

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[†]

[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 *Parliament of Fowls*; in the former he mistakenly attributes the dream itself to Macrobius, though he correctly ascribes it to Cicero in the *Parliament of Fowls*. 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:¹ there is the enigmatic dream, in Greek *oneiros*, in Latin *somnium*; second, there is the prophetic vision, in Greek *horama*, in Latin *visio*; third, there is the oracular dream, in Greek *chrematismos*, in Latin *oraculum*; fourth, there is the nightmare, in Greek *enypnion*, 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-

[†] 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 translator's 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

preting since they have no prophetic significance. [4] Nightmares may be caused by mental or physical distress, or anxiety about the future: the patient experiences in dreams vexations similar to those that disturb him during the day. As examples of the mental variety, we might mention the lover who dreams of possessing his sweetheart or of losing her, or the man who fears the plots or might of an enemy and is confronted with him in his dream or seems to be fleeing him. The physical variety might be illustrated by one who has overindulged in eating or drinking and dreams that he is either choking with food or unburdening himself, or by one who has been suffering from hunger or thirst and dreams that he is craving and searching for food or drink or has found it. Anxiety about the future would cause a man to dream that he is gaining a prominent position or office as he hoped or that he is being deprived of it as he feared.

[5] Since these dreams and others like them arise from some condition or circumstance that irritates a man during the day and consequently disturbs him when he falls asleep, they flee when he awakes and vanish into thin air.² Thus the name *insomnium* was given, not because such dreams occur "in sleep"—in this respect nightmares are like other types—but because they are noteworthy only during their course and afterwards have no importance or meaning.

[6] Virgil, too, considers nightmares deceitful: "False³ are the dreams (*insomnia*) sent by departed spirits to their sky." He used the word "sky" with reference to our mortal realm because the earth bears the same relation to the regions of the dead as the heavens bear to the earth. Again, in describing the passion of love, whose concerns are always accompanied by nightmares, he says: "Of to her heart rushes back the chief's valour, oft his glorious stock; his looks and words cling fast within her bosom, and the pang withhold calm rest from her limbs."⁴ And a moment later: "Anna, my sister, what dreams (*insomnia*) thrill me with fears?"⁵

[7] The apparition (*phantasma* or *visum*) comes upon one in the moment between wakefulness and slumber, in the so-called "first cloud of sleep." In this drowsy condition he thinks he is still fully awake and imagines he sees specters rushing at him or wandering vaguely about, differing from natural creatures in size and shape, and hosts of diverse things, either delightful or disturbing. To this class belongs the incubus, which, according to popular belief, rushes upon people in sleep and presses them with a weight which they can feel. [8] The two types just described are of no assistance in foretelling the future; but by means of the other three we are gifted with the powers of divination.

We call a dream oracular in which a parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god clearly reveals what will or will not transpire, and what action to take or to avoid. [9] We call a dream a prophetic vision if it actually comes true. For example, a man dreams of the return of a friend who has been staying in a foreign land, thoughts of whom never enter his

mind. He goes out and presently meets his friend and embraces him. Or in his dream he agrees to accept a deposit, and early the next day a man runs anxiously to him, charging him with the safekeeping of his money and committing secrets to his trust. [10] By an enigmatic dream we mean one that conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the true meaning of the information being offered, and requires an interpretation for its understanding. We need not explain further the nature of this dream since everyone knows from experience what it is. There are five varieties of it: personal, alien, social, public, and universal. [11] It is called personal when one dreams that he himself is doing or experiencing something; alien, when he dreams this about someone else; social, when his dream involves others and himself; public, when he dreams that some misfortune or benefit has befallen the city, forum, theater, public walls, or other public enterprise; universal, when he dreams that some change has taken place in the sun, moon, planets, sky, or regions of the earth.

[12] The dream which Scipio reports that he saw embraces the three reliable types mentioned above, and also has to do with all five varieties of the enigmatic dream. It is oracular since the two men who appeared before him and revealed his future, Aemilius Paulus and Scipio the Elder, were both his father,⁶ both were pious and revered men, and both were affiliated with the priesthood. It is a prophetic vision since Scipio saw the regions of his abode after death and his future condition. It is an enigmatic dream because the truths revealed to him were couched in words that hid their profound meaning and could not be comprehended without skillful interpretation.

It also embraces the five varieties of the last type. [13] It is personal since Scipio himself was conducted to the regions above and learned of his future. It is alien since he observed the estates to which the souls of others were destined. It is social since he learned that for men with merits similar to his the same places were being prepared as for himself. It is public since he foresaw the victory of Rome and the destruction of Carthage, his triumph on the Capitoline, and the coming civil strife. And it is universal since by gazing up and down he was initiated into the wonders of the heavens, the great celestial circles, and the harmony of the revolving spheres, things strange and unknown to mortals before this; in addition he witnessed the movements of the stars and planets and was able to survey the whole earth.

[14] It is incorrect to maintain that Scipio was not the proper person to have a dream that was both public and universal inasmuch as he had not yet attained the highest office but, as he himself admitted, was still ranked "not much higher than a private soldier."⁷ The critics say that dreams concerning the welfare of the state are not to be considered significant unless military or civil officers dream them, or unless many plebeians have the same dream. [15] They cite the incident in Homer⁸ when, before the assembled Greeks, Agamemnon disclosed a dream that he had had about a forthcoming battle. Nestor, who helped the army quite as much with his prudence as all the youth with their might, by way of instilling confidence in the dream said that in matters of general welfare they had to confide in

2. Cf. Artemidorus 1.1, iv.

3. *Aeneid* vi.896. For the Virgilian passages use has been made of the excellent translation of H. R. Fairclough in the Loeb Classical Library (New York, 1930). On a few occasions, as here, Macrobius has succumbed to his exegetical penchant and has distorted the obvious Virgilian meaning to suit his purpose. On such occasions it has been necessary to adapt Professor Fairclough's translation. Macrobius' other major work, the *Saturnalia*, deals largely with Virgil's poetry.

4. *Ibid.*, iv.3-5.

6. One his father by nature, the other his grandfather by adoption.

7. *Scipio's Dream* ii.1.

the dream of a king, whereas they would repudiate the dream of anyone else. [16] However, the point in Scipio's favor was that although he had not yet held the consulship or a military command, he—who himself was destined to lead that campaign—was dreaming about the coming destruction of Carthage, was witnessing the public triumph in his honor, and was even learning of the secrets of nature; for he excelled as much in philosophy as in deeds of courage.

[17] Because, in citing Virgil above as an authority for the unreliability of nightmares, we excerpted a verse from his description of the twin portals of dreams, someone may take the occasion to inquire why false dreams are allotted to the gate of ivory and trustworthy ones to the gate of horn. He should avail himself of the help of Porphyry, who, in his *Commentaries*, makes the following remarks on a passage in Homer⁹ presenting the same distinction between gates: "All truth is concealed. [18] Nevertheless, the soul, when it is partially disengaged from bodily functions during sleep, at times gazes and at times peers intently at the truth, but does not apprehend it; and when it gazes it does not see with clear and direct vision, but rather with a dark obstructing veil interposed." [19] Virgil attests that this is natural in the following lines: "Behold—for all the cloud, which now, drawn over thy sight, dulls thy mortal vision and with dank pall enshrouds thee, I will tear away."! If, during sleep, this veil permits the vision of the attentive soul to perceive the truth, it is thought to be made of horn, the nature of which is such that, when thinned, it becomes transparent. When the veil dulls the vision and prevents its reaching the truth, it is thought to be made of ivory, the composition of which is so dense that no matter how thin a layer of it may be, it remains opaque.

ANICIUS MANLIUS SEVERINUS BOETHIUS

From the Consolation of Philosophy†

[The late Roman Christian philosopher Boethius (480–524 C.E.) was the author of treatises on music and mathematics and the translator of works of ancient philosophy by Aristotle and other writers. While the head of government services under Theodoric the Great, he was unjustly accused of treason, for which he was ultimately executed. During his imprisonment, he wrote his most widely recognized work, the *Consolation of Philosophy*, in which he supports the idea of a Platonic goodness that orders the universe. The belief that virtue is its own reward was solace for the wrongful charges leveled against him.

Chaucer, who wrote a translation of the *Consolation* himself, drew upon many of its themes in his work. For example, the eponymous goddess of the *House of Fame*, shares her mutable stature with Boethius's Lady Philosophy, and the image of a mind carried by wings above the clouds is a source for "Geffrey's" celestial journey in that poem. Boethius was also an important source for the fickle goddess Fortune. Additionally, the *Consolation* provided

the underlying structure of many medieval dream visions, which typically present an allegorical figure guiding a troubled narrator to a resolution of his problems. Chaucer was fond of experimenting with this form, for instance in the *Book of the Duchess*, where he includes a distressed narrator but omits the guide figure, or in the *Parliament of Fowls*, where the guide abruptly abandons the dreamer to his own resources. The *Consolation* was also a major influence on many of Chaucer's shorter lyrics.]

Book I

POEM I

I who once wrote songs with keen delight am now by sorrow driven to take up melancholy measures. Wounded Muses tell me what I must write, and elegiac verses bathe my face with real tears. Not even terror could drive from me these faithful companions of my long journey. Poetry, which was once the glory of my happy and flourishing youth, is still my comfort in this misery of my old age.

Old age has come too soon with its evils, and sorrow has commanded me to enter the age which is hers. My hair is prematurely gray, and slack skin shakes on my exhausted body. Death, happy to men when she does not intrude in the sweet years, but comes when often called in sorrow, turns a deaf ear to the wretched and cruelly refuses to close weeping eyes.

The sad hour that has nearly drowned me came just at the time that faithless Fortune favored me with her worthless gifts. Now that she has clouded her deceitful face, my accursed life seems to go on endlessly. My friends, why did you so often think me happy? Any man who has fallen never stood securely.

PROSE I

Lady Philosophy appears to him and drives away the Muses of poetry.

While I silently pondered these things, and decided to write down my wretched complaint, there appeared standing above me a woman of majestic countenance whose flashing eyes seemed wise beyond the ordinary wisdom of men. Her color was bright, suggesting boundless vigor, and yet she seemed so old that she could not be thought of as belonging to our age. Her height seemed to vary: sometimes she seemed of ordinary human stature, then again her head seemed to touch the top of the heavens. And when she raised herself to her full height she penetrated heaven itself, beyond the vision of human eyes. Her clothing was made of the most delicate threads, and by the most exquisite workmanship; it had—as she afterwards told me—been woven by her own hands into an everlasting fabric. Her clothes had been darkened in color somewhat by neglect and the passage of time, as happens to pictures exposed to smoke. At the lower edge of her robe was woven a Greek Π, at the top the letter Θ, and between them were seen clearly marked stages, like stairs, ascending from the lowest level to the highest. This robe had been torn, however, by the hands of violent men, who had ripped away what they could. In her right hand,