The dream vision is often placed under the general heading of revelation literature or is considered as merely an unsurprising development of the general fascination with dreams in Classical or Biblical narratives, but this classification is too general and actually blunts the special dynamics of the form as Guillaume de Lorris, Chaucer, and the rest understood it. Though the form borrows much from revelation literature and from the many narratives of antiquity which feature dreams as events, its origins lie elsewhere, in the psychology, philosophy, and literary theory of the late Middle Ages. Nonetheless, to understand the impact of the late medieval dream vision we must perceive its special relationship to the apocalypse and to the dream-as-narrative-event, because these two "real" categories define the ontological space which the dream vision occupies.

For the dream vision is a self-conscious anomaly, an unaccountable and "impossible" experience, unlike the apocalypse and the somatic dream. It exists, we shall see, in the space between the literary categories of apocalypse and narrative dream. As an analogy, consider Todorov’s definition of the fantastic:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is a victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and
the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has
indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is
controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an
imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living
beings—with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently.

The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we
choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring
genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation
experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting
an apparently supernatural event.  

In Todorov’s definition, the “neighboring genres” of the uncanny
and the marvelous are both directly apprehensible: the first is finally
seen to acquiesce in the laws of nature while the second does not.
The fantastic, in Todorov’s definition, neither affirms nor violates
those laws of nature: it is somehow neither A nor not A. And its
power as a literary mode directly derives from its impossible, anom­
alous hesitation or suspension between comprehensible ontological
statuses.

It is a similar notion of hesitation, of suspense, that characterizes
the dream vision, and a similar assault on law, on category, on tax­
onomy that characterizes its effect. The purpose of this chapter and
the next is to present and analyze the two twin medieval taxonomies
within which or above which the dream vision is suspended. Here I
will examine the literary context of the dream vision, the two appre­
hensible poles of dream-as-narrative-event and apocalypse be­
tween which the dream vision existed. In the next chapter I will
describe the development and maturity of a parallel psychological or
scientific taxonomy of dreams and visionary experiences derived
from Macrobius and Patristic sources and will show that the literary
form consciously and deliberately beggars both of these systems of
classification to achieve its unique poetic effect.

Both this chapter and the next will include texts and examples
familiar to medieval writers like Chaucer, but they will also include
examples utterly unfamiliar to them. The reason for discussing such
texts as the Oneirocriticon of Artemidorus of Daldis or Gilgamesh
or the Oresteia is to show that the literary and oneiric classifications
of dreams and visions which the dream vision deconstructs are not
only ancient and ubiquitous but also essential for the rational ordering of experience in any culture.

The Dream-as-Narrative-Event

As a motif in narrative literature, the dream is as old as literature itself. In fact, the earliest extant work of literature, the epic of Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, is a surprisingly appropriate place to begin a characterization of the dream as an event in third person narratives. A representative use of the dream as a message from the gods (a "theogonic" dream) is this passage at the beginning of the narrative, following the report of Gilgamesh's dream foretelling the coming of the wildman Enkidu:

Now Gilgamesh got up to tell his dream to his mother, Ninsun, one of the wise gods. 'Mother, last night I had a dream. I was full of joy, the young heroes were round me and I walked through the night under the stars of the firmament, and one, a meteor of the stuff of Anu, fell down from Heaven. I tried to lift it but it proved too heavy. All the people of Uruk came round to see it, the common people jostled and the nobles thronged to kiss its feet; and to me its attraction was like the love of woman. They helped me, I braced my forehead and raised it with thongs and brought it to you, and you yourself pronounced it my brother.'

The situation seems simple—the goddess Ninsun sends her son a dream telling him to expect Enkidu, a monstrous alter ego with whom Gilgamesh must do battle before the two "brothers" become friends and set out on their adventures together. This interpretation is obvious to the reader, who has reached this point in the narration after reading of the gods' displeasure with the hero, his wildness, his recklessness, and his need for an equal "like him as his own reflection, his second self, stormy heart for stormy heart." Further, in the passage immediately preceding the dream report above, the magic lover of Enkidu tells him that Gilgamesh will be informed of his coming in a dream.

The difficulty of course is that the dream fails to do this, fails to communicate its intended message to Gilgamesh, who must turn to the source of the dream to ask what it (she) meant. Thus, given the fact that the dream is so enigmatic that it fails to impart its message
and serves only as the occasion for Gilgamesh to ask Ninsun to interpret it, why then include it at all? Why not simply have Ninsun tell her son to expect Enkidu?

The answer to this question is crucial to our understanding of the dream as a narrative event, for this "unnecessary" and ineffective dream produces many of the same psychological and esthetic effects as does the Book of the Duchess or Pearl. First and most important, the dream is here, however paradoxically, a device of literary realism: in Gilgamesh, the gods speak, at least initially, not in clouds or apparitions but through a medium that each of us has experienced. Considered in this way, dream-events bridge the gap between the highly favored hero and us lesser folk and thus allow the pleasure of vicarious adventure to be found in primitive narratives such as Gilgamesh. In this perspective, the fact that Gilgamesh cannot unravel his dream is not at all remarkable—we cannot usually unravel our dream-messages from the gods either. This tiny fact allows readers the momentary thrill of wild imaginings; if they could but remember and interpret their dreams as Gilgamesh can, then perhaps the riddles of their lives could be solved and they too could hear the arcana verba, a privilege allowed to none on earth.

The second psychological effect of the dream is almost as important as the first, and one which builds on the matters of interpretability and enigma just introduced. We have seen that the text of Gilgamesh is constructed so as to make the dream immediately apprehensible to readers but not to the dreamer himself, who must rely on the interpretive powers of his goddess-mother. The obvious effect of this structure is to enhance the readers' pleasure by predestining their intellectual superiority to the hero: not only can readers imagine themselves in Gilgamesh's situation; they can imagine themselves handling it better. This sense of superiority will become a conventional element in the dream vision throughout its history—Amant, Geoffrey, Margery's father, Long Will, and Skelton's Drede all share an absolute inability to see what is right there in front of them. The ultimate use of this motif, that of the naive-obtuse-unfit narrator in the dream vision, is far more sophisticated
than it is here, but the early interpretive superiority of readers to dreamer in the dream vision plays a crucial role in suspending the poem between forms.

These two qualities, the realistic depiction of communication with the gods and the element of enigma (if only for the dreamer), are common to most uses of the dream in primitive or Classical narrative literatures. Their combination for dramatic purposes is nicely illustrated in the report of Clytaemnestra's snake dream in Choephoroi. At the grave of Agamemnon, Orestes asks the chorus why Clytaemnestra has ordered funeral offerings for the man she murdered:

**Chorus:**
I know, child, I was there. It was a dream she had. The godless woman had been shaken in the night by floating terrors, when she sent these offerings.

**Orestes:**
Do you know the dream too? Can you tell it to me right?

**Chorus:**
She told me herself. She dreamed she gave birth to a snake.

**Orestes:**
What is the end of the story then? What is the point?

**Chorus:**
She laid it swathed for sleep as if it were a child.

**Orestes:**
A little monster. Did it want some food?

**Chorus:**
She herself, in the dream, gave it her breast to suck.

**Orestes:**
How was her nipple not torn by such a beastly thing?

**Chorus:**
It was. The creature drew in blood along with the milk.

**Orestes:**
No void dream this. It is the vision of a man.

**Chorus:**
She woke screaming, out of her sleep, shaky with fear, as torches kindled
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all about the house, out of the blind dark that had been on them, to comfort the queen. Now she sends these mourning offerings to be poured and hopes they are medicinal for her disease.6

The principal curiosity of this passage from Aeschylus is that Clytaemnestra evidently did not understand the meaning of her dream, which is so clear to both Orestes and to readers. The simplest explanation for this lack of insight on her part is that, like her victim Cassandra, Clytaemnestra is cursed with prophetic powers from which she cannot benefit, powers manifest in haunting, fatalistic realizations apprehended by all but the seer. This dream, like that of Pilate’s wife in the Gospels (see page 32), is not a revelation or a warning from on high but a vaguely decorative taunt, almost a divine tease. The gods clearly approve of Orestes’ plan of revenge and, in effect, participate in it by supplying psychological torment for Clytaemnestra. At the very least, the gods use the dream to underscore the ineluctability of the events to come. The effect of this dream is, then, like that of Gilgamesh’s: to make visible to readers the immanent divine order controlling the narrative. The dreamer, even if he is a hero, is regularly denied this intelligence by divinities who keep the evidence of their intervention hidden from actors and reveal it only to seers, on whom wise heroes rely for information and advice.

Clytaemnestra’s dream illustrates yet another use to which the dream was regularly put in ancient (and medieval) narratives: dream events serve as substitutes for depictions of the inner life of characters. Literature has always been faced with the problem of describing the inner turmoil of characters in narratives; actions need motives and characters, if they are to be realistic, must somehow be provided with reasons for doing the things they do. The literatures of various periods have developed various conventional mechanisms to meet this need, such as psychomachia, the dramatic aside or soliloquy, and the modern convention of the omniscient narrator. The dream event was often used as another such mechanism, a device especially useful in accounting for unexpected or remarkable decisions or transformations in characters (and a mech-
anism, by the way, neither more nor less artificial than any other). Clytaemnestra's offering at Agamemnon's grave and Ebeneezer Scrooge's Yuletide metamorphosis are both explained or "covered" by dramatic dream events. Especially for cultures that lacked popular terminology for (or interest in) the inner life, ones which lacked words like "tension," "emotion," and "motive" borrowed from physics and metaphors like being "torn between" two courses of action, dreams were a useful device for imposing (if not achieving) psychological realism. There may have been others available, such as the portent ("In hoc signo vinces") or the apparition, but the dream is far more interesting and dramatically rich because its origins are so ambiguous: Scrooge's disclaimer to Marley about undigested beef and Clytaemnestra's "I accept nothing from a brain that is dulled with sleep" both testify with Pertelote's dissertation that dreams can have mundane causes. On one level, these mundane causes allow dreamers to discount their dreams while readers do not; more importantly, though, the ambiguity of the dream allows authors to portray powerful, even obsessive motivation in characters without needing explicitly to resort to supernatural agency or to the hyperbolic language that so often invades poetry during and after the Renaissance.

The most extended treatment of the dream as a narrative event in Greek literature must be the crucial series of dreams in Book Seven of Herodotus' History. A long and painful session with his advisors had finally convinced Xerxes that it was unwise to lead an army into Greece:

When he had thus made up his mind anew, he fell asleep. And now he saw in the night, as the Persians declare, a vision of this nature—he thought a tall and beautiful man stood over him and said, "Hast thou then changed thy mind, Persian, and wilt thou not lead forth thy host against the Greeks, after commanding the Persians to gather together their levies? Be sure thou dost not well to change; nor is there a man here who will approve thy conduct. The course that thou didst determine on during the day [i.e., to attack, a decision Xerxes reached before the Council], let that be followed."

The dream troubles Xerxes, but on its authority alone he does not
change his mind about the invasion; thus, the next morning, on the advice of his uncle Artabanus, he announces once more that he will not lead the Persian host against Greece.

The next night, Xerxes receives another dream visitation, and this time the interlocutor is perturbed that his earlier advice was ignored by the king:

Son of Darius, it seems thou hast openly before all the Persians renounced the expedition, making light of my words, as though thou hadst not heard them spoken. Know therefore and be well assured, that unless thou go forth to the war, this thing shall happen unto thee—as thou art grown mighty and puissant in a short space, so likewise shalt thou within a little time be brought low indeed.9

This second visitation rattles Xerxes, who sends for Artabanus and recounts to him the oracular experiences he has had now for two nights. Artabanus is highly sceptical but finally accedes to a rather harebrained test of the dreams’ value: he agrees to wear Xerxes’ robe and crown and to sleep on the king’s couch to see if he too might receive the dream. Artabanus sensibly objects that a prescient god might conceivably recognize that the sleeper isn’t Xerxes but, in the end, falls asleep on his nephew’s couch and, sure enough, dreams a dream himself:

Thou art the man, then, who, feigning to be the tender of Xerxes, seekest to dissuade him from leading his army against the Greeks! But thou shalt not escape scathless, either now or in time to come, because thou hast sought to prevent that which is fated to happen. As for Xerxes, it has been plainly told to himself what will befall him, if he refuses to perform my bidding.10

The awakened Artabanus, not surprisingly, now argues passionately for the invasion, convinced that the three dreams proceeded from the gate of horn, the gate of true revelation.

And of course the dreams did reveal that the Persian invasion of Greece was fated, though it was no less fated that the invasion should fail. Thus, the Greek historian records what we must take to be a case of monstrous divine duplicity, the gods sending a tantalizing invitation to the haughty enemy of the Greeks, an invitation
which, when followed, humbled him before his divinely favored enemies.

A look at the dream-event in Scripture reveals both similarities to the Greek examples and profound differences as well. The dream in the Old Testament is still a device of literary realism, but it is one from which most of the ambiguity, enigma, and hence danger, have been removed. The dream in the Bible is typically symbolic like the examples just considered, but the Biblical dreams are normally interpreted both by their dreamers and by others without difficulty, a change owing (in part, no doubt) to the revolutionary Hebrew conception of a benevolent god, a deity lacking the capriciousness and perversity of the Olympians and other primitive gods. Jacob's dream at Bethel is a representative example:


(Genesis 28: 12-14)

And he saw in a dream a ladder standing upon the earth with its top touching Heaven. Angels of God ascended and descended it, and, resting against the ladder, the Lord said to him: "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you sleep I give to you and to your progeny."11

Jacob's comment on awakening, "Vere Dominus est in loco isto, et ego nesciebam" ("Truly the Lord is in this place, but I did not realize it"), identifies the dream as a true vision of God and not as a meaningless everyday dream.

The dream of Jacob's ladder is fairly representative of the use of the dream as a narrative event in Scripture. It is at once believable and special because, while all of us have dreams, few of us have dreams which are so strikingly communicative. It is true that this dream is a sign of Jacob's special favor with God; it is, however, also true that, like the dreams of Gilgamesh or Clytaemnestra, this dream functions as a source of motivation in literature that had no vocabulary for describing the powerful impulses that move charac-
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ters in religious narratives. It would not have done to say simply that Jacob got the feeling that Bethel was an especially holy place; the Scripture writer needs (for various reasons) to exteriorize this intuition by giving it a divine origin. Like the voice of God speaking through the mouths of the prophets, the dream motif is a technique for normalizing and exteriorizing—for “realizing” in the original sense of that word—the sure and special presence of God.

In its enigma too, this dream resembles the Sumerian and Greek examples. As a symbolic artifact, this dream is not appreciably clearer than Gilgamesh’s or Clytaemnestra’s dreams: all are figurative with specific personal applications which must be grasped by their dreamers. Their principal difference lies in the mere fact of their interpretability—Jacob understands his dream because God sees to it that he does. This is not, I stress, owing to the transparency of Jacob’s dream or to the opacity of the others but is a fact of the narrative. Perhaps the Jews are smarter than the Greeks or Sumerians, and perhaps God inspires them—it is never explained; in whichever case, whenever a Jew or another person in favor with God has a dream in the Old Testament, the favored dreamer can regularly figure out what it means. When an enemy has a dream, that is frequently another matter.

The implications of this difference—interpretability—are important ones for the dream vision. In Western Judeo-Christian religious narratives, the dream is not regularly enigmatic or elusive: the God of the Jews and Christians did not regularly play games with humans as the Olympians did. Thus, to claim that the late medieval dream vision draws on the enigmatic excitement of the Scriptural dream is somewhat misleading. The enigma of dreams in the Middle Ages (as in the Bible) generally lay not in what God was saying but in whether or not it was God that was talking; that is, in whether the dream had earthly or divine origins. Old Testament writers regularly condemned dream interpretation as a form of magic and paganism because (we may infer) Yahweh does not treat His people so contumeliously as to speak to them in riddles. When the God of Abraham your father and Isaac decided to speak to one of His creatures, He did so openly and explicitly.
In Greek literature and in the Old Testament, then, we may generalize that dreams were used to show the dreamer’s favor with God and to move stories along in a way that would not strain credibility. Everyone dreams, yet few of us can remember our dreams in great detail and fewer still of us can rehearse our dreams so that their relevance to our life and its decisions becomes clear. In the non-scriptural examples, the dreamer needs another party to explain the meaning of the dream, a fact which permits folk like Elektra or Chryses or Ninsun to interpret them or remain silent for their own gain or to the ruin of wrongdoers. The God of the Old Testament, consistently more personal and paternal, communicates with people in the same way, although His enigmatic dreams are almost always interpretable to those who receive them.

The Gospels also contain many premonitory and prophetic dreams and, as a rule, these dreams are even less ambiguous and mysterious than the Old Testament examples (and considerably less arresting as narrative events). An angel appears to Joseph in Nazareth, for example, to lay to rest any doubts he had about his pregnant fiancée; this dream, with deft comic touches added, became a favorite feature of medieval plays of the Annunciation. The two best examples of this sort of dream event, though, are those granted to Joseph and to the Magi, dreams warning them of the danger to the Christ Child:

Et responso accepto in somnis ne redirent ad Herodam, per aliam viam reversi sunt in regionem suam. (Matthew 2: 12)

And, following the advice which came to them [the Magi] in a dream, that they not return to Herod, they returned to their own land by another route.


The Lord appeared to Jospeh in a dream, saying: Arise and take the boy and his mother from here until I tell you to return, for Herod is going to seek out the boy to kill him.

These are not ordinary dreams, either to us or to medievals, and the very terminology used to describe them seems to underscore this.
Specifically, the warnings were not the dreams: the preposition "in" in both cases tells us that the extraordinary communications occurred "in" (i.e., during) sleep or dreams, taking advantage of the spiritual or psychic openness which, it was commonly believed, was a property of sleep.\textsuperscript{12}

If these dreams seem somewhat shrouded in mystery, in special phrasing that seems to set them apart from our own everyday dreams, the dream of Pilate's wife seems more commonplace, more fully realizing the ambiguity of the Greek examples. As he sits in judgment on Jesus, Pilate receives a message from his wife:

\begin{quote}
Sedente autem illo pro tribunali, misit ad eum uxor eius, dicens: Nihil tibi, et iusto illi: multa enim passa sunt hodie per visum propter eum.
\textit{(Matthew 27: 19)}
\end{quote}

Even as he sat in judgment on Jesus, his wife sent a message to him: Have nothing to do with this just man, for I have learned much about him in a dream today.

This dream is an important contrast to the wonderful dreams of the beginning of the New Testament, the passages "in somnis" just considered, for this dream is a true quotidian premonition, a mysterious, in some ways egregious, piece of divine intelligence. Pilate's wife appears in no other place in the Gospels, and the mention of her dream at this point in the Passion serves no narrative purpose other than to heighten the drama and pathos of a scene that needs more of neither. Indeed, the dream is, in its narrative, actually more than egregious: if Pilate had heeded his wife's warning and had not turned Jesus over to the Jews, then the Redemptive act, the center of human history, would have been thwarted. This fact alone should call the origin of the dream into question.

In some ways, this dream is like Clytaemnestra's dream of the snake, little more than a gratuitous reminder that the readers are witnessing important events fraught with theological significance, tensions that express themselves in premonitions. The phrase, "per visum," itself suggests this nonauthoritative origin, or at least it would have to medieval readers. \textit{Visum} was a technical term in me-
Dieval oneiromancy which never referred to a divinely inspired dream; a visum was normally characterized as a hallucination or daydream or (in its more sinister sense) the incubi or bogeymen experienced in the moments between waking and sleep. This would mean, at least to a medieval reader of the Bible and of dream visions, that the dream of Pilate’s wife was not one of those special and rare communications from God but was something more mysterious and exciting, perhaps Satan’s last attempt to frustrate Salvation History by preventing the sacrifice of the Son of God.

The complexity and suggestivity of the dream motif in narrative is best illustrated in Roman literature. In ways that the writers of Scripture could not, the Latin poets used the dream as an effective dramatic device—taunting, premonitory, yet always ambiguous. One of the best examples of the dream as a narrative event in Latin literature can be found in Book Four of the Aeneid: Aeneas’ dream on the night before he leaves Carthage illustrates fully both the power and the enigma of the motif. Earlier in the book, in a waking vision, Aeneas receives a scolding from Mercury:

*tu nunc* Karthaginis altae
fundamenta locas pulchramque uxorius urbem
exstruis? heu, regni rerumque oblite tuarum!
ipse deum tibi me claro demittit Olympo
regnator, caelum et terras qui numine torquet,
ipse haec ferre iubet celeris mandata per auras:
quid struis? aut qua spe Libycis teris otia terris?
si te nulla mouet tantarum gloria rerum
[nee super ipse tua moliris laude laborem,]
Ascanium surgentem et spec heredis Iuli
respice, cui regnum Italiae Romanae tellus
debetur.

Are you
now laying the foundation of high Carthage,
as a servant to a woman, building her
a splendid city here? Are you forgetful
of what is your own kingdom, your own fate?
The very god of gods, whose powers sway
both earth and heaven, sends me down to you
from bright Olympus. He himself has asked me
to carry these commands through the swift air:
What are you pondering or hoping for
while squandering your ease in Libyan lands?
For if the brightness of such deeds is not
enough to kindle you—if you cannot
attempt the task for your own fame—remember
Ascanius growing up, the hopes you hold
for Iulus, your own heir, to whom you are owed
the realm of Italy and the land of Rome.

Such an experience has very little to do with the medieval dream
vision; it is closer, oddly enough, to the divine visitations of the New
Testament than to the *Hous of Fame*. Mercury does not speak to
Aeneas in a dream; the passage is represented as an apparition,
which always marked a privileged communication from a divine
protector. Further, the message of the vision is not truly premonitory
but rather speaks of Aeneas' fated future with casual assurance.
Aeneas is represented as dragging his feet in the divinely ordered
plan for the founding of Rome: he is an insider, a full and fully
informed participant who needs to be reminded of his special role.

Later in the same book, Aeneas has a dream. On the evening
before he is to leave Carthage, he sleeps on the stern of his ship and
sees Mercury again:

Aeneas celsa in puppi iam certus eundi
carpebat somnos rebus iam rite paratis.
huic se forma dei uultu redeuntis codem
obtulit in somnis rursusque ita uisa monere est,
omnia Mercurio similis, uocemque coloremque
et crinis flauos et membra decora iuventa:
'nate dea, potes hoc sub casu ducere somnos,
nec quae te circum stent deinde pericula cernis,
demens, nec Zephyros audis spirare secundos?
illa dolos dirumque nefas in pectore uersat
certa morti, variosque irarum concitat aestus.
non fugis hinc praecox, dum praecipitare potestas?
iam mare turbati trabibus saevasque uidebis,
conlucere faces, iam feruere litora flammis,
si te his attigerit terris Aurora morantem.
heia age, rumpe moras. uarium et mutabile semper
femina.' sic fatus nocti se immiscuit atrae.

Aeneas on the high stern now was set
to leave; he tasted sleep; all things were ready.
And in his sleep a vision of the god
returned to him with that same countenance—
resembling Mercury in everything:
his voice and coloring and yellow hair
and all his handsome body, a young man's—
and seemed to bring a warning once again:
"You, goddess-born, how can you lie asleep
at such a crisis? Madman, can't you see
the threats around you, can't you hear the breath
of kind west winds? She conjures injuries
and awful crimes, she means to die, she stirs
the shifting surge of restless anger. Why
not flee this land headlong, while there is time?
You soon will see the waters churned by wreckage,
ferocious torches blaze, and beaches flame,
if morning finds you lingering on this coast.
Be on your way. Enough delays. An ever
uncertain and inconsistent thing is woman."
This said, he was at one with the black night. 15

This passage stands in subtle but important contrast to the earlier vision. While the earlier waking experience was a warning, it alerted Aeneas not to any impending danger but rather chastised him for his forgetful and irresponsible behavior in staying at Carthage. The vision expressed the gods' displeasure with a hero who had put aside his fated duty in favor of Dido, Carthage, and the saner life of a mere man. In fact, the waking visitation of Mercury is the precise opposite of a warning of impending danger in that the remainder of the Aeneid is a record of the tribulations which lie in the direction in which Mercury nudges the hero in this vision.

The dream, however, is premonitory in the short fall, a warning of immediate danger. While it certainly looks forward to Aeneas'
future mission in Italy—he could not fulfill his destiny if he is cut down in Carthage—this dream-warning is considerably less far-sighted than the vision, more rooted in the here and now. Beyond this, a medieval dream interpreter would have noticed crucial differences in Aeneas' state of mind just before the two experiences, differences which serve to distinguish the literary vision or fictional apocalypse from the dream event. Before the first (which Vergil clearly intends for us to understand as a real visitation from Mercury), Aeneas is blithely going about Dido's business without the brooding restlessness of the inactive hero. The vision is actually aimed at this very state of mind—rather than warning Aeneas against external dangers, it seeks to amend his own mind, a grave internal threat to his destiny. A medieval dream interpreter would have seen this fact as evidence that the vision was a true apparition, because it is obviously not the product of the hero's troubled conscience.

The dream, however, is far more ambiguous, far more successful as a dramatic device. Unlike the earlier vision, the dream happens at a time of worry and foreboding—unable to sleep, Aeneas sits on the stern of his ship—and is preceded in the narrative by Dido's painful speech searching for a response to Aeneas' decision to leave. Thus, both Aeneas and the readers have reason to fear the worst and thus to suspect that this second visit of Mercury is an anxiety-dream. Further, Mercury is not explicitly identified in the dream (as he was in the vision); in the later passage the reference is to "similis dei . . . redeuntis" ("the god's image returned"), which implies, if only weakly, that this present image, so remarkable for its fidelity to the first, may in fact have the first as its origin. The verb phrase "uisa monere est" similarly weakens the credibility of the dream: although the phrase is not as ambivalent in Latin as its translation, "seemed to bring a warning," might suggest, the phrase nonetheless grounds the dream in the sleeping metaphorical sight of the hero. As with the other examples, then, the use of the dream in the Aeneid is at least potentially ambiguous, perhaps suggesting divine communication, perhaps serving as a window into the emotional
life of the character, and surely advancing the narrative by providing character motivation.

As a final example of the dream as a narrative event, we may cite the following passage in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, a writer not otherwise known for credulity in such matters. Late in Book Three, Augustine relates the dream of his mother Monica and, more important, his unsuccessful attempt to deflect its meaning away from himself:

She saw herself standing upon a certain wooden rule, and coming towards her a young man, splendid, joyful, and smiling upon her, although she was grieved and crushed with grief. When he asked her the reasons for her sorrow and her daily tears—he asked, as is the custom, not for the sake of learning but of teaching—she replied that she lamented for my perdition. Then he bade her rest secure, and instructed her that she should attend and see that where she was, there was I also. And when she looked there she saw me standing on the same rule.  

Augustine the author has absolutely no doubt about the divine authority for this dream, though elsewhere in the same book of the *Confessions*—and the proximity is not accidental—he reserves his most caustic rhetoric for the superstitious beliefs of the Manichees, beliefs too absurd even for his unregenerate self (see chapter 3 below for a quotation).

Augustine's memory of his pathetic, defensive response to his mother's dream forms the coda of the story:

Unde illud etiam, quod cum mihi narrasset ipsum visum, et ego ad id trahere conarer, ut illa se potius non despararet futuram esse quod eram; continuo sine aliqua haesitatione, *Non*, inquit, *non enim mihi dictum*
While Augustine is certain of the special nature of the dream, it is for him subsumed into the universal, immanent hand of the Father leading him ineluctably on the path he is fated to take. Always the logician and rhetorician, Augustine is more unnerved at being bested in disputation by his mother (coached from on high, to be sure) than by her eerie, premonitory dream. In short, for Augustine, Monica’s dream is of a piece with the death of Alypius, the encounter with Faustus, and even with *Tolle, lege*: it is no less and no more than another of God’s ubiquitous incursions into his errant life.

These dreams as narrative events are an important literary context for the medieval dream vision, one of the two categories between which the poetic form asserted itself. These dream events in third person narratives constitute proof that everyday dreams are sometimes significant, sometimes, remarkably, vehicles for enigmatic messages from beyond. More importantly, however, these dream-events serve as powerful narrative catalysts: they suggest, inspire, and usually result in decisive, often heroic action, and therefore can be seen as a conventional method of depicting a character’s motivation in the largely externalized literatures of the ancient
world. These dreams are thus the literary forebears of works such as *Psychomachia*, the *Consolation of Philosophy*, and *Le Roman de la Rose*, in which the action that the allegory represents is wholly an intellectual one, one depicted in an external psychological grammar that is, in all fairness, the forerunner of Freud's superego, ego, and id. We shall see that the dream vision used this fundamentally psychological thrust of the narrative dream, still and always tantalized by the possibility that its origins may be more than psychological.

The Apocalypse

The second of the two literary contexts of the late medieval dream vision is apocalyptic writing, the traditional literary form which begins (in the Christian era) with the Book of Revelation and comes soon to include a remarkable body of early Christian reports of visions, ecstases, divine or angelic visitations, and deathbed ravishments into Heaven. At first glance, these works might not seem separable from the dreams-as-narrative-events just discussed (and even less separable from the dream vision), but their differences from these other forms would have been obvious and crucial to medieval readers. The most important difference, as I suggested earlier, is the context of the vision, its circumstances. Aeneas' dream of Mercury, for example, comes at a high dramatic moment in Book Four of the *Aeneid*: on the evening before his departure from Carthage, Aeneas himself senses this tension, is at first unable to sleep, and then finally falls into an uncomfortable slumber on the stern of his ship. He dreams a classic anxiety dream, resurrecting the mental image of Mercury from his earlier vision and exteriorizing his fears about Dido's response to his departure. A medieval expert would have given this dream as much credence—and the same sort of credence—as a modern psychologist would: the dovetailing of day residue in an unquiet mind thoroughly impugns the dream as a divinely originating premonition.

The apocalypse, however, has a completely different context. If an apocalypse occurs in a larger work at all, this larger work is typically "factual," a history or chronicle or spiritual biography. The visionary is never depicted as distressed or anxious; in fact, he is
always represented as worthy, pure, and totally free from worldly cares. The psychic emptiness of the visionary is conventionally emphasized in mystical tracts such as *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and its history as a requirement for mystical experience is long and distinguished: only a vessel empty of earthly concerns can accept the indwelling of the Divine Presence. And the emptiness must be a conscious emptiness, a simplicity of heart and an abstinence of mind: visionaries may occasionally be tranced or even on the point of death, but never asleep.

The other difference between the dream-event and the apocalypse is in content. The dream events in larger narratives are generally without striking or memorable content: their purpose is to advance their narratives and not to move the readers with their messages. Even Clytaemnestra's dream, however striking its imagery may be, shares this merely personal relevance, for the image of the snake is, within Aeschylus' fiction, Clytaemnestra's and not ours, and the dream report is a projection of her guilt and dramatic situation, not the readers'. The apocalypse, however, succeeds only insofar as its content is compelling and universal: the Apocalypse, for example, is comprehensible as a revelation merely by the application of Semitic and Christian iconography without any need to resort to the personality or circumstances of St. John. The Apocalypse is a framed narrative, of course, but it is one whose frame has no dramatic or formal relationship to the visionary report which it introduces: the frame of an apocalypse serves only to authenticate the vision and to normalize the visionary, that is, to assure the readers that the vision did take place and that the visionary was sane, sober, and unencumbered by emotional or physical distress. The frame thus readily dispensed with, the vision takes over completely, with all its symbols, colors, and eschatological meanings supporting a universal ethical or theological truth. To put it simply, Clytaemnestra's dream is finally about her guilt and Joseph's dream is about the imminent danger to the child Jesus, while John's vision has no personal context at all: it is from first to last an artifact transmitted by God to be experienced by all as universally applicable.

The distinction can be seen by briefly examining two later works
in the apocalypse tradition, the *Visio Sancti Pauli* and the *Visio Wettini* of Walahfrid Strabo. The *Visio Sancti Pauli* is one of the earliest and most important of the large body of apocryphal visions. It was probably written in the second century and was alleged by its author to be the lost narrative of the experience to which St. Paul refers in 2 Corinthians:

> Si gloriari oportet (non expedite quidem) veniam autem ad visiones et revelationes Domini. Scio hominem in Christo ante annos quattuordecim, sive in corpore nescio, sive extra corpus nescio, Deus scit, raptum huiusmodi usque ad tertium caelum. Et scio huiusmodi hominem sive in corpore, sive extra corpus nescio, Deus scit: quoniam raptus est in paradisum: et audivit arcana verba, quae non licet homini loqui. Pro huiusmodi gloriabor; pro me autem nihil gloriabor nisi in infirmitatibus meis.
> 
> (2 Corinthians, 12:1-5)

I must continue boasting—it serves no purpose—and turn now to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who, some fourteen years ago—whether in the body or outside of the body I do not know; God knows—was rapt into the third heaven. And I know that this man—either in his body or outside of it (I do not know; God knows)—was taken up into Paradise itself and there heard secret words which men are not permitted to speak. About this I boast; about myself I boast of nothing save my infirmities.

The document which purports to be the account of this vision, the *Visio Sancti Pauli*, generates from this scant Scriptural allusion a rich, dramatic first-person account of the Apostle’s rapture. The frame prologue to the vision report, a masterful little story in itself, places Paul’s visionary experience in sharp contrast to the everyday dreams of lesser men:

> Consule Theodosio Augusto minore et Cynegio, tune habitante quodam honorato Tharso, in domum que fuerat sancti Pauli, angelus per noctem apparens revelauit ei dicens ut fundamenta domus dissolveret et quod inuenisset palam faceret; haec autem fantasmata esse putauit.

In the consulship of Theodosius Augustus the Younger and of Cynegius, a certain nobleman living in Tarsus, in the house which was that of Saint Paul, an angel at night appeared to him, saying that he should open the foundations of the house and should publish what he found, but he thought that these things were dreams.
As the frame narrative continues, we learn that the homeowner refused to follow the instructions of the angel until the heavenly visitor had come a second, and then a third time: his feeling after three such messages was that these might be more than "fantasmata." Set beside Paul's meticulous insistence on having been rapt into Heaven, this sympathetic depiction of the homeowner's scepticism about dreams in *somnio* amounts to a convenient index to the different perceptions of dream and vision in the early Christian era. The dream was suspect and unreliable: no one could expect the poor homeowner to tear his house down on the authority of a mere dream. Only after three such messages—recall the cumulative effect of the repeated dreams in Herodotus—does the homeowner, still with misgivings, dig up his foundation.

The apocalyptic vision is different, special. Paul does not report that he was asleep when he had it, and his Apostolic authority and reputation for no-nonsense bluntness make the *Visio* instantly authoritative and precious (or at least this was the intention of the author). The reference to dreams in the frame prologue is thus a rhetorical strategy designed to place the subsequent vision in a context which will remind readers of the received distinctions between the worthless dream and the divine revelation.

This formula for revelation-writing, based ultimately on the *Book of Revelation* itself and locally on the *Visio Sancti Pauli* and its contemporaries, became the ironclad convention for a millennium of Christian ecstasis writers. Literally scores of visions, ecstatic accounts, and at least one "visionary novel" (*The Pastor of Hermes*) were written in the first centuries of the Christian era, and all of these emphasize the implicit ground rules of the *Visio Sancti Pauli*: that visions are not dreams and that the context, introduction, and "environment" of a vision must identify it as a qualitatively different experience from that of the dream. Time after time in these apochryphal writings, the authors use the Pauline formulas "*raptus in caelum*" and even "*sive in corpore, sive extra corpus*." Along with this conscious adherence to the tradition, these writings, such as the visions of Sedrach, Our Lady, St. John, and many others, explicitly insist that they are records of waking visions and not of dreams, an
emphasis that continued throughout the long history of the ap­
calypse genre. In the ninth century, for example, Walahfrid Strabo elaborately assures us that the visionary Brother Wetti is awake:

Turn frater: "Non mensa placet, non pabula prosunt.
Cedo locum, compellor enim feritate doloris
Strata videre mea. Haec aliam portate sub umbram."
Tolluntur stramenta aliamque feruntur in aedem
Continguum cellae quam cenatum ante petivit.
Ergo ubi membra suo componit languida lecto,
Conclusis oculis penitus dormire nequiebat.
Spiritus ecce doli foribus processit apertis
Clericus in specie, frontis latuere fenestrae,
Ut nec signa quidem parvi videantur ocelli.

Then brother Wetti said: "It upsets me to be at table; the food does me no good. I give up my place; a severe pain forces me to look to my bed; please carry this bed to another room." His bed was lifted up and taken to another room next to the cell to which he had come to take his meal.

He had laid down his limbs on his couch, closed his eyes, but had not yet been able to fall into a deep sleep, when suddenly the spirit of guile came through the open doorway. He was dressed as a priest; the apertures of his brow were shrouded in darkness so that not so much as the gleam of an eye could be seen.²²

The quotation is significant because it represents a late but still "se­
rious" survival of the tradition, the conventions of which have been solidified into final guarantors of verity. Strabo, Hincmar, Bede, and the rest, out of touch with the original Christian impulse to apoca­
lypse, imitated the form conscious of dangers not appreciated or realized in the first centuries of the Christian era: what if this is just a silly dream, a phantasm? Of what value is it then? To protect the truth claims of these narratives, the writers typically included elabo­
rate disclaimers (such as Strabo's above), shrilly assuring readers that the visionary is not asleep—at the point of death, in ecstasy, semiconscious, even delirious from starvation, but not asleep.

Another crucial convention in these writings is their absolute in­
sistence on third person narration. Even in 2 Corinthians, St. Paul adopts the form to describe his own experience: "Scio hominem in Christo" ("I know man in Christ"). In his introduction to the Visio
Wettini, David Traill theorizes that this third person narration became conventional for a variety of reasons: to avoid the credibility problems in relying on the visionary as reporter as well, and to provide a voice external to the experience to assure readers that the visionary was a normative and trustworthy individual, one, for example, who hadn’t eaten that night and would thus have no pollutants in his stomach. In short, the narrator was a moderator who could take pains to investigate and guarantee the validity of the vision (at least circumstantially), pains avoided with a vengeance by dream vision writers.23

The later history of the apocalypse is outside the scope of this study, but it is relevant to show just how it diverged rhetorically and thematically from the medieval dream vision. In the eleventh century, we find the Visio Episcopus Goliardis, which uses the conventional motifs for playful, parodic purposes:

A tauro torrida lampade Cynthii
 Fundente iacula ferventis radii,
 Umbrosas nemo ris latebras adi,
 Explorans gratiam lenis Favonii.
 Aestivae medio diei tempore,
 Frondosa recubans Iovis sub arbore,
 Astantis video formam Pythagorae;
 Deus scit, nescio, utrum in corpore.
 Ipsam Pythagorae formam aspicio,
 Inscriptam artium schemate vario.
 An extra corpus sit haec revelatio,
 Ultrum in corpore, Deus scit, nescio.

In May, when fall Apollo’s rays
 Like bright hot spears in showers,
 I wander, sweetened by Zephyrus
 In secret woodland bowers.
 At noon, upon this summer’s day
 In Jove’s oak’s shade, as I resting lay,
 I see Pythagorus’ form stand there:
 God knows if in body—I cannot say.
 I see Pythagorus himself,
 Who wrote, of all the arts, the scheme,
In this vision, the standard Pauline formula is put into a comic, even satiric context. This does not mean, of course, that the revelation form was bankrupt in the eleventh century; it does mean, when one notices how its conventions have become merged with the terminology of classical antiquity, that if the form was not obsolescent by this time, it was at least dryly and predictably conventional.25

A semisecular tradition of vision writing also exists in the later Middle Ages, a tradition dating back to the "Vision of Er." Though works in this lineage often swing close to the overtly religious apocalypse (and less often to the dream vision), their development is fairly independent. The major works in this Platonic visionary tradition are Prudentius’ Psychomachia, Martianus Capella’s De Nuptiis Mercuriae et Philologiae, and, of course, The Consolation of Philosophy. For a variety of reasons, these important poems lie outside the provenance of this book; though their influence on Guillaume de Lorris and Chaucer is unarguable, these allegorical visions do not have a direct formal relationship to the dream vision.

First and most important, the manner of these poems is unilaterally and uncompromisingly discursive and their mode is either naively allegorical or dialogic, unlike religious apocalypses which often included typological or historical figures as figurative elements. Consequentially, the Platonic visions seem to care little about literal credibility: it hardly matters that readers do not believe the literal truth of the "Vision of Er" or The Consolation of Philosophy, for the fruit of these texts is their doctrine and not the literal truth of their fabulous imagery. While it is appropriate that Boethius have such a vision at this low point in his life, the Boethian doctrine dramatically realized by Lady Philosophy is easily detachable from the fictional frame. In contrast, the literal truth of the religious apocalypse was crucially important to its medieval readers, as evidenced by the ecclesiastical scrutiny given to visionaries whose writings were innocuous or even completely orthodox. The Platonic vi-
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sion frame was a disposable convention, while that of the Christian apocalypse was not.

The later history of the Platonic revelation only serves to illustrate the conventionality of the form and its use for naive didactic allegory. The form experienced a major resurgence in the twelfth century in the luxuriant allegories of such as Alain de l'Isle and Bernard Silvestris. Anticlaudianus, De Planctu Naturae, and the Cosmographia were roughly contemporary with the Visio Episcopus Goliardis just quoted, but these poems, despite their power and beauty, exploit the apocalypse frame for only the barest conventional purposes. Thus, we must not confuse the profound doctrinal or philosophical influence of these works—for example, that of the Pleynt of Kynde on the Parlement of Foules or on the Roman de la Rose—with literary influence: Guillaume de Lorris, Chaucer, and Jean de Meun were greatly indebted to the Chartrean Naturalists and to other Neo-Platonists for ideas about love, nature, and even about allegory, but the form they chose to express these ideas had, we shall see, very different origins.

These two forms—the dream as narrative event and the apocalypse—are the two literary poles between which the dream vision found its existence. Their carefully contrived essences and conventions, which seem to be as old as literature itself, create a taxonomy, a structure that includes two and only two kinds of experience: one a dream in a story, a dream fraught with ambiguity and ambivalence like our own, the other a singular communication from God sent to humanity through the agency of a privileged individual. From the very beginning, the distinction between these two sorts of experience was carefully maintained by the perpetuation of formal conventions which clearly identified a given work as either a dream or a revelation. Dreams (like Clytaemnestra's or Monica's or those in the Bible) were either ordinary, albeit curious, or somebody else's; apocalypses (like St. John's or Wetti's) were, irrelevantly, somebody else's too, but their message was universal, hence impersonal, hence everybody's and nobody's.

In the beginning and within purely literary circles, this taxonomy
—it is either somebody else's dream or everybody's revelation—developed accidentally and innocently: we shall see in the next chapter that a remarkably similar, even parallel, scientific structure of exclusion, based on classical and medieval oneiromancy, developed alongside its literary analogue. This second taxonomy, one dividing dreams into revelatory dreams and your dreams, was far from accidental: it was the serendipitous discovery of the conservative fathers of the Church, which they set in stone to protect the institutional Church from dangerous visionaries and their chaotic dreams. The ultimate effect of the twin taxonomies or classifications, one literary, the other scientific, was exclusion, the exclusion of the everyday somatic dream of the ordinary person which somehow spoke to universal concerns—in short, the relevant dream.

By virtue of pressures more within the province of the psychiatrist than that of the literary historian, the dream vision was born in the space between the dream event and the apocalypse, a space between wholly dramatic and wholly didactic purposes. At one extreme, the dramatic, is the dream event. Its energy is completely focused on the story of which it is a part. In the case of the Magi or Aeneas, the dream is a source of character motivation, an internal event which advances the external events of the narrative (the return by another route, the departure from Carthage). As such, the dreams are quite pointless outside their contexts and have no didactic value: we are not moved by them to flee to Egypt or to anticipate an armed attack (or even to muse on how inconstant a thing is woman). Their point and purpose are wholly psychological: they are evidence of their dreamers' reasons (inspired or otherwise) for doing what they did. No one could live in St. Paul's house in Tarsus and not fancy that it might contain some relic, and the writer of the *Visio Sancti Pauli* understands this well; the homeowner's dream must play three times before he thinks anything of it and takes pick and shovel. Dreams as narrative events move texts.

The revelation, however, is a text. The apocalypse is generally narrated by an objective third party whose function is to add credibility to the report, and the visionary is invariably depicted as straightlaced, holy (and rather boring)—a person who doesn't have
nighlrm Shield, doesn't eat the wrong foods, and doesn't talk to imaginary playmates. This person, often a saint, and one commonly on the point of a holy, peaceful death, is so trustworthy, so far above suspicion, that he generally disappears from his own text: after all, the vision has nothing special to do with him—there is ideally no "him" for the vision to have to do with—but a special communication to the world from God that merely uses this person as a medium. Having thus neutralized the dramatic potential in the text and having established a special claim of divine communication, the vision writer is free to represent God's revealed truth without obstruction or impediment.

The dream vision draws much from these two forms. From the dream event it takes drama and an abiding interest in the personality of the dreamer as the esthetic center of the work. Like the dreams of Clytaemnestra or of Pilate's wife, the dreams of Chaucer or of the "jueler" of Pearl are uniquely psychological events inextricably tied to the personalities of their dreamers. From the apocalypse the dream vision takes a fascinated, unblinking report of a remarkable inner occasion. The form of the dream vision, a lengthy dream report framed by a brief prologue and epilogue, invites a sort of forgetfulness on the part of its readers, invites them to treat the dream report as an important, even supernal message only accidentally enclosed within an "insignificant" dream. While the dream vision does not owe a direct debt to the Apocalypse and its tradition, it is impossible to imagine a medieval reader of Pearl or of Piers Plowman or even of the Hous of Fame failing to think of St. John and his glimpse of Heaven and allowing himself to consider this unlikely revelation as a vicarious affirmation of the revelatory powers of one's own dreams.

But the dream vision did not simply establish itself between these two forms: it transcended them. Neither the narrative dream event nor the revelation can lay any special claim to irresistible rhetorical power. The dream event has little specifically rhetorical value at all, for it is simply one of a series of events in a story subject only to the limitations of realism and to the grammar of narrative causation. The revelation, while powerful, is hardly rhetorically so: ecstasis
writers generally make little attempt to enlist the readers' support or agreement beyond providing the explicit assurance that the text's import is revelatory. To do more than this would cheapen the divine message, freely given and embraceable in faith by those of faith.

The dream vision, however, does have a strategy, a typical rhetorical thrust. This strategy is the subject of chapter 4, but we may note here that the strategy inheres in the simple description of the form: the story of a man (dream event) and his dream (apocalypse). The form takes the didactic integrity and brilliance of the apocalypse and puts it in the head and in the "story" of a suspect, individual dreamer and, ultimately, draws its energy from its position or space between the two forms, a space within which readers can never be sure whether the words they read are God's or those of one who has dreams.