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"A Dubious Twilight": Reflections on Dreams in Patristic Literature

PATRICIA COX MILLER

As Wendy O'Flaherty has argued persuasively in her recent book, *Dreams, Illusion, and Other Realities*, it is possible to falsify the hypothesis that one is dreaming—by waking up; but it is not possible to verify that one is awake by falling asleep. The thought that one cannot verify the fact that one is awake but only only falsify the fact that one is asleep (by waking up) delivers something of a jolt to Western "common sense," which typically takes for granted the distinctness of such categories as "real" and "unreal," "conscious" and "unconscious," "dream" and "waking life." Yet, as O'Flaherty points out, we know that we cannot see ourselves seeing an illusion, just as we cannot verify the "reality" of ourselves in the moment when we are engaged in testing our reality.[1]

Although the kinds of dichotomous structures that I have just mentioned (real and unreal, and so forth) may be epistemologically useful, they are ontologically suspect and, when probed deeply enough, the lines of demarcation that support such structures tend to wobble, if not disappear altogether. This is especially the case when one is considering the relationship between dreams and waking life, where, as Socrates says in the *Theaetetus*, "there is plenty of room for doubt."[2] Indeed, across the centuries there has been so much room for doubt that, as O'Flaherty shows so well, people have insisted on tantalizing themselves with the thought that dreams are real and the "real" world is a dream: the line not only wobbles; the categories change places.

In the company of such thoughts we are in a kind of twilight zone where, to borrow a phrase of Marianne Moore, there are imaginary gardens—with real toads in them.[3] Unfortunately, we cannot escape this twilight zone by dismissing it as the product of exotic Indians immersed in *māyā*; the Western tradition has its own frogs, and nowhere are they livelier than in late

1. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams, Illusion and Other Realities* (Chicago, 1984), pp. 198–199 and passim.
2. Plato, *Theaetetus* 158d, in *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, 1961), p. 863.
3. Marianne Moore, "Poetry," in *A College Book of Modern Verse*, ed. James K. Robinson and Walter B. Rideout (New York, 1958), p. 325.

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antiquity, Christian and otherwise. Natalius the Confessor, after all, had real bruises to show for his night-long beating by dream angels, and Perpetua awoke from her dream of eating paradisal cheese with the taste of something sweet in her mouth.[4]

In the realm of theory, Athanasius uses dream experience as proof that the soul is rational and immortal: "When the body is still, at rest and sleeping, a man is in inner movement—he contemplates [*theōrei*] what is outside himself, he traverses foreign lands, he meets friends, and often through them divines [*manteuomenos*] and learns in advance [*proginōskōn*] his daily actions. What else could this be but a rational soul [*psūchē logikē*]?"[5] In sleep the soul imagines, it sees phantasmal sights (*phantazetai*), and those phantoms of the night turn out to embody the basic (immortal) logic of the psyche.[6] Further, dreams break the barrier between the soul and a much larger (normally unseen but very "real") world "outside"—a world of foreign lands, friends, and true beholding (*thēoreō*). On the basis of such testimony, it would seem that one sees most clearly only in the dark, a thought that is probably more troubling to us than it was to Athanasius or to the tradition to which he was heir.

As though echoing what he had said in the *Theaetetus* about our perceptual uncertainty when pressed to say whether we are awake or dreaming we are awake, Socrates remarks in the *Symposium* that his "understanding is a shadowy thing at best, as equivocal as a dream."[7] That is a statement of the particular kind of darkness that belongs to dreams. It involves a mode of understanding that is shadowed and equivocal, speaking with more than one voice, as in the following poem.

> In a dream I meet
> my dead friend. He has,
> I know, gone long and far,
> and yet he is the same
> for the dead are changeless.
> They grow no older.
> It is I who have changed,
> grown strange to what I was.
> Yet I, the changed one,
> ask: "How you been?"
> He grins and looks at me.
> "I been eating peaches
> off some mighty fine trees."[8]

4. For Natalius, see Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.28; for Perpetua, see *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 4, in *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, trans. Herbert Musurillo (Oxford, 1972), pp. 111–112.
5. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 31.38–44, in *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Thomson (Oxford, 1971), p. 87.
6. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 33.25 (Thomson, p. 90).
7. Plato, *Symposium* 175c (Hamilton and Cairns, p. 530).
8. Wendell Berry, "A Meeting," in *A Part* (San Francisco, 1980), p. 18.

In this poem, the "I" in the dream meets a dream figure, a friend, who is dead, "gone long and far." The friend in the dream is dead (even though he grins, looks, and speaks), while the dream "I" is convinced of his own status as not-dead because he is conscious (although he is dreaming) that he has changed. Yet it is the dreamer who feels that he has "grown strange" to himself, while the dead man is the one who calls up the sensuous imagery of a world that is alive, "eating peaches off some mighty fine trees." Who is "really" alive, and who is dead?

Ancient readers would have liked this poem, since it gives expression to a dimension of dream-reality that runs fairly consistently through the classical and late antique traditions: that is, that the dream is the "place" where apparently unquestioned, and unquestionable, realities like life and death meet, qualify each other, even change places. A striking example comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and I would like to use this dream and its context as an entrée into the world of patristic dreamers.

Part of Book Eleven of the *Metamorphoses* tells the story of King Ceyx, who dies in a torrential storm at sea.[9]. Meanwhile, his wife Alcyone, knowing nothing of her husband's death, continues to burn incense at the altar of Juno as petition for his safe return. Juno, irked by the touch of Alcyone's unconsciously mourning hands, summons Iris to go to "the drowsy house of Sleep," "to tell that god to send Alcyone a dream of Ceyx, to tell the truth about him." So Iris goes to the kingdom of Sleep, a place of "dusky twilight shadows" (the "dubious twilight"—an erroneous translation by Humphries—of my title),[10] where she delivers her plea to Sleep: "O Mildest of the gods, most gentle sleep, Rest of all things, the spirit's comforter, Router of care, O soother and restorer, Juno send orders: counterfeit a dream to go, in the image of King Ceyx, to Trachis, to make Alcyone see her shipwrecked husband." Sleep wakes up Morpheus, who is the best of all his sons at imitating humans, "their garb, their gait, their speech, rhythm, gesture."

Morpheus flies to Alcyone's bedside and stands there with the face, form, pallor, and nakedness of the dead Ceyx: "His beard was wet, and water streamed from his sodden hair, and tears ran down as he bent over her: 'O wretched wife, do you recognize your husband? Have I changed too much in death? Look at me! You will know me, your husband's ghost, no more your living husband. I am dead, Alcyone.' " Still asleep, Alcyone knows that "the voice of Morpheus was that of Ceyx; how could she help but know it? The tears were real, and even the hands went moving the way his used to." She weeps and tries to touch this dream figure, crying for him to wait for her. But

9. See *Ovid: Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington, 1955), pp. 272–282 (*Meta.* 11.400–750).
10. See Ovid, *Meta.* 11.596: "Nebulae caligine mixtae exhalantur humo dubiaequae crepuscula lucis" (Clouds of vapor breathe forth from the earth, and dusky twilight shadows).

her own voice wakes her up, and she screams: " 'The queen Alcyone is nothing, nothing, dead with Ceyx.' "

The very least one might point out about this wrenching story is its supremely equivocal perspective on dreams. In a twilight realm Sleep, called the "mildest of gods" and the "spirit's comforter," sends as his soothing message a counterfeit, his shape-shifting son, living phantasm of the dead Ceyx. Morpheus, unsubstantial yet somehow alive as the drenched ghost of the king, speaks, as Alcyone's dream, what no one living could ever say: "I am dead." Yet Alcyone knows in her sleep, conscious as she lies unconscious, that the tears are real, though the dream cannot be seen in the lamplight when she opens her eyes. What is unreal is real, what is counterfeit is true, what is alive is dead, what is divine is human—and also the reverse. There is no resting point, no end to the paradoxical turns in this story, whose final twist (for our purposes) is that the living Alcyone awakens into her own death.

I will move abruptly, in time if not in spirit, to the dream of another young woman, Perpetua of Carthage, who recorded her dreams in a journal while in prison awaiting death because of her profession of Christian faith. Her journal survives in the account of her and her companions' martyrdom, the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, written sometime following A.D. 203, the traditional date of the martyrdom.[11] What follows is Perpetua's account of her first dream.

> Then my brother said to me: "Dear Sister, you are greatly privileged; surely you might ask for a vision to discover whether you are to be condemned or freed." Faithfully I promised I would, for I knew that I could speak with the Lord. And so I said, "I shall tell you tomorrow." Then I made my request and this was the vision I had.
>
> I saw a ladder of tremendous height, made of bronze, reaching all the way to the heavens, but it was so narrow that only one person could climb up at a time. To the side of the ladder were attached all sorts of metal weapons: swords, spears, hooks, daggers, spikes; so that if anyone tried to climb up carelessly or without paying attention, he would be mangled and his flesh would adhere to the weapons.
>
> At the foot of the ladder lay a dragon of enormous size, and it would attack those who tried to climb up and terrify and so discourage them from trying.
>
> "He will not harm me," I said, "in the name of Christ."
>
> Slowly, as though he were afraid of me, the dragon stuck his head out from underneath the ladder. Using it as my first step, I trod on his head and went up.
>
> Then I saw an immense garden, and in it a grey-haired man sat in shepherd's clothes. Tall he was, and milking sheep. He called me over to him and gave me a mouthful of the curds he was drawing; and I took it into my cupped hands and ate it. And all those who stood around said, "Amen!" At the sound of this word I woke up, with the taste of something sweet still in my mouth.[12]

11. For a discussion of the authenticity of Perpetua's journal, which is incorporated into the text of the martyrdom, see E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (New York, 1970), pp. 48–53; for an interesting psychological and historical discussion of Perpetua's dreams, see Mary R. Lefkowitz, "The Motivations for St. Perpetua's Martyrdom," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44 (1976): 417–421.
12. *Passio Perpetuae* 4 (Musurillo, pp. 111–113).

Characterizing her dream as "speaking with the Lord," Perpetua betrays her oneness with her culture, which understood dream-speech as a kind of divine logic.[13] Indeed, Perpetua's contemporary and African confrère, the theologian Tertullian, remarks in his *De Anima* that "just about the majority of people get their knowledge of God from dreams."[14] One might wonder, at least provisionally, what theological knowledge is when its breeding ground is dreams. In any case, if we in the twentieth century tend to think of dreams as personal complexes in disguise, ancient dreamers thought of dreams as complexes of the gods. For a whole tradition of dreamers and dream interpreters, from Homer to Augustine, dreams were not subjective fantasies or phenomena of the pysche; they were, rather, autonomous and divine (whether demonic and so negatively divine, or angelic and so positively divine). Dreams were not so much "a royal road to the unconscious" as they were pictures, however phantasmal, of a more profound consciousness.[15]

In the case of Perpetua, in what does this consciousness consist? Again, Tertullian can provide a theological context for Perpetua's dream. In the sections of *De Anima* dealing with sleep and dreams, Tertullian argues that sleep is a natural state, part of the rational work of God (*rationale aliquod opus dei esse*).[16] No further proof of sleep as a natural state is needed than Adam who slept as well as ate and drank. But there is more to this scriptural proof: Adam's sleep was the type of the death of Christ. "For as Adam was a figure of Christ, Adam's sleep shadowed out the death of Christ."[17] Sleep is "so salutary and so rational" because sleep is an image (*exemplar*) of the divine dispensation.[18] Sleep is the "very mirror of death," says Tertullian, and what the dreams of sleep image is the death that is really life.[19]

This is how Perpetua understood her dream: "At the sound of the word 'Amen' I woke up, with the taste of something sweet still in my mouth. I at once told this to my brother, and we realized that we would have to suffer, and that from now on we would no longer have any hope in this life."[20] Like Alcyone in our Ovidian context, Perpetua awakens from this parable of the night into her own death. Also like Alcyone, she has seen the phantasmal shape of a dead man—the Christ in shepherd's garb—a dead man so alive

13. The literature from antiquity is extensive; see the discussions by E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, pp. 37–53, and Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 40–45, 54–55, 66–67.
14. Tertullian, *De Anima* 47.2, in *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertuliani: De Anima*, ed. J. H. Waszink (Amsterdam, 1947), p. 65 (my translation).
15. For a survey of dream material in biblical, classical, and late antique literature, see *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, 1964–1976), vol. 5, s.v. "ὄναρ," by Albrecht Oepke, pp. 220–238.
16. Tertullian, *De Anima* 43.7 (Waszink, p. 59).
17. Tertullian, *De Anima* 43.10 (Waszink, p. 60).
18. Ibid.
19. Tertullian, *De Anima* 42.3 (Waszink, p. 58).
20. *Passio Perpetua* 4 (Musurillo, p. 113).

that the ghost leaves something tangible behind, tears in the one case, curds in the other. In the moment of her awakening, Perpetua's "real" life has become a kind of prelude to the realization of her dream. The dream then becomes both frame and substance of her subsequent actions, a living parable of the paradoxical relation between life and death.

What Perpetua sees, in the text, is called a *visio* (Gr. *horama*), a prophetic vision that actually comes true. This was one of the three basic types of meaningful dreams, according to Artemidorus's *Onirocritikon*. The other two were the *somnium* (Gr. *oneiros*), an enigmatic dream that conceals with strange shapes and veils with ambiguity the true meaning of the dream and so requires interpretation for understanding; and the *oraculum* (Gr. *chrēmatismos*), a dream-oracle in which a god or some person—parent, dead friend, or hero—appears to the dreamer and foretells a future event.[21]

All three forms of "meaningful" dreams were involved with the future. Dreaming a meaningful dream was usually connected with forth-telling or foresight. Yet the foresight was not sight of a possible future but a future reality into which the present flowed unbrokenly. The dream continued to operate after the dreamer finished dreaming and woke up. In the dream, the dreamer understood something that had not yet happened: as George Steiner has remarked, in antiquity dreams inscribed "a hieroglyphics of futurity."[22] Dreams were the imagistic marks that the future impressed on the sleeping soul. This perspective is quite different from the modern (especially Freudian) view in which dreams feed not on prophecy but on remembrance: for us, dreams yield a "night-alphabet of our authentic past," telling us where the psyche has been, not where it is going.[23]

While it is certainly true that the phrase "hieroglyphics of futurity" is an apt characterization of Perpetua's dream, which moved immediately into the fabric of her reality, there is another dimension of the dream as hieroglyph that is important to note in Perpetua's case. That dimension is literary. Perpetua's dream is an example of dream as vehicle for interpretation of scripture. An entire biblical tradition, from Genesis to Revelation, is assembled in the images of Perpetua's dream.

Inhabiting Perpetua's dream of the ladder "reaching all the way to the heavens" is another dream, the dream of Jacob at Bethel, in which angels ascend and descend upon a ladder that reaches from earth to heaven (Gen. 28:11-22). The Gospel of John carried this dream on, imagining the Christ as the ladder upon which the angels move (John 1:51). In her dream Perpetua has become one of the angels, and the ladder leads to the Christ in

21. Artemidorus, *The Interpretation of Dreams: Oneirocritica*, 1.1-5, trans. Robert J. White (Park Ridge, N.J., 1975), pp. 14-20.
22. George Steiner, "The Historicity of Dreams (two questions to Freud)," *Salmagundi* 61 (1983): 13.
23. Ibid.

the guise of a shepherd. Other scriptural texts dwell in her dream as well: there is Genesis 3:15, which envisions the enmity between woman and serpent, whose head will be bruised; there is Revelation 12, where a woman newly with child (as Perpetua herself was at the time of her imprisonment) escapes confrontation with a dragon and is nourished in a wilderness; and finally, as a possible source for that curious scene in Perpetua's dream in which the shepherd milks a sheep and gets instant curds of cheese, there is Job 10:10: "Didst thou not pour me out like milk, and curdle me like cheese?"[24]

It is not, of course, particularly surprising that Perpetua, a Christian catechumen, would dream in images drawn from the "stuff" of her recent initiation.[25] Yet the idea that dreaming might be a mode of scriptural exegesis as well as a vehicle for theological reflection seems to have been one of the guiding insights of the martyrologies that were composed subsequent to the *Passio Perpetuae*, and is represented especially well by the night visions of the *Shepherd of Hermas*.[26]

The conviction that dreams can speak with hermeneutical authority was an outgrowth of the attribution, by dream theorists and dreamers alike, of an absolute and all-encompassing power of the dream to signify. A stark example is Aelius Aristides, an aristocratic gentleman of the second century and rhetorician of some note, but a hypochondriac of even greater note.[27] A series of illnesses led Aristides to Asclepius, the god of healing who gave his prescriptions for remedy in dreams.[28] A large part of Aristides's life seems to have been spent in travels from one temple of Asclepius to the next. In A.D. 145, this was his condition: "I had catarrhs and difficulty with my palate, and everything was full of frost and fire, and my stomach trouble was at its peak."[29] Asclepius appeared in Aristides's dreams and ordered him to follow

24. See Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, pp. 111-113.
25. See W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Garden City, N.Y., 1967), p. 269, for the suggestion that martyrs' dreams reflected the teachings to catechumens in Carthage.
26. See especially the *Martyrdom of Marian and James* and the *Martyrdom of Montanus and Lucius*, in Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, pp. 197-238. The five "visions" (*horaseis*) that come to the author of the *Shepherd of Hermas* "when he gets sleepy," "while sitting on his bed," and so on are elaborate dreams that provoke a profound metamorphosis in the psyche of the author, whose understanding of himself and of the divine world is considerably deepened as he moves through one dream after another.
27. See the discussions of Aristides in Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity*, pp. 41-44, and Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, pp. 39-45.
28. For detailed discussions of dream therapy in the cult of Asclepius, see Howard C. Kee, "Self-Definition in the Asclepius Cult," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 3, *Self-Definition in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Ben F. Meyer and E. P. Sanders (Philadelphia, 1982), pp. 118-136; Charles Allison Behr, *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales* (Amsterdam, 1968), pp. 23-40 and passim; Carl Kerenyi, *Asklepios: Archtypal Image of the Physician's Existence* (Princeton, 1959); and C. A. Meier, *Ancient Incubation and Modern Psychotherapy* (Evanston, 1967).
29. Aelius Aristides, *The Sacred Tales* 2.46, in Behr, *Aelius Aristides*, p. 232.

a regimen that became typical: bathing in icy rivers, walking barefoot in snow, and other forms of "shock treatment."[30]

After one such dream Aristides reported: "When we were at the river bank, none of my friends had the heart to encourage me, although the temple priest himself was present along with some philosophers. I nonetheless cast off my garments and having called upon the god, dove into the middle of the river. There was a loud roaring sound. I dallied for as long as possible. When I emerged on the bank, a warmth went through my whole body. And much steam rose up, and I was red all over."[31] His feeling of frost and fire, when he had come though the dream and the river, had returned (steam and redness), but as well-being rather than sickness. It is a real question, I think, whether Aristides's life provoked his dreams, or whether his dreams "produced" his life.[32] Perhaps it is a case of undecidable oscillation between both; certainly, they formed an intimate pair. Like Hippolytus, who commented on one of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams that "the dream seems to interpret itself, being clear for those who are in rapport with Scripture," Aristides found his dreams to be transparent to meaning.[33] They were their own interpretation, and authoritatively so.

Part of the authority of dreams in antiquity was their autonomy, their ability to come and go as *they* pleased. One of the earliest examples of the easy mobility or free play of dream is in Book Four of the *Odyssey*.

> Now it occurred to the grey-eyed goddess Athena to make a figure of dream in a woman's form. . . . The goddess sent this dream to Odysseus' house to quiet Penelope and end her grieving. So, passing by the key-hole through the door, the image came a-gliding down the room to stand at her bedside, and to murmur to her: "You are sleeping, Penelope! The gods whose life is ease no longer suffer thee to pine and weep; your son returns unharmed."[34]

Sleeping Penelope and the dream have a fairly lengthy conversation, and then the wavering form, described as both a dim phantom and a clear dream, departs by a draft of wind back through the keyhole.

Such gliding phantoms had a long history; several centuries after Homer, Augustine was still thinking along similar lines. In the *City of God*, Augustine remarks that "we must believe with complete conviction that omnipotent God

30. See the discussion by André-Jean Festugière, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* (Berkeley, 1960), pp. 91–95.
31. Aelius Aristides, *The Sacred Tales* 2.53 (Behr, p. 234).
32. See Peter Brown's discussion of Aristides's illnesses as a barometer of the social tensions of his time: "Aristides' behavior, therefore, poses a problem: did the rising within him of a threatening sense of superiority backed by considerable energy and aggression unconsciously help bring on the illnesses and the murderous cures that tied his energy down to a battle with his body, so that Aristides' overweening ambition was safely locked away in a world of grandiose dreams and visions?"; *Making of Late Antiquity*, p. 43.
33. Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* 3.6, in *Hippolyte: Commentaire sur Daniel*, trans. Maurice Lefèvre, Source chrétiennes 14 (Paris, 1947). p. 137.
34. Homer, *Odyssey* 4.790–837, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (Garden City, N. Y., 1963), pp. 76–78.

can do anything he pleases."[35] He then gives his considered opinion about a certain kind of dream figure: "I believe that a person has a phantom which, in his imagination or in his dreams takes on various forms through the influence of circumstances of innumerable kinds. This phantom is not a material body; and yet with amazing speed it takes on shapes like material bodies; and it is this phantom, I hold, that can in some inexplicable fashion be presented in bodily form to the apprehension of other people when their physical senses are asleep or in abeyance."[36] An example of this phenomenon, which Augustine assures his readers he has gotten on good authority from someone who would never lie, concerns a man who reported that

> in his own house, at night-time, before he went to bed, he saw a philosopher coming to him, a man he knew very well; and this man explained to him a number of points in Plato, which he had formerly [that is, in person] refused to explain when asked. Now this philosopher was asked why he had done something in the other's house which he had refused to do when requested in his own home, and he said in reply, "I did not do it, I merely dreamed that I did." This shows that what one man saw in his sleep was displayed to the other while awake by means of a phantom appearance.[37]

To us this story may sound a bit credulous; but Augustine had no doubt that the dreams we "see" in sleep have an independent existence, are somehow connected with divine omnipotence, and are even capable of philosophical erudition.

Between the phantoms of Homer and those of Augustine there was the angel, which brings us into another dimension of the twilight realm under discussion. In the Gnostic work entitled *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the feminine revealer says, "I am the sight of those who dwell in sleep."[38] She is a soft voice speaking "below language," whence she delivers her theological wisdom.[39] It was this kind of model that Origen seems to have had in mind as he developed his idea of angelic consciousness, an idea I would like to explore briefly.

To speak "below language" and to be the sight of dreamers suggest that the one so characterized is the locus or spring of insight within those who speak words and dream dreams. Origen was quite interested in such an inner resource. In his *Homilies on Genesis*, Origen comments on the phenomenon of Isaac dwelling at the well of vision (L. *visio;* LXX *horasis*) in Genesis 25:11.[40] What fills this well, "vision," is one of the technical designations for a meaningful dream. Indeed, Origen notes that he understand *visio* in terms of

35. Augustine, *The City of God* 18.18, in *Augustine: Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Baltimore, 1972), pp. 782–783.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., pp. 783–784.
38. *Trimorphic Protennoia*, (Nag Hammadi Library [*NHL*] 13.35), trans. John D. Turner, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, dir. James M. Robinson (New York, 1978), p. 462.
39. Ibid., *NHL* 13.41 (Robinson, p. 465).
40. Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 11–13, in *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine, Fathers of the Church 71 (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp. 168–195.

Jacob's dream at Bethel. He then goes on to consider what the picture of Isaac not only dwelling at but digging wells of vision might mean.

Isaac is "the word of God," a type of Christ, and his digging connotes for Origen the kind of interpretative ability that sees the spirit in the letter, the figurative in the literal.[41] When one can see that the well of scripture is filled with vision, one is, like Isaac, dwelling in dreams. Dream becomes for Origen a figure for scriptural interpretation. Yet he goes further.

Origen says, " If anyone can know and understand each vision of the things which are in the Law or in the prophets, that man dwells 'at the well of vision.' "[42] Each word of scripture has a visionary or dreamlike dimension. Thus "dream" for Origen is a figure not only for figural interpretation but for the words of scripture itself. "Isaac dwelling at the well of vision" is then a complicated image that expresses both a perspective on language and a stance concerning the interpretation of that language. Dream has become a figure for figuration, a metaphor for metaphor.

Everyone has the ability to dig and to dwell like Isaac. To dwell in vision, which is to dwell in scripture, is to experience what Origen calls " the living water" of scriptural meaning.[43] There is such a well of living water in each of us: "Let us attempt to do also that which wisdom admonishes: 'Drink the waters of your own springs and wells, and let your spring be your own.' Therefore you also, O hearer, attempt to have your own well and your own spring, so that you too, when you take up a book of the Scriptures, may begin even from your own understanding to bring forth some meaning."[44] Finding such "spiritual" and "allegorical" meanings, as Origen calls them, constitutes digging wells whose living water is "a kind of heavenly perception and latent image of God."[45]

Latent in each of us, then, is this exegetical ability named by dream. Elsewhere Origen develops the idea further, and with the addition of an important term. In *On Susanna*, Daniel the dreamer is credited with enjoying "at all times" the presence of "an angel of clear vision"; in *Against Celsus*, the angelic warning in Joseph's dream in Matthew 2:13 leads Origen to remark that many others have had such "suggestions [*phantasiae*] brought before the soul" by an angel.[46] Such angelic phantasies are "impressions on the mind" (*to tūpoun to hēgemonikon en oneirō*): they are the marks made in dreams on the authoritative part of the soul.[47] These governing phantasies form what Origen calls "a generic divine sense" (*theias aistheseōs*), a virtual scriptural

41. Origen, *Hom. on Gen.* 12.5 (Heine, p. 182).
42. Ibid., 11.3 (Heine, p. 173).
43. Ibid., 13.3 (Heine, pp. 189–195).
44. Ibid., 12.5 (Heine, p. 183).
45. Ibid., 13.3 (Heine, pp. 189, 191).
46. Origen, *On Susanna*, in *PG* 11.44A, trans. Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity*, p. 71; *Against Celsus* 1.66, in *Origène: Contre Celse*, trans. Marcel Borret, Sources chrétienne 132, 4 vols. (Paris, 1967–1969), 1:263.
47. Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.48 (Borret, p. 202).

hermeneutic, since the "sense" about which Origen is speaking involves interpretation of biblical works.[48] "Below language," then, is the angel, who speaks a dream-language different from ordinary speech. As Peter Brown has remarked, for Origen the angel was a "presence presiding over the weaving of his thoughts." Such an "invisible companion" "lodged contact with the divine in the structure of the personality."[49] These angels are inner hermeneuts, and the dreams in which they speak carry the figural mode of intepretation. Both in scriptural text and in the self, angelic speech is dream-language, and the dream functions in formal and material ways as the principle as well as the substance of interpretation.

One of the most interesting exegeses in this regard comes in the *Commentary on John*. Origen discusses the apocryphal *Prayer of Joseph*, an expanded commentary on Jacob's second dream which envisions the angel of the dream descending and tabernacling in Jacob. Origen uses the *Prayer of Joseph* "to render more credible the belief concerning John the Baptist which maintains that he, being an angel, took a body in order to bear witness to the light."[50] Jacob's dream, in the expanded understanding of it, has become the model for understanding the theological witnessing of John the Baptist; John's resource was angelic. Exegetical connections between the two scriptural testaments are made through the dream, and the center of focus is an indwelling angel. Angel and interpreter have come together through dreams.

For Origen, interpretation is phantasmal, like a dream: interpretative ability wells up from "angelic" allegorical resources within. But in the final patristic text that we will consider, the *Gospel of Truth*, life itself is a dream.[51] Yet in this text dream is not a mere metaphor. It is rather the trope that sets reality in motion, in both positive and negative ways. In the *Gospel of Truth*, "the one who has no root" is the one who thinks, " 'I have come into being.' "[52] Ironically, the person who *asserts* the existence of the self is the one who in fact misconstrues life. Such a misconception, with the assertive egoism that it involves, constitutes ignorance of the Father, and living in this kind of arrogant ignorance is characterized as a "disturbing dream," full of illusions and neurotic terrors.[53] When one lives with a distorted view of reality, life is a nightmare. How, then , does the Father, true source of being, wish us to think of ourselves? Like this, says the *Gospel of Truth*: " 'I have come into being like the shadows and phantoms of the night.' "[54] The true self is phantasmal, and the light shines on the terror, dispelling its illusions, only when one

48. Ibid.
49. Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity*, pp. 69–71.
50. Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.31, quoted and discussed by Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Prayer of Joseph," in his *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden, 1978), pp. 27–28.
51. *The Gospel of Truth*, *NHL* 1.3, trans. George W. MacRae (Robinson, pp. 37–49).
52. Ibid., *NHL* 1.3.28 (Robinson, p. 42).
53. Ibid., *NHL* 1.3.29 (Robinson, p. 43).
54. Ibid., *NHL* 1.3.28 (Robinson, pp. 42–43).

recognizes the transpersonal likenesses that play through one. Reality is still dreamlike—shadows and phantoms—but no longer nightmarish. As with Origen's angel of presence and Perpetua's dream-talk with God, reality is shaped by dream figures. For the *Gospel of Truth*, the human task is not to question the dream, but precisely to recognize it. Dream and waking life have become two dimensions of the same reality.

As Athanasius remarked, dreams and the soul's reason formed a pair, and even Tertullian admitted that dreams were a source—even a major source—for theological knowing. Origen saw interpretation as a kind of extension of dream-like inspiration, and for Perpetua, dream and "real life" formed an unbroken continuum. These voices testify to a way of thinking, lying dormant in the Western religious tradition, that has been largely neglected: that the language of the dream was an important religious language for early Christians, as it was for their cultural fellows. This brief look at dreams in a patristic context means to suggest that a study of dreams can provide a significant hermeneutic entrée to patristic traditions. As Clement of Alexandria said, rocky pillows yield superhuman visions.[55]

55. Clement of Alexandria, *The Pedagogue* 2.9, in *Clément d'Alexandrie. Le Pedagogue*, trans. Claude Mondésert, Sources chrétiennes 108 (Paris, 1965), pp. 155-163, for Clement's discussion of dreams.

Litterati, Spirituales, *and Lay Christians According to Otloh of Saint Emmeram*

IRVEN M. RESNICK

It seems somewhat paradoxical that at the very time in the eleventh century when laity and clergy were most critical of the corrupt and decadent life led in many monasteries throughout Europe, one should find among reformers the most exaggerated claims for the benefits of monastic life. Peter Damian (1007-1072), one of the most ardent and indefatigable monastic reformers, provides ample evidence of this paradox.

On the one hand, Damian compares the status of monks to that of the cherubim in the celestial hierarchy, that is, as nearest to God.[1] Monastic life is, he declares, a second baptism.[2] Like the first, it cleanses the professing one of sin.[3] Among the various types of monastic observance it is the path of the hermit which is highest and most perfect—more perfect even than that of the cenobites—because it provides an environment which eliminates almost every occasion for sin.[4] For this reason Damian cites approvingly Romuald's desire to turn the whole world into a hermitage and to induct all its inhabitants into the monastic order.[5] Nevertheless, life in a cenobitic household is itself a good, even if its customs are inferior to those found in the hermitage.[6]

On the other hand, Damian was painfully aware of the degenerate life led

1. Damian, Op. 28, *Apologeticus monachorum adversus canonicos*, in *Patrologiae cursus completus*, Series latina, ed. J.P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844-1864) 145, 518A (hereafter cited as *PL*). I cite this text with reservation, since there is some question about its authenticity. For a catalogue of Damian's works, including a discussion of their authenticity, see especially Giovanni Lucchesi, "Clavis S. Petri Damiani," in *Studi su San Pier Damiani in Onore del Cardinale Amleto Giovanni Cicognani* (Faenza, 1961): 249-407.
2. Damian, Op. 16, *Contra Episcopum monachos ad saeculum revocantem* c. 8, *PL* 145, 377A. In a similar way, Damian claims that the canonical hours of the divine office are like seven baptismal baths ("quasi septem baptismatum lavacra. . .") which wash away at least the lesser sins into which one—lay or cleric—falls daily. See Op. 10, *De horis canonicis*, c.1, *PL* 145, 223C.
3. See G. Miccoli, "Théologie de la vie monastique chez Saint Pierre Damien, (1007-1072)," pp. 469-470, in *Théologie de la vie monastique* (Paris, 1961). G.G. Coulton notes that Odo of Cluny made the same claim. See his *Five Centuries of Religion*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1929-1950) 1: 262.
4. See Op. 18, *Contra intemperantes clericos*, *PL* 145, 395D; Op. 15, *De suae congregatis institutis*, c. 1, *PL* 145, 336C.
5. "adeo putaretur totum mundum in eremum valde convertere, et monachico ordini omnem populi multitudinem sociare." *Vita Sancti Romualdui*, c. 37, *PL* 144, 988A.
6. This can be ascertained from the praise Damian reserves for the communities at Monte Cassino and Cluny. See, for example, *De Gallica profectione*, *PL* 145, 873-874, written by one of Damian's companions on a visit to Cluny. Also see Epist. 6.2; 4; 5.

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