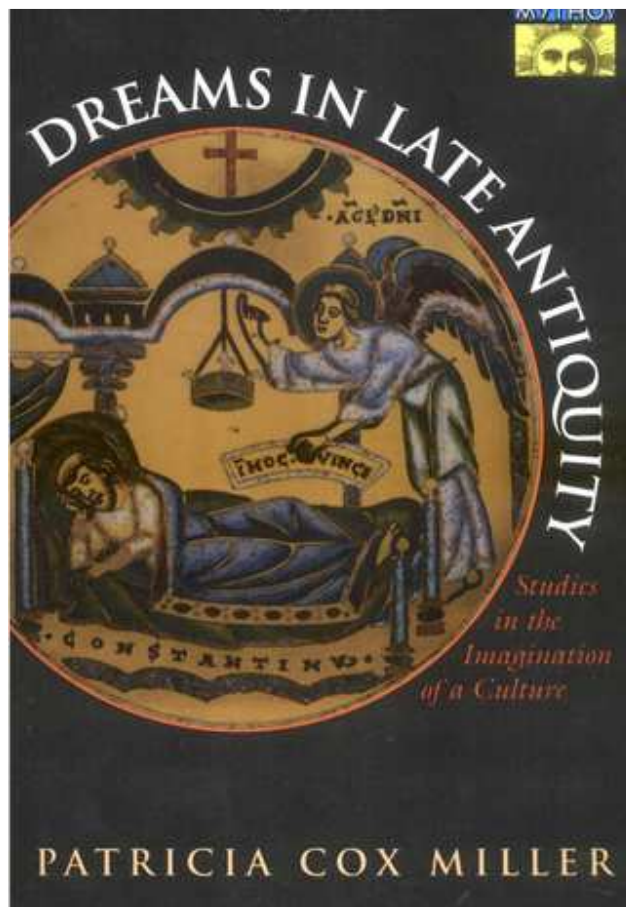


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INTRODUCTION

TRADITION has it that Socrates dreamed on the night before he met Plato that a young swan settled in his lap and, developing at once into a full-fledged bird, it flew forth into the open sky uttering a song that charmed all hearers.¹ A Hellenistic parody of this dream plays tradition another way: Socrates dreamed that Plato became a crow, jumped onto his head, and began to peck at his bald spot and to croak.² Historians of philosophy may want to decide between the heroic Plato who transformed his master's words into charming songs, on the one hand, and the comic Plato who croaked as he pecked on the teacher's bald head, on the other. What interests me, however, is the use of dreams as a way of portraying a philosophical relationship. With their vivid concatenation of images, these dreams lend tangibility and concreteness to the intangible, abstract idea of philosophical influence. This, I will argue, was one of the major functions of dreams in late antiquity: as one of the modes of the production of meaning, dreams formed a distinctive pattern of imagination which brought visual presence and tangibility to such abstract concepts as time, cosmic history, the soul, and the identity of one's self. Dreams were tropes that allowed the world—including the world of human character and relationship—to be represented.

It seems strange to suggest that dreams bestowed tangibility. Is it not paradoxical to say that the material is conveyed by the ephemeral? Perhaps, but Graeco-Roman dream literature shows that there was a late-antique predilection to confound apparently discrete categories, and it was in this predilection that dreams found their proper signifying ground. It is important to note immediately the difficulty of speaking about the relation between such categories as "dream" and "reality" or the "tangible" and the "intangible" without reifying or essentializing them and so missing a striking feature of the late-antique imagination. In another cultural context, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty has explored the conceptual twists and turns

¹ Alice Swift Riginos, *Platonica*, pp. 21–24. This story was popular in late antiquity, as the numerous extant testimonia show. It was used to demonstrate Plato's philosophical skills (e.g., Apuleius, *De Platone* 1.1; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6.8) and one author, Tertullian, used it as an example of the soul's activity during sleep, when the mind is at rest (*De anima* 46.9).

² Riginos, *Platonica*, pp. 54–55. As Riginos notes, this anecdote is preserved only in Athenaeus' *The Learned Banquet* 11.507C–D (second century C.E.), although, as Riginos has shown, Athenaeus took the anecdote from the *Memoirs* of Hegesander of Delphi (second century B.C.E.), thus demonstrating the lengthy history that this and the preceding anecdote had in Greek and Roman tradition.

that talk of dreams provokes, and because her observations are pertinent to this discussion, I turn briefly to her recent book, *Dreams, Illusion, and Other Realities*.

One of the intriguing observations in O'Flaherty's book shows that 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 can only falsify the fact the 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.³

Although the kinds of dichotomous structures just mentioned (real and unreal, and so forth) may be epistemologically useful, they are ontologically suspect, and when the lines of demarcation that support such structures are probed deeply enough, they tend to wobble, if not to 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."⁴ 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 from Marianne Moore, there are imaginary gardens—with real toads in them.⁵ We cannot escape this twilight zone by dismissing it as the product of O'Flaherty's exotic Hindus immersed in *māyā*; the Western tradition has its own frogs, and nowhere are they livelier than in late antiquity. Perpetua, after all, awoke from her dream of eating paradisaic cheese with the taste of something sweet in her mouth, and Macrobius thought that a vision of the entire cosmos lay encoded in a dream: monotheist and polytheist, martyr and philosopher alike subscribed to the figurative world of dreams.⁶

Socrates can help again in exploring the particular kind of "imaginary

³ Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams, Illusion, and Other Realities*, pp. 198–99.

⁴ Plato, *Theaetetus* 158d, in *Collected Dialogues*, p. 863. See the discussion by Steven S. Tigner, "Plato's Philosophical Uses of the Dream Metaphor," pp. 204–12. Tigner argues that Plato "recognized in certain familiar features of dream-consciousness a conceptually potent model for man's epistemological situation" (211).

⁵ Marianne Moore, "Poetry," in *A College Book of Modern Verse*, p. 325.

⁶ For Perpetua, see *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 4.10 (ed. Van Beek, p. 14); for Macrobius, see *Commentarii in somnium Scipionis*.

garden” that was the ancient dream world. As though echoing what he had said in the *Theaetetus* about our perceptual uncertainty when pressed to say whether we are awake or dreaming that we are awake, Socrates remarks in the *Symposium* that his “understanding is a shadowy thing at best, as equivocal as a dream.”⁷ This is a statement of the kind of wisdom that belongs to dreams. It involves a mode of discourse 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

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?

I think that ancient readers would have liked this poem, because 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 site where apparently unquestioned, and unquestionable, realities like life and death meet, qualify each other, even change places. A particularly striking representation of the equivocal qualities of the dreamworld forms part of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. It will take us more squarely into the imagistic world of the late-antique oneiric imagination.

Part of Book II 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" 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 sends 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, and 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 her own voice wakes her, and she screams: "The queen Alcyone is nothing, nothing, dead with Ceyx."

Ovid's portrait of the dreamworld insists on its equivocality. 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 living person could ever say literally: "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—the unsubstantial figment of the imagination (the "phantasm") conveys the essential message. What is counterfeit is true, what is alive is dead, what is divine is human—and also the reverse. There is no final resting point, no end to the paradoxical turns in this story. Certainly in Ovid's presentation, the dream does not dissolve reality but rather crystallizes it.

The idea that a figurative language or, in contemporary terminology, a discourse of tropes (a "tropical discourse," as Hayden White would have

⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 11.400–750 (trans. Humphries, pp. 272–82).

it¹⁰) might make one's sense of the real more rather than less crisp is directly related to antiquity's association of dreams and their interpretation with divination. Classically defined, divination, derived from the Latin *divinare*, "to predict," has been called an "occult science" that assembles as a group such practices as "foretelling the future, interpreting the past, and, in general, discovering hidden truth (by way of clairvoyance, precognition, telepathy, and other such phenomena)."¹¹ The basic assumption upon which divination is usually said to be founded is that of "cosmic sympathy," which views the universe as an immense living organism whose parts are intricately interconnected with one another, such that observation of one part could lead to insight about other parts.¹²

This definition is fine as far as it goes, but it leaves out what is for my purposes a crucial aspect of divinatory practice, namely, its function as a technique for reading the intersection of the human condition and the natural world. Rather than highlighting the connection between divination and prediction, as is the standard scholarly practice, I prefer to understand divination as an imaginal and poetic appropriation of aspects of the natural world (including human relationships and activities) toward the construction of a language of signs. As forms of what could be called an ancient semiotics, these sign languages, because they are visually articulate, give shape and form and so a way to explore those hopes, fears, anxieties, and other feelings that simmer under the surface of ordinary consciousness and might, except for the imagistic patterning provided by divinatory techniques, remain inchoate and so "hidden."

The *Alexander Romance*, one of the most popular novels from late antiquity, offers a list of some of these sign languages. Early on in the text, one of the main characters, Queen Olympias, asks the prophet Nektanebos about methods for arriving at true predictions. He replies: "There is a wide choice of method, O Queen. There are horoscope casters, sign solvers, dream specialists, oracular ventriloquists, bird observers, birth-date examiners, and those called *magoi*, who have the gift of prophecy."¹³ Diviners found their signs in animal bodies—the patterns made by flights of birds, for example, or the sheen of an animal's liver; they found their signs in cosmic space—the configurations made by stars and planets; and they found their signs in the images of people's dreams.¹⁴

¹⁰ See Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* and *Metahistory* for discussions of the tropological character of historical thought.

¹¹ Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, pp. 231, 229.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 230–31. Earlier classic studies of divination are W. R. Halliday, *Greek Divination*; André-Jean Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. 1; and Martin Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, vol. 2.

¹³ Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Alexander Romance* 4 (ed. Reardon, p. 657).

¹⁴ A convenient summary of the various kinds of Hellenistic divination, from theriomancy to astrology to oneiromancy, is given by Luther Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, pp. 40–53.

The questions that people brought to the practitioners of these sign languages tended largely to focus on such down-to-earth matters as love and marriage, health, and economic fortune.¹⁵ Given the earthiness of such concerns, it is not surprising that people turned to “earthy” images of their everyday surroundings—birds, stars, dreams—to gain insight into their own situations. Divination was solidly rooted in the ordinary; yet it was an ordinariness charged with a sense of the extraordinary. Robin Lane Fox includes as part of his delightfully detailed chapter on divinatory practices the following story from Pausanias, which exemplifies divination’s connection with the ordinary.

The market-place of Pharai [in Achaea] is an old-fashioned, big enclosure, with a stone statue of Hermes in the middle that has a beard: it stands on the mere earth, block-shaped, of no great size. . . . They call it Market Hermes and it has a traditional oracle. In front of the statue is a stone hearthstone, with bronze lamps stuck onto it with lead. You come in the evening to consult the god, burn incense on the hearthstone, and fill up the lamps with oil; then you light them all and put a local coin on the altar to the right of the god; and then you whisper in the god’s ear whatever your question is. Then you stop up your ears and go out of the market-place, and when you get out, take your hands away from your ears and whatever phrase you hear next is the oracle.¹⁶

Insight into life’s situations can be gleaned from the chance phrase of a passerby! In divination, almost anything—even so common a thing as an overheard remark—can be used to construct meaning. Insight floats on the surface of everyday life—but it does so enigmatically and so needs a disciplined language to interpret it.

From the philosophical—“Does the soul survive death?”—to the economic—“Will I be sold into slavery?”—to the poignantly personal—“Does she love me?”—the questions that people brought to diviners involved pressing concerns.¹⁷ “It was normal,” as Lane Fox has observed, “to prefer divination to indecision.”¹⁸ Yet, however “normal” the recourse to divination and its techniques may have been, divinatory practice has typ-

Useful collections of samples from a wide variety of divinatory practices may be found in Frederick C. Grant, *Hellenistic Religions*, pp. 33–63, and in Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, chs. 4–6.

¹⁵ See the examples given in Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, p. 211, and the remark by Grant, *Hellenistic Religions*, p. 33: “People in all walks of life consulted them [oracles] for help with every type of problem. Many of the questions asked reflect the wistful, utterly human character of the problems submitted.”

¹⁶ Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 7.22.2 (trans. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, p. 209).

¹⁷ For texts and discussion, see Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, p. 56; Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, p. 211; and John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire*, pp. 71–98.

¹⁸ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, p. 211.

ically been shadowed by the charge of irrationality in scholarly discussion. Conceptualized as the weak sister of such enterprises as medicine, astronomy, and mathematics, divination has been seen as a parasite feeding on legitimate, “rational” sciences.¹⁹ Interesting in light of this modern predisposition is the fact that the question of divination’s rationality did not seem to most late-antique thinkers to be a question worthy of debate.²⁰ Cicero was the major exception to this rule—but his skepticism about the viability of divinatory signs to convey meaning was not characteristic of the age at large.²¹ Much more characteristic was the Stoic belief that the universe was a vast and varied sign system whose decoding could be revelatory of the human condition.²²

In the face of ancient testimony to the value of divination’s ability to provide techniques for meditating on human problems, it is curious that many modern scholars have insisted that the nature of divinatory practice was dubious, even deceptive. As one of the mantic arts, dreams and their interpretation in late antiquity have not escaped the judgmental onus placed upon divination as a whole. A classic example of this perspective on divination by dreams is the standard lexical essay on the topic in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.²³ Albrecht Oepke, the author of this survey, has no doubt that with regard to the dreamworld, late-ancient people had “gone primitive.” He argues that a mark of one’s distance from “rational explanation” is the degree to which one invests dreams with meaningful intelligibility.²⁴ For Oepke, the picture presented by the dreams of late antiquity is “in the main one of wild and riotous fantasy” in which “disgusting themes are all to the fore.”²⁵ While he notes that dreams were thought to address such everyday concerns as health, financial well-being, love, and sexual fulfillment, these are for him “trivi-

¹⁹ The classic statement of this perspective is Festugière’s extended discussion of “le déclin du rationalisme” in *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, 1:1–18, which can be paired with Nilsson’s view that “religion made science its underling. . . . The analogies with which Greek rationalism worked shot up like weeds in the hothouse of mysticism. There was no longer any difference between religion and science, for both rested upon divine revelation; religion had swallowed science up” (*Greek Piety*, pp. 140–41). See also Naphtali Lewis’s references to “the grip of the irrational” and “a massive flight from reality” (*The Interpretation of Dreams and Portents*, ix) and Lane Fox’s comment on the “dubious attendants” that “found a home in the company of rational astronomy, mathematics, and medicine” (*Pagans and Christians*, p. 211).

²⁰ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, p. 211. See also Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, p. 257.

²¹ Cicero’s *De divinatione* was a major statement—and critique—of divinatory practice and theory in late antiquity. It will be discussed in Chapter Two.

²² On the doctrine of *sympatheia* that underlay this cosmic sign system, see the detailed discussion in Festugière, *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, 1:89–101.

²³ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5, s.v. *onar*, by Albrecht Oepke, pp. 220–38.

²⁴ *TDNT*, 5:225.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

alities” of a “bourgeois” mindset “in the worst sense.”²⁶ In their dreams, ancient people are in Oepke’s view “unmasked”: they show little philosophical, and even less theological, sophistication. As Oepke says, “*in somnio veritas*,” and this is what he means: “For all its scientific aspirations, the ancient interpretation of dreams is little more than a mixture of fatalism, superstition, and filth.”²⁷

It seems that scholarship such as Oepke’s has suffered from an overly Cartesian frame of reference wherein reason and unreason are the only two categories available for judging perceptions of world and self.²⁸ This kind of binary framework, which uses only the oppositional categories of logic and illogic, cannot recognize or account for a “third,” imaginal category of perception and judgment. From a Cartesian perspective, a phenomenon like divination can only be metaphysical tomfoolery or bad empirical science. Hampered by this limiting framework, scholarship on divination has been in something of the same position as that of the friends who were with Socrates on his last day: “While they were preparing the hemlock, Socrates was learning a tune on the flute. ‘What good will it do you,’ they asked, ‘to know this tune before you die?’”²⁹

Perhaps, as Harold Bloom has suggested, “we all suffer from an impoverished notion of poetic allusion.”³⁰ What scholarship on divination needs is a reading of such **practice** as a poetics that allowed late-ancient people to handle ordinary problems in an imaginal way.³¹ If, for example, one views dream-divination as a *discourse*, as a method that allows for an articulate construction of meaning, one can avoid the debilitating Cartesianism of an interpreter like Oepke, which produces an ancient populace that is credulous, foolish, intellectually inferior. When divination is granted its proper status as a genuine epistemology, its terms need no longer be essentialized and ridiculed.

A good example of the difference between a dualistic reading such as Oepke’s and the kind of reading that I am proposing involves the term *fatalism*. From a perspective like that of Oepke, the **divinatory** language about fate is not a construal or construction of the world in imaginal terms; in fact, it is not a “language” at all. Rather, “fate” is taken to be a

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ For a succinct discussion of the limits of binarism, see Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, pp. 14–16.

²⁹ Italo Calvino, *The Uses of Literature*, p. 134 (quoting E. M. Cioran).

³⁰ Harold Bloom, “The Breaking of Form,” p. 15.

³¹ Luck takes a step in this direction when he remarks, “In a universe where supernatural powers were thought to influence every act and thought, ancient divination was essentially a form of psychotherapy. It helped people cope with their worries about the future, and it forced them to reach decisions after all the rational angles had been explored” (*Arcana Mundi*, p. 257).

transparent window upon a conceptual world of dogmatic belief in the rule of deterministic forces that calls forth fetishistic practices. I argue, on the other hand, that when one understands language—including the language of fate—as one of the modes of the production of meaning, that is, as a set of mediatorial figures that allow the world to be represented, then a reading of divinatory terms emerges that avoids Oepke's primitivizing view. Consider the following statement by Achilles Tatius about dreams:

It is a favorite device of the powers above to whisper at night what the future holds—not that we may contrive a defense to forestall it (for no one can rise above fate) but that we may bear it more lightly when it comes. The swift descent of unforeseen events, coming on us all at once and suddenly, startles the soul and overwhelms it; but when the disaster is expected, that very anticipation, by small increments of concern, dulls the sharp edge of suffering.³²

In this passage, fate is not “fatalistic,” nor is it personified as a cosmic power that is relentlessly deterministic of particularities of the future. Rather, fate serves as a cipher for the future, which is itself a temporal metaphor for what is unknown. In the face of an understandable dread at the thought of life's disastrous possibilities, dreams—one of the languages of fate—“dull the sharp edge of suffering” by articulating the possible shapes of that very suffering. When fear is named, it loses some of its terrifying power. This passage from Achilles Tatius suggests that, as a divinatory practice, dream-divination was situated not in superstitious attempts to control the course of events but rather in formulations of a language of self-understanding. At least in this case, the use of divination leads to emotional stability—“that we may bear it more lightly when it comes”—and not to the “wild and riotous fantasy” that Oepke's perspective would lead one to believe.

To ask questions out of binarism, then, is to literalize and so to misconstrue one of the major languages with which late-ancient people attempted to interpret themselves to themselves. The wager of this book depends upon an argument for “the value of recognizing the equivocal richness of apparently obvious or univocal language.”³³ The oneiric discourses of late antiquity are only “obvious” and “univocal” when the interpretive model within which they are allowed to speak is characterized

³² Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* 1.3 (trans. Winkler, p. 178). See the similar comment by Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 1.3.11, “We should consider that even with events that will necessarily take place their unexpectedness is very apt to cause excessive panic and delirious joy, while foreknowledge accustoms and calms the soul by experience of distant events as though they were present, and prepares it to greet with calm and steadiness whatever comes” (text and trans. in Robbins, p. 23).

³³ J. Hillis Miller, “The Critic as Host,” p. 223.

by what Peter Brown has called a “cramping dualism.”³⁴ One feature of this dualistic model of historical interpretation that has produced misleading stereotypes regarding dream-literature is its division of thought and practice into two opposing categories: “high” literate culture and “low” vulgar practice.³⁵ This model consigns late-antique interest in dreams to the latter category as something that only disreputable figures like magicians and other “commoners” meddled in. The fact that such privileged representatives of “high” culture as Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and Jerome were vitally interested in dreams is dismissed by this model as unimportant, if their interest is mentioned at all.

When the distinction between elite and vulgar is abandoned, a shift in perspective occurs which allows the interpreter to focus on the thoughts and practices that highlight the shared human concerns of theologians like Augustine and users of magical spells, concerns that cut across lines of social status and intellectual attainment. This book focuses on a type of imagination that was deeply embedded in the culture at large; from my perspective, all of the people who tapped the resources of the imaginal forms of dreams can be viewed as ordinary people going about the ordinary business of trying to understand themselves and their world.

I emphasize the ordinariness of this widespread use of oneiric discourses because it is so easy to privilege as exotic what seems to us, so distant in time and space, to be an alien practice. Furthermore, once a phenomenon has been designated as exotic, it becomes fair game for either idealization or denigration, as early anthropological writing about “the primitive” demonstrates.³⁶ Jonathan Z. Smith has argued that when religion is imagined as an ordinary rather than an exotic category of human expression and activity, that choice is “more productive for the development of history of religions as an academic enterprise.”³⁷ In his view, “there is no primordium—it is all history.”³⁸ I agree with this view and have attempted in the discussions that follow to view the dream-literature of late antiquity in the ways in which Smith suggests viewing religious texts—“as texts in context, specific acts of communication between specified individuals, at specific points in time and space, about specifiable subjects.”³⁹

The book is divided into two parts. Part I deals with images and concepts of dreaming. It focuses particularly on how a culture imagines for itself one of its own processes of imagining, as well as on the various

³⁴ Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, p. 13.

³⁵ See the discussion by Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, pp. 8–13.

³⁶ For a thorough exploration of this phenomenon, see Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*, especially pp. 3–41.

³⁷ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion*, xiii.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

theoretical and classificatory systems that were used to decipher and manage oneiric phenomena. Attention is given to the role of dreams as a technology for managing hopes, fears, and anxieties, and to their role as a discourse that provided occasion for articulations of ethical and philosophical ideas. Part II is composed of a series of essays on Graeco-Roman dreamers. These essays are detailed explorations of the ways in which specific individuals used dreams to construct worlds of personal meaning.

CONCLUSION

IN A RECENT set of lectures on critical theory delivered at the University of California in Irvine, Hélène Cixous has lamented the loss of onerous resources in the contemporary world. She writes:

There are few dreams in books. It's as if they have a bad reputation. There are fewer and fewer of them. Dreams used to occur in all the great books—in the Bible, in epic poems, in Greek literature, in the Babylonian epic poems, in Shakespeare—in an archaic mode, then they became more remote. I associate this increasing remoteness, this dessication, with the diminishment of other signs. In the same way we find:

less and less poetry
less and less angels
less and less birds
less and less women
less and less courage.
Jacob wakes up, he gets up. What becomes of the ladder?
You have to take a rock, put it under your head, and let
the dream ladder grow. It grows down—toward the depths.¹

In sharp contrast to the late-twentieth-century culture of Cixous's construction, the culture of Graeco-Roman antiquity knew, as Clement of Alexandria had remarked, that rocky pillows make for superhuman visions.² The sign-world of late antiquity did not lack for dreams, or ladders, or angels. On the contrary, this was a culture in which theories and practices of dreaming actively engaged the intellectual and personal interests of a wide spectrum of people irrespective of social, economic, religious, or philosophical differences. Far from being a sign of "dessication," to use Cixous's term, late-antique dreaming provided fertile ground for fostering insight in surprisingly varied contexts—from the cosmic speculations of philosophers like Macrobius to the erotic obsessions of lovers in the magical papyri. It should be clear from the preceding pages that late-antique "dream ladders" not only grew down to the depths of the world of individual concerns but also reached up to the world of gods and other spiritual

¹ Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, pp. 107–8.

² Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 2.9.78 (ed. and trans. Mondésert, p. 157).

powers, linking both worlds with a distinctive discourse of imagination that had both hermeneutical and therapeutic qualities.

The types of interpretation in which dreams functioned as nodal points for reflection were many, and in all of them dreams provided a rich resource for apprehending matters both theoretical and personal in a concrete, visual way. Constituting an imaginal, rather than a solely empirical, or a solely conceptual, discourse, dreams were useful as vehicles for the discovery of complex insights about human life. Providing *both* the impulse to interpret *and* the matter for interpretation, dreams found a signifying home in the allegorical imagination of thinkers like Macrobius and Augustine; in the taxonomic imagination of Artemidorus, Tertullian, and other classifiers; in the psycho-dramatic imagination of the dream-senders of magic, as well as in the tormented psyches of people like Jerome and Perpetua; in the socio-ethical imagination of Hermas and Apuleius; in the philosophical imagination of Plutarch and the theological imagination of virtually everyone; and in the healing imagination, where healing can be construed in emotional terms, as in Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa's coming to terms with the deaths of loved ones by means of dreams, and in physical terms, as in the oneciric therapies provided by the Asclepius cult. Dreaming was indeed an interpretive "language" with many "dialects," as this study has argued throughout.

Equally as diverse as the interpretive constructs within which dreams were situated were the ways in which dreamers interacted with and characterized their dreams. Perpetua and Aristides, for example, asked for dreams and, although their petitionary techniques were different—prayer and incubation, respectively—both actively sought the consolation offered by oneciric visions. Hermas and Jerome, on the other hand, felt invaded by the dreams that forced them to confront crises of conscience and behavior. Metaphors for dreams also carried positive and negative feeling tones: the arboreal bats of Virgil and the demon-dreams of the Christian apologists carry a sense of brooding or haunting that stands in contrast with the oneciric angels of Origen and the Asclepian dream-statues of Aristides. Likewise, Plutarch's placement of dreams in a cosmic mixing bowl conveys a sense of dreaming that is quite different from Ovid's placement of them in an underworld of cobwebs and shape-shifting counterfeits.

What unites this disparate material is the way in which late-antique dreamers used dreams to find meaning and order in their worlds. The flexibility of dreams as hermeneutical devices is particularly evident when the variety of those "worlds" is considered. From dramatic contexts of life-and-death choices such as Perpetua faced, through literary contexts involving textual exegesis such as rabbinic interpreters were engaged in, to practical contexts of social and economic anxiety such as Artemidorus' catalogues give testimony to, dreams functioned as occasions for formulating

coherent understandings as well as for giving articulate expression to perceptions of self and world.

As the foregoing studies of individual dreamers' relations to their dreams give witness, ancient dreams were not usually experienced as simple mirrors held up to the thoughts and concerns of everyday life. Such dreams, indeed, were relegated to the trashbin of psychic trivia by Artemidorus in his taxonomy of dreams. Instead of being seen as mimetic to reality, dreams were valued by Graeco-Roman dreamers for their ability to shift the grounds of perception by bringing into sharp focus those ideas and emotions that would otherwise have remained inchoate and by making clear the potential consequences for the future of thoughts and behaviors in the present.

Much of the time, the images offered in dreams were enigmatic, and it was precisely that riddling quality which demanded the kind of reflective engagement that produced new insight. For example, the allegorical personifications of virtues and vices in Hermas' dreams, while at first baffling to him, eventually led him to reassess the moral character of his own and his religious community's lives. Likewise, the haunting character of the glowing bones of Gregory of Nyssa's dream led him to understand something about the quality of his sister's life and also served to console him following her death. The imagistic constructions of Perpetua's dreams of heavenly ascent and gladiatorial combat not only reconciled her to the certain outcome of the course of action that she had chosen but also allowed her to frame her actions as a woman in terms that were not theologically debasing.

Even when oneiric images seemed clear, that is, transparent to the meaning conveyed, they functioned to bring submerged thoughts and fears to conscious awareness and provoked the dreamer to new forms of interaction with the world. Jerome's reaction to his dream of being tried and convicted for his non-scriptural reading habits is a good example of the way in which a more acute form of self-awareness could both force its way into consciousness by the agency of dreams and instigate decisive action. Gregory of Nyssa's dream of being beaten by the Forty Martyrs and Gregory of Nazianzus' dream of beguilingly chaste women, both of which prompted these men not only to reflection about the ascetic life but also to the adoption of its practices, similarly demonstrate the manner in which dreams were understood as barometers of inner dispositions and as roadmaps for negotiating the intersection of personal conscience and public action.

A demonstration of the significance of dreams in the personal and cultural construction of meaning in late antiquity has been the aim of this study. Even though the use of dreams to discern orderly structures in the world and to provoke reorientations in self-understanding may seem

strange to us in the late twentieth century, particularly if we inhabit the poetically diminished world of Cixous's lament, it is nonetheless the case that for many people in late antiquity, dreaming provided a way for imagining the world well. For them, the sometimes terrifying, sometimes consoling "angels" of dreams gave them a more secure, because more thoughtful, context in which to live.