

70 It is constructed of resounding brass  
that murmurs constantly and carries back  
all that it hears, which it reiterates;  
there is no quiet anywhere within,  
and not a part of it is free from noise;  
no clamor here, just whispered murmurings,  
as of the ocean heard from far away,  
or like the rumbling of thunder when  
great Jupiter has made the dark clouds speak.

80 Crowds fill the entryway, a fickle mob  
that comes and goes; and rumors everywhere,  
thousands of fabrications mixed with fact,  
wander the premises, while false reports  
flit all about. Some fill their idle ears  
with others' words, and some go bearing tales  
elsewhere, while everywhere the fictions grow,  
as everyone adds on to what he's heard.

Here are Credulity and Heedless Error,  
with Empty Joy and Fearful Consternation;  
and here, with Unexpected Treachery,  
90 are Whispers of Uncertain Origin;  
nothing that happens, whether here on earth  
or in the heavens or the seas below,  
is missed by Rumor as she sweeps the world.

\* \* \*

## MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

### *From Scipio's Dream*<sup>†</sup>

[Cicero was a Roman orator and prominent statesman (106–43 B.C.E.) who is widely considered one of the greatest Latin writers and rhetoricians. He composed many arguments and essays on behalf of both friends and contemporaries, and made a number of influential political speeches. Originally, *Scipio's Dream* was part of the sixth book of Cicero's *De re publica*.

In the *Parliament of Fools*, Chaucer's narrator falls asleep reading *Scipio's Dream* and is visited by a vision of Africanus, Scipio's adopted grandfather. Africanus (Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus the Elder) acts as a guide figure both for Scipio in *Scipio's Dream* and for Chaucer's narrator as he journeys to an imagined ideal garden. Chaucer also mentions Scipio briefly as an important visionary in the *House of Fame* and in the *Book of the Duchess*.]

## CHAPTER I<sup>1</sup>

[1] When I arrived in Africa in the consulship of Manius Manilius<sup>2</sup> (I was military tribune in the fourth legion, as you know), the intention that was uppermost in my mind was to meet King Masinissa,<sup>3</sup> who for very good reasons was most friendly to my family. [2] When I came before him, the old man embraced me with tears in his eyes and, after a pause, gazing heavenward, said: "To you, O Sun on high, and to you other celestial beings, my thanks are due for the privilege, before I pass from this life, of seeing in my kingdom and beneath this very roof Publius Cornelius Scipio, at the mere mention of whose name I am refreshed, for the memory of that excellent and invincible leader never leaves my mind."<sup>4</sup>

Then we questioned each other, I about his kingdom and he about our commonwealth, and in the ensuing conversation we spent the whole day. [3] Moreover, enjoying the regal splendor of our surroundings, we prolonged our conversation far into the night; the aged king could talk of nothing but Scipio Africanus, recollecting all his words as well as his deeds.

After we parted for the night, I fell into a deep slumber, sounder than usual because of my long journey and the late hour of retirement. [4] I dreamt that Africanus was standing before me—I believe our discussion was responsible for this, for it frequently happens that our thoughts and conversations react upon us in dreams somewhat in the manner of Ennius' reported experiences about Homer,<sup>5</sup> of whom he used to think and speak very often in his waking hours. My grandfather's appearance was better known to me from his portrait-mask than from my memories of him.<sup>6</sup> Upon recognizing him I shuddered, but he reproved my fears and bade me pay close attention to his words.

## CHAPTER II

[1] "Do you see that city which I compelled to be obedient to the Roman people but which is now renewing earlier strife and is unable to remain at peace?" (From our lofty perch, dazzling and glorious, set among the radiant stars, he pointed out Carthage.) "To storm it you have now come, ranking not much higher than a private soldier. Two years hence as consul<sup>7</sup> you will conquer it, thus winning for yourself the cognomen which until now you have had as an inheritance from me.<sup>8</sup> After destroying Carthage and celebrating your triumph, you will hold the office of censor;<sup>9</sup> you will go

1. *Scipio's Dream* was originally the closing portion of the sixth book of Cicero's *De re publica*. This translation is based upon the interpretation that Macrobius gave to Cicero's words. It will consequently deviate on a few occasions from Cicero's intended meaning. A careful rendition of the Ciceronian meaning may be found in C. W. Keyes's translation of the *De re publica* and *De legibus* in *The Loeb Classical Library* (London and New York, 1928), pp. 261–83.

2. 149 B.C.E.

3. An ally of Rome in the Second Punic War, he materially assisted Scipio the Elder in defeating Hannibal in 202 B.C.E.

4. The elder Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, conqueror of Hannibal in 202 B.C.E. and adoptive grandfather of the narrator of this dream, Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus the Younger.

5. Cf. Lucretius *De rerum natura* 1.123–25; Cicero *Academica* 1.151; Persius *Satirae* vi.10–11.

6. The descendants of a Roman who held one of the higher magistracies were accorded the privilege of displaying a wax mask of him in their atrium. Cicero (*De senectute* xix) places the death of the elder Scipio and the birth of the younger Scipio in 185 B.C.E. Polybius (*Livy Ab urbe condita* xxix.52) gives the date of the elder Scipio's death as 183.

7. Elected consul in 147 B.C.E.; Scipio was proconsul when he destroyed Carthage in 146.

8. The cognomen Africanus.

9. In 142 B.C.E.

† *From Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, translated by William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 87–92. Reprinted by permission of Columbia UP. The translators' notes have been abbreviated and renumbered.

as legate to Egypt, Syria, Asia, and Greece;<sup>1</sup> you will be chosen consul a second time in your absence, and you will bring to a close a great war, destroying Numantia.<sup>2</sup> [2] Arriving at the Capitol in a chariot, you will find the commonwealth gravely disturbed because of the policies of my grandson.<sup>3</sup> Then, Scipio, it will behoove you to display to your people the brilliance of your intellect, talents, and experience.

"But at that point I see the course of your life wavering between two destinies, as it were. When your age has completed seven times eight recurring circuits of the sun, and the product of these two numbers, each of which is considered full for a different reason, has rounded out your destiny, the whole state will take refuge in you and your name; the Senate, all good citizens, the Allies, and the Latins will look to you; upon you alone will the safety of the state depend; and, to be brief, as dictator you must needs set the state in order, if only you escape death at the hands of your wicked kinsmen."

[3] Hereupon Laelius<sup>4</sup> let out a cry, and the others groaned deeply; but Scipio said with a smiling expression: Hush! please; don't awaken me from my sleep; hear the rest of the dream.

#### CHAPTER III

[1] "But that you may be more zealous in safeguarding the commonwealth, Scipio, be persuaded of this: all those who have saved, aided, or enlarged the commonwealth have a definite place marked off in the heavens where they may enjoy a blessed existence forever. Nothing that occurs on earth, indeed, is more gratifying to that supreme God who rules the whole universe than the establishment of associations and federations of men bound together by principles of justice, which are called commonwealths. The governors and protectors of these proceed from here and return hither after death."

[2] At this point, though I was greatly dismayed, not at the fear of dying but rather at the thought of being betrayed by relatives, I nevertheless asked whether he and my father Aemilius Paulus<sup>5</sup> and the others whom we think of as dead were really still living.

"Of course these men are alive," he said, "who have flown from the bonds of their bodies as from a prison; indeed, that life of yours, as it is called, is really death. Just look up and see your father Paulus approaching you."

[3] When I saw him, I wept profusely, but he embraced and kissed me and forbade me to weep. As soon as I could check my tears and speak out, I said: "I pray you, most revered and best of fathers, since this is truly life, as I hear Africannus tell, why do I linger on earth? Why do I not hasten hither to you?"

[4] "You are mistaken," he replied, "for until that God who rules all the region of the sky at which you are now looking has freed you from the fetters of your body, you cannot gain admission here. Men were created with the understanding that they were to look after that sphere called

Earth, which you see in the middle of the temple. Minds have been given to them out of the eternal fires you call fixed stars and planets, those spherical solids which, quickened with divine minds, journey through their circuits and orbits with amazing speed. [5] Wherefore, Scipio, you and all other dutiful men must keep your souls in the custody of your bodies and must not leave this life of men except at the command of that One who gave it to you, that you may not appear to have deserted the office assigned you. But, Scipio, cherish justice and your obligations to duty, as your grandfather here, and I, your father, have done; this is important where parents and relatives are concerned, but is of utmost importance in matters concerning the commonwealth. [6] This sort of life is your passport into the sky, to a union with those who have finished their lives on earth and who, upon being released from their bodies, inhabit that place at which you are now looking" (it was a circle of surpassing brilliance gleaming out amidst the blazing stars), "which takes its name, the Milky Way, from the Greek word."

[7] As I looked out from this spot, everything appeared splendid and wonderful. Some stars were visible which we never see from this region, and all were of a magnitude far greater than we had imagined. Of these the smallest was the one farthest from the sky and nearest the earth, which shone forth with borrowed light. And, indeed, the starry spheres easily surpassed the earth in size. From here the earth appeared so small that I was ashamed of our empire which is, so to speak, but a point on its surface.

#### CHAPTER IV

[1] As I gazed rather intently at the earth my grandfather said: "How long will your thoughts continue to dwell upon the earth? Do you not behold the regions to which you have come? The whole universe is comprised of nine circles, or rather spheres. The outermost of these is the celestial sphere, embracing all the rest, itself the supreme god, confining and containing all the other spheres. In it are fixed the eternally revolving movements of the stars. [2] Beneath it are the seven underlying spheres, which revolve in an opposite direction to that of the celestial sphere. One of these spheres belongs to that planet which on earth is called Saturn. Below it is that brilliant orb, propitious and helpful to the human race, called Jupiter. Next comes the ruddy one, which you call Mars, dreaded on earth. Next, and occupying almost the middle region, comes the sun, leader, chief, and regulator of the other lights, mind and moderator of the universe, of such magnitude that it fills all with its radiance. The sun's companions, so to speak, each in its own sphere, follow—the one Venus, the other Mercury—and in the lowest sphere the moon, kindled by the rays of the sun, revolves. [3] Below the moon all is mortal and transitory, with the exception of the souls bestowed upon the human race by the benevolence of the gods. Above the moon all things are eternal. Now in the center, the ninth of the spheres, is the earth, never moving and at the bottom. Towards it all bodies gravitate by their own inclination."

#### CHAPTER V

[1] I stood dumbfounded at these sights, and when I recovered my senses

1. Cicero (*Academica* 1.1.5) places the date of the embassy before that of the censorship.

2. Again chosen consul in 134 B.C.E., he destroyed Numantia in 133 after a siege of fifteen months.

3. Tiberius Gracchus.

4. A very dear friend of the younger Scipio and one of the speakers in Cicero's dialogue *De amicitia*.

Here Cicero interrupts Scipio's narrative, which is resumed in the following chapter.

5. Became one of Rome's greatest heroes by his defeat of Persius, king of Macedonia, in 168 B.C.E.

"That," replied my grandfather, "is a concord of tones separated by unequal but nevertheless carefully proportioned intervals, caused by the rapid motion of the spheres themselves. The high and low tones blended together produce different harmonies. Of course such swift motions could not be accomplished in silence and, as nature requires, the spheres at one extreme produce the low tones and at the other extreme the high tones. [2] Consequently the outermost sphere, the star-bearer, with its swifter motion gives forth a higher-pitched tone, whereas the lunar sphere, the lowest, has the deepest tone. Of course the earth, the ninth and stationary sphere, always clings to the same position in the middle of the universe. The other eight spheres, two of which move at the same speed, produce seven different tones, this number being, one might almost say, the key to the universe. Gifted men, imitating this harmony on stringed instruments and in singing, have gained for themselves a return to this region, as have those who have devoted their exceptional abilities to a search for divine truths. [3] The ears of mortals are filled with this sound, but they are unable to hear it. Indeed, hearing is the dullest of the senses: consider the people who dwell in the region about the Great Cataract, where the Nile comes rushing down from lofty mountains; they have lost their sense of hearing because of the loud roar. But the sound coming from the heavenly spheres revolving at very swift speeds is of course so great that human ears cannot catch it; you might as well try to stare directly at the sun, whose rays are much too strong for your eyes."

I was amazed at these wonders, but nevertheless I kept turning my eyes back to earth.

## CHAPTER VI

[1] My grandfather then continued: "Again I see you gazing at the region and abode of mortals. If it seems as small to you as it really is, why not fix your attention upon the heavens and contemn what is mortal? Can you expect any fame from these men, or glory that is worth seeking? You see, Scipio, that the inhabited portions on earth are widely separated and narrow, and that vast wastes lie between these inhabited spots, as we might call them; the earth's inhabitants are so cut off that there can be no communication among different groups; moreover, some nations stand obliquely, some transversely to you, and some even stand directly opposite you; from these, of course, you can expect no fame. [2] You can also discern certain belts that appear to encircle the earth; you observe that the two which are farthest apart and lie under the poles of the heavens are stiff with cold, whereas the belt in the middle, the greatest one, is scorched with the heat of the sun. [3] The two remaining belts are habitable: one, the southern, is inhabited by men who plant their feet in the opposite direction to yours and have nothing to do with your people; the other, the northern, is inhabited by the Romans. But look closely, see how small is the portion allotted to you! The whole of the portion that you inhabit is narrow at the top and broad at the sides and is in truth a small island encircled by that sea which you call the Atlantic, the Great Sea, or Ocean. But you can see how small it is despite its name! [4] Has your name or that of any Roman been able to pass beyond the Caucasus, which you see

in the known quarter of the globe. But who will ever hear of your name in the remaining portions of the globe? With these excluded, you surely see what narrow confines bound your ambitions. And how long will those who praise us now continue to do so?"

## CHAPTER VII

[1] "Not even if the children of future generations should wish to hand down to their posterity the exploits of each one of us as they heard them from their fathers, would it be possible for us to achieve fame for a long time, not to mention permanent fame, owing to the floods and conflagrations that inevitably overwhelm the earth at definite intervals. [2] What difference does it make whether you will be remembered by those who came after you when there was no mention made of you by men before your time? They were just as numerous and were certainly better men. Indeed, among those who can possibly hear of the name of Rome, there is not one who is able to gain a reputation that will endure a single year. [3] Men commonly reckon a year solely by the return of the sun, which is just one star: but in truth when all the stars have returned to the same places from which they started out and have restored the same configurations over the great distances of the whole sky, then alone can the returning cycle truly be called a year; how many generations of men are contained in a great year I scarcely dare say. [4] As, long ago, the sun seemed to be failing and going out when Romulus' soul reached these very regions, so at the time when it will be eclipsed again in the very same quarter, and at the same season, and when all constellations and planets have been returned to their former positions, then you may consider the year complete; indeed, you may be sure that not a twentieth part of that year has yet elapsed.

[5] "Therefore, if you despair of ever returning to this region in which great and eminent men have their complete reward, how insignificant will be that human glory which can scarcely endure for a fraction of a year? But if you will look upwards and contemplate this eternal goal and abode, you will no longer give heed to the gossip of the common herd, nor look for your reward in human things. Let Virtue, as is fitting, draw you with her own attractions to the true glory; and let others say what they please about you, for they will talk in any event. All their gossip is confined to the narrow bounds of the small area at which you are gazing, and is never enduring; it is overwhelmed with the passing of men and is lost in the oblivion of posterity."

## CHAPTER VIII

[1] After he said these words, I interrupted: "If, as you say, Africanus, a man who has served his country steadfastly finds a passage to the sky, so to speak, then, though I have walked in your steps and those of my father from boyhood and have never forsaken your brilliant example, I shall now strive much more zealously, with the promise of such a reward before me."

[2] "Do you then make that effort," he said, "and regard not yourself but only this body as mortal; the outward form does not reveal the man but rather the mind of each individual is his true self, not the figure that one

indeed, a god is that which quickens, feels, remembers, foresees, and in the same manner rules, restrains, and impels the body of which it has charge as the supreme God rules the universe; and as the eternal God moves a universe that is mortal in part, so an everlasting mind moves your frail body.

[3] "For that which is always self-moved is eternal, but when that which conveys motion to another body and which is itself moved from the outside no longer continues in motion, it must of course cease to be alive. Therefore, only that which is self-moved never ceases to be moved, since it never abandons itself; rather, it is the source and beginning of motion for all other things that move. [4] Now a beginning has no origin: all things originate in a beginning, but a beginning itself cannot be born from something else, since it would not be a beginning if it originated elsewhere. But if it has no beginning, then indeed, it has no ending: for if a beginning were destroyed it could not be reborn from anything else; nor could it create anything else from itself if, indeed, everything has to come from a beginning. [5] Thus it happens that the beginning of motion, that which is self-moved, originates in itself; moreover, it cannot experience birth or death; otherwise the whole heavens and all nature would have to collapse and come to a standstill and would find no force to stir them to motion again."

## CHAPTER IX

[1] "Therefore, since it is clear that that which is self-moved is eternal, is there anyone who would deny that this is the essence possessed by souls? Everything that is set in motion by an outside force is inanimate, but that which has soul is moved by its own inward motion, for this is the peculiar function and property of soul. If the soul is unique in being self-moved, surely it is without birth and without death.

[2] "Exercise it in the best achievements. The noblest efforts are in behalf of your native country; a soul thus stimulated and engaged will speed hither to its destination and abide without delay; and this flight will be even swifter if the soul, while it is still shut up in the body, will rise above it, and in contemplation of what is beyond, detach itself as much as possible from the body. [3] Indeed, the souls of those who have surrendered themselves to bodily pleasures, becoming their slaves, and who in response to sensual passions have flouted the laws of gods and of men, slip out of their bodies at death and hover close to the earth, and return to this region only after long ages of torment."

He departed, and I awoke from sleep.

## MACROBIUS AMBROSIIUS THEODOSIUS

*From the Commentary on Scipio's Dream*<sup>†</sup>

[Macrobius was a Roman grammarian and philosopher (flourished ca. 399–422 c.e.). His commentary on the *Somnium Scipionis* (the Dream of Scipio) gained popularity in the Middle Ages for its discourse on the nature of different dream-types. It is generally accepted that Macrobius's commentary is responsible for both the preservation and elevation of this portion of Cicero's work.

Chaucer refers to Macrobius's commentary on *Scipio's Dream* in both the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parlament of Foules*; in the former he mistakenly attributes the dream itself to Macrobius, though he correctly ascribes it to Cicero in the *Parlament of Foules*. Additionally, Macrobius's writings on dream-types relate to the beginning of Chaucer's *House of Fame*, in which the narrator describes the varied forms dreams may take and the reasons for their appearance.

Macrobius's commentary opens with a discussion of the relationship between Plato's and Cicero's discussions of life after death. Rather than convey his message via a man returned from the dead as Plato did in the *Republic*, Cicero's visionary is one newly awakened from a dream. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of two types of fables (those that are purely imaginative and those whose fictions are based on a firm foundation of truth), preferring only the second in philosophical writings. Just as some fictions are preferable to others, so also some kinds of visions also are more likely to yield truth. In the section that follows, Macrobius proceeds to a brief exposition of dream theory, including the five categories of dream outlined below.]

## CHAPTER III

[1] After these prefatory remarks, there remains another matter to be considered before taking up the text of *Scipio's Dream*. We must first describe the many varieties of dreams recorded by the ancients, who have classified and defined the various types that have appeared to men in their sleep, wherever they might be. Then we shall be able to decide to which type the dream we are discussing belongs.

[2] All dreams may be classified under five main types.<sup>1</sup> There is the enigmatic dream, in Greek *oneiros*, in Latin *somnium*; second, there is the prophetic vision, in Greek *horonta*, in Latin *visio*; third, there is the oracular dream, in Greek *chrematismos*, in Latin *oraculum*; fourth, there is the nightmare, in Greek *empnion*, in Latin *insomnium*; and last, the apparition, in Greek *phantasma*, which Cicero, when he has occasion to use the word, calls *visum*.

[3] The last two, the nightmare and the apparition, are not worth inter-

<sup>†</sup> From *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, translated by William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 87–92. Reprinted by permission of Columbia UP. The translators' notes have been abbreviated and renumbered.

1. The elaborate classification and description of dreams forming this chapter was one of the most popular sections of the *Commentary* and caused the author to be regarded as one of the leading authorities on dreams during the Middle Ages. The classification is of course not original; the bulk of it bears striking resemblances to the classification given by Artemidorus at the opening of his