1982) Pp. 76-109.

²³⁹ For more, see Kruger's *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, especially Ch. 1-3.

²⁴⁰ Again, for more on this theme, I recommend the works of Russell (dream visions), Spearing (dream visions), Kruger (the significance of dreams in the Middle Ages), and Collins (apocalyptic visions).

²⁴¹ As I argue above, the labels “authentic” and “literary” are imperfect—these distinctions overlapping and blurring even further as one crosses cultural boundaries. The distinction between the degree of seriousness with which a culture approaches a text is, however, often pronounced. See Barr's discussion of the terms “authentic” and “literary,” “Introduction,” *Willing to Know God*, especially pp. 35. For more on the social role of the mystic vision, see Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* and Katharina M. Wilson, *Medieval Women Writers*. For more on the role of apocalypse, see J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* and “Jewish Apocalyptic against Its Hellenistic

“authentic” traditions (like the mystic tradition of Julian) serve as cultural referents to their literary cousins: The ability of the authentic prophet or visionary to access knowledge beyond temporal and epistemological limitations carries over to the literary dream and vision genres, lifting them—in the least, subconsciously—toward transcendent expression. Achieving this type of text-transcendence is essentially the argument of Macrobius, perfectly illustrated in dream sequence section of Daniel and in the *Dream of Scipio*.

In this study, I have primarily focused on four significant works in the Western dream and vision tradition, all of which not only directly engage the theme of authority, but demonstrate diverse authorizing strategies important to their respective genres and traditions. Daniel’s piety and faith are further legitimized by his access to the divine truths revealed through the dreams of the kings and, eventually, in his own visions. This combination of dream narratives and apocalypse proves massively influential in the Jewish and Christian dream and vision literature to follow. Arising from another tradition, Classical Neoplatonism, Macrobius makes a famous defense of the use of dream narratives in philosophical discourse, asserting that their complex and diverse modes of expression ideally convey the philosophical mysteries of the Platonic universe. Macrobius’ defense of dream literature and his explication of the five categories of dreams eventually work their way into medieval Christian dream theory and dream vision literature. Beginning in a place of cultural marginalization, Julian of Norwich is ultimately able to attain canonization through the mystical and intimate revelations in her visions, demonstrating the power of “authentic” visionary writing. And in *The House of Fame*, Chaucer incorporates many of the authorizing strategies prevalent in the dream and vision literature

Near Eastern Environment,” pp. 27-36. For a comparison of several modes, see Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*.

tradition in his characteristically subversive mode, turning his dream vision into an ironic house of cards, whose counterfeit authority crumbles under its own weight.

The more ambivalent, playful, and even subversive approaches of influential High and Late Medieval dream authors—especially de Meun and Chaucer—helped to expand the possible attitudes toward authority in dreams and visions in literature in the centuries to follow.

Increasingly skeptical approaches to dream and visionary experiences mark many of the texts of the Modern period; however, the more traditional, spiritualized perception certainly coexists with the ironic/ambiguous texts. For example, Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress from this Worlde to That Which is to Come* (1678), one of the most widely read English works of the next three centuries, is a 17th century text that maintains the divine revelatory approach to the dream vision genre. Poems by the Romantics of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, most notably Blake's visionary prophecies and Byron's "Darkness" (1816), complicate the genre, directly engaging dream and vision modes to convey satiric and often ambiguous messages. Many short stories of the 19th century also took up the dream and vision modes to diverse effects; works such as Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" (1819), Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" (1835), Poe's "Ligeia" (1838), and Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890), employ the dream vision in subtly different ways, each emphasizing possible psychological sources for the narratives. Though the move is hardly fluid and anything but monolithic, the overarching trend of post-medieval dreams and visions is in the direction of Chaucer: an increase in the ambivalence about both clear interpretation and the authority of the dream/visionary source.

As Steven F. Kruger states in *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, the 20th century was the century of the private dream—the personal, the subjective, the psychological. While tracing dreams and visions to bodily or psychological sources has a far longer history than Freud's *Die*

Traumdeutung (1900) —as evidenced in Macrobius and Chaucer—the theories of Freud and Jung successfully popularized the psychological approach to the dream experience. Though many of Freud’s and Jung’s premises faded under sustained light, the 20th century Western approach to dreams largely follow the central psychoanalytic thesis: dreams are the “royal road” to understanding the unconscious self, the key to divulging the deepest truths of the ego and the enigmatic id.²⁴²

Many 20th century storytellers apply the psychoanalytic premises of Freud to traditional dream genres, presenting psychoanalytic versions of dream sequences, dream visions, waking visions, (pseudo-)prophetic utterances, etc. Such an approach is evident in much of the popular fiction of the century, especially in film. From the Surrealist subconscious dream sequence, Bunuel and Dali’s *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), to the psychoanalytic iterations of the dream vision genre, like *Mulholland Drive* (2001), to more original integrations of dreams, like Christopher Nolan’s *Inception* (2010), many filmic storytellers embraced dreams as windows into the psyche of characters. *Inception* demonstrates the broad appeal of that approach to audiences; a study in psychoanalytic dream interpretation based around several dream sequences portraying protagonists venturing deeper and deeper into their subject’s (and their own) subconscious, the film earned over \$800 million worldwide. Clearly the Freudian/Jungian representation of dreams proved both popular and lucrative.

²⁴² I have conflated Freud and Jung here simply because the two are often intertwined in popular understandings of dream theory. Freud and Jung of course came to disagree about the nature of dreams: Freud in essence believed the unconscious masked itself in dreams, obscuring the inner workings of the id; Jung, on the other hand, believed dreams were the direct, unmediated expression of the dreamer’s mental world. For Jung, dreams were a “spontaneous self-portrayal, in symbolic form, of the actual situation in the unconscious” conveyed in symbolic, metaphors, and images (Jung, C. G. *The collected works of C.G. Jung*, Vol. 8. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967. Par. 505).

Of course, like all centuries, the 20th was too complex to be monopolized by a singular conception of dream experience. The traditional spiritual understanding of dreams and visions coexisted with the psychological and physiological. Dreams and visions as divinely (or infernally) inspired messages still frequent the fiction of the period. A few examples in film: the infernally imparted dream sequence in Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), the supernatural dreams of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), and Sarah Connor's prophetic vision of a global holocaust in *Terminator 2* (1991). In this way, the 20th century is an enlightening case study in both the overlap and disconnect of contemporary academic/scientific consensus and popular literary themes and perceptions.

The dream or vision as a “royal road” to insight into the mind of characters might have gained some traction because of the academic musings of Freud and his followers, but by no means did that approach eradicate the more traditional perception of dreams and visions. The more recent physiological studies will continue to have an impact on the portrayal of dreams and visions in literature—as Adrian Lyne's *Jacob's Ladder* (1990) demonstrates²⁴³—I suspect we will continue to find our poets and novelists and directors and screenwriters presenting dreams and visions as portals to transcendent realms.

²⁴³ Lyne's *Jacob's Ladder* is a physiologically-induced dream vision in which the protagonist, an American Vietnam soldier, experiences a prolonged, drug-induced nightmare before dying in triage.

APPENDIX

DREAM AND VISION GENRES

Authentic Dreams and Visions

- **Corrective Prophecy**
 - Lamentation
 - Remonstrations
 - Exhortation
- **Divine Mystic Visions**
 - **Revelation**
 - Divine Principles
 - Infernal/Purgatorial/Heavenly Visions
 - Future Events (secular)
 - Apocalypse
 - **Anti-revelation** (Demonic inversions of revelation)

Literary Dreams and Visions

- **Dream Sequences**
- **Dream Visions**
 - **Didactic Instruction**
 - Philosophical Visions
 - Love Visions
 - **Pseudo-revelation**
 - Divine Principles
 - Infernal/Purgatorial/Heavenly Visions
 - Future Events (divine and/or secular)
 - **Ironic/Invalid Dream Visions**

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John T. Bickley was born in Tallahassee, Florida, in 1976; graduated summa cum laude from Leon High School, Tallahassee, Florida, in 1995; and graduated summa cum laude from Florida State University with a BA in English, Liberal Studies Honors and Honors in the Major, in 1999. He held Bright Futures and FSU Academic Scholarships all four years at Florida State; was named to the Dean's List every semester; earned a Bess Ward Study Abroad Honors scholarship (1997); and won a prize for an essay on the Roman Forum in a statewide Florida Honors Programs writing competition (1998). In 1998, Bickley was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Fellowship, where he helped to develop the script for the NEH video, *Rediscovering America* (1999), narrated by Morgan Freeman. At Florida State, Bickley was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, and Golden Key. His Honors Thesis project was a screenplay adaptation of *Beowulf*, which earned him an internship at the LivePlanet film productions office (West Hollywood, CA) in 1999. In 2001, he earned his MA in English at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, working as a teaching assistant for the Department of English and writing his Master's thesis on "'Godless' Definitions and Interpretations in *The Great Gatsby*" (2001).

After his internship at LivePlanet, Bickley returned to Florida State on a doctoral Presidential Fellowship, pursuing his Ph.D. in Humanities while serving as a teaching assistant in English, as an adjunct instructor in Humanities and Communications at Florida State, and as an adjunct instructor in Humanities at Tallahassee Community College. Additionally, he worked as a research assistant for Florida State Department of English faculty members David Johnson and Dennis Moore. While completing his coursework, Mr. Bickley also helped to develop and teach

the Humanities core courses at Christ Classical Academy, Tallahassee, a classical preparatory school. Beginning in 2010, Bickley has worked full-time as Instructor in English Composition, Humanities, and English literature at Bainbridge College, Bainbridge, Georgia, where he has also served on several administrative and curriculum committees. Bickley regularly leads study-abroad groups, including trips to Italy (May 2012 and July 2010), Scotland (May 2011), and England (May 2006). His dissertation, “Dreams, Visions, and the Rhetoric of Authority” (Fall 2012), was directed by David Johnson. His other doctoral committee members were Dr. Nancy de Grummond, Dr. Francois Dupuigrenet Desroussilles, and Dr. Matthew Goff. Bickley graduated with a Ph.D. in Humanities (Spring 2013).

Among his scholarly works, Bickley wrote an essay on a southwestern plains Native American tribe for *Humanities Magazine* (1998), published an article on Woody Allen’s *Deconstructing Harry* (1997) in a casebook on the writer/director (Routledge, 2001); co-authored a 7,000-word introduction and bibliographical material for the Penguin Classics edition of Joel Chandler Harris’s *Nights with Uncle Remus* (2003); and published entries on George Cary Eggleston and Thomas Harriott for *Southern Writers: A New Biographical Dictionary* (LSU Press, 2006). In 2010, he read a paper on filmic adaptations of prophetic visions in Luc Besson’s *The Messenger* (1999) at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Medieval Association (Roanoke). His feature-length screenplays include *The Arroyo* (co-writer; co-producer, 2012), *Reagan’s War* (writer, 2011-2012), and *Courage* (co-editor, 2012). Bickley has also co-written eight investigative television reports on crony capitalism (in production).