The relationship between the dream vision and its literary and scientific contexts is fairly clear: the poems filled parallel gaps in the two taxonomies with vicarious experiences the taxonomies denied to readers and dreamers. In literature, there were psychological dreams and revelatory dreams, but neither of these totally satisfied the real human need for a psychologically significant (or "realistic") experience—an everyday dream—that was also prescient. Readers could encounter tales of wondrous dream visitations to the men and women of the past, special, magical moments when, for a time, the chasm separating this world from the next narrowed a bit for the privileged individual. Such moments, which Artemidorus identified as "personal revelations," were wonderful and tantalizing, but they happened only to Joseph or to Aeneas or to the Magi. These dreams brought their dreamers crucial messages and demonstrated these persons' favor with God and special role in a divine plan. The dreams could come at any time, in fact did come when the dreamer least expected them, and never came when the dreamer was troubled or anxious or undecided about a course of action.

Elsewhere, readers could read apocalypses (or what Artemidorus called "universal revelations"). Unlike the personal revelations of others, these revelations were as much the readers' as the visionary's: the message belonged to all equally, and the visionary was only the medium of communication. These revelations showed readers the
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Platonic World of Forms, the Christian afterlife—visions of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven and visions of the end of the world—but they never trafficked in more mundane signs and wonders such as announcements of the return of a friend from a foreign land or hints on when to plant the crops.

The medieval science of dreams offered even less comfort and satisfaction. While the dream writers seemed to provide a mechanism for determining the worth of dreams, their systems did little more in fact than to deny their readers the very dreams they most needed and wanted: the visio, oraculum, and somnium came only to those whose minds were free of perturbation, while those beset with worry and anxiety were, ipso facto, denied the dreams that would ease their malaise. Thus, while science denied the "relevant dream" in fact, literature teased readers by denying them even its vicarious satisfaction, telling them again and again, "Io non Enea, io non Paolo sono."

It was into this environment, and actually because of it, that the dream vision was born. On the simplest of affective levels, the poetic account of the revelant insomnium provided the vicarious experience missing from the two classifications; further, in filling the gaps in the taxonomies, the dream vision called the taxonomies themselves into question.

But gaps are not origins, and overworked metaphorics is not the medium of literary analysis. Someone had to perceive these gaps or inconsistencies in the literary and scientific discussions of dreams and then fill them with a carefully constructed poetic artifact, an artifact that, like modern science fiction, draws its energy from its subtle mix of the known and the unknowable, the demonstrable and the imaginable. More specifically, a rhetoric, a form, a psychology, and a metaphysics were needed to focus and loose the affective energy latent in the classifications and in the human response to their suppression. These topics—three developments that combined to make the dream vision theoretically possible—are the matter of the following pages: first, the figmental rhetoric of Augustine and Macrobius (along with its appreciation by later writers); second, the liberation of the dream frame from its doctrinal and eschatologi-
cal subject matter by Guillaume de Lorris; and third, the contingent, democratic iconography inherent in the nominalism of the early fourteenth century.

**A Rhetoric and a Form: Augustine and Macrobius**

There is increasing evidence that hermeneutics in the Middle Ages begins with Augustine, begins in his appreciation of the subtle and sophisticated matrix of reader, text, and subject. This appreciation, gleaned from the *Confessions* and the *De Doctrina Christiana*, allows us to see Augustine anticipating the “modern” notion of a text’s existence as residing in a reader’s appreciation of it, a notion far from the traditional sense of medieval hermeneutics as textual alchemy. This is not the place to develop an Augustinian theory of reading; some remarks are necessary here, however, to illustrate the ways in which the semiotic theories of Augustine and Macrobius combined to form the basis for the rhetoric of the dream vision.

For Augustine, reading was not a form of communication; it was a means of verification, a celebration of the reader’s possession of the truth. Like every other human activity for Augustine, reading was subject to the test of *uti versus frui*, use versus enjoyment; much unlike other human activities, reading radicalizes the use-enjoyment distinction in remarkable ways. In Book One of the *Confessions*, for example, Augustine seems to be making the distinction between "reading" (verb, intransitive) and "reading something" (verb, transitive), a distinction with which Hamlet would tease Polonius:

Quid autem erat causae cur graecas litteras oderam quibus puercus im-buebar, ne nunc quidem mihi satis exploratum est. Adamaveram enim latinam, non quas primi magistri, sed quas docent qui grammatici vocantur. Nam illas primas ubi legere et scribere et numerare discitur, non minus onerosas poenalesque habebam, quam omnes graecas. Unde tamen et hoc nisi de peccato et vanitate vitae, quia caro eram, et spiritus ambulans et non revertens? (Psal. 77, 39) Nam utique meliores, quia certiores erant primae illae litterae, quibus fiebar in me, et factum est, et spiritus ambulans et non revertens? (Psal. 77, 39) Nam utique meliores, quia certiores erant primae illae litterae, quibus fiebar in me, et factum est, et spiritus ambulans et non revertens? (Psal. 77, 39) Nam utique meliores, quia certiores erant primae illae litterae, quibus fiebar in me, et factum est, et spiritus ambulans et non revertens? (Psal. 77, 39) Nam utique meliores, quia certiores erant primae illae litterae, quibus fiebar in me, et factum est, et spiritus ambulans et non revertens? (Psal. 77, 39) Nam utique meliores, quia certiores erant primae illae litterae, quibus fiebar in me, et factum est, et spiritus ambulans et non revertens? (Psal. 77, 39) Nam
amorem, cum interea meipsum in his a te morientem, Deus vita mea, siccis oculis ferrem miserrimus.

Why I detested the Greek language when I was taught it as a little boy I have not yet fully discovered. I liked Latin very much, not the parts given by our first teachers but what the men called grammarians teach us. The first stages of our education, when we learned reading, writing, and arithmetic, I considered no less a burden and punishment than all the Greek courses. Since I was but “flesh, and a wind that goes and does not return,” where could this come from except from sin and vanity of life? Better indeed, because more certain, were those first studies by which there was formed and is formed in me what I still possess, the ability to read what I find written down and to write what I want to, than the later studies wherein I was required to learn by heart I know not how many of Aeneas’ wanderings, although forgetful of my own, and to weep over Dido’s death, because she killed herself for love, while all the while amid such things, dying to you, O God my life, I most wretchedly bore myself about with dry eyes.²

This is a standard an often-quoted passage in the Confessions, recounting Augustine’s sense of shame at falling victim to the seductive wiles of classical literature. It is followed by another well-known passage enlarging on the danger of “tears for Dido” as a symptom of moral depravity, but I quote it here not for this emphasis but instead to focus on Augustine’s elliptical praise for grammar, for reading as a skill. The passage places this humble skill—and it is clearly this limited sense of the grammatici that Augustine has in mind—in moral opposition to reading some specific text as a source of pleasure or instruction: rhetoric or logic come to mind as rubrics. To be sure, Augustine here is speaking of pagan literature, but the extenuated pleasure he describes here is a pleasure to be found in any and all texts. For, after dunning himself for weeping, Augustine returns to the subject of literacy:

Sed nunc in anima mea clamet, Deus meus, et veritas tua dicat mihi: Non est ita, non est ita; melior est prorsus doctrina illa prior. Nam ecce paratior sum oblivisci errores Aeneae, atque omnia ejusmodi, quam scribere et legere. At enim vela pendent liminis grammaticarum scholae: sed non illa magis honorem secreti, quam tegumentum erroris significat. Non clament adversus me, quos jam non timeo, dum confiteor tibi quae vult anima mea, Deus meus, et acquiesco in reprehensione mal-

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Now let my God cry out in my soul, and let your truth say to me, "It is not so. It is not so." Far better is that earlier teaching. See how I am readier to forget the wanderings of Aeneas and all such tales than to read and write. True it is that the curtains hang before the doors of the grammar schools, but they do not symbolize some honored mystery but rather a cloak for error [segmentum erroris]. Let not men whom I no longer fear inveigh against me when I confess to you, my God, what my soul desires, and when I acquiesce in a condemnation of my evil ways, so that I may love your ways, which are good. Let not these buyers and sellers of literature inveigh against me if I put this question to them: "Did Aeneas ever come to Carthage, as the poet says?" For if I do, the more unlearned will answer that they do not know; the more learned will even deny that it is true. But if I ask them with what letters the name Aeneas is spelled, all who have learned this much will give the right answer in accordance with that agreement and convention by which men have established these characters among themselves. Again, if I should ask which of these would be forgotten with greater inconvenience to our life, to read and write or those poetic fables, who does not discern the answer of every man who has not completely lost his mind? Therefore, as a boy I sinned when I preferred these inane tales to more useful studies, or rather when I hated the one and loved the other. But then, "One and one are two, and two and two are four" was for me a hateful chant, while the wooden horse full of armed men, the burning of Troy, and Creusa's ghost were most sweet but empty spectacles.³

The basic distinction which this passage makes, the distinction between reading and writing as useful and practical skills and the study
of myth and literature as dangerous vanities, is a familiar one in Augustine, a man who has little use for the Latin classics and a man who has come to painful terms with his own classical rhetorical training and expertise. What is interesting about the passage, then, is not the negative side, not the rejection of the vanities of literature, but Augustine’s odd, sincere praise of the simpler, more rudimentary arts of the grammatici. At first glance, this looks like a simple anachronism: “grammar” in the Middle Ages referred to a much wider field of study than it does today, making it seem, perhaps, that Augustine is praising grammar and disparaging rhetoric. But this is not what Augustine is doing: he is contrasting simple literacy with the youthful study of classical myth and heroic poetry (though both would have been “grammatical,” at least in later medieval curricula). In effect, what Augustine is saying here is that the skill of reading (uti) is good, but that reading a text, getting lost in its details and (especially) sympathizing or identifying with a text’s characters is not: whenever Augustine recalls himself doing the latter, for example, weeping for Dido while witnessing dry-eyed his own spiritual suicide, he blanches in shame and confesses his guilt. The grammatic arts, especially spelling, are more valuable to Augustine because, although he perceives their obvious conventionality, they are coextensive with all speakers of Latin; the others, being stories, open themselves to debate, opinion, and fantasy. Augustine, therefore, seems to be suggesting here that words and meanings are equally worthless at a divine vantage point (although orthography is more stable than hermeneutics) and that the only worth that inheres in the act of reading is the invisible inner worth of a soul moving imperceptibly to God.

The distinction between intransitive and transitive reading (between “reading” and “reading something”) appears again in Augustine, in the De Doctrina Christiana, but this time the worthless chaff is not a disreputable pagan poem but, it would appear, Sacred Scripture itself:

Sic lapidum, sic herbarum, vel quaecumque tenentur radicibus. Nam et carbunculi notitia, quod lucet in tenebris, multa illuminat etiam obscura librorum, ubicumque propter similitudinem ponitur; et ignorantia ber-
The same thing is true of stones, or of herbs or of other things that take root. For a knowledge of the carbuncle which shines in the darkness also illuminates many obscure places in books where it is used for similitudes, and an ignorance of beryl or of diamonds frequently closes the doors of understanding. In the same way it is not easy to grasp that the twig of olive which the dove brought when it returned to the ark signifies perpetual peace unless we know that the soft surface of oil is not readily corrupted by an alien liquid and that the olive tree is perennially in leaf. Moreover, there are many who because of an ignorance of hyssop—being unaware either of its power to purify the lungs or, as it is said, to penetrate its roots to the rocks in spite of the fact that it is a small and humble plant—are not able at all to understand why it is said, "Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed." The "knowledge of the carbuncle" or of anything else is, it seems, useless in and of itself; indeed, the passage suggests that "knowledge" or "notitia" can include myths, superstition, folklore or any real or imaginary lore surrounding anything. This "knowledge," which we might be tempted to call "context," understood aright by those with the faith to apply it correctly to the ubiquitous theme of the love of God, becomes a verification of that love abroad in the world. It becomes part of God's "grammar" of the world, a grammar expounded by scores of patristic exegetes. The text of the world, of Scripture, and of all things, is useful (uti) only for those who wish to hear once more God's message of love; it is properly enjoyed (frui) only as a celebration of this same repeated message. Recalling the issue of Aeneas' possible landfall at Carthage, we can see that the knowledge of the carbuncle separates the ignorant from the learned, but this distinction is finally meaningless, for the ignorant may read with the same faith as the learned have and therefore find the same
truth verified. Such minutiae are, for Augustine, at best, various in­
tregnments hiding-revealing the one and only truth; at worst, they are dangerous, seductive byroads which can lead vain and unwarned readers from their wonted destination. To put it simply, then, for Augustine, intransitive reading is what we do while we are listening to the Father, listening to “my God cry aloud in my soul,” and the written, palpable words of the text, finally, need have nothing to do with that internal cry, although they may, if we are not careful, render that cry inaudible.

Like so much of the De Doctrina Christiana, this sounds impossi­
bly theoretical, but elsewhere Augustine provides an example of this special, pure, “intransitive” reading. In Book Six, Chapter Three of the Confessions, Augustine describes his friend Ambrose in a mem­
orable passage:

Cum quibus quando non erat, quod per exiguum temporis erat, aut cor­
pus reficiebat necessariis sustenaculis, aut lectione animum. Sed cum legebat, oculi ducebantur per paginas, et cor intellectum rimabatur, vox autem et lingua quiescebant.

When he was not with them [Milanese who sought his spiritual direc­
tion], and this was but a little while, he either refreshed his body with needed food or his mind [animum] with reading. When he read, his eyes moved down the pages and his heart sought out their meaning, while his voice and tongue remained silent.6

This is more than the first recorded instance of silent reading in Western letters; it is, for Augustine, a profound theological, psycho­
logical, and ethical insight. Notice that Ambrose is not reading for meaning or studying—Augustine does not even mention what it is that he is reading—he is, we are told, refreshing his mind as one refreshes his body with food, is reading for enjoyment. His eyes, silently travelling across the page, do not themselves perceive the sense, Augustine says, and neither does his mind: it is his heart which seeks the sense. In effect, Ambrose is meditating: he is, as Richard of St. Victor and the author of The Cloud of Unknowing advise, distracting or occupying his mind while opening his heart
and soul to meaning, a meaning that does not necessarily inhere in
the text. By reading silently, Ambrose avoids the seductive melodies
of classical rhetoric (on which Augustine was an expert) by refusing
to perform the text audibly, by reading (intransitive) and attending
only to the silent cry of God audible in his soul.

The most striking example of Augustinian intransitive reading is
his own experience, the sorites Vergiliana he performed in Alypius'
garden at his conversion:

Et ecce audio vocem de vicina domo cum cantu dicentis et crebro repeten-
tis, quasi pueri an puellae, nescio: Tolle, lege; tolle, lege.

And lo, I heard from a nearby house, a voice like that of a boy or girl, I
know not which, chanting and repeating over and over, "Take up and
read. Take up and read."

The rationalist Augustine assumes the chant to be part of a chil-
dren's game but, with a moment's thought, can remember no game
of which this particular phrase was a part, so

Repressoque impetu lacrymarum, surrexi, nihii aliud interpretans, nisi
divinitus mihi juberi ut aperirem codicem, et legerem quod primum ca-
put invenisssem.

I checked the flow of my tears and got up, for I interpreted this solely as a
command given to me by God to open the book and read the first chapter
I should come upon.

At this point the narration breaks off as Augustine recounts his
memory of the story of St. Anthony's belief that the words of the
Gospel he heard one day were a miraculous admonition addressed
specifically to him. This short digression, like the momentary
thought of the child's game, is an example of Augustine's sense of
hermeneutic knowledge, the "knowledge of the carbuncle" or here,
of children's games or of hagiography. This knowledge adds noth-
ing whatever to the experience; it serves simply to verify rationally
the epiphany that is taking place. And the memory of Anthony does
indeed verify and valorize Augustine's own experience, for he re-
members that

. . . tali oraculo confestim ad te esse conversum. Itaque concitus redii ad
eum locum ubi sedebat Alypius: ibi enim posueram codicem Apostoli,
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... by such a portent he was immediately converted to you.

So I hurried back to the spot where Alypius was sitting, for I had put there the volume of the apostle when I had got up and left him. I snatched it up, opened it, and read in silence the chapter on which my eyes first fell: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering or impurities, not in strife and envying, but put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh and its concupiscences." No further wished I to read, nor was there need to do so.9 [my emphasis]

The rest, of course, is history. What we need to see in this passage is the precise part that the words of Scripture play in Augustine's conversion. Augustine knew Romans 13: 13–4 well; the words were not new to him. What was special about the experience was that the words were miraculously directed to him and him alone; Augustine intuits that, like St. Anthony, "admonitus fuerit, tanquam sibi dicetur quod legebatur" ("he had been admonished ... as if the words read were addressed to him").10 Taken together with the description of Ambrose above, this passage seems to claim that (as the mystics suggest), to read Scripture is to open the heart to the real word of God by opening the eyes to His orthographic words. We fail to do this experience justice if we call it merely "identification" or, worse, "taking the words to heart," for what Augustine is describing here is a relationship of reader to text far more radical than identification: "appropriation" might be a term strong enough. For Augustine does not see himself as simply being "like" the original recipients of Paul's letter, and it is not simply that he marvels at God's timeliness in showing him these old but relevant words at this exact moment in his spiritual development: in a miraculous sense, Augustine is the recipient of the divine message, is drawn to see that he is part of a special and well-defined community of individuals that is the object of God's discourse through St. Paul.

As Augustine himself observes earlier in the Confessions, the
psychic appropriation that happens in intransitive reading is not "rhetorical" or even rational in nature. Before his conversion,

Itaque institui animum intendere in Scripturas sanctas ut viderem quales essent. Et ecce video rem non compertam superbis, neque nudatam pueris; sed incessu humilem, successu excelsam et velatam mysteriis: et non eram ego talis ut intrare in eam possem, aut inclinare cervicem ad ejus gressus. Non enim sicut modo loquor, ita sensi cum attendi ad illam Scripturam sed visa est mihi indigna quam Tullianae dignitate compararem. Tumor enim meus refugiebat modum ejus; et acies mea non penetrabat interiora ejus. Vernum tamen illa erat quae cresceret cum parvulis; sed eqo dedignabar esse parvulis, et turgidus fastu mihi grandis videbar.

I accordingly decided to turn my mind to the Holy Scriptures and to see what they were like. And behold, I see something within them that was neither revealed to the proud nor made plain to children, that was lowly on one's entrance but lofty on further advance, and that was veiled over in mysteries. None such as I was at that time could enter into it, nor could I bend my neck for its passageways. When I first turned to that scripture, I did not feel towards it as I am speaking now, but it seemed to me unworthy of comparison with the nobility of Cicero's writings. My swelling pride turned away from its humble style, and my sharp gaze did not penetrate into its inner meaning. But in truth it was of its nature that its meaning would increase together with your little ones, whereas I distained to be a little child and, puffed up with pride, I considered myself to be a great fellow.\footnote{11}

It is important to notice here that Augustine is \emph{not} saying that, in his younger, worldly days, he did not appreciate Scripture rhetorically, though now he does: the tenses and references do not permit this reading. When Augustine describes Scripture as "incessu humilem, successu excelsam et velatam mysteriis" ("humble on entrance, lofty on advance and veiled with mysteries"), he is describing it as he presently appreciates it. The point of the quotation is that the textual experience of Scripture, in contrast to what we would call the rhetorical experience of Cicero or other Latin classics, did not appeal to the young, prideful, and unregenerate Augustine. He says that the experience of Scripture was (on recollection) a humbling one: notice that the text did not repel him but rather his unfitness for it kept
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him from it: "Tumor enim meus refugiebat modum ejus..." The careful phrasing means that the younger Augustine's failure to appreciate Scripture was one of will, not of intellect or effort. The experience is thus ethical rather than rhetorical, since the impediment was not the humble text but the prideful reader. Without the humility to give faith precedence over reason and without the faith to see what he knows God has written, Augustine saw only the uninteresting and inferior rhetorical chaff, "incessu humilem." Later on, the text and its homely style have not changed at all: Augustine has changed and now can see the message "neither revealed to the proud nor made plain to children" but visible only with eyes of faith; "successu excelsam" in this sense suggests not merely "advance" or progress but, once more, "appropriation" or "embrace."¹²

This appropriation or "embrace" of Scripture (or of other special texts like the dream vision) is an embrace anterior to receiving or failing to receive a meaning from the text: for Augustine, reading Scripture is a perception of communion with its divine Author and not primarily one of communication. Such an intuition or experience of communion precedes any hermeneutic engagement with the text and is always distinct from appreciation or interpretation; the experience of the text is either one or the other. On the one hand, if the reading experience is intransitive and pride does not repel the reader, the reader will achieve this almost sacramental communion with the Author of the text. On the other hand, if the reading experience is transitive and pride and the text as object obstruct the communion of reader and Author, then the best the reader can hope for is interpretation and appreciation.

Thus humility, repulsion, and plainness are not the "defense mechanisms" of the sacred text whose purpose is to protect it from the gaze of the unworthy; these emotional responses are integral parts of the reading experience. The factual education of the Christian rhetor as laid down in the De Doctrina Christiana does nothing to diminish the humbling sacramental experience of lectio divina, but neither does it enhance this contemplative, intransitive reading; the "knowledge of the carbuncle" can only illumine the surface, the
text, and not the Author. At best, such trivia as the properties of beryl or olive oil that Augustine discusses can only verify and celebrate the true message of the text, a meaning discovered in an openness of the mind and a willingness of the heart such as Ambrose’s unforced receptiveness, his eyes travelling across the page, his tongue silent, his heart seeking the sense.

Such a rhetorical orientation is very difficult to find among the rhetoricians of the late classical period and equally rare among the early Fathers of the Church: this participatory sense of the text does not fully re-emerge in Christian thought until the mystical writers of the twelfth century and after. In fact, there is only one other writer who develops a parallel sense of the “special text,” a text that does not merely impart information but acts as a means for establishing a communion of spirits, a text that is a celebration of truths already acknowledged, a text for intransitive reading.

The writer is Macrobius. The *Commentary on the Somnium Scipionis* shares all of the notions developed from Augustine. Like Creation, the *Somnium* still bears the marks of its author, and the communion of the reader with Scipio is finally more important than the encyclopedic information encoded in the text. As Scripture is for Augustine, the *Somnium Scipionis* for Macrobius is a transcendent work that contains “the whole body of philosophy,” the sum of all knowledge.

Macrobius demonstrates the scriptural nature of his text, its fitness for intransitive reading, by an admittedly artificial expansion of Cicero’s narrative. From the smallest details in his original, Macrobius extrapolates entire sciences or bodies of knowledge which he perceives to lie latent in the *Somnium*. Like Scripture for Augustine, however, the *Somnium* for Macrobius is not a textbook from which the sciences can be extracted; on the contrary, the reader must approach the *Somnium* with prior encyclopedic knowledge to find all of philosophy verified in Scipio’s mystic vision. Again like Scripture for Augustine, the *Somnium* for Macrobius is a celebration of the truth and of that community of believers who apprehend the truth in the text “successu excelsam et velatam mysteriis.” The phi-
Philosopher reading the *Somnium* and identifying with the "rapt" Scipio finds the truths he already affirms—both scientific truths and ethical verities—embodied in the visionary experience of the Roman hero.

But Scipio's dream was a fake and Macrobius knew it. He acknowledges this fact quite early in the *Commentary* in considering the rhetorical choices open to Cicero:

> hanc fabulam Cicero licet ab indoctis quasi ipse veri conscius dolent irrisam, exemplum tamen stolidae reprehensionis vitans excitari narraturum quam reviviscere maluit.

Cicero, as if assured of the truth of this tale [*Plato's "Vision of Er"]*, deplored the ridicule it received at the hands of ignorant critics and yet, fearful of the unwarranted censure that was heaped upon Plato, preferred to have his account given by a man aroused from sleep rather than by one returned from the dead.¹³

One might assume that such an admission might have a less than salutary effect on Cicero's (and Macrobius') credibility, but such is not the case. Macrobius' response to the problem is to develop a sophisticated sense of truth-in-fiction, a heuristic in which transcendent truths may be—or may only be—expressed in self-consciously fabulous figures or analogies.¹⁴ In the next chapter of the *Commentary*, Macrobius introduces this notion:

> nec omnibus fabulis philosophia repugnatur, nec omnibus adquiescit; et ut facile secerni possit quae ex his a se abdicet ac velut profana ab ipso vestibulo sacrae disputationis excludat, quae vero etiam saepe ac libenter admitat, divisionum gradibus explicandum est.

Philosophy does not discountenance all stories nor does it accept all, and in order to distinguish what it rejects as unfit to enter its sacred precincts and what it frequently and gladly admits, the points of division must needs be clarified.¹⁵

This process of differentiation, involving distinctions between tall tales and so-called fabulous narratives, with subdivisions upon subdivisions, is a thorny one best represented graphically:
**VARIETIES OF FICTION**

*after Macrobius, *Commentary on the Somnium Scipionis, I, ii*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fabula</th>
<th>Fictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wholly fictitious</td>
<td>Narratio Fabulosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>base</td>
<td>“solid foundation of truth”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seemly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Macrobius, only the rightmost, bottommost category, the “seemly narratio fabulosa,” is fit to serve as a vehicle for philosophic exposition because only such a story is

\[
\text{sacrarum rerum notio sub pio figmentorum velamine honestis et tecta rebus et vestita nominibus enuntiatur}. \quad . . .
\]

a decent and dignified conception of holy truths, with respectable events and characters, . . . presented beneath a modest veil of allegory.\(^\text{16}\)

The next sentence makes the defense of the *Somnium Scipionis* complete by applying the distinction between unseemly fable and seemly fabulous narrative to the present text and to its Platonic forebear:

\[
\text{cum igitur nullam disputationi pariat iniuriam vel Er index vel somnians Africanus, sed rerum sacrarum enuntiatio integra sui dignitate his sit tecta nominibus, accusator tandem edoctus a fabulis fabulosa secerere conquiscat.}
\]

Therefore, since the treatises of Plato and Cicero suffer no harm from Er’s testimony or Scipio’s dream, and the treatment of sacred subjects is accomplished without loss of dignity by using their names, let our critic at last hold his peace, taught to differentiate between the fable and the fabulous narrative.\(^\text{17}\)

Macrobius next excludes certain subjects which are too lofty for even such decorous tales and then, in a crucial passage, develops an affective rhetoric for the *narratio fabulosa*:

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de dis autem (ut dixi) ceteris et de anima non frustra se nec ut oblectent ad fabulosa convertunt, sed quia sciant inimicam esse naturae apertam nudam que expositionem sui, quae sicut vulgaribus hominum sensibus intellectum sui vario rerum tegmine operimentoque subtraxit, ita a prudentibus arcana sua vostra per fabulosa tractari. sic ipsa mysteria figurarum cuniculis operiuntur ne vel haec adeptis nudam rerum talium natura se praebat, sed summatis tantum viris sapientia interprete veri arcani consciis, contenti sint reliqui ad venerationem figuris defendentibus a vilitate secretum.

But in treating of the other gods and the Soul, as I have said, philosophers make use of fabulous narratives; not without a purpose, however, nor merely to entertain, but because they realize that 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 secrets handled by more prudent individuals through fabulous narratives. Accordingly, her sacred rites are veiled in mysterious representations so that she may not have to show herself even to initiates. Only eminent men of superior intelligence gain a revelation of her truths; the others must satisfy their desire for worship with a ritual drama which prevents her secrets from becoming common.

Thus, the narratio fabulosa is elitist, though not absolutely so. As Augustine says in the De Doctrina Christiana, the initiate must be an encyclopedic philosopher to decode the fiction; one must possess all knowledge to understand, if this only is the goal. The person of simple faith, however, may embrace and revere the truths without understanding, just as Macrobius' "reliqui" ("others") may witness the ritual drama and worship at a distance. Ultimately, such people are probably better off than the "eminent men of superior intelligence" because total understanding—a perfect transitive reading—is an impossibility; both Macrobius and Augustine see their texts as unfathomably rich and teach that the initiate’s devotion is sublime not in mere comprehension but "in the embrace."

Macrobius and Augustine differ on the issue of whether the initiates should espouse or pronounce the truths they discover. Augustine’s position was, of course, "evangelical," that all doctrine should be universally promulgated, though he seemed to believe that all could never comprehend all. The De Doctrina Christiana pre-
supposes that a careful and seemly exposition of the truths of Scripture is possible, though no expert could ever be so universally knowledgeable as to understand all of Scripture's integumenta, let alone tell all to the unlearned but faithful populace.

Macrobius' view was markedly different. The very purpose of fiction for Macrobius is to insulate truths from ignorance and sacrilege, so it follows that the unworthy should not be made privy to the truth, but should instead worship its fictional representation. This strange notion of worship in lieu of understanding has a curious later history among Christian writers, as Peter Dronke has shown in an edition of a Commentary on Macrobius' Commentary by Guillaume de Conches (twelfth century). Going far beyond Macrobius, Guillaume (understandably) perceives the pagan gods themselves as fictions perpetuated to insure the proper behavior in the masses, a control actually endangered by a revelation of the truth:

Ratio est, quare nuda et aperta expositio est inimica nature deorum: scilicet ut soli sapientes sciant secreta deorum, per interpretationem integumentorum. Rustici vero et insipientes ignorant, sed tantum credant, quia si modo sciret rusticus, quod Ceres non est aliud quam terre naturalis potencia crescendi in segetes et eas multiplicandi, item quod Bacchus non est aliud quam terre naturalis potencia crescendi in vineas, non timore Bachi vel Cereris—quos deos esse reputant—retardarent se ab aliqua inhonesta actione.

There is a reason why naked and open exposition is repugnant to the nature of the gods: namely that only the wise should know the secrets of the gods, (arrived at) through the interpretation of integumenta. As for churls and foolish men, let them not know but only believe. For if a churl were but to know that Ceres is nothing other than the earth's natural power of growing into crops and multiplying them, or again that Bacchus is nothing other than the earth's natural power of growing into vines, then fear of Bacchus or Ceres—whom they think to be gods—would no longer keep them back from any dishonorable action in their way of life.\textsuperscript{19}

The fictions channel and regulate the actions and beliefs both of the wise who understand and also of the ignorant who do not. Commenting on the Macrobean phrase, "figurarum cuniculus" ("labyrinth of images," quoted earlier), Guillaume meditates:
This grand image brings together many variegated strands and concepts. The *figurarum cuniculus* is the dark, arbitrary passageway run by trusting believers in the truth, a track “humble at entrance but sublime in embrace.” This integument or covering is a human creation, worthless in itself but priceless for the truth to which it leads its trusting runners. To perceive the integument itself, to understand it, is unnecessary to perceive the truth, and the darkness makes this irrelevant investigation all the more difficult. If one has only faith, the humble and submissive runner will be led, albeit blindly, through the maze of the labyrinth. If one has only knowledge, this prideful non-runner will stand and strain to see the construction of the labyrinth, unwilling to submit to its narrow trails, unwilling to be led to the truth. If one has both faith and knowledge, then this privileged runner will occasionally glimpse the light that would blind in excess, even as he runs the *cuniculus*.  

It would be inaccurate to call these ideas drawn from Augustine and Macrobius a “rhetoric,” and even less accurate to call them the rhetoric of the dream vision. It is fair, though, to see in them a movement, a thrust in two thinkers important for the Middle Ages that extenuates or even calls into question the traditional sense of hermeneutics. To sum up the ideas, Augustine and Macrobius both radicalize the traditional “fruit and chaff” analogy to the extent that the chaff is at best irrelevant and fabricated and at worst seductive and misleading. This position may seem a bit extreme in the case of
Augustine, but the *De Doctrina Christiana* contains several passages where Augustine seems to be consciously manufacturing fruit out of the most ridiculous chaff; for example:

*Et tamen nescio quomodo suavius intueor sanctos, cum eos quasi dentes Ecclesiae video praedicere ab erroribus homines, a que in ejus corpus, emollita duritia, quasi demorsos mansosque transferre.*

Nevertheless, in a strange way, I contemplate the saints more pleasantly when I envisage them as the teeth of the Church cutting men off from their errors and transferring them to her body after their hardness has been softened as if by being eaten and chewed.\(^{22}\)

Augustine (*nescio quomodo*) enjoys this, and it is important to understand just why he does. There is, of course, no legitimate relationship between teeth and the saints according to any human perspective: the point of the comparison is that the creative intellectual exercise of (literally) *making* the comparison is an act of faith which valorizes both the perceptor and the specific detail of the physical world perceived. The exercise would not work, in fact, if a pre-existing logical or iconographic relationship were available: that would not only ruin the fun but would also eliminate the faith-communion between the perceptor and the Author, ruin the exercise of seeking the meaning with the *heart* as opposed to ascertaining it with the intellect.

Elsewhere, Augustine can be heard to announce, in effect, that there is nothing inherently holy in the lexical words of Holy Scripture or even in the word "God" (compare "Yahweh");\(^{23}\) the words are merely a necessary but contingent system of grunts kindly tolerated by a bemused deity:

*Et tamen Deus, cum de illo nihil digni dici possit, admisit humanae vocis obsequium, et verbis nostris in laude sua gaudere nos voluit. Nam inde est et quod dicitur Deus. Non enim revera in strepitu istarum duarum syllabarum ipse cognoscitur; sed tamen omnes latinae linguae scios, cum aures eorum sonus iste tetigerit, movet ad cogitandum excellentiissimam quamdam immortalemque naturam.*

For God, although nothing worthy may be spoken of Him, has accepted
the tribute of the human voice and wished us to take joy in praising Him with our words. In this way He is called Deus. Although He is not recognized in the noise of these two syllables, all those who know the Latin language, when this sound reaches their ears, are moved to think of a certain most excellent immortal nature.²⁴

In both writers, then, as this quotation from Augustine indicates, the bond between tenor and vehicle is neither inherent, intellectual, nor rational: both rhetorics operate only in faith. Without faith, Augustine’s Christian rhetoric falls apart, as does Macrobius’ Stoic-Platonic rhetoric: scoffers at the systems—pagans for Augustine, Epicureans for Macrobius—who are unwilling to suspend disbelief and enter humbly into the humble fiction, are forever shut off from the truth. Only the wise may learn all or nearly all there is to know of the veil, but all of faith can perceive the fitness and seemliness of the integumentum or narratio fabulosa, believe in the goodness of its craftsman (Craftsman), worship the unseen truths, and travel across the labyrinthine page, their tongues silent, towards ultimate communion with the craftsman in the truth.

We thus have a system that requires a surface or integument that must of necessity be self-consciously and self-evidently fictional or worthless, an artifact created by an individual artificer and designed to embody the truth for the wise and to act as a pathway to that same truth for the less-than-wise. Thus, this fiction is humble and even ridiculous at entrance but sublime in its embrace by faithful readers, a rabbit-run the twists and turns of which are pointless in themselves—though possibly amusing—and valuable only in that they lead finally to an identity or communion with the architect of the cuniculus. The end point of the work, this communion or identity, demonstrates to readers that they are part of an elect, a special community which hears the word of the Apostle and intuits it to be addressed specifically to them.

This in turn begins to describe a form. The surface of this form is an inherently worthless projection of an individual human psyche, fit and seemly, perhaps, but revelatory only of the condition of that psyche. While this surface is humble, its contents are sublime, at
least for readers whose souls are potentially congruent with that of
the fabricator of the labyrinth; for those readers who can transcend
the form and embrace the contents—"incessu humilem, successu
excelsam et velatam mysteriis" ("humble on entrance, lofty on ad-
vance and veiled with mysteries")—the dark labyrinth allows them
to see clearly insomnium.

Freedom in Parody: The Roman de la Rose

The Somnium Scipionis was the first dream vision. It was a first-
person account of a dream which suggested (but by and large failed
to develop) a complex relationship between dream and dreamer. Its
exegesis by Macrobius in the fourth century foregrounded the latent
ambiguities in the nature of the dream and also, by a strange coinci-
dence, associated Cicero’s strange, enigmatic text with a body of pro-
topsychological dream lore that was to become the standard discus-
sion of the topic for a thousand years or more. In the context of an
Augustinian rhetoric, the Somnium Scipionis and its Commentary—
the precious allegorical vision of the great auctor Cicero and its bril-
liant expansion by the polymath Macrobius—was obviously assured
a special place in late medieval learning. The twelfth and thirteenth
centuries were years of dogged search for the literary treasures of
the past and, even later, men such as Petrarch and Poggio would
embark on veritable expeditions in search of lost fragments of
Cicero and other Latin authors, but the Commentary on the Som-
nium Scipionis was already their prized possession. Cicero’s de re
publica had not yet been discovered (nor had Plato’s Republic, of
course), but the Somnium Scipionis was already theirs, thanks to the
man who explored (and often invented) its profundity, Macrobius.
Thus, Cicero, Macrobius, and a thoroughly congruent Augustinian
perspective on the integumenta of the dream-text: this was a textual
nexus ripe for exploitation by poets.

Exploitation came remarkably late in the Middle Ages. In fair-
ness, there were many dream-frame poems before the Roman de la
Rose—the allegorical spectacles of the Chartrean Naturalists, for
example—but these works were in the apocalypse tradition and
thus lacked one or more of the distinguishing marks of the dream
vision. The Chartrean Naturalists and Dante wrote visions (sometimes waking, sometimes sleeping) which imitated John’s vision on Mount Patmos or fed on a separate folkloric tradition of descents into the underworld or raptures into Heaven, while other dream poets before Guillaume de Lorris wrote visions on what should properly be called Boethian models, delicious love-debates presided over by an allegorical figure of authority, the descendant of Lady Philosophy. None of these poets fully exploited the arresting ambivalence of Cicero’s Somnium; none captured the unique epistemological crux of truth-in-fiction; none troubled themselves to present a distressed, unfit visionary whose vision transcends his unfitness.

None, that is, until Guillaume de Lorris. The Roman de la Rose must stand as the first work in a millennium which brings together the disparate rhetorical motifs of Cicero, Macrobius, and Augustine in a framework that captures the ambivalence of the opening of the Somnium Scipionis. The claim that the dream is a revelation; the broad hints that it cannot be so; the grounding of the dream-experience in an individual psyche in turmoil or distress; the ultimate, intuitively obvious import of the dream to an elite who have the faith to embrace the work: all is present, for the first time, in the Roman.

To illustrate, we need do little more than quote:

Aucunes genz dient qu’en songes
n’a sa fables non et mengonges;
mes l’en peut tex songes songier
qui ne sont mie mengongier,
ainz sont apré bien aparent, . . .

Many men sayn that in sweveninges
Ther nys but fables and lesynges;
But men may some swevenes sen
Whiche hardely that false ne ben,
But afterward ben apparaunt.  

This deft touch takes the reader immediately into the heart of the dream question and speaks directly to the inconsistency between the rational voice of authority (what “men sayn”) and the psychological
needs and realistic experience of real people (what “men may . . .

sen”). While this statement serves at its surface to decide the issue in favor of the prescient dream, the semantic structure of the sentence foregrounds and highlights the medieval ambiguity about dreams rather than smoothing it over. Thus, such an opening should hardly be read as a simple assertion that the sceptical “clerkys” are wrong; if anything, its acknowledgment of what “men sayn” reminds us of the Wife of Bath’s Prologue, in which the persona’s obsession with authority is as evident as her opposition to it.

The rhetorical complexity increases in the next few lines, as, in seemingly trying to strengthen his case for his own dream as a revelation, Guillaume introduces a decidedly recalcitrant authority:

si en puis bien traire a garant
un auctor qui ot non Macrobes,
qui ne tint pas songes a lobes,
angois escrit l’avision
qui avint au roi Scypion.
Qui c’onques cuit ne qui que die
qu’il est folor et musardie
de croire que songes aviegne,
qui se voudra, por fol m’en tiegne,
quar endroit moi ai ge fiance
que songes est senefiance
des biens as genz et des anuiz,
que li plusor songent de nuiz
maintes choses covertement
que l’en voit puis apertement.

This may I drawe to warraunt
An authour that hight Macrobes,
That halt nat dremes false ne lees,
But undoth us the avysioun
That whilom mette kyng Cipioun.
And whoso saith or wenyth it be
A jape, or elles nycere,
To wene that dremes after falle,
Let whoso lyste a fol me calle.
For this trowe I, and say for me,
That dremes signifiencue be
Of good and harm to many wightes,
That dremen in her slep a-nyghtes
Ful many thynges covertly,
That fallen after al openly.26

These lines are typically read as an appeal to the authority of Macrobius but, given the sense of Macrobius and of his work that we have developed in the last two chapters, it is hard to read these lines of Guillaume de Lorris in that way. Guillaume cites the authority of Macrobius on only two matters here, and the validity of the citations needs some scrutiny. First, Guillaume correctly attributes to Macrobius the teaching that not all dreams are necessarily false or lying and, second, credits him (as all modern classicists do) with recording and preserving the “avisioun” of Scipio. Both of these acknowledgments are technically righteous but, as we have seen, they are also severely circumscribed and undercut by Macrobius himself, in ways Guillaume and his readers must have perceived. First, though indeed he says that all dreams are not false, he does not say by any means that all are true. In fact, Macrobius’ favorite example of the worthless somatic dream, the lover’s dream of the possession of the beloved, matches the one we are about to hear all too closely, and Guillaume’s claim that the Rose-dream came true can hardly stand against the explicit disqualification in the very commentary that Guillaume cites. Second, Guillaume’s gratitude to Macrobius for recording the Somnium Scipionis is complicated, we have seen, by broad hints that the Somnium itself is a somatic dream (or, worse, a narratio fabulosa, as Macrobius admits). The question then arises, why does Guillaume de Lorris introduce Macrobius here only to do such obvious, intentional violence to his teachings and, effectively, to turn him on his encyclopedic head?

The answer to this question can be found in the next lines of Guillaume’s Prologue:

El vintieme an de mon aage,
el point qu’Amors prent le paage
des jones genz, couchier m’aloi.
une nuit, si con je souloie,
et me dormoie mout forment,
et vi un songe en mon dormant
qui mout fu biaus et mout me plot;
mes en ce songe onques riens n’ot
qui tretor avenu ne soit
si con li songes recensoit.

Within my twenty yer of age,
Whan that Love taketh his cariage
Of yonge folk, I wente soone
To bedde, as I was wont to done,
And faste I slepte; and in slepyng
Me mette such a swevenyng
That lyked me wonders wel.
But in that sweven is never a del
That it nys afterward befalle,
Ryght as this drem wol tel us alle.27

These lines maintain the precarious balance established in the preceding ones, a balance between somatic and divine explanations for the dream. Again, Guillaume makes the express claim that the events depicted in the dream subsequently came true, but he also alludes unmistakably to naturalistic explanations, noting that, after all, he has this dream at that time when “Amors prent le paage de jones genz” (“Love exacts his price from young folk”). Such a situation should remind us of exactly the same contradiction in the Som­nium Scipionis, in which Scipio offers what seems to be evidence of a somatic dream, evidence which Macrobius ignores. Officially, then, this present dream is as indeterminate as that of Scipio, one (this time consciously) suspended between contraries and satisfying the popular need for the relevant dream.

The similarity between Amant’s and Scipio’s dreams does not end here, for the operation of the God of Love is not simply a localized metaphor confined to the prologue: the figure, of course, becomes a fully-realized personification in the dream. This change in the status of “Amors”—from a conventionalized personification of love languor to a principal allegorical antagonist—deepens and changes the
ambiguity of the situation. While the metaphor of love "exacting his price" means one thing at the simple level of personification, it means something radically different if the poem itself is evidence of that exacted price: suddenly, perhaps, this dreamer is not simply in love languor but is actually the recipient of a special revelation, obsessed with divine madness, prophetic frenzy. In short, the deepening complexity of the Roman reveals the same mutual valorizing process that operated in the Somnium Scipionis: the dream is valorized by the dreamer's great devotion to the deity, while it is clear that such a holy and seemly revelation would only come to a pious follower of Cupid.

Such a reading is the only explanation for the "mes" at line 28: "mes en ce songe ongues riens n'ot qui tretot avenu" ("but in this dream there is nothing that did not later happen"). The concessive suggests that, under these circumstances, we would not normally assume that the dream would be prescient; after all, this dreamer is one of the "jones genz" debilitated by Love. The statement thus maintains the delicate balance between what "men sayn" and what "men sen" at the beginning of the poem and actually capitalizes on the status of the poet-dreamer as courtly lover. As a lover in fact, he is disqualified as a dreamer of visiones or oracula or somnia; as a lover in the mythos of courtly love, he is obviously a worthy contemplative whose temporary ariditas (analogous to the mystic's) should cause him to hope for an ultimate revelation. Such a maneuver is a stroke of genius for the courtly love poet Guillaume, who playfully transforms love languor from an obstacle to revelation to a manifestation of the new erotic "piety" that authorizes revelation.

The next lines of the Prologue complete the strategic parallel with the Somnium Scipionis, going so far as to imply that Guillaume understood the Marcrobean sense of truth-in-fiction:

Or veil eel songe rimeer
por vos cuer plus feire agueer,
qu'Amors le me prie e comande.
Et se nule ne nus demande
comant je veil que li romanx
soit apelez que je comanz,
ce est li Romanz de la Rose,
ou l’art d’Amors est tote enclose.

    Now this drem wol I ryme aright
To make your hertes gaye and lyght,
For Love it prayeth, and also
Commaundeth me that it be so.
And if there any aske me,
Whether that it be he or she,
How this book, the which is here,
Shal hatte, that I rede you here:
It is the Romance of the Rose,
In which at the art of love I close.28

Fundamentally, the poem is a divinely sanctioned entertainment: Love commanded that it be so for the enjoyment and instruction of the god’s devotees, just as God’s book of the world may be legitimately enjoyed by his followers and just as the Somnium Scipionis can be reverenced by Macrobius’ fellow philosophers. Such an intention de-emphasizes the status of Guilluame’s personal revelation and brings the poem into line with the special collapse of uti-frui in intransitive reading. The content of the dream—its “factual basis”—is secondary to the truths of the theology of Amors that are contained in its integument. All may read and enjoy the story, and, additionally, the wise will find therein that “l’art d’Amors est tote enclose,” that the entire body of philosophy can be found in the text, a claim that directly echoes the Somnium Scipionis.

Thus, in remarkable parallels with Macrobius, Guillaume claims that his dream is true, not (importantly) in its events but in its sentence, its hidden, scriptural, intransitive truth. While Guillaume certainly claims that his dream is a personal revelation, the force of its principal truth claim is that it is a “ritual drama” produced to lighten the hearts of the followers of Love and, in so doing, to verify and celebrate the truths they already hold in common. The “religious” reader of the Roman will be brought by it into that special communion with Amant and will, in embracing the dream, perceive that he too is Amant, is one with the dreamer in his devotion to the God of Love.
ORIGINS

The Roman de la Rose is thus the watershed text of the dream vision tradition, the singular blasphemous parody that cribbed the rhetorical strategies of Macrobius and Augustine and brought them into the service of secular, popular literature. The ambiguous status of the dream, grounded in the consciousness of the dreamer but ultimately seeming universal in its application, the recognition of truth-in-fiction—all of the motifs recognized by Macrobius are here.

A Psychology and a Metaphysics: Nominalism

The Roman de la Rose is very nearly the whole story of the origin of the late medieval dream vision: only one problem remains. Guillaume's persona is still, however metaphorically or blasphemously, an initiate, a saint of the new erotic religion, and it is only in his status as an initiate that his dream can be valorized. In other words, the Roman was possible only because courtly love was a mock religion and the "higher truths" buried in its labyrinths are parodic religious truths. To normalize this experience, to allow the dreamer to be truly an everyman and not a man privileged with raptus Deo, a revolution was needed, a revolution in metaphysics, epistemology, and psychology. Such a revolution would provide a new sense of the value of the figmenta of the human mind and would free these images from the constraining requirement that they adhere to an eternal, universal, and unchanging world of forms. Such a revolution would make the dream vision truly a dream, not a revelation of the higher world but one thoroughly of the inner, individualized world of the dreamer, a world that could only be shared by those who first share in the thoughts, obsessions, and ultimate righteousness of the dreamer.

The revolution is nominalism. Fundamentally, nominalists and conceptualists attacked the ancient Platonic notion that there physically exists a "world of forms," a realm consisting of universal, abstract, incorporeal quiddities on which all phenomenal existence is based. The original concept is probably traceable to the cave metaphor of Plato's Republic but, once Christianized, the notion of "extramental universals" became a central tenet of natural philosophy.

It was, in fact, on initially theological grounds that Ockham first
questioned the extramental existence of universals; if incorruptible and eternal universals exist, Ockham reasoned, then they could not have been created by God. Further, if universals exist, then their very existence constrains God's omnipotence, since He would be able to act on them only in accordance with their universal nature. His first formulation of this position echoes the figmental rhetoric of Macrobius and Augustine:

Et dico, quod universale non est aliquid reale habens esse subjectivum, nec in anima nec extra animam, sed tantum habet esse objectivum in anima, et est quoddam fictum habens esse tale in esse objectivo, quale habet res extra in esse subjectivo.

I maintain that a universal is not something real that exists in a subject [of inherence], either inside or outside the mind, but that it has being only as a thought-object in the mind. It is a kind of mental picture which as a thought-object has a being similar to that which the thing outside the mind has in its real existence.  

This is not the place to assess the impact of this teaching on medieval philosophy; what is relevant to this present discussion is the curious effect that such a teaching has on the rhetorical nexus perceptible in Macrobius and Augustine, one which sees surfaces as vehicles of truth but worthless in and of themselves. In the Platonic system, the status of phenomena is ambivalent: on the one hand, they are but the shadows of noumena, which at best only imperfectly represent them to creatures; on the other hand, phenomenal reality is visible and corporeal, making it hard to remember that these things are the shadows and the invisible entities are the truer reality. The same ambivalence surrounds the "phenomena" of the Roman de la Rose: the literal or phenomenal level of the poem, however unaccountable it may appear, serves as the vehicle for a divine revelation and so is insulated from challenge or scrutiny. In other words, the reader of the Roman can never declare unilaterally that any given detail of the vision—say, Amant's basting his sleeves at line 100—is totally grounded in the dreamer's own experience because the detail might well be an integument, a vehicle for a hidden allegorical tenor whose meaning has been denied to the reader. As a
reading experience, the Roman can never fully engage a reader because, given Guillaume's claim that the dream is a prescient revelation—a somnium—any given detail or event may operate in a context or at a level unavailable to the reader.

Dualism and its universals exert a pressure on Macrobius and Augustine as well. Despite their rhetorical approaches to their texts, neither exegete is permitted to question the literal truth of the text under analysis. Macrobius especially must balance a sense of the Somnium Scipionis as ritual drama with the contradictory claim that it is also literally, naively prescient as well; that, as a revelation, the Somnium actually shows a picture of the Platonic cosmos while, as a fabulous narrative, it simultaneously embraces the "entire body of philosophy." Augustine sidesteps this issue by Christianizing the Platonic scheme and claiming that divine artifacts can simultaneously be things and signs (subject to both use and enjoyment, to both intransitive and transitive reading). Effectively, then, in a Platonic framework, the allegorist is always a type of the Creator; his allegorical text is inescapably sacramental, containing representations that are never merely the figments of his own mind.

Ockham's psychology and metaphysics changed this. Without delimiting God's omnipotence or omniscience in any way, Ockham simply claims that human intelligence does not regularly partake of that omniscience. Revelations and prophecies certainly take place but, says Ockham, the normal intellectual process of abstraction is not the result of divine indwelling or of a share in the mind of God. Universals exist, but not outside of the individual mind: they are created by repeated predication (that is, "candiditas" is that quality shared by vanilla ice cream, bond paper, cumulus clouds, etc.). For Ockham, the mental images of which our graphic or oral signs are expressions are grounded in our own minds, not in another realm, and thus are subject to judgments about their validity or righteousness:

Figmenta habent esse in anima, et non subjectivum, quia tunc essent verae res, et ita chimaera et hircocervus et huiusmodi essent verae res; . . .

. . . fictions have being in the mind, but they do not exist independently
[subjectivum], because in that case they would be real things and so a chimera and a goat-stag and so on would be real things.\textsuperscript{31}

In his later writings, Ockham abandoned metaphorical formulations of this doctrine, including the notions of "fictum" or "figmentum," for one more firmly rooted in sign theory. This later formulation identified universals as the basic building blocks of thought, the \textit{nomines} or names with which the mind forms propositions:

\[\ldots \text{ipsae intelleciones animae vocantur passiones animae, et supponunt ex natura sua pro ipsis rebus extra vel pro alius rebus in anima, sicut voces supponunt pro rebus ex institutione.} \ldots\]

The mind's own intellectual acts are called states of mind. By their nature they stand for the actual things outside the mind or for other things in the mind, just as the spoken words stand for them by convention.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus, Plato's world of forms exists, but only in Plato's mind, only as the products of his individual process of abstraction, and only as the inventory of images with which he constructs propositions and syllogisms. They are unique and personal: as each person's experience of phenomenal reality is different from that of every other person, so each individual's stock of \textit{intelleciones} will be different from everyone else's, as different as different languages or as similar as different pronunciations of "Aeneas."

Thus, the new nominalist orientation was inward, though something short of solipsistic: clearly, worlds of forms still exist and are still communal if not actually universal, and "psychological" universals like \textit{caninitas} and \textit{candiditas} are probably no less righteous and accurate categories of \textit{experience} than oral or written names represent. They are based on accrued experience, judgment, wisdom, learning, and understanding and, though no two corresponding senses of, say, "virtus," will be exactly synonymous, the senses of "virtus" developed by most good people will be at least recognizably similar. Like spoken languages but anterior to them, this interior language of universals is a useful and necessary vehicle for thought and communication: useful because conventional, necessary because everything that is not God is contingent, making knowledge of God
impossible and knowledge of everything else experiential and approximate at best.

Such a rethinking of epistemological and metaphysical problems in the late Middle Ages could not fail to have its effect on literature, especially on allegorical and naively iconic literature. By decapitating a Platonic metaphysics, nominalism turned literature away from a vaguely Neo-Platonic sense of fantasy and allegory as realizations of the world of forms or windows onto a higher realm. Thus, a nominalist allegory, or more generally a nominalist poem, uses imagery not only to communicate (what might be) ultimate realities but also to examine and explore the mind of the image-maker, the poet. A poem such as the Book of the Duchess, for example, uses nominalism to have it both ways: the poem can simultaneously mourn Blanche and foreground the intellectual and creative poverty of the narrator and the audience:

The ficta (or figmenta) of the brain fail to correspond exactly with the phenomena. It becomes important, then, that man's schemes be interrupted, reassessed, even broken, as they were in the Book of the Duchess, so that man, as dreamer, can be rendered naked to start afresh.33

Such an observation accounts nicely for the inherent silliness of the obtuse narrator of this stark and serious poem. In this perspective, the Book of the Duchess becomes a study in perspective itself, in the contingency of language and in the danger of interpreting phenomena by way of pre-existing generalizations in the interpreter's mind or available to it through books. "Man, as dreamer" becomes the subject of the poem equally with the events dreamed because, just as speech reflects the speaker's thoughts, nominalist universals—realized as dream images—reflect the thinker's soul.

In a more general rhetorical sense, this change in focus from noumenal reality to psychological realities (and the uncertain "communal" reality built from them) served to make nominalism an uncanny backdrop for the medieval dream vision. Recalling Augustine and Macrobius, we should ask what would be the end point of a labyrinth of images that is not merely figmental but which is also the semiotic signature of its architect? In other words, what is em-
braced by the reader who overcomes the initial humility of another's dream and actually comprehends its alien images? The answer is something short of ultimate knowledge or revelation, but something which was, for the logician Ockham, the only human achievement that could transcend the contingency of the phenomenal world. The end point of the dream vision is the communion of two minds, whose ficta are astonishingly identical; it is the intuition that the words (or the dream) are not someone else's or anyone's but—"tolle, lege"—mysteriously, specially the reader's coequally with the dreamer. Ockham, of course, saw this communion as possible only in logic, the cold-blooded, abstract system of propositions leading to intellectual or notional assent, but the dream vision extended the possibilities: to read another's dream is to find oneself thinking that person's thoughts, but to embrace that dream, to comprehend or see the justice of its ficta or figmenta—this is to become one with that dreamer.

Thus, just as the rhetorical goal of reading Scripture is to become one with God in spirit—and not necessarily in mind—the rhetorical goal of reading a dream vision is to become one with the dreamer. The reader actually has shared in the distress, the distraction, and the vision of the dreamer, actually "comes to the place where he is already," as Augustine would say. Such a revelation is certainly less sublime than the one experienced on Mount Patmos but, for the fourteenth century, it was also a more credible and engaging one, one to which a subtle but powerful rhetoric would be brought to bear.